# Taiwan President Lai Ching-te Calls for Peace Amid Rising Tensions with China, China's Influence Campaigns Amid U.S. Electoral Concerns



**Taiwan President Lai Ching-te Calls for Peace Amid Rising Tensions with China**

On May 20, 2024, Lai Ching-te was inaugurated as Taiwan's president in Taipei. In his inaugural address, Lai emphasized the importance of maintaining peace amid escalating tensions with China. He called on China to cease military and political intimidation towards Taiwan, while reiterating the island’s commitment to maintaining the status quo without conceding to Beijing's claims of sovereignty.

Chinese President Xi Jinping views Taiwan as a part of China and has previously stated that force could be used to unify it with the mainland if necessary. Lai, perceived by China as a "separatist," underscored that Taiwan would not surrender its sovereignty to Beijing.

Following Lai's speech, China's Taiwan Affairs Office accused him of perpetuating a separatist agenda and undermining regional stability. In conjunction with this, China sanctioned three U.S. defense contractors over arms sales to Taiwan.

Lai, a former doctor, won the election in January with 40% of the vote and faces a divided parliament. His tenure represents the first time a single political party in Taiwan has governed for more than two consecutive presidential terms. He succeeded Tsai Ing-wen, who had strengthened Taiwan’s defense and U.S. relations. Lai aims to continue similar policies while addressing domestic issues like wage growth, energy security, and affordable housing.

To ease cross-strait tensions, Lai proposed restarting tourism and student exchanges with China, though skepticism remains about the prospects for improved relations. Chinese state and social media offered minimal coverage of Lai's inauguration, with significant terms related to Taiwan blocked on platforms like Weibo.

**China's Influence Campaigns Amid U.S. Electoral Concerns**

Concerns are emerging about China's potential influence in the U.S. elections, as Secretary of State Antony Blinken alluded to evidence of Chinese attempts to interfere. Analysts, however, are divided on whether China will significantly impact the U.S. electoral process, noting Beijing’s uncertain stance between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.

China has been increasingly active in disinformation campaigns globally, leveraging social media platforms like TikTok. The U.S. State Department's recent reports highlighted sophisticated Chinese influence operations, including the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation to undermine democracy.

Efforts by China to interfere in elections have also been noted in countries such as Taiwan, Australia, and Thailand, often resulting in backlash against Beijing. In the context of the upcoming U.S. elections, China's strategy seems more focused on fostering discord rather than supporting a particular candidate.

The U.S. continues to bolster defenses against foreign disinformation, although the challenge remains significant, especially with the proliferation of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence.