

**CHEN SHUIBIAN'S "LEGACIES" AND
MA YING-JEOU'S OPPORTUNITIES:
A DEPARTURE FOR CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS?**

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Executive Summary

After eight years as president of the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan, Chen Shuibian (陈水扁) finally stepped down. A highly controversial politician, Chen irritated both Beijing and Washington until his last days in office.

Widely regarded as a trouble-maker instead of a peace-maker, Chen has proved to be a liability for the Democratic Progressive Party, in particular its presidential candidate, Frank Hsieh (谢长廷), whose defeat in the 22 March 2008 presidential election was mainly due to the incompetency and corruption of the Chen Shuibian government in the past eight years.

With his approving rate at only 21 percent, Chen ended his tenure on a sour note. On 19 May 2008, one day before Chen's official departure, the World Health Assembly again, for the 12th time, rejected Taipei's application for an observer status in the World Health Organization under the name of "Taiwan."

Hours after he completed his eight years in office as president on Tuesday, 20 May 2008, Taiwanese prosecutors immediately launched a corruption probe against Chen for his role in the handling of a special presidential fund used to pursue Taiwan's "money diplomacy."

Nonetheless, Chen Shuibian indeed has left some "legacies" on cross-strait relations. First of all, because of his combative style, anyone else would look more tolerable in the eyes of Beijing and Washington. Second, because of his strong pro-independence policies, any policy that is different from his would compare favorably for Beijing.

In this context, Ma Ying-jeou (马英九), a candidate elected on the ticket of the Kuomintang (国民党), took oath to become president of the ROC on 20 May 2008. He officially affirmed his three-no's (no unification, no independence, and no use of force) policy on cross-strait relations.

This policy is hardly a significant departure from Chen's "four no's plus one policy" (of not declaring independence, not changing the national title, not pushing for the inclusion of the "state-to-state" description in the Constitution, not promoting a referendum to change the status quo in regards to the question of independence or unification, and not raising the issue of abolishing the National Unification Council or the Guidelines for National Unification).

It is not clear how Ma is going to implement his policy. Since Beijing is the one that has not given up non-peaceful means on cross-strait relations, it is not up to Ma to decide whether military force would be used.

Furthermore, a few days before he took office, Ma told The Associated Press that unification with China was not likely "within our lifetimes," an extraordinary comment that discredits the narrative of detente that has appeared as a result of Ma's election.

Worse still, Ma nominated Ms. Lai Shin-yuan (赖幸媛), a former Taiwan Solidarity Union (a pro-independence party in Taiwan) legislator, to serve as the Chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council, sparking widespread controversy.

Beijing was silent for almost two whole days after Ma delivered his inaugural speech. There was no mention of Ma's speech in major newspapers of the Mainland. When Chen Yunlin (陈云林), head of Taiwan Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council, finally made an announcement of Beijing's policy toward Taiwan on 22 May 2008, he mentioned neither Ma's name nor his speech.

Of course, Beijing has not given up on Ma yet. But Beijing will adopt an attitude of wait-and-see toward Ma as it did toward Chen. Not only will Beijing listen to what Ma says but it will also watch what he does.