

INTERACTION BETWEEN GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

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The prospects for 2024 confirm the strong relationship that will take place between electoral processes and geopolitical conflicts. Starting in Asia, the presidential election in Taiwan will take place on January 13. The fight is between the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of the current pro-North American president, who cannot run for re-election - limited to only two consecutive terms - and the nationalist Kuomintang, which does not promote the declaration of independence and is further away from Washington. This party had managed to form a coalition of the three most relevant opposition forces, becoming the probable winner. But this coalition was dismantled at the end of November. This would open the possibility of the DPP coming first with 30% of the votes. The issue is relevant and was raised at the recent Summit between Biden and Xi. The American president demanded Chinese non-intervention in the electoral process, which could occur through cyber tools. His Chinese counterpart demanded the same. A victory for the Kuomintang would reduce the risk of a war around Taiwan and diminish American regional influence. An eventual victory of the current ruling party would generate the opposite. China has more than 1.4 billion inhabitants, while Taiwan has only twenty-three million. But its choice takes on a global strategic dimension.

The Ukrainian presidential election, according to the constitution, would take place on March 31, 2024, but its holding is uncertain. President Volodimir Zelensky has stated that the constitutional text itself prevents holding elections while martial law is in force. The president is aware that his image has deteriorated in recent months, as the war has reached a "stalemate", there are signs of tiredness and fatigue in his forces, and he faces a harsh winter that will paralyze military operations further and that will be used by Russia to advance the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure. Furthermore, recruiting difficulties are becoming greater every day. Statements made in early November to *The Economist* by the top Ukrainian military commander, General Valeri Zaluzhny, have had political repercussions. He is a man of great prestige, with a favorable image close to 70%, which doubles that of Zelensky today, which is approximately 35%. There are those who see the military leader as a threat to them if the presidential election is held. In general, by making his point of view

public, he has confronted the President, who has refuted him and made some military appointments to reduce his power. But in the middle of the war he cannot relieve the general, given the great popularity he maintains in the population and in the Armed Forces. Although the war has been going on for 2 years in February 2024, the political debate is ongoing despite Zelensky's announcement that he will postpone the election. Paradoxically, Zaluzhny's popularity plays in favor of a negotiation scenario with Russia, given that he has publicly maintained that the war is at a "stalemate." On the contrary, the president's political leadership is strongly linked to the continuation of the war, and an eventual negotiation would reduce his popularity and power as a leader.

At the same time, in Russia, the presidential election will be on March 17 and Putin will hold it, despite the war. Unlike Zelensky, the Russian president sees that, for his eventual re-election, the war is a factor that works in his favor. Russian nationalism has been revitalized and he is the one who best represents it in the country today. Putin's more than likely re-election allows him to prolong the conflict and postpone a negotiation, given that time is in his favor. But the election hinders a military necessity. Putin's strategy requires a new recruitment, which would reach two hundred thousand men to have the possibility of prevailing in the military field. But it would be a clearly unpopular measure that, although it would not cause him to lose the election, it would reduce his support among the population. The Russian president is not at risk of losing, given his authoritarian regime and the concentration of power he has in his hands. As in previous elections, opposition parties that do not put his victory at risk, are expected to run. The liberal opposition is weakened, with its leaders imprisoned or exiled. His electoral participation would be rather symbolic. It is a very different scenario from the past, in which the opposition in the streets complained against the lack of transparency in the electoral process. The ultranationalist sectors that criticize Putin for the lack of results in the war could become the most relevant force in the opposition. But its most relevant figure - the most popular pro-war blogger - was arrested after Prigozhin's failed coup d'état.

Regarding the Gaza conflict, although the election is distant, it is still a key to interpretation, while in Israel Netanyahu's popularity is declining, but he may postpone an eventual election due to war. The last election in Palestine (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) took place in 2006, seventeen years ago. Hamas

won with 44.4% of the votes and obtaining seventy-four seats. Second place went to Al Fatah (the force that governs the West Bank today) with 41.4% and forty-five seats obtained. A total of one million people voted and the turnout was 76%. Since then, no more elections have been held, largely due to the recurrence of war conflicts with Israel. Polls published before the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel showed that, if an election was held at that time, Hamas in the Gaza Strip would have obtained 25% of the votes and lost the election. This is one more element that may have led this organization to carry out a terrorist act to intensify and spread the conflict. In the West Bank - which has a population similar to that of the Strip - Fatah governs. Analyzing elections in Palestine seems unrealistic, but a long-term vision can be part of an eventual solution. In 2021, the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmud Abbas, called for elections, which were never held. Israel has a parliamentary system and since 2006 it has had seven elections, on which the election of the prime minister depends. But in the last four years, elections were held in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Netanyahu has ruled most of the time since 2006. When the Hamas terrorist attack occurred, the Israeli society was divided into two, the Netanyahu bloc with a strong influence of religious extremism, and the multi-party opposition. Polls after the start of the war show that, if there were elections, the current prime minister would lose them. But in the midst of the war, he presides over a government of national unity and the opposition does not demand the holding of elections in this situation.

In conclusion: the elections in Taiwan show a struggle between a traditional nationalist party, today further away from Washington, and the current ruling party, a relatively new force closer to the United States. The Ukrainian presidential election is postponed, with a silent struggle between the Chief of the Armed Forces, who is very popular, and the president, whose image is decreasing. In Russia, the presidential election will show a clear victory for Putin, who will once again prevail over a divided and weak opposition, but in which the ultranationalists could be the first minority. Finally, regarding Palestine, the last election was held in 2006, while in Israel, four national elections have been held in the last five years, with a likely future election when the military conflict subsides.