

Taiwan's Presidential and Legislative Elections

by Shelley Rigger

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Abstract: Taiwan's newly-elected president, Ma Ying-jeou, is determined to relax the tension that has gripped the Taiwan Strait for more than a decade. His positions during the election campaign were calculated to reassure both the Beijing government and the Taiwanese people. On the one hand, he made it clear that he would remove barriers to improved relations and reach out to the Chinese leadership. At the same time, he was equally clear in his commitment to protecting Taiwan's interests. Ma's positions strike a balance between preserving Taiwan's de facto political independence and moving toward a more constructive relationship with the mainland. This approach enjoys widespread popular support in Taiwan. Still, the devil is in the details, and implementing Ma's ideas will require cooperation from Beijing, and from other political actors within Taiwan itself.

Taiwan's 2008 elections delivered an unequivocal result: The Kuomintang (KMT) has returned to power, with a margin of victory that leaves Taiwan's long-time ruling party holding a larger share of political power than at any time since fully-democratic national elections were instituted in the early 1990s.¹ In January, KMT candidates captured 53.5 percent of the vote and 81 out of 113 seats in Taiwan's national parliament, the Legislative Yuan.² In March, the party snatched the ultimate prize, Taiwan's

¹ When Taiwan's national legislature, the Legislative Yuan, was first subjected to comprehensive reelection in 1992, KMT-nominated candidates won 63 percent of the seats with 53 percent of the votes. In the first direct presidential election, held in 1996, KMT nominee Lee Teng-hui captured 54 percent of the vote.

² KMT-nominated candidates captured 53.5 percent of the votes in the voting for district and Aboriginal representatives. The KMT party list won 51.2 percent of the votes allocating 34 seats on the basis of proportional representation. The other major party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won 38.2 percent of the district and Aboriginal votes, resulting in 13 district seats, and 36 percent of the party list vote, for a total of 14 seats. Candidates not affiliated with either major party won five district/Aboriginal seats, and no proportional seats.

presidency, when KMT nominee Ma Ying-jeou polled 58.5 percent of the vote, winning majorities in 18 of the island's 23 municipalities. KMT-backed executives also run seventeen municipalities, to the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP's) six.

The recent victories confer on the KMT leadership both a popular mandate and the institutional backing to implement a broad range of policy initiatives. Although the election results undoubtedly reflect colossal public dissatisfaction with two-term incumbent president Chen Shui-bian, they also represent a significant affirmative vote for the KMT. The KMT's opponents in both races, mainly candidates of Chen's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), were at pains to distance themselves from Chen. There was no shortage of criticism for then President Chen and his policies among his party brethren, and many DPP candidates (including the party's presidential nominee, Frank Hsieh) espoused positions closer to Ma's than Chen's. Nonetheless, large majorities preferred KMT candidates in both elections.

The KMT's commanding position for the next four years raises many questions, three of which are addressed here:

- What policy changes will the new administration likely enact regarding relations with the United States and mainland China?
- How well does President-elect Ma Ying-jeou's approach to cross-strait relations and U.S.-Taiwan relations mesh with the Taiwan public's preferences?
- How likely is Ma to succeed in implementing his policies? What challenges will he face from the United States, Beijing and his own, potentially fractious, party

Ma Ying-jeou's approach to cross-strait relations and US-Taiwan relations:

KMT nominee Ma Ying-jeou held his campaign themes—including his position on cross-strait relations—remarkably steady throughout the long presidential campaign. His mainland policy centered on a promise to improve economic and political relations with the PRC while preserving Taiwan's fundamental interests—most importantly, its *de facto* independence as the Republic of China. Given the sensitivity of the issue and the (perceived) competitiveness of the race, the temptation to temporize must have been substantial, but Ma never retreated from his core positions. In insisting on these positions, Ma sent costly signals—signals that could have jeopardized the election—to both the Taiwan electorate and the PRC government.

Ma's determination to deepen economic engagement with the mainland was best illustrated by the high-profile plank in his platform that calls for a cross-strait "common market." The common market idea—originally associated with Ma's running mate, Vincent Siew—attracted intense criticism from the DPP camp. According to Hsieh's campaign, Ma's policy would create a "one China market" that would flood Taiwan with low-wage, socially-inferior

mainland Chinese workers and dubious Chinese capital. In the last week of the campaign, the Hsieh camp ran a newspaper ad showing three men urinating in public; the text read “With a One China market, our public parks will turn into public toilets.” In addition to the common market proposal, Ma also promised to open direct transport links between Taiwan and China and lift investment restrictions that have driven many Taiwan companies to withdraw from the Taiwan stock exchange.

