

## *National Security Challenges to Taiwan's Third Power Transition*

| Chih-cheng Lo

After reviewing Taiwan's experiences with its previous two power transitions, we have drawn up a number of "worst case scenarios" for a possible third power transition in the future. At the same time, we provide concrete policy proposals as to how these potential national security challenges could be effectively addressed.

We believe that the cross-strait and foreign policy taken by the government of President Ma Ying-jeou after the change of government in 2008 has created a completely new cross-strait situation. China is now even more likely to control Taiwan's economic rise and might even have the ability to influence Taiwan's domestic politics. Just like a number of influential international scholars have said, "China's influence over Taiwan already far exceeds that of the United States. China's influence has already caused changes in the U.S. strategic environment so that the United States needs to reconsider its policy toward Taiwan." A third presidential transition in 2012 will put the old government through its paces to see whether it is able to follow the established practice of the two previous changeovers. And it will also strictly test whether incumbent President Ma can embrace the democratic ethos for a peaceful transfer of power and guide Taiwanese society toward another milestone in democratic deepening.

We can reasonably foresee that Taiwan may face the following national security challenges in the run-up to the 2012 presidential election and during the new government's first hundred days in power:

- The ruling Kuomintang (KMT) decides to

combine the legislative elections and the presidential election, which would advance the presidential ballot to January 2012. Should the election truly result in a third power transition, the handover period from the outgoing to the incoming government would be stretched to four months, which could cause a constitutional vacuum or crisis.

- In order to help Ma and the KMT win reelection, Beijing might declare in the final phase of the election that it will relocate further inland some of the missiles that are targeted at Taiwan. It could go even further and set a deadline for the signing of a cross-strait peace treaty in the event of Ma's reelection, or allow Taiwan to participate in more international organizations, again as an observer and as long as the "one China principle" is followed.
- Should the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) win the election, and again refuse to accept political preconditions such as "one China" and the "1992 Consensus," China will probably relaunch its efforts to lure away Taiwan's diplomatic allies, which could result in countries breaking off diplomatic ties en masse, and even obstruct Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly in May 2012.
- Before the election, Taiwan could see another shooting attack or political assassination.
- Should Taiwan see severe confrontation

between the blue and the green camps due to a very close election outcome and an overly long transition period, it remains to be seen whether the Ma government will display a democratic attitude and hand over government power completely.

The “scenarios” described above predict “worst outcomes.” However, based on past experience, they are all very likely to become real challenges to Taiwan's third power transition. Therefore, we conclude our book with the following policy proposals:

- The stances or platforms that presidential candidates advocate before the election need to take into account post-election reality, and statements must be worded cautiously.
- After winning election, the president-elect must put aside election campaign’s thinking and seek to build domestic consensus and unity based on a realistic attitude.
- A “presidential transition national security task force” should be formed: The United States Presidential Transition Act of 2000 formally empowers permanent officials in the federal government to provide training and orientation for new political appointees. The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) once suggested that the U.S. government establish a Presidential Transition National Security Coordinating Council to take charge of national security related aspects of the transition, including training and newcomer orientation, and to impart its past experiences in dealing with national security affairs. If the Ma government is able to adopt similar legislation before the election to ensure that Taiwan’s presidential transitions are completely covered by law, then controversies such as the Presidential Office's recent probe into missing files from the government of former President Chen Shui-bian could be avoided.
- During the election campaign a “shadow national security team” should be formed to enable the new government to get up to speed quickly after taking power, thus reducing mistakes.
- An inclusive decision-making process should be established to prevent handing out directives without prior assessment of the situation. The president’s decision-making on major national security issues must not be limited to a small inner circle or exclude dissenting views and the opinions of professional bureaucrats should be respected.
- Coordination across government units should be strengthened with regard to national security affairs to ensure that major decisions are well thought out.

Taiwan has only a short history of power transitions. Be it the presidential transition of 2000 or 2008, the new government and the new president grappled with initial difficulties in the absence of a well-rounded power transition system and mature political culture. The Chen government “crossed the river by stepping the

stones,” while the Ma administration “vigorously shut out dissenters.” While their approaches differed, both committed a number of unnecessary mistakes during the transition period and even took decisions that deviated from their election platforms or lacked consideration for long-term national security.

TBT’s main motivation in publishing *Democratic Consolidation: National Security Challenges to Taiwan’s Power Transitions* was to explore how a new president and his government can effectively respond to national security challenges during the presidential interregnum. The book’s most important value lies in a review of the two previous presidential transitions to pinpoint the shortcomings of the respective new government and its leader in addressing national security challenges as reference for a third power transition in the future.

Since at the present stage the performance of the Ma government is lackluster, its public support rather low, and its cross-strait policy formulation and implementation frequently called into question for being too “China friendly,” we believe that the probability of a third power transition in 2012 is very high and that the DPP will very likely return to power. Since the Ma government has decided to concurrently hold the legislative and presidential elections in January next year, the DPP’s possible victory would lead to a four-month long interregnum, which doubtlessly would increase uncertainties surrounding the power transition process.

More importantly, a third political alternation in

2012 would set a new precedent in that power must be handed over for the first time by an incumbent president who has failed to win reelection. Whether the Ma government embraces democratic principles at that time and cooperates in a peaceful transfer of power will be decisive as to whether Taiwan’s democracy can be further consolidated and deepened. And possible inappropriate or unwise reactions on the part of China should the DPP reclaim government power will also put to the test the new government’s ability to maintain cross-strait peace. **TBT**