

Remarks of Foreign Minister Joseph Wu at Pacific Islands Dialogue

October 7, 2019

Deputy Assistant Secretary Oudkirk, Director Christensen, Excellencies Ambassadors and Honorable Representatives, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am honored to jointly launch the first Taiwan-US Pacific Islands Dialogue with Deputy Assistant Secretary Oudkirk.

The Pacific has long been recognized for its abundant resources and strategic importance. It was seen as a body of water separating two continents, and we saw rivals in the Second World War fight bitterly to take control of this vast area. Now we see many like-minded countries working in their own ways to bring sustainable development, democracy and good governance to the countries dotting this huge blue ocean on the map.

In the Pacific Islands Forum, where I participated in August, the US, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the EU, and more, are all making their own respective efforts. Among the PIF members and partners, I am proud to say that Taiwan stands out as a model of assistance to Pacific Island countries.

We have set up agricultural technical missions that bring food security to local populations. I am sure DAS Oudkirk remembers that the fruits and vegetables provided to the PIF in Tuvalu for the whole duration were from our technical mission. We also provide medical assistance to our allies and beyond. We provide scholarships and job training opportunities to young islanders. We also work with the US in the Pacific Islands Leadership Program that brings future island leaders for exposure in Hawaii and Taiwan. We bring benefits directly to the people, in what our friends in the Pacific call the Taiwan model. This is the best of all possible forms of assistance, even though the actual dollar amount might not be big.

We also work with the US under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework to bring

officials and experts from the region to Taiwan for training in public health, environmental protection, cyber security, HA/DR, women's empowerment, media literacy, and other important areas. I am very pleased that Japan and Sweden are now fully on board the GCTF. I am anticipating more friends joining us as co-organizers. We are the like-minded, and we are doing the good things the like-minded are supposed to be doing.

However, this shared sense of international cooperation and coordination for the betterment of the Pacific has been seriously challenged by the undercurrent of authoritarian expansionism. The most noticeable example of this was China taking away Taiwan's allies Solomon Islands and Kiribati in September.

Some say the switch is just more of the diplomatic competition that has long existed between Taiwan and China. But many others are very concerned that China is trying to interfere in Taiwan's upcoming national elections, just as it did last year in our local elections. I personally also worry that the Taiwan model of foreign aid will be gradually replaced by the

“China model,” which represents corruption, deception, and debt traps.

If we look deeper, we see that China’s actions were strategically designed, and this is their most worrisome aspect. Solomon Islands are right at the doorstep of Australia, our most important friend and partner down under. And Kiribati occupies an enormous expanse of water, where previously China built a modern space tracking station that can monitor US satellite and missile activities. We have seen reports that China is interested in reopening this radar station in Kiribati, and building a naval base in Western Province of Solomon Islands. From the long-term strategic perspective, like-minded friends and partners should really be worried whether the Pacific will remain free and open, and whether the key actors follow the rules-based international order.

Developments in the South China Sea in the last decade or so serve as a good lesson for all of us. We did not say or do much when China started building tiny rocks into islands. We also saw runways, radar, and other military facilities put on

these man-made islands. We then took the word of Xi Jinping when he promised the US that China had no intention of militarizing the South China Sea. It seems to me, unfortunately, that it is already too late for us to change the fait accompli in the South China Sea, and that China is there to stay no matter how frequent the FONOPs are. I certainly don't want to see the Pacific turned into another South China Sea, with us one day all sighing that it is too late for us to do anything.

My dear friends, the best we can do to prevent that scenario is for all responsible stakeholders in the region to realize the value of Taiwan's presence in the Pacific, and push back strongly against China's efforts to erode that presence.

Taiwan, the US and other democratic actors share similar interests in ensuring that the Pacific remains free and open, and that we uphold the existing regional order that has sustained peace and stability over the past decades. It's time we start working together to act on those interests. And I hope the discussion among the like-minded today can bring us new measures of cooperation for our shared

vision of a free and open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.