On political engagement, Ma’s central campaign theme was his determination to reopen dialogue with Beijing based on the “1992 consensus,”³ an idea even more controversial than the cross-strait common market. President Chen has attacked the concept many times, and his would-be successor did the same throughout the campaign. The DPP rejects the 1992 consensus both on procedural grounds, claiming that it is a fraud that never actually happened, and on substantive grounds, arguing that any formulation that binds Taiwan to a one China framework is harmful to Taiwan’s interests. Given the high number of DPP attacks against the 1992 consensus in the 16 years since it was (allegedly) concluded, for Ma to insist upon this point was risky; it would have been safer for his presidential campaign to set the consensus aside and focus on other issues or to obfuscate the matter.

One might imagine that such calculations were unnecessary, given Ma’s strong lead in the polls, but in fact, KMT leaders were never fully confident he would win. Their experiences in 2000 and 2004, when the KMT saw huge leads evaporate just weeks (or hours) before the voting—combined with the high number of voters calling themselves undecided in pre-election polling—convinced KMT strategists to take nothing for granted. In the last days before the election, Ma’s campaign staffers drove themselves to distraction imagining DPP dirty tricks to “steal” the election – which is how they believe Chen won in 2004. On March 21, the *New York Times* reported “The suppression of Tibet protests by Chinese security forces, as well as missteps by the Nationalist Party, which Beijing favors, have nearly erased what had seemed like an insuperable lead for Ma Ying-jeou, the Harvard-educated lawyer who has been the front-runner in the race.”⁴ The fact that Ma refused to retreat from the 1992 consensus, even in

³The “1992 Consensus” refers to talks between Taipei and Beijing in 1992, when the two sides agreed to set aside the problem of national sovereignty in order to discuss practical issues. In essence, they agreed that trying to find a mutually-acceptable definition of each side’s sovereignty would make a dialogue on the practical matters impossible, so they would agree that both sides believed in “one China,” and leave the discussion there. The KMT describes the 1992 consensus as “one China, different interpretations,” with the Taiwan side interpreting “one China” to mean the Republic of China. In short, the KMT holds that the two sides reached an agreement to disagree. The DPP has consistently held that there was no consensus reached in 1992; it also rejects the idea that Taiwan is part of China under *any* interpretation.

⁴Keith Bradsher, “China Tensions Could Sway Vote in Taiwan,” *New York Times*, March 21, 2008.

this perilous political environment, underscores his determination to establish its legitimacy as the basis for dialogue with Beijing.

The DPP pointed to Ma's commitment to the 1992 consensus as one of many signs that the KMT candidate was more committed to unification than to protecting Taiwan's interests. Hsieh's campaign rallies rang with accusations that Ma and the KMT were preparing to "sell out Taiwan" to the PRC. To make their case, however, DPP speakers needed to ignore or dismiss the many public statements in which Ma warned Beijing to keep its expectations low regarding unification. These messages constituted a second costly signal—one that could delay or derail the progress on cross-Strait relations Ma needs to prove his mettle as president.

Ma has never denied that the KMT's long-term preference is for unification, but he regards unification as one of several options Taiwan might adopt—not an inevitable solution. As long as decisions about Taiwan's future result from a democratic process, he avers, he can accept any outcome. To reinforce this emphasis on democracy as the basis of policy, Ma says there is no chance Taiwan would unify with a non-democratic People's Republic of China. To qualify as democratic, he has said, the PRC government must meet stringent criteria—including reversing its verdicts against the Tiananmen Square protesters of 1989.

Ma's campaign message regarding unification centered on two themes. First, he flatly stated that unification would not be a topic for dialogue during his term of office. This unequivocal statement, reiterated regularly throughout the campaign, put Beijing on notice that moving too quickly to press Taiwan on unification would backfire. It also reassured Taiwanese voters that electing Ma would not result in precipitous changes to Taiwan's status. Ma's second campaign theme was his "three nos" formula: no unification, no independence, no armed conflict. This statement offers reassurance to the PRC and to the Taiwan electorate, as it addresses the deepest fears of each side.

