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By JAMES MCGREGOR

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TAIPEI - Where does Taiwan go from here? '

The ruling Kuomintang is still in shock over Saturday's elections in which the opposition Democratic Progressive Party overcame a stacked deck and scored impressive victories.

The DPP, a fractious group led by former political prisoners and fueled by public discontent. seems confused whether to celebrate its victory or scream about alleged election fraud in several races it lost.

Both sides now face the awesome task of putting aside decades of hate and fear to figure out a way to work together. And this must be done quickly because the elections have created a volatile brew. Taiwan's Legislative Yuan, the country's lawmaking body, is primed for an ugly explosion over whether Taiwan should declare itself independent of ties to China or seek a formula for peaceful co-existence.

When the next session opens in January. the remaining 163 life-term KMT lawmakers who have been frozen in office since 1947 elections in China will be joined by 130 lawmakers chosen by voting and appointments last weekend. Within 'this group of 130 are eight DPP lawmakers elected on a platform of Taiwan declaring independence, and 18 KMT lawmakers who are the sons and daughters of Chinese who fled to Taiwan from' China with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. This group of second generation mainlanders is determined to develop a way to tensify Taiwan and China

Harassing the Government

In local government, the DPP has won six of Taiwan's 16 county magistrate positions. So DPP politicians in these powerful posts now will have a big say in the lives of seven million of Taiwan's 20 million citizens. The DPP says it plans to use these magistrate positions to harass the national government.

Thus, Taiwan is set to have a legislature paralyzed with fighting about reunification or independence, and administrative branches of government more concerned with infighting than solving the island's practical problems.

As is usual in Taiwan. the average citizens are way ahead of their government leaders. Voters interviewed during the campaign and since the voting say they were seeking to establish a two-party system that could provide checks and balances. Their foremost concern is stability and furthering the island's economic development while solving the problems of horrible pollution, soaring crime rate, rampant financial speculation and an antiquated infrastructure that provides a

quality of life that is far from commensurate with the citizenry's \$7,200 per-capita income.

Voters here seem to realize something else that has yet to dawn on this island's politicians. A functioning democracy can provide Taiwan with an effective poison-pill defense against China. '

in one sense it is easy for China to take over Hong Kong in 1997. All authoritarian Chinese regime merely will jump into the chairs of Britain's colonial administrators who never have allowed the colony to develop democratic traditions.

But if Taiwan can develop full democracy in the next few years, China has good reason to keep the island at arm's length. The last thing China's rulers want is to _ absorb a province where people are accustomed to speaking their mind and electing their government representatives.

Democracy in Taiwan will give China's - leaders good reason to work out an accord that allows China to- benefit from Taiwan's technology, business acumen and abundant capital while providing Taiwan autonomy so its democratic ideals don't infect China's masses. . 1

Businessmen, scholars, average citizens and the more thoughtful government officials in Taiwan are optimistic that this can be accomplished. One reason is that in 10 years or so, the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait who really hate each other will be dead. The old-guard in Taiwan wants parliament and China's old-guard who ordered the slaughter of students in Tiananmen Square in June are cut from the same cloth.

These people grew up together but ended up on different sides of the Chinese civil war. To them, the division of Taiwan and China is a matter of face, and both believe that democracy is a chaotic form of government that goes against the Confucian ideal of citizens displaying blind fealty to enlightened rulers.

' But when these faces are gone, the next generation in both China and Taiwan 1.1':1

Y Teng-hu

is Taiwan's Best Defense Against China will have the opportunity to devise some sort of a Chinese commonwealth in which 1 two separate Chinese nations can cooperate under an ethnic banner. To do so, however, Taiwan's leaders have to determine how to avoid prematurely forcing a showdown with China over Taiwan's status.

This won't be easy.

At its core, the Taiwan Independence Movement is a call for fully representative government. In March, Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui, a native Taiwanese, was re-elected upon the death of Chiang Ching-kuo. But Taiwan's citizens won't have a say in the matter, even though his considerable popularity would make him a shoo-in if he faced popular election. Instead, Taiwan's National As-

sembly will vote on Mr. Lee's fate. The National Assembly now has 797 members. 1 of which 701 are life-term members from 1;; China.

This is the major reason there is a now a strong movement for rewriting Taiwan's constitution. The current document was written in 1947 in China. It defines parliament as a 4.725-seat three-body institution elected by citizens living within national borders that include all of China, Tibet and Mongolia.

Many scholars in Taiwan are calling on the government to rewrite the document with "creative ambiguity" to trim it down to Taiwan-size while leaving enough China connections to prevent provoking China's communist rulers, who have threatened to invade Taiwan if the island declares independence. But only the National Assembly can change the constitution, and by doing so the old-guard assembly members job.

Ham-Fisted Tactics

The more practical solution is for the DPP and KMT to work together to sideline the issue of Taiwan's international status. Many believe this can only be done by speeding up the retirement of the KMT's old-guard, and replacing them through elections in Taiwan. The KMT already would be writing themselves out of a ready has a plan to do this over the next 10 years. But the DPP is unlikely to wait that long. 1

Unless the two parties can come to an agreement Taiwan society is in real danger of splitting apart along ethnic lines. Second-generation mainlanders are very frightened about the new political power of ethnic Taiwanese politicians, both the DPP's elected officials and President, Lee angry about the continuing dominance in parliament of the old-guard Chinese. 4

Ethnic Taiwanese are, very.

On Saturday, Taiwan's voters sent a message to the KMT; They rejected the party's plan to create a one-party democracy by slowly opening up seats to election and using state television and other ham-fisted tactics to crush opponents. The DPP on Saturday proved that it can compete and win; even in an election system designed to perpetuate the ruling party's dominance. Now the opposition's elected officials have to prove they can govern the counties they won and present fresh policy initiatives in the legislature. But, most importantly, the DPP and KMT have to prove they can cooperate. If they need motivation to do so politicians of both parties can simply look across the Taiwan Strait and realize that Taiwan's best defense against China is a genuine functioning democracy at home. 1.

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