

China-KMT Visit Judoes 'Taiwan Independence' Ploy

by William Jones

The visit of Kuomintang (KMT) leader Lien Chan to mainland China has dealt a serious blow to the diabolical policy of the Cheney-Rumsfeld neo-conservative faction of maintaining a high-tension state between Taiwan and China. At a loss over the continued strong economic growth of this nation of 1.3 billion people in East Asia, combined with a very successful diplomatic initiative by China to improve its economic and diplomatic ties with the other nations of East and Southeast Asia, the neo-cons have exerted every effort to provoke instability in the region in an attempt to keep those nations in their camp, and at each other's throats. The neo-con support of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's flirtation with the "Taiwan independence" issue, as well as their attempt to tie Japan closer to the Pentagon's apron-strings by broadening the regional role of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, are two pillars of this policy.

As a result of the ground-breaking visit by the leader of the Taiwan-based Kuomintang party, Lien Chan, the first KMT leader to visit the mainland in 65 years, the political geometry of the cross-strait relationship has been totally transformed. Lien spent a mere eight days on the mainland, but the red carpet was rolled out for the KMT leader, from the moment he landed in Nanjing on April 28, until he left Shanghai on May 3. During the course of his visit, he held an historic meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao, and the KMT signed a cooperative agreement with the Communist Party of China which would allow the two parties to work on their own to attempt to improve relations between the two sides, in spite of the sabotage attempts by the Chen Shui-bian government.

The process has been playing out for some time now, and President Chen has been more and more boxed into a corner

because of his flirtation with the U.S. neo-cons' "Taiwan independence" gambit. The fact that the neo-cons themselves have been coming under heavy fire, with the nomination of John Bolton as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations now in jeopardy, and the neo-con Iraq war "cakewalk" looking more and more like the "death of a thousand cuts," they are finding it difficult to gain momentum in heating up a new "Taiwan crisis."

The 'Journey of Peace'

Lien Chan's arrival in Nanjing on the first step of his "Journey of Peace" was pregnant with symbolism. Nanjing, the capital during the great Ming Dynasty, had been chosen as the capital of the new Republic of China by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who lived and worked there during the short time he served as its President. The mausoleum of Dr. Sun in Nanjing has long been a focus of pilgrimage for visitors on both sides of the strait, underscoring the common tradition of Chinese history before the split between the Nationalists and the Communists after World War II. In his speech at the mausoleum, where he laid a wreath at the tomb, Lien Chan reiterated the importance of the Sun Yat-sen tradition for people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. He also visited the Presidential Palace where Dr. Sun lived and worked during his Presidency.

Arriving in Beijing on April 29, Lien addressed students at the prestigious Beijing University. Lien said that a majority of people in Taiwan will not accept a policy of "desinification" aimed at severing ties with the mainland. "Parents hope their children can learn more about the cream of Chinese culture," he told the students. "One-plus-one makes more than two," he continued. "The common prosperity of

Chinese on either side of the strait is no longer an unattainable dream.”

Creating a Permanent Channel for Dialogue

Lien then received a warm welcome from Hu Jintao, with whom he had a private meeting on April 29. The two signed a joint communiqué, in their capacity as leaders of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China, respectively, which stressed the need for making progress on five major areas of cooperation: reestablishing cross-strait talks, which had been initiated in 1992 on the basis of both parties accepting the concept of “one China,” but which had been torpedoed by Chen Shui-bian’s independence drive; the formal end of the state of hostility across the strait; all-round economic cooperation and trade across the strait; launching discussions about Taiwan’s participation in international activities; and the establishment of a platform for regular exchanges between the two parties. The communiqué said that it would “give priority to discussions on Taiwan’s participation in the activities of the World Health Organization.” Membership in the World Health Organization has also been one of the “carrots” the U.S. neo-cons and their allies on the island have been using to rally people in Taiwan around their “independence” ploy.

The formal establishment of ties between the two parties helps to fill the gap in the relationship between the two sides, given the frosty relations between Taipei and Beijing because of the “Taiwan independence” platform of the ruling Taiwan’s ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The two agreed to continued party-to-party exchanges as a means of creating an independent line of communication between the two sides.