Just in case Beijing might have missed the point, Ma added a stinging coda at the end of the campaign. On March 18, with violence raging in Tibet, Ma issued a statement that touched on every one of Beijing's sore spots. The statement began, "The Republic of China is a sovereign independent democratic state. The future of Taiwan should be decided by Taiwan's 23-million people, and no intervention by the PRC is to be tolerated." After calling PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's assertion that mainland Chinese people should have a role in determining Taiwan's status "not only rude, irrational, arrogant, and absurd, but also self-righteous," the statement described the crackdown in Tibet as "a savage and stupid act." Ma reiterated his support for Taiwan's reentry into the United Nations and urged Beijing to "open a dialogue with the Dalai Lama." Finally, as if to make sure that no sacred cow would escape the blade, Ma concluded, "If the PRC continues its crackdown on the Tibetan people, and if the situation in Tibet continues

to deteriorate, I will not, if elected President of the Republic of China, rule out the possibility to stop sending our delegation to the 2008 Beijing Olympic games.”⁵

If Ma's campaign message to Taiwan's voters was that they should expect him to move aggressively toward tighter cross-strait economic relations and to seek better political relations under the 1992 consensus framework, the message to Beijing was equally blunt: don't expect me to deliver Taiwan on a silver platter if I win. By making both messages plain and unequivocal, Ma earned the credibility he needs to move toward a dialogue while taking unification off the agenda.

That said, it is fair to ask what the content of this vaunted dialogue will be. Here again, Ma's campaign made his intentions clear. Ma's agenda for dialogue is rooted in an agreement KMT chair Lien Chan and CCP General-Secretary (and PRC president) Hu Jintao reached in April 2005. The two leaders' joint statement reads, in part, “It is the common proposition of the two parties to uphold the ‘Consensus of ‘92’, oppose ‘Taiwan independence,’⁶ pursue peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, promote the development of cross-strait ties, and safeguard the interests of compatriots on both sides of the strait.” The statement also called for enhanced economic cooperation—including “all-round, direct and two-way ‘three links’” and expressed the two sides' shared desire to “promote a formal ending to the cross-strait state of hostilities, reach a peace accord, and build a framework for the peaceful and steady development of cross-strait ties, including the establishment of a military mutual trust mechanism, to avoid cross-strait military conflict.” The leaders also agreed to “promote discussion on issues of participation in international activities, which concern the Taiwan public, after cross-strait consultations are resumed, including priority discussion on participation in the World Health Organization's activities.” Ma's campaign emphasized this last point in its promise to work with the PRC to achieve a *modus vivendi* on Taiwan's international space.⁷

To call for dialogue while excluding the issue about which one's negotiating partner ostensibly is most eager to talk, as Ma has done, would seem to guarantee failure, but the Lien-Hu agreement provides fodder for

⁵ Ma Ying-jeou Statement, March 18, 2008. Accessed at: www.kuomintangnews.org (April 5, 2008).

⁶ The Chinese Communist Party and the KMT differentiate between Taiwan independence, which is unacceptable to both, and the independence of the Republic of China. The KMT has always insisted that the ROC exists as an independent, sovereign state. In theory, ROC independence is unacceptable to the CCP, but it has not challenged the KMT on this point in many years.

⁷ The English translation of the KMT-CCP agreement from which these passages are excerpted is available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4498791.stm> (accessed April 5, 2008). A complete Chinese text is available at: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-04-29/19065787389s.shtml> (accessed April 7, 2008).

years of negotiations without ever raising the issue of unification. (The closest the agreement comes to mentioning unification is a call for a “virtuous circle of cooperation . . . so as to bring about brilliant and splendid prospects for the Chinese nation.”) Using interim steps—the economic agreements and peace accord—to facilitate dialogue while postponing the day of reckoning on unification is an important part of the Ma Ying-jeou/KMT approach to cross-Strait relations—one that appears likely to meet Beijing leadership’s expectations (which has signed onto this strategy already) and the Taiwanese people’s.

