



Mathurin Hybrid Initiative

Global Advisory
Report

**2024 TAIWAN
ELECTIONS**

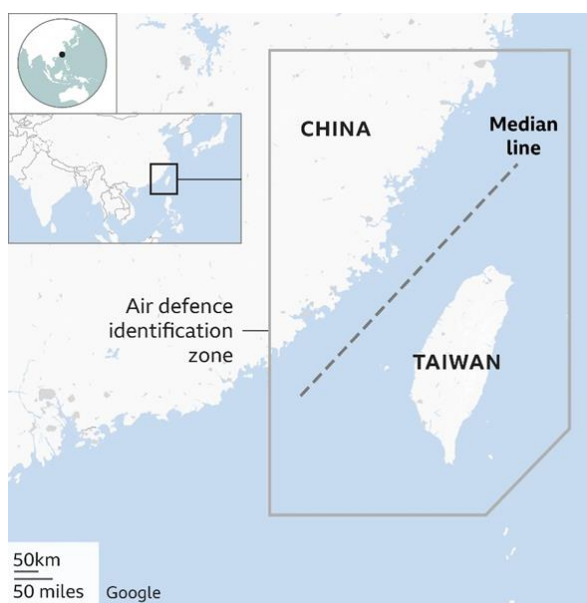
Nimca Muhudin

12/01/2024

The upcoming presidential election in Taiwan on 13 January is one of the highly anticipated elections of 2024. It has gained attention from the international community due to the strategic interests of the United States (US) and China. Taiwan's current President, Tsai Ing-Wen, is stepping down after 8 years in office due to constitutional restrictions that limits presidents to two terms. Thus, she is ineligible for a third term and, as such, a new president must be elected. Currently, there are three potential candidates competing for the presidency: the leading contender, Vice President Lai Ching-te from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), followed by Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT), the largest opposition party, and Ko Wen-je representing the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Various factors and concerns play an important role in shaping voter's decisions, including the rising cost of living, labour rights, affordable housing and education. Notably, China has emerged as a significant influencer in voter's choices due to its impact on the electoral landscape and voter sentiments. For instance, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) asserts that Taiwan is a province of China and consistently advocates for reunification. They view this election as an opportunity to achieve this goal peacefully, relying on a more cooperative Taiwan government. Consequently, they oppose the ruling DPP, which they consider a separatist party, and have actively enforced tactics to influence voter preferences away from supporting the DPP.

China Threatens Taiwan's Sovereignty

China has employed numerous tactics such as military coercion and spreading of misinformation through social media to influence the results of the election to be in their favour. For example, they used a strategy known as 'grey zone warfare', aimed at



subduing the enemy without fighting by consistently breaching the median line dividing the 110-mile-wide-strait between them, both at sea and in the air. This was evident in September when 103 Chinese aircrafts flew near Taiwan, with 40 crossing the median line. This has significantly hindered the capabilities of the Taiwanese air force, as they struggle to respond adequately. A retired admiral highlights the disparity between the two nations, emphasizing that China's extensive fleet of over 2,000 fighter jets allows them to conduct daily flights, while Taiwan has less than 300, many of which require increased maintenance.

China has openly expressed their dislike for Tsai and the DPP, with Beijing warning voters that a "vote for Lai is a vote for war". Many oppositionist parties have echoed these sentiments, with the presidential candidates striving to persuade voters of their leadership capabilities in ensuring peace and stability throughout the Taiwan strait. For instance, Lai has promised to uphold the status quo and engage in dialogue with

Beijing. However, Beijing is determined to undermine the power of the DPP, having perceived Lai as separatist. Other candidates such as Hou offer an alternative to voters, stating that “a vote for KMT is a vote for peace”. Beijing has demonstrated its support for the KMT due to its historical ties with China. Additionally, the KMT has also been actively fostering close relations with China as seen by the frequent visits of its deputy Chairman to the country in recent weeks.

CONCLUSION

China’s increased aggression coupled with the recent international conflicts has led to the people of Taiwan feeling uncertain. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Myanmar’s coup as well as recent fighting in the Middle East means that there is heightened risk that China could take action against Taiwan. Tensions between the two nations have increased dramatically as China continues to threaten Taiwan through military demonstrations, Beijing has conducted several military exercises which practiced attacks on Taiwan. In response to escalating tensions, the current DPP government has taken measures to enhance its military capabilities, investing in new military machinery and reinstating a 12-month-long compulsory military service. Furthermore, the upcoming election not only determines the future of Taiwan’s sovereignty but also carries potential consequences for the rest of the region. According to Michael Cunningham of the Heritage Foundation’s Asian Studies Center, Nations such as the Philippines and Japan are in the region are deeply concerned about China’s aggression regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea. The increased military strength of China has raised tensions in the region, prompting nations to closely monitor to the elections. A potential conflict in Taiwan could prove catastrophic for the global economy, given the nation’s crucial role in microchip supplies. Additionally, the US, Taiwan’s biggest supporter, has also warned China against interfering with the presidential elections. Operating under a doctrine known as “strategic ambiguity”, the US has the capability to militarily defend Taiwan in the event of an attack by China. Therefore, it is clear that the 2024 elections have been overshadowed by the prospect of war, due China’s relentless pressure and insistence that Taiwan belongs to them, determined to proceed with plans for reunification.

References:

- Chau, T. (2023) *Taiwan's defining moment: Election to determine future of relations with China*, *Nikkei Asia*. Available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/The-Big-Story/Taiwan-s-defining-moment-Election-to-determine-future-of-relations-with-China> (Accessed: 01 January 2024).
- Davidson, H. (2023) *Taiwan prepares to pick new president amid growing threat from China*, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/30/taiwan-election-new-president-growing-threat-china> (Accessed: 01 January 2024).
- Davidson, H. and Lin, C.H. (2023) *Taiwan presidential election: Opposition in chaos as China looms in background*, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/06/taiwan-presidential-election-opposition-in-chaos-as-china-looms-in-background> (Accessed: 01 January 2024).
- McElvoy, A. (2023) *The first nail-biter election of 2024: Taiwan*, *POLITICO*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/tawain-election-2024-taipei-south-china-sea-tensions-william-lai-hou-xi-jinping-nail-biter/> (Accessed: 01 January 2024).
- Wingfield-Hayes, R. (2023) *China is ramping up the pressure for Taiwan's election*, *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-67770782> (Accessed: 01 January 2024).