Stops on his journey were replete with allusions to the common Chinese culture shared by Taiwan and mainland China. After Beijing, Lien Chan travelled to Xian, the city of his birth, where he had spent the first eight years of his life before the family migrated to Taiwan. Lien visited the school that he attended as a child, where he was greeted with celebrations and dances given by the students there. He gave the school a gift of 100,000 yuan as well as a three-volume history of Taiwan, written by his grandfather, Lien Heng, in 1918. He also visited the grave of his grandmother, who is buried in Xian. While in Xian, he also visited the famous terracotta soldiers which had been unearthed in recent years, again using the opportunity to reiterate the long tradition of Chinese civilization.

In addition to the stress on culture in Lien Chan’s visit, the economic aspects of the relationship were also center-stage, with Lien Chan leading a 60-man delegation which included many Taiwanese businessmen. While Lien marvelled at the enormous changes that he saw in China since he left 56 years ago, he also pointed to the tremendous economic dynamic in Taiwan, which, he continually underlined, could be of immense benefit to the mainland in its ambitious devel-

opment programs. At the end of the visit, China agreed to lift the tariffs on more than ten kinds of fruit imported from Taiwan and to include six more fruit species for import.

Everywhere he went, he was met by tremendous crowds, who treated him almost like a returning hero. It was also obvious on various stops that the visit was a tremendous emotional experience for him personally, with tears starting to well up in his eyes as he commented on the visit to the tomb of his grandmother. Although Chen Shui-bian had done everything he could to sabotage the visit, the various stops on Lien Chan’s visit were also widely covered in the Taiwan press and media, including the famous “handshake” with President Hu, and have elicited a great swell of support from the people of Taiwan, with estimates that some 60% of the population strongly support better ties with the mainland.

Lien Chan’s visit also served to reinvigorate the 1992 consensus reached by the two sides, in which they both accepted the notion of “one China” as the basis of their negotiations, with enough ambiguity in what exactly “one China” meant for the both sides to interpret it in their own way. The last decade’s emergence, with the direct support of the U.S. neo-conservative apparatus, of the “Taiwan independence” card, had effectively undermined that “consensus.” Emphasizing the renewed importance of the “consensus,” Lien Chan had one of his last meetings on the mainland with the 90-year old Wang Daohan, the head of the Association for Relations

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Across the Taiwan Strait, who had been the Chinese negotiator of that 1992 agreement.

Chen Shui-bian could hardly avoid the tremendous impact of the visit on the Taiwan electorate. In response to the visit, President Chen, hoping to regain the momentum, called for peace talks with Beijing. "The door for dialogue and negotiations is still open between the two sides," he said. The Chinese leadership has previously rejected calls by Chen for negotiations as long as he adheres to an independence program.

In response to Chen's call, at a press conference on May 4, Wang Zaixi, the deputy director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the CPC Central Committee, invited all parties from Taiwan, including the DPP, to visit the mainland, on condition that they accept the "one-China principle." On that basis, Wang said, all issues might be discussed, including the concerns Taiwan has about Chinese missiles situated on the coast opposite Taiwan. In an important symbolic gesture, China has given two giant pandas to Taiwan.

In what may well become a one-two punch for the Chen Shui-bian leadership, the Lien Chan visit will be followed by a visit by James Soong, the leader of the People First Party. Soong, a former governor of Taiwan, had broken with the KMT when the party under Lee Tung-hui began to veer toward the U.S. neo-con "independence" platform. He worked together with Lien Chan's KMT during the last parliamentary elections in Taiwan to secure a parliamentary majority against Chen's policy. This clear recognition by the Beijing leadership of Taiwan political forces that are prepared to discuss with Chinese leaders on the basis of the "one-China" formula, places the Taiwan President in the uncomfortable position of a leader of a small fringe, frantically clinging to a somewhat obsolete neo-con agenda.

No doubt, the visit also had some of the China-bashers at Washington-based neo-con think tanks, like the American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation, chewing the rug over the changed situation in the region. But things are not going so well for them on most fronts. Even their "Japan card" has also become somewhat frayed in the aftermath of the large anti-Japan demonstrations in many Chinese cities last month, and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's public apology for Japanese war crimes during World War II in Jakarta, the Japan-China relationship is also starting to come out of the freezer after the harsh Chinese reaction to the earlier communiqué by the U.S. and Japanese defense officials which, for the first time, put the "Taiwan issue" on their bilateral agenda.

Bogged down also by their Iraq War debacle, which is threatening to become a permanent military quagmire, the neo-con policy of the lunatic Bush Administration is being buffeted on all sides. Rather than serving to tone down their aggressive machinations, their setbacks may simply serve to increase their desperation, leading to even more attempts at a provocation.