Ma’s plan for cross-Strait dialogue also meshes well with Beijing’s current grand strategy, which emphasizes avoiding conflict and preventing Taiwan from moving farther toward *de jure* independence, while allowing the forces of economic integration and political amity to pull Taiwan more deeply into the PRC’s orbit. The current PRC leadership appears to place greater importance on neutralizing Taiwan as a threat to Chinese sovereignty than on coercing Taiwan into early unification.⁸

Ma’s Cross-Strait Policy and Popular Preferences

The easiest way to argue that Ma’s cross-Strait policies enjoy popular support is to consider the landslide victories he and his party have won this year. The electorate gave 58.45 percent of its votes to Ma after a campaign in which his positions on cross-Strait relations were challenged daily in the strongest terms his opponents could muster. Still, there were many reasons for Ma’s success, including poor performance by the DPP incumbent, a strong desire for political change, widespread reluctance to embark on another four years of gridlock (given the KMT’s legislative majority), powerful KMT organizations in many districts, Ma’s own personal charisma and popular hopes for an economic turnaround. In short, we need more evidence than Ma’s performance in the election to be confident that Taiwan voters truly welcome his cross-Strait policies.

In recent years, foreign observers have worried that public opinion in Taiwan was moving in a dangerous direction. In 1998, Ted Galen Carpenter noted an “inexorable” trend toward independence that would lead inevitably to military conflict. This claim was the basis for his 2006 book, *America’s Coming War With China: A Collision Course over Taiwan*.⁹ Although the percentage of Taiwanese telling pollsters they support immediate independence has increased little over the past decade, and

⁸For an account of China’s emerging grand strategy, see Avery Goldstein, “The Diplomatic Face of China’s Grand Strategy: A Rising Power’s Emerging Choice,” *China Quarterly*, Dec. 2001, pp. 835–864.

⁹Ted Galen Carpenter, “Let Taiwan Defend Itself.” *Cato Policy Analysis*, August 24, 1998. Available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-313.html> (accessed April 7, 2008).

large majorities prefer to maintain the status quo, it is difficult to determine how much of a role China's threats play in keeping support for *de jure* independence low.

Some observers argue that a better measure of their "true preferences" is the percentage who identify themselves as "Taiwanese," rather than "Chinese" or "both Taiwanese and Chinese." If we gauge support for changing Taiwan's status by that metric, the trend is very different. According to surveys conducted by the Election Studies Center at National Chengchi University, the percentage calling themselves Taiwanese has more than doubled since 1992, from about 17 percent to over 43 percent. The percentage claiming a Chinese identity has plunged from 26 percent to under 5 percent.¹⁰ Many observers look at these figures with alarm. But the political scientist Yun-han Chu draws a different conclusion, noting "for the silent majority, the two identities were not mutually exclusive . . . [and] the younger generation . . . turned out to be the least susceptible to the incubation of an exclusive Taiwanese identity."¹¹

It seems logical that the rise in Taiwanese identity would make islanders more resistant to integration and engagement with the mainland, but this is in fact often not the case. As the percentage claiming a Taiwanese identity has risen, support for *de jure* independence has remained flat, while support for cross-strait engagement has risen sharply. Since 1992, the percentage of Taiwanese who say the pace of cross-strait exchanges is too slow has increased from 19 percent to 35 percent (with another 41 percent saying the pace is "just right" in 2008).¹² In the same period, support for tougher regulations on cross-strait exchanges fell from 57 to 44 percent, while support for loosening the rules more than doubled, from 20 percent to 42 percent.¹³ Meanwhile, direct transportation links have the support of about three-quarters of Taiwanese.¹⁴ As Yu-shan Wu wrote of public opinion in the 1990s, "the rapid nativization of ethnic consciousness is only partially reflected in positions on national identity and the independence/unification question, and its influence on concrete policy positions [related to cross-strait economic relations] is even more limited. . . . Put

¹⁰ "Changes in the Chinese/Taiwanese Identity of Taiwanese as Tracked in Surveys by the Election Studies Center, NCCU (1992-2007). From the series "Important Political Attitude Trend Distribution." Available at <http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/eng/data/data03-2.htm> (accessed April 7, 2008).

¹¹ Yun-han Chu, "Taiwan's Politics of Identity: Navigating Between China and the United States," *Power and Security in Northeast Asia: Shifting Strategies*. Byung-Kook Kim and Anthony Jones, Eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007) p. 241.

¹² "The Pace of Cross-Strait Exchanges," Mainland Affairs Council. Available at <http://www.mac.gov.tw/english/index1-e.htm> (accessed April 7, 2008).

