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# Taiwan's Nationalist Party Leader Prepares for Historic Meeting with Chinese President

By Luis Ramirez

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Lien Chan, right, waves to well-wishers upon arrival at the forbidden city in Beijing

Taiwan's Nationalist Party leader Lien Chan is preparing to deliver a message of peace to Chinese President Hu Jintao. Analysts are calling the meeting - scheduled for Friday in Beijing - a landmark in relations between two longtime enemies.

Children bearing flowers welcomed Kuomintang Chairman Lien Chan Thursday on the tarmac of the Beijing airport. It was one more example of the warm treatment the Taiwanese opposition Nationalist Party leader has received since Tuesday - becoming the first Kuomintang head to set foot on the mainland since the Nationalists fled to Taiwan following their defeat to Communist forces in 1949.

Mr. Lien is scheduled to meet Friday with President Hu Jintao, who chairs the Chinese Communist Party. The Taiwanese politician told reporters at the airport Thursday he seeks to bridge 56-year-old divisions across the Taiwan Strait.

"How to create a peaceful and win-win future through dialogue is the common aspiration of people on both sides - a historical responsibility we must shoulder and an unpreventable public opinion trend," he said.

Critics in Taiwan have labeled Mr. Lien a traitor for coming to the mainland and have accused him of allowing himself to be used by Beijing to further split political forces in Taiwan. Factions are more than ever divided between those

who want formal independence and those who do not rule out eventual reunification with the Communist mainland.

Analysts say that after more than half a century, the former bitter enemies appear to have found common ground: both the Taiwan Nationalists and the mainland Communists oppose the agenda of pro-independence President Chen Shui-bian.

Some see the historic weeklong visit as an opportunity to ease tensions that have risen sharply since last month when Beijing passed an anti-secession law giving the mainland a legal basis to attack the democratically ruled island if it formally declares independence.

Mr. Lien has no legal power to sign agreements with the mainland. But analysts say his visit is a step toward resuming dialogue across the Taiwan Strait, which has been suspended for five years.

The United States, which has warned both sides not to take unilateral actions that could raise tensions in the Taiwan Strait, has welcomed Mr. Lien's visit to the mainland. The White House this week said it hopes Beijing will continue to reach out to Taiwan's leadership, saying diplomacy is the only way to resolve the cross-strait issue.

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Taiwan's Nationalist Party Chairman Lien Chan, left, toasts with Taiwan Affairs Office Director Chen Yunlin during a banquet in Shanghai, China. As Taiwan's leading opposition figure wraps up his historic tour of China, Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian is taking a conciliatory line toward Beijing...

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