

March 8, 2024

## **Election of Taiwan's New President Lai Ching-te and New Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim and the Future of the Situation in East Asia**

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**(This is an English translation of the article written by SUZUKI Keisuke, Member of the House of Representatives, Japan, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Somei (Hundred Ducks in Full Voice)" of CEAC on January 19, 2024.)**

In the recent Taiwanese presidential and legislative Yuan elections, both presidential candidate Lai Ching-te and vice presidential candidate Hsiao Bi-khim emerged victorious. I would like to take this opportunity to express my congratulations to my close friends President Lai Ching-te and Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim. The results of the presidential election indicate that Lai Ching-te, who ran a stronger campaign than pre-election predictions had indicated, received the most votes in northern big cities such as Taipei, New Taipei City, and Taoyuan, which are considered strongholds of the Kuomintang (KMT). Despite considerable criticism and loss of interest in Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), he enjoyed enormous nation-wide support, including overwhelming support in the south of the country, which is the DPP's traditional electoral power base. Thus, it is noteworthy that a wide cross-section of the Taiwanese electorate reposed their trust in an administration led by President Lai Ching-te.

Although the election was a three-way battle, President Lai garnered over 40% of the votes. This implies a pressing need for his administration to address the nation's issues as soon as possible, not simply as the leader of his supporters in the DPP but also as the leader of whole Taiwanese including those who support the KMT or TPP. Additionally, when one considers the significance of national unity and solidarity in the event of a crisis, one realizes that Lai's election was a positive outcome. The current mayors of Taoyuan, Taipei, and New Taipei City—a crucial region in the context of a crisis situation in Taiwan—are all members of the KMT. Creating stronger ties between the national government and those cities would be of immense significance prior to and in the event of a crisis occurring in Taiwan. In this sense, the results of the recent election—specifically, the fact that the Lai campaign received sufficient votes to triumph over the KMT in this region—is significant political capital that could be used to pave the way for the creation of these types of stronger ties. The fact that the DPP performed better than expected in the Taiwanese legislative Yuan election is also noteworthy. It was the leading

party in terms of share of votes in the proportional representation as well. The results showed that, of the total of 113 representatives, most of whom were elected in single-seat electoral districts, 52 belong to the ruling KMT and 51 to the opposition DPP. The Taiwan People's Party (TPP) won eight seats, while two seats were won by independent candidates. As there is a difference of only one seat between the KMT and the DPP, efforts to form a coalition may proceed smoothly. Thus, one can consider these election results to be more positive than anticipated. It will likely enable the administration to build a stable political base, which would be necessary to avert a crisis in Taiwan—or face one, should it occur.

Although China has been drawing significant global attention because of its actions vis-à-vis Taiwan, no particular event, such as in Hong Kong, occurred during the last presidential election held in Taiwan did not occur this time. Further, the opposition party used the country's relationship with China as a point of dispute in the recent election. The result of this election shows the unambiguous emergence of the maturity of the Taiwanese democracy as well as the deeply rooted resistance among the Taiwanese people to the "reunification" of Taiwan with China and their strong support for the maintenance of the status quo.

Regarding how effectively can we deter General Secretary Xi Jinping's ambition to invade Taiwan, thus preventing a crisis or war with Taiwan—one of the major issues Japanese politics is facing today—if a president had been elected from the KMT or TPP, which were highly likely to have taken a weak stance toward China based on China's recent tendency to "negotiate only with strong counterparts and take a firm stance against weak counterparts," China might have immediately gone on the offensive. The support of the electorate of Taiwan for President Lai Ching-te—he has much better sense of balance and practical judgment than his predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, with a more nuanced understanding of security—implies that there is now a political environment in Taiwan that is conducive to continuing and deepening ties with Japan, the US, and other like-minded countries. As the new president assumes office, he will be expected to build a stable political base domestically, strengthen the practical security capabilities of the Taiwanese military, and steadily improve the country's ability to manage crises, including in the economic and energy-related sectors.

The key areas of interest in international politics in the future include the National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2027, in which General Secretary Xi Jinping will aim to maintain his leadership for a fourth term; the US presidential election to be held this fall; and whether Japan can build a stable political base by the general election expected within this year. A general election is also expected in the UK, which continues to strengthen its ties to the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, political circumstances in Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and South Korea require attention.

I visited New York and Washington D.C. from the 8th to the 10th of January, where I met with approximately 20 experts include Congress members, Senetors, government and military officials, experts, and institutional investors. We discussed the view of the US regarding Taiwan contingency, the presidential election and the economic situation in the US, and the US presidential campaigns' Indo-Pacific strategies. I believe that in a variety of ways, 2024 would be a crucial year, and how Japan and the US deal with the impending challenges would be closely observed. As a Diet member from the ruling party, I will continue to do everything within my power to protect the interests of Japan. I will continue to work toward strengthening the relationship between Japan and Taiwan and building up the international circumstances that can deter Chinese ambition and would help to avoid a Taiwan contingency or a war in East Asia.