¹³ "How should our government handle Taiwanese investment on Mainland China?" Mainland Affairs Council. Available at <http://www.mac.gov.tw/english/index1-e.htm> (accessed April 7, 2008).

¹⁴ "Should we open up direct transportation links with Mainland China?" Mainland Affairs Council. Available at <http://www.mac.gov.tw/english/index1-e.htm> (accessed April 7, 2008).

simply, the trend toward Taiwanization in basic ethnic consciousness has not evolved into a political demand for Taiwan independence.”¹⁵

One of the most interesting and useful ways of studying these issues is a method developed by Yun-han Chu that measures conditional preferences. In these surveys, respondents are asked whether they would agree with these statements:

- If the social, economic and political conditions in the mainland become comparable to Taiwan, the two sides should become unified.
- If Taiwan can maintain peace with mainland China after declaring independence, Taiwan should become a new nation (state).

Respondents who agree with both statements Chu defines as “open-minded rationalists.” Those who disagree with both are “strong believers in the status quo.” Those who agree with one but disagree with the other are “committed believers” in either unification or independence. In the 2006 survey, 29.8 percent qualified as principled believers in independence (which is to say, they would prefer independence if it came at no cost, and they would not support unification even if the two sides were very similar) and 15.1 percent were principled believers in unification. What is most interesting, however, is the largest group—33.3 percent—who were open-minded rationalists, willing to accept either outcome under favorable conditions.¹⁶

Chu’s conclusions—which are supported by a several other studies—suggest that the mainland China policy Ma Ying-jeou and his party are promoting aligns well with popular preferences on the island.¹⁷ As Chu puts it, “my analysis does not support the view that cross-strait relations are on the verge of a major departure from the status quo. While the prospect of peaceful reconciliation has turned more promising, a negotiated peace between the two sides is still far off . . . Democratization has reinforced the Taiwanese quest to retain charge of the island’s own future, making the threshold for constructing a winning coalition for reunification extremely high.”¹⁸ If this is the case, it is not surprising that Taiwanese voters would endorse a policy aimed at promoting engagement and dialogue while deferring a conversation about unification to the distant future.

¹⁵ Wu Yu-shan, “*Liangan guanxi zhong de Zhongguo yisbi yu Taiwan yisbi.*” *Zhongguo Shiwu* 4, April 2001, pp. 71–89.

¹⁶ Chu, op. cit. p. 245.

¹⁷ See Wu, op. cit.; Andy G. Chang and T.Y. Wang, “Taiwanese or Chinese? Independence or Unification? An Analysis of Generational Differences in Taiwan.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, February–April 2005, pp. 29–49; Shelley Rigger, “Taiwan’s Rising Rationalism: Generations, Politics and Taiwanese Nationalism,” *East-West Center Policy Studies* #26 (2006); Gunter Schubert, “Taiwan’s Political Parties and National Identity: The Rise of an Overarching Consensus.” *Asian Survey* 44, July–August 2004, pp. 534–554.

¹⁸ Chu, op. cit. p. 250.

Implementing the Ma Ying-jeou Platform for Cross-Strait Relations

Now that Taiwan's electorate has spoken, implementing Ma's platform will require cooperation from three other important constituencies: Beijing, Washington and the KMT. Ma's campaign laid out a new approach for the KMT, one that emphasizes Taiwan's (or the ROC's) democratic nature. The "old KMT"—under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo—was a Chinese nationalist party (its full name, *Zhongguo Guomin Dang*, means "Chinese Nationalist Party"). This identity fueled suspicions that it would be willing to sacrifice Taiwan to the unificationist imperative in Chinese nationalism. It also reinforced the sense of the KMT as an alien political force imposed upon Taiwan, which inspired the DPP to embrace a competing ethno-nationalist vision of Taiwan's future, that of an independent Taiwanese state.

The "new KMT," populated by former president Lee Teng-hui's ethnically-transcendent "New Taiwanese," downplays ethno-nationalism in favor of democracy. Ma Ying-jeou's statements on cross-Strait relations project a civic nationalist blueprint, one in which Taiwan's (or the ROC's) national identity is defined by its democratic political system, not the ethnicity—Chinese or Taiwanese—of its citizens. By declining to play the ethno-nationalist game, Ma is able to set aside the long-standing anxiety about whether he is capable of being an authentic representative and leader for the Taiwanese people. His positions on cross-Straits issues establish him as a politician who puts Taiwan first, one who treats Taiwan as an end in itself, and not as a means to a Chinese nationalist end.

