Taiwan S 2Nd Democratic Presidential Election Essay, Research Paper

Introduction:

On Saturday, March 18, 2000, voters will go to 13,457 ballot booths in the free area of the Republic of China that is Taiwan. Four years after their democratic presidential election and with their island s future still uncertain, voters in Taiwan will be choosing a successor to current leader Lee Teng-hui. The five presidential candidates are independent James Soong, the Kuomintang s (KMT) Lien Chang, the New Party s Lee Ao, independent Hsu Hsin-liang and the Democratic Progressive Party s (DPP) Chen Shui-bian (Fig.1). But as Taiwan s people prepare to choose only their second popularly elected president and perhaps transfer Taiwan s leadership to a new party for the first time in 51 years. The three leading candidates (Lien Chan, Chen Shui-bian, and James Soong) have been subdues, their rhetoric mild, and the tone tentative and cautious. The reason is China, 90 miles away across the Taiwan Strait (Fig 2). When the communists took control of China in 1949, the Nationalists under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan, where they established the Republic of China as a government in exile and imposed martial law. China has considered Taiwan a renegade province ever since and has threatened to use force to bring about reunification. Four years ago, as Taiwan prepared for its first-ever direct presidential election, China rattled its tiny neighbor and brought U.S. warships to the scene by conducting missile tests in the Taiwan Strait. On February 21, 2000, less than a month before Taiwan s election on March 18, the Chinese struck again. This time they announced that foot-dragging on reunification had been added tot he list of things international meddling or a declaration of independence are the others that would trigger an attack on Taiwan. There are other issues in this year s election including corruption and election, including corruption and campaign finance reform, but the issue known as cross-strait relation is far and away the most important.

History of Political Parties in Taiwan:

There has been a long history of election in Taiwan. But the democratic reforms in Taiwan have been gathering momentum over the last decade. Ever since steps were first taken to liberalize and expand the political process, each election has carried politics on Taiwan closes to the goal of full democracy. The political parties of the Republic of China are the Kuomintang, Democratic Progressive Party, and the New Party. The Kuamintang (Nationalist Party) is the current ruling party of the Republic of China. Having to celebrate its one hundredth anniversary on November 24, 1994, the KMT has widespread appeal, boasting a membership of approximately 2.1 million. The party was founded as a revolutionary league dedicated to overthrowing the Chinese monarchy in 1912 when its leader Sun Yat-sen established the Republic of China after the collapse of the Qing (Ching) dynasty. Following Sun s death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek assumed control of the KMT and in collaboration with the Communists consolidated the governments power throughout China. In 1927, however, Chiang turned on the Communists, launched and killed thousands and crushed communists organized labor

unions, thus beginning a long devastating civil war. In the late 1930s the KMT and the Communists reunited to fight the Japanese but only for the duration of World War II, and

in 1945 they were again fighting each other for control of China. After suffering a series of defeats at the hands of the Communists, Chiang and his Nationalists forces fled to Taiwan in 1949. The Kuomintang has maintained a virtual monopoly of power on the island ever sine, holding nearly all legislative, executive, and judicial posts. Over the past decade, however, it has seen some of its power eroded by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party. The Democratic Progressive Party, formed on Sept. 28, 1986, now has approximately 200,000 members. The Party s organizational structure closely resembles that of the Kuomintang. The party was established primarily by family members and defense lawyers of imprisoned dissidents, the DPP became the first political party to challenge the Kuomintang s decades long grip on power. The DPP quickly support from ethnic Taiwanese frustrated by the authoritarian rule of the Kuomintang, whose loyalists and leaders had fled from mainland China in 1949 following their army s defense by the Chinese Communists. In its charter the DPP promotes holding a referendum on independence from China and opposes the Kuomintang s one China s policy. DPP presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian has pledged, however, that if elected he will not declare independence for Taiwan unless China invades. The New Party was established in August 1993, shortly before the Kuomintang s 14th National Congress, a group of KMT Young Turks including six legislative Yuan members and one former lawmaker broke away from the party to establish the New Party. The New Party differs from the KMT and the DPP in organizational structure, stressing the leadership of those holding public office. At the head of the party is the National Campaign and Development Committee. The convener of the committee, a position currently filled by Lee-Chian-hua,

serves as the leader of the party. In August 1999, the party took almost everyone by surprise by nominating the renowned writer Li Ao as its presidential candidate for the 2000 presidential election.

Candidates Campaign Issues for Three Presidential:

Conventional wisdom holds that each of the three major presidential candidates enjoys certain notable advantages. Former Taiwan Governor James Soong is regarded as the most charismatic. Official Kuomingtang candidate Vice President Lien Chan is backed by his part s awesome resources. Former Taipei Mayor Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party has a reputation for action and dynamism.

James Soon s Proposal:

James Soon, independent was once a leading figure in the ruling Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalist Party. Soong split with the party in November 1999 when he launched his own campaign for president. He challenged the KMT s candidate, Vice President Lien Chan. Soong, once the director-general of Taiwan s Government Information Office and later managing director for two of Taiwan s nationwide broadcast television network, has sought to distance himself from the policies of the KMT in recent months. More recently, from 1993 to 1998, he was governor of Taiwan Province. He has proposed a 30 year non-aggression pact with Beijing. That would be followed by a 20- year quasi-international arrangement between Taiwan and mainland China modeled after the European Union, after which referendum would be held on independence. Soon has also proposed calling on all-party conference to build a national consenous on steps to take in improving relations with China. Soong enjoyed a lead in the polls until late Feb., when the KMT filed a lawsuit alleging Soong of embezzling $12 million from the party leader. Soong denied the accusation.

