

TAIWAN COULD BE FLASHPOINT

# Capitalism has not converted China

By Nicholas Evan Sarantakes

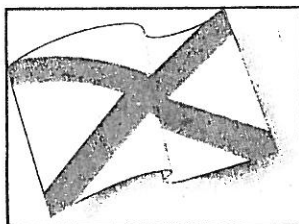
Is China a friend or enemy of the United States? A simple question without a simple answer. Perhaps the best response is that while China might not be a full-blown enemy, it is certainly no friend.

Since 1972 when President Richard Nixon made his historic trip to China, Americans have been buying into a delusion about this ancient land. Nixon's move made sense as a cold-blooded geopolitical calculation. It completed a split between the major Communist powers of the Cold War era and allowed the United States to play one off the other.

The move also opened up the China market. American businessmen were eager to move into China, seeing new sources of cheap labor and huge new markets for their goods and services. The Chinese were also more than willing to establish commercial ties with the United States, but for reasons of their own.

Americans convinced themselves that they were doing more than just increasing their profits, that democracy would follow capitalism, that they were planting the democratic virus in a Communist nation.

Things looked rather different from the perspective of those in Beijing. Marx wrote that capitalist were so greedy they would sell



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the rope to their own hanging. So Chinese leaders figured it would be OK to use the Americans to help them build up their economic, commercial, industrial and military strength.

A strong China does not in and of itself run counter to U.S. interests, even though China has been a weak power during the entire existence of the United States. The problem is Taiwan. When Nixon did his thing in Beijing, the Chinese made it clear that they considered Taiwan to be a Chinese province. The United States had no problem with this view.

It had, in fact, adopted this position as its own during World War II, when it made Japan return Taiwan to Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China. When Chiang lost the Chinese civil war to the Communists, what remained of his government fled to Taiwan and continued to claim to be the government of all of China.

The United States supported this claim until 1978 when President Jimmy

Carter finished Nixon's dirty work and extended diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China, ending at the same time the political relationship with Taiwan. The PRC has always said that while peaceful unification was its desired method for regaining control of Taiwan, it would use whatever means were necessary to regain control of this rogue province.

While the Carter administration was willing to accept that position, Congress was not. In 1979 both houses passed the Status of Taiwan Act by massive margins. This legislation made it possible for Taiwan to maintain commercial ties with the United States, and procure military supplies. Essentially the executive branch had one China foreign policy, while the legislative branch had another. Americans got to have their cake and eat it, too.

The leadership of the PRC has never given up its claim to Taiwan. While Chiang was nothing more than a right-wing dictator, Taiwan has, since his death, evolved into a legitimate, multi-party democracy. Needless to say, the Taiwanese are less than thrilled at the idea of losing their freedoms in a unified, Communist China. Chinese leaders consider Taiwan a domestic situation in which the United States should

have no say.

While China lacked the military resources to cross the Strait of Taiwan, it was willing to tolerate the ambiguous American policy. Now, things are beginning to change. Peaceful unification is still the method that best serves the interests of the PRC, but scenarios that might bring about a war in five to 10 years are no longer all that far-fetched.

While the mainlanders who arrived with Chiang are Chinese, the native Taiwanese are not so sure if they are part of China. There is a political party on Taiwan that favors independence, and Beijing has made it clear that this development would be enough to trigger an invasion.

What would Americans do in that situation remains to be determined. The United States has no formal military obligation to Taiwan, but could we watch a Communist nation destroy a legitimate democracy without doing anything?

What seems more and more likely is that the United States is going to have to realize that injections of capitalism have not turned communists into democrats and that it is no friend.

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