

Taiwan: An Enduring Partner with the US in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Remarks at the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles

March 11, 2019

Forward

Members of the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, distinguished guests, and friends in California: *Jia ba buay?* Have you eaten yet? This is a traditional Taiwanese way to say hello. It's a true delight for me to be back in Los Angeles. I fondly remember the city, taking my family for a drive along the breathtaking Pacific Coast Highway and stopping for an In-N-Out Burger—all that fun stuff I don't have the luxury to do since becoming Foreign Minister.

I would like to thank the Council for inviting me to speak today. For more than half a century, the Council has dedicated itself to promoting dialogue on global issues. Your slogan, “conversations matter,” resonates deeply within my heart, for I also believe that as long as we are able to sit down and talk to one another, we can promote friendship and partnership.

Therefore, I am honored to have this opportunity to share with you the story of the 23 million people in democratic Taiwan, our 40-years rock-solid partnership with the United States, and Taiwan's role as a force for good in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

A Frontline State for Freedom and Democracy

I stand before the World Affairs Council today remembering President Reagan's 1988 speech at the Council where he called for a worldwide crusade for freedom and democracy, and cited Taiwan in the array of economic miracles that bore fruit thanks to the advocacy of freedom. President Reagan's remarks still ring true, now more than ever.

The people of Taiwan endured 38 painful years of martial law, but we never gave up on our pursuit for freedom and democracy. Through the efforts of many who sacrificed for our civil liberties and freedom, Taiwan has moved out of that dark chapter of history and blossomed into a full-fledged democracy—one of the only democracies amongst Chinese-speaking societies. As Vice President Mike Pence acknowledged in October last year: "Taiwan's embrace of democracy shows a better path for all the Chinese people." And we are absolutely committed to defending and strengthening our democracy, and ensuring that it remains resilient.

The people of Taiwan are rightfully proud that today, Taiwan is consistently ranked as one of the freest and most democratic countries in the world by international organizations such as Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, and Reporters Without Borders. Taiwan maintains a robust civil society, one that has the capacity to contribute to pressing issues around the world. And Taiwan maintains a free and open economy, having achieved its best ever ranking of 10th out of 180 countries in the 2019 global economic freedom index of the Heritage Foundation's annual report. We will not be shy if you want to take Taiwan as a role model for others to emulate.

But we know that we cannot take these accomplishments for granted.

Looking around, rising authoritarian regimes and growing illiberal populist movements have cast a shadow over global freedom in recent years. We live in fraught times. The US National Security Strategy has stated that revisionist powers use technology, propaganda and coercion to reshape a world antithetical to our interests and values. These alarming trends remind us of the importance of safeguarding Taiwan, given its position on the frontlines against the marching armies of authoritarianism.

For it is true, Taiwan is the first line of defense in an ideological battle that is taking place in Australia, Japan, the United States, Europe, and in like-minded societies all over the world. We have felt the brunt of China's intensified campaign to subvert Taiwan's democracy every day, through military intimidation, economic coercion, diplomatic assaults, disinformation, and political subversion, seeking to undermine our elected government and interfere with our elections.

At the beginning of this year, China's President Xi Jinping delivered a speech on Taiwan on January 2, touting unification with the "one country, two systems" model, which is recognized around the world as having corroded Hong Kong's civil liberties, political rights, and rule of law. And contrary to China's earlier promises to win the "hearts and minds" of the Taiwanese people, Xi also blatantly declared that China would not renounce the use of force, and retain the option of taking all necessary measures."

These hardline comments, coupled with China's recent efforts in international legal warfare to alter Taiwan's status into a province of China, as well as its new military exercises in waters surrounding Taiwan, continue to destabilize the Taiwan Strait and threaten the region. China's actions are testing the resolve of not only the people of Taiwan, but also

like-minded partners that have a stake in regional peace and stability.

When the Chinese leaders no longer hide their intentions, we must ask the question: Who will be next if Taiwan falls? To me, Taiwan should never allow that scenario to happen. We are absolutely committed to defending ourselves from the onslaught of Chinese expansionism. We understand our responsibilities beyond our borders. We need to be resilient to show to the world that democracy is the better path for mankind. My dear friends, now the democratic Taiwan is the David struggling with the authoritarian Chinese Goliath. Democracy will prevail, and Taiwan will prevail.

Taiwan-US Partnership at Its Best

While the threat posed by China is becoming graver, our relations with the US are growing stronger than ever as we prepare to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).