The first practical test of Ma's new approach will be whether he is able to jumpstart cross-Strait economic liberalization. The economic components of his plan should be the easiest to implement, not least because Beijing already gave them its blessing in the 2005 KMT-CCP agreement. During the campaign, Ma promised quick action on direct links, investment liberalization and bringing PRC tourists to Taiwan. The most difficult of these is the first, since the others can be accomplished almost entirely by unilateral action. But the 2005 agreement sets direct sea and air links as a goal, along with increased trade and investment, as well as opening mainland markets to Taiwanese agricultural products. Negotiating a common market agreement is a longer term step, but again, the CCP agreed to do this in the 2005 KMT-CCP pact.

During Ma's first month as president, he made significant progress toward these practical goals—enough to alarm some Democratic Progressive Party supporters. Between the election and inauguration, Vice President Vincent Siew met with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Boao, China. As soon as Ma and Siew took office, dialogue between the two sides' quasi-official representative groups resumed, proving that the ill-defined 1992 consensus is, in fact, sufficient grounds for talks. By mid-June, less than a month after the inauguration, the two sides had signed agreements to permit weekend cross-

strait charter flights and increase the number of Chinese tourists in Taiwan. Many more issues remain to be resolved, but as long as the dialogue continues, the economic issues, at least, will be addressed.

Achieving progress on political issues—including reducing tensions, implementing military confidence building measures, normalizing relations and signing a peace accord—will be a bigger challenge. Here again, though, the two sides already have agreed in principle to pursue these goals. Perhaps more importantly, Beijing currently defines its core interests in the Strait as stabilizing relations with—and neutralizing—Taiwan as a potential flashpoint for conflict by minimizing the chances it would make a lunge for *de jure* independence. Because easing cross-Strait relations is consistent with Beijing's overall strategic goals, the chances for positive steps are good.

Still, Beijing and Taipei have missed opportunities to improve their relationship before, and there is no shortage of potential roadblocks ahead. To begin with, it is crucial that both sides keep their claims modest on behalf of the 1992 Consensus. Ma has spoken of the pact as “mutual non-denial”—not mutual recognition. For Beijing to commence dialogue under this formula implies a retreat from its past insistence on the far-stricter “One China principle.” Nonetheless, hopes are rising that the 1992 Consensus, loosely interpreted, will be enough. According to news reports, Hu Jintao told President George W. Bush on March 26 that the 1992 Consensus means “both sides recognize there is only one China, but agree to differ on its definition.”¹⁹ Beijing has long insisted the consensus was not an agreement to disagree, so this shift in interpretation is noteworthy, and encouraging.

If optimism tempered with caution is in order when assessing the chances of progress in Beijing-Taipei relations, the order of the day in U.S.-Taiwan relations may well be optimism unrestrained. Relations between Washington and Taipei deteriorated badly during the Chen presidency, especially in his second term. Richard Bush, who headed the American Institute in Taiwan under presidents Clinton and George W. Bush, began a December 2007 speech in Taiwan by saying, “Today I wish to speak about why U.S.-Taiwan relations have sunk to such a low point,” then later asked, “Why . . . did the [George W.] Bush Administration start as the most Taiwan-friendly administration since the termination of diplomatic relations (or since World War II) and end up as probably the most hostile?”²⁰

In the speech, Bush offers a nuanced answer, citing the inevitable tension in any security partnership, especially one between democratic states. Bush provides a comprehensive explanation, but most analysts focus on the visible manifestations of the tension between Taiwan and the United States:

¹⁹ Katherin Hille, “Hopes Rise for Taiwan-China Dialogue,” *Financial Times*, April 2, 2008.

²⁰ Richard Bush, “U.S.-Taiwan Relations: What’s the Problem?” Brookings Institution website, available at http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2007/1203_taiwan_bush.aspx (accessed April 7, 2008).

poor communication, policy surprises (such as Chen's "one country on each side" statement, or George Bush's open criticism of Chen's government at a White House meeting with Chinese premier Wen Jiabao), Taiwan's failure to complete arms purchases and the myriad initiatives the Chen administration undertook, known in Washington as "salami slicing tactics" (including everything from renaming the Chiang Kai-shek International Airport to promoting a new constitution and orchestrating referenda on sensitive issues).

After more than four years of growing tension, U.S. officials were hard pressed to stifle cries of relief when Ma won the presidency by a decisive margin. Add to that the KMT's near three-fourths majority in the legislature and the voters' forceful rebuke of controversial referenda. Under these circumstances, the diplomatic restraint reflected in President Bush's statement on election night seems positively admirable. On June 19, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice touched on the issue in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. Rice denied that U.S.-Taiwan relations had been bad under Chen Shui-bian, but she acknowledged that the Bush Administration had been "concerned that some of the things that Chen Shui-bian tended to do were just outright provocative." Rice seemed intent on balancing the ledger. She noted that while the United States was happy to see cross-strait relations improving under Ma, it was important for Beijing to remember that its own "provocative behavior" would meet opposition from the United States.

While the mainstream view in the United States holds that the nation's interests are served by stability and diminished tension in the Taiwan Strait, not everyone will welcome improved Taipei-Beijing relations with equal fervor. There is a faction within the U.S. foreign policy community, known variously as the Blue Team or the Neo-Conservatives, who believe Taiwan's separation from China benefits the United States. In their view, too much amity between Taipei and Beijing would strengthen the PRC, which would no longer be required to focus its military preparations on preventing Taiwan independence, thereby posing an increased threat to the United States. Most recently, this view surfaced in a post-election report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Observers in Taiwan—including many who have argued this logic for some time—noticed the report. The pro-DPP English-language *Taipei Times* editorialized, ". . . Taiwan may perhaps be growing too close to China, which, as the CRS report stated, could threaten U.S. interests in the region and have a negative impact on weapons sales to Taiwan. All of a sudden, peace no longer seemed to be such a good thing."²¹

The third constituency Ma must persuade, before his cross-Strait agenda can be fully implemented, is his own party. Here again, cautious optimism is warranted. On the one hand, with the KMT in control of nearly three-fourths of the legislature, Ma should have an easy time passing legislation to execute his policies. On the other hand, the KMT's large majority makes

²¹ "Washington Sends Mixed Signals," *Taipei Times*, April 8, 2008.

the historically-fractious party, which only this year repaired schisms of more than a decade, harder to discipline than ever. Ma's ability to lead the KMT when it was out of power was a matter of debate; now that the party is back in control, reining in its worst impulses will require a firmer hand than he has demonstrated in the past. Still, KMT legislators are not an ideological bunch; it may be possible to secure their cooperation on cross-Strait policy by providing side-payments of more immediate and material benefit to them and their districts.

As the reopened cross-Strait dialogue began to bear fruit in the first month after Ma's inauguration, the KMT legislative leadership raised the issue of legislative involvement in the negotiating process. Speaker Wang Jin-pyng raised the possibility that the legislature might pass a bill guaranteeing the body representation in negotiations. While Wang's proposal met with a stern reaction from the executive branch, the Premier Liu Chao-shiuan affirmed that cross-Strait agreements would be submitted for legislative ratification. It is important for the two branches to work out a balance of executive autonomy and legislative oversight; the fact that they do not automatically agree is probably a healthy sign. Nonetheless, these debates are fodder for claims that the KMT is internally divided.

Conclusion

Taiwan's relations with Beijing and Washington have deteriorated over the past eight years. There is blame on all sides—Beijing's inflexibility and Washington's distraction certainly played a role. Still, a major contributing factor was Chen Shui-bian's determination to spend much of his presidency—especially his second term—strengthening Taiwan's resistance to closer engagement with the PRC. Many of his undertakings in this direction were perceived in Washington as gratuitous and in Beijing as provocative. Whether a new DPP president would have continued those policies is beside the point now that the election is over.

Ma Ying-jeou's election augurs well for improvement in relations both across the Strait and across the Pacific. His approach to cross-Strait relations offers a balanced mix of engagement and restraint, dialogue and self-protection. His policy platform is consistent with the preferences of a substantial majority of Taiwan's people, and he enjoys their confidence as well. To win over the forty percent who did not vote for him, Ma must prove his sincerity in putting Taiwan's interests first. If he diligently pursues the policy agenda he laid out during the election campaign, then that should not be an impossible task.

