



Cross-Strait Relations: Ma's "Three No's" by Ralph A. Cossa

Koumintang (KMT) candidate Ma Ying-jeou has proclaimed a "three no's" policy – no unification, no independence, no use of force – in outlining his planned approach to cross-strait relations should he win the March 22 Taiwan presidential election. This is a clever take-off on the PRC's long-standing "three no's": no Taiwan independence; no "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan"; and no Taiwan membership in organizations where statehood is required. Ma's construct is much more thoughtful and positively oriented; it appears aimed at reassuring three main audiences: the people of Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, and the United States and international community in general.

Ma's first no actually reads, in full, "no negotiations for unification during my presidential term(s)." This serves several important purposes. It aims first to reassure those at home who fear that if Ma were elected, he would somehow "hand over Taiwan's sovereignty" to China. Nothing Ma has ever said would lead one to believe this is his intention. Just as it has proven impossible for current President Chen Shui-bian to unilaterally make Taiwan officially "independent," absent support from the people and legislature, it would be equally impossible for Ma to officially and unilaterally turn Taiwan into a PRC province, even if he wanted to. Nonetheless, fears and accusations persist, even among those who should know better. Hence the domestic importance of the "no unification negotiations" pledge.

This pledge also helps to further temper PRC expectations about what a KMT victory would bring. Most Chinese Taiwan-watchers expect that regardless of who wins in March, the next Taiwan president is likely to be less confrontational than President Chen. Some may harbor hopes that reunification would somehow be in the cards if the KMT prevails. While being careful not to preclude reunification as one possible long-term outcome – to do so would trigger Beijing's Anti-Secession Law (ASL) – Ma's message reminds Beijing that talk about reunification remains premature. In truth, nothing short of a complete political transformation on the Mainland will make reunification attractive to the people of Taiwan.

His second pledge, "no pursuit of *de jure* independence," is aimed first and foremost at Beijing, although the message is equally welcomed in Washington and around the globe. Moves toward independence, like beauty, are clearly in the eye of the beholder, but few would argue that Chen Shui-bian has taken a long (and continuing) series of steps that seem aimed at stretching to the limit (if not beyond) his own "no independence" pledge. Both China and the international community would welcome an end to what often appears to be

a deliberately provocative game of chicken by the current Taiwan administration.

No one loses much sleep worrying about a Taiwan attack on the Mainland. Clearly, Ma's "no use of force by either side of the Taiwan strait" is aimed at sending an important message to Beijing: that its current threatening "marry me or I'll kill you" approach has failed to win the hearts and minds of the Taiwan people and is counterproductive to China's openly professed long term goal. Let's be realistic: China will never give an unconditional "no use of force" pledge. Beijing realizes that the primary deterrent to Taiwan moving toward *de jure* independence is fear of the possible consequences. It is unlikely to give up this important leverage.

But, it is not too much to challenge Beijing, after the Taiwan presidential election, to make a conditional no use of force pledge; namely, that "as long as the Taiwan authorities do not take steps toward *de jure* independence, China will remain completely committed to a peaceful resolution to the cross-strait issue." This is, in fact, consistent with China's current stance and also with the ASL. It would set a positive tone for the future development of cross-strait relations, especially if accompanied by a freeze or (preferably) reduction in the number of Chinese missiles currently pointed toward Taiwan. In keeping with the "no use of force" pledge, the new Taiwan administration might also want to give serious consideration to scrapping its own offensive missile program.

Let me end with a bold (although some would say unrealistic or hopelessly naive) suggestion. President Chen has said that his own "four no's" policy will end with his administration – others will say it effectively ended months, if not years ago. Regardless, ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate (Frank) Hsieh Chang-ting, has a clean slate in proclaiming his own list of assurances. Why not proclaim, in the interest of (finally) having a bipartisan cross-strait policy, that he is also willing to endorse and adopt a similar "no reunification, no independence, no use of force" policy?

Such a move would help depoliticize Taiwan's most important and sensitive national security issue. It would help assure Beijing and Washington that the "new" DPP – now under Hsieh's leadership after Chen felt compelled to resign as party chairman after the KMT's landslide victory in this month's Legislative Yuan election – is genuinely determined to set a more cooperative course. It would also reinforce the shared DPP/KMT goal of increasing Taiwan's "international breathing space," a goal that realistically can only be accomplished with Beijing's acquiescence. It would limit the impact of the Taiwan/UN referendum – separate KMT and DPP versions will be voted on during the presidential elections – and also help limit Chen's options if he is tempted to try to institutionalize his own more controversial and divisive

approach toward cross-Strait relations either before the election or during the post-election, pre-May 20 inauguration period.

In short, it would serve Taiwan's, Beijing's, and Washington's, national security interests and create a long overdue "win, win, win" scenario.

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