Enacted on April 10, 1979, the TRA was born of the need to protect significant security and commercial interests between Taiwan and the US in the wake of the change of diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. It has played an indispensable role in shaping American strategy in Asia and provided a reliable security umbrella that allowed Taiwan to blossom into one of the world's leading free-market democracies. The TRA has served as a guiding principle and a cornerstone for a deep, robust, and comprehensive partnership between Taiwan and the US.

There is no better time to reinforce this special bond and build on our strong ties and our shared values as we celebrate four decades of enduring friendship. Since President Tsai assumed office in May 2016, the Taiwan-US partnership has become much stronger. The bipartisan support on

Capitol Hill has been phenomenal, as we see bills, legal clauses and statements supporting Taiwan passed by the House and Senate one after another. Significant progress has also been made in the area of security cooperation, as evidenced by multiple announcements of arms sales. In addition, we have received unprecedented US support for Taiwan's international participation. As for political exchanges, we have seen a record number of federal and state officials visiting Taiwan, including your very own Marie Royce, who came to Taiwan for the dedication ceremony of the huge, state-of-the-art new AIT complex, which is a concrete symbol of the rock-solid Taiwan-US relationship.

To celebrate 40 years of strong relations, my Ministry has worked with our US counterparts to roll out a yearlong campaign with the motto "Enduring Partnership." We will showcase this relationship through activities that highlight the cultural, educational, and historical ties between our two countries, as well as events that underscore our joint interests and values. For example, I am pleased to tell you that as we speak, Taiwan is holding a regional dialogue on religious freedom, the first-ever regional forum following last year's Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, DC.

Some of you have probably noticed that US officials, including Secretary of State Pompeo, describe Taiwan as "a reliable partner, a democratic success story, and a force for good in the world." I am yet to find another country enjoying such a high regard by the US government, and Taiwan is rather proud of it.

Taiwan's Role for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific

As the Trump administration carries out its strategy for Asia, Taiwan marches forward in lockstep with our most vital partner and serves as an ideal ally for like-minded countries in the pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Our indispensable relationship with the United States is the best example to chart a collaborative path for the entire Indo-Pacific and like-minded countries around the world. Despite China's mounting pressure campaign to unjustly exclude Taiwan from international fora, to sever Taiwan's ties with diplomatic allies, and to isolate Taiwan from regional trade blocs, it has never for one day stopped Taiwan from contributing to the world where we can, and defending the liberal international order and universal values where we must.

The best way to defend Taiwan, as President Tsai declared in her National Day address last year, is to make ourselves indispensable and irreplaceable to the world. This means that Taiwan must be ready and prepared to be more outward looking and to do all the heavy lifting necessary to turn dreams into reality. And this is Taiwan's commitment to our "value-based diplomacy," embracing each and every like-minded partner to build a common future for a peaceful, prosperous, free and open Indo-Pacific in generations to come.

Allow me to be blunt: our "warm power" trumps authoritarian "sharp power".

Taiwan has proactively reached out to our neighbors via President Tsai's signature New Southbound Policy. The essence of this policy is to strengthen democratic institutions, collective security, commercial relationships, and people-to-people linkages across the region.

We are also committed to supporting the development of countries in the Indo-Pacific in ways that do not saddle them with debt and flood their markets with cheap imports. We have set forth our Official Development Assistance, or ODA, to support infrastructure and development projects in countries across the region. This represents our belief that Taiwan, with our expertise in transportation, logistics, and construction, can play a bigger role in the future development of the region. We are also gradually building up partnerships with the US and Japan in this regard. In addition to this, across the blue Pacific, our agricultural and medical teams work day in and day out to improve the livelihoods of people in some of the smallest states in the world—countries that may have been neglected by the international community but we are absolutely committed to supporting.

Also in line with our value-based diplomacy, both our government and civil society are increasingly active in sharing Taiwan's soft power in the region and across the world. For example, both Taiwan and the US have been working on the Global Cooperation and Training Framework, or GCTF, to contribute to issues ranging from women's empowerment, media literacy, public health, digital economy, and environmental protection, to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Furthermore, from supporting demining efforts in war-torn Syria through our membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, to providing humanitarian assistance to displaced Venezuelans, and to combating Ebola in Africa, we have strived to be a powerful force for good in the world.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to stress again, Taiwan is a frontline state

defending democracy, freedom and the global rules-based order. We seek to strengthen our democracy, safeguard our freedom of the press and speech, and shine brightly as a beacon of hope for many who also aspire to breathe the air of freedom and democracy. At this critical juncture where great-power competition exacerbates and ideological battle looms, Taiwan has made its choice clear: We stand with the forces of freedom and democracy. When we stand together, we stand stronger. Together we rise and together we resolve to be a force for good in the world.

Thank you all.