James Soong s Position: (Fig.3)

Soong has suggested that Taiwan and China engage in a quasi-international relationship similar to the European union, but China is not interested. Although he was born in China and has supported reunification in the long term, Soong also has recommended that Taiwan arm itself with submarines that could launch strikes at China s airports and harbors. Popular, charismatic and at one time an effective provincial governor, Soong has led the polls throughout much of the campaign. He has also been the focus of another issue: corruption. When the KMT failed to make him its presidential candidate, Soong bolted the party and began campaigning as an independent. Stung by his disloyalty, Lien and Lee have likened Soong to Adof Hitler and Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos. They also accused him of embezzling $11.7 million in the party funds. Meanwhile, Democratic Progressive Party candidate Chen Shui-bian has accused the KMT of black gold (literally term: bribery and gangster) politics- using its businesses (from petrochemical to karaoke bars; assets of $3.8 billion) to influence local politics, business and even organized crime. But Soong has denied the charges several times. He says the money came from political contributions and that he was entrusted by President Lee to carry out party tasks. Among the tasks, Soong says, was supporting the family of the late Chiang Ching-kuo Chiang Lai-shek s son and successor- who rules Taiwan when it was under martial law. Soong has offered to repay the KMT more than $8 million, but the party has refused to accept the money. After the charges were leveled in late 1999, Soong s popularity dipped significantly. Even so, the latest polls show he still enjoys a slight lead over Chen.

Lien Chan s Proposal and Position: (Fig.4)

Lien Chan, Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) is the handpicked successor of President Lee Teng-hui and is the hope of the ruling Kuomintang, or the Nationalist Party, to cling to its 50- year hold- on power. Lien, who was premier under Lee from 1993 to 1997, has also served as governor of Taiwan Province, foreign affairs minister and minister of transportation and communication. Lien has pledged to improve contacts with China and says he favors opening direst trade and postal and air links with the main land. He also promises to push for regular summits between the two sides. Lien rejects, however, the Beijing government s one country, two systems model for reunification under which Hong Kong and Macau reverted to Chinese rule in 19997 and 1999. He endorses President Lee s policy of demanding an equal state-to-state relationship with China, a view that has enraged the Beijing government. Lien is gruff, distant, and stiff, and trails Soong and Chen in the opinion polls. Although he could be expected to continue Lee s policies, he has not repeated Lee s state-to-state remark and has suggested a peace zone in the Taiwan Straight. He has also recommended Taiwan expand its defense capabilities by developing long-range missiles. Lien says the Beijing has to face the reality and work together to work out solutions. Beijing has to face the reality and work together to work out solutions. Taiwan is simply calling attention to the reality of the two sides bring governed over the past 50 years.

Chen Shui-bian s Proposal and Position: (Fig.5)

Chen Shui-bian, Democratic Progressive Party is known for his advocacy of independence. Chen recently softened his nationalist campaign talk and now promotes building closer track ties with main land China. Chen would neither declare independence nor change the official name of Taiwan-unless it was invaded. He promises he will not bring Taiwan to the brink of war. Like fellow presidential contender

Lien Chan, Chen supports establishing shipping links with China and possibly later lifting restrictions on direct flights tot he mainland. He says he would consider allowing Taiwan banks to open branches in China. He would aim to resume cross-strait negotiations and would open to discussing the one China policy, so long as it was not pre-condition for dialogue. Chen would try to visit China after the presidential election and before his inauguration if elected. Likewise, he would invite Chinese leaders to visit Taiwan. Chen says that unless China attempts to use force, the DPP will never declare the independence of Taiwan unilaterally, or even call for a referendum on the issue. He stresses that Taiwan has already become an in dependent, sovereign country, so there is no need to take up the question of whether Taiwan is independent. As mayor of the capital Taipei from 1994 to 1998, Chen gained a reputation of being tough on corruption. He also became know for his media stunts, which included surprise visits with TV crews to government offices to look for officials taking unauthorized days off. Once a maritime lawyer, Chen made his name defending political dissidents during Taiwan s martial law era, which ended in 1987. Frustrated by seeing his clients repeatedly convicted by the state, Chen entered politics as a Taipei City Councilor in 1981 and was elected to the Legislative Yuan or parliament, in 1989. Chen called on all of his supporters to join together and make an historic choice: to change Taiwan s fate and root out corruption from politics.

Conclusion:

The three principal presidential contenders- Vice President Lien Chan, the KMT s candidate, Democratic Progressive Party s candidate Chen Shui-bian and independent James Soong have played down whatever differences they might have with

the Communists. Lien Chan would like to explore the possibility of building better mainland, establishing what he calls a win-win situation between the two sides. James Soong thinks that Taiwan s fundamental position is that Taiwan want to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Chen Shui-bian states that the ones who can normalize relations with the mainland with the mainland are not the parties that have had historical disputes with China. The KMT-Communist Party dispute still exists. The DPP, on the other hand, has no historical baggage. These three major presidential candidates are all willing to pursue peace with China, but they are likely to be restrained by two factors: First, the race is so tight that whoever wins will do so by a small margin and will not have a mandate. The new president will thus have to reach a cross-party consensus before dealing with China. Second, the influence of mass sentiment is such that the new president must win the confidence of the people before any negotiations. But meanwhile, the polls say that as many as 80 percent of Taiwan s 22 million people do not want to reunify with China in the foreseeable future, and for obvious reasons.

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