The Struggle For Taiwan Essay, Research Paper

The Struggle for Taiwan

Who is the legal governing body of Taiwan? A question, which has embattled two nations and almost brought the United States into war several times. Few other international situations combine the passion and possibility for disaster that this does. With the United States bound by its promise to protect Taiwan from invasion, and the Chinese govt. steadily increasing its rhetoric for Taiwan?s reunification with the mainland, we have on this small island the stage for a possible super power confrontation. The likes of which we avoided for 50 years with the Soviet Union. How has this island brought us to the possibility of war? It all began roughly 50 years ago.

World War II and its aftermath was a trying time for the people of China. After having waged war against the Japanese for a decade, and dealing with its own communist uprising, the country was extremely weakened. Immediately following WWII the island of Taiwan, a former province of China, was turned over to Chinese control, from the Japanese, in accordance with the Potsdam conference of 1945. During this time however the communist forces were continuing their civil war and by 1949 gained complete control of China. The nationalist govt. and the remnants of its army lead by Chiang Ki-shek fled to Taiwan and reestablished their govt., which still claimed governance over Mainland China. Following several invasion attempts by the Chinese in the 1950?s the United States entered into a mutual security treaty with Taiwan in 1955 pledging to help in defending the island from attack by China. For years after the United States continued to recognize the Republic of China based in Taiwan as the governing body of Mainland China. However by 1971 the ROC lost its seat in the United Nations to the Beijing based government known as the Peoples Republic of China. Following this was the United States official recognition of the PRC in 1979 and the exclusion of the ROC from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in 1980. During this Taiwan was dominated by the Kuomintang (KMT) govt., which still wished for a reunification of China. All of this came to a halt in the 1990?s.

Following the eruption of Taiwan?s economy China again turned its eye towards the island. In 1993 the PRC released a document titled ?The Taiwan Question and the Reunification of China.? In it China stated its intent and ambition to annex Taiwan and strive for a ?coexistence of two systems? in ?one China?. The KMT continued its pledge that the communist regime in China cannot legitimately represent the Chinese people. It became obvious that, with Chinas hard-line stance that Taiwan MUST be reunified and Taiwan?s stance against this, compromise and even peace might not be possible. In the late 90?s the KMT saw its grip weaken with the emergence of the Democratic Progressive Party. This party ran on the principle not of reuniting China under KMT control, but of independence for Taiwan from China. Then in 1995 and 1996 the Chinese sought to influence the elections by conducting missile tests off the coast of China and even military exercises on the coast of China nearest Taiwan. All in the hopes of inhibiting the Taiwanese peoples desire for independence. It did not however work. The 1996 presidential election saw a landslide victory for the candidate staunchly opposed by Beijing. Then in 200 in possibly the biggest step by the people of Taiwan towards independence they elected president Chen Shiu-bian of the DPP.

Chen?s election marks the emerging uncertainty of Taiwan?s future. While not running on a policy of independence, in fact Chen advocates an increase in economic ties between the two countries, Chen is a supporter of a free Taiwan. He was the choice Beijing feared the most and, with his election, much doubt is given for any peaceful reconciliation between China and Taiwan. The Chinese govt. stated after the election ?Taiwan?s local leadership election and its results cannot change the fact that Taiwan is a part of China?s territory.? These words along with the threats by many PLA generals that war would follow a Chen election have brought us to the current situation and the possibilities it presents.

Recently China has begun to poise itself for an invasion of Taiwan. From planning air raid drills in cites that have not seen them in 50 years, to exercises involving the use of Chinas civilian ships in the transportation of military men and hardware. The U.S. continues to pledge support for the Taiwanese in the event of an invasion and still keep 2 carrier groups within striking distance of Taiwan?s beaches. Although many military studies have shown that any invasion of Taiwan by China would be near impossible to complete, given Chinas lack of appropriate weaponry, the fact still remains that the worlds only two countries currently able to claim superpower status would be in direct armed conflict with one another. A proposition that must be avoided at all costs.

The ?Taiwanese Question? has proven to be riddle not easily solved for the past 50 years. I believe the only inevitable event is Taiwanese independence. The U.S. cannot and will not allow armed aggression to topple a nation whose govt. has been rightfully elected by the people. The scary notion of direct war between two nuclear superpowers is a frightful one indeed. However the policy of the United States to oppose armed soviet expansionism should be upheld in protecting the govt. of Taiwan in its efforts for independence.