

Euro-Atlantic meets Indo-Pacific: Ukraine, Taiwan, and the Changing Geopolitics of the World

Joseph Wu, Taiwan Foreign Minister

October 14, 2022

The Honorable Fischer, Chair of the Foreign Affairs
Committee of the Czech Senate;

The Honorable Merezhko, Chair of the Foreign Relations
Committee of the Ukrainian Rada;

The Honorable Dercoix, Member of the Foreign
Relations Committee of the Czech Senate;

The Honorable Agor, Chargé D'affaires at the US
Embassy in the Czech Republic;

Dr. Hala, Founder and Director of Sinopsis;

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Greetings from Taiwan!

I. Introduction

I would like to start by thanking Sinopsis and the Czech Senate Foreign Affairs Committee for inviting me to this conference. I fondly recall my very pleasant and rewarding trip to beautiful Prague last year, when I was welcomed to the Czech Senate, and spoke at a seminar organized by Sinopsis. What a great visit it was! In particular, for the Czech government to ride out

diplomatic pressure and allow a Taiwanese foreign minister to speak at a public event was truly admirable. This shows the courage of the Czech Republic. Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to you one more time.

Today, I am absolutely delighted to be with Chairman Fischer and Dr. Hala again. I also want to say that I am humbled to be with Mr. Merezhko, who chairs the Taiwan Caucus in the Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada. Ukraine has become an emblematic symbol in the minds of the Taiwanese people. It is my true honor to be with someone who has been resisting the Russian invasion and fighting for freedom against autocracy. I hope I can soon personally welcome Mr. Merezhko and other Ukrainian friends to Taiwan to exchange ideas on what we can do for each other and for the rest of the world.

II. Ukraine is an inspiration to Taiwan

I am greatly encouraged to see the Ukrainian people pushing Russian troops out of their territory inch by inch, mile by mile, and city by city. With your bravery and determination, and with the support of fellow democracies, I am very sure that you will soon remove the invaders altogether. And Taiwan will be ready to work with democratic partners, such as the Czech Republic, to help rebuild the beautiful country of Ukraine. We will do so in the same spirit that we have assisted Ukrainian

refugees and sent hundreds of tons of relief aid into Ukraine. I haven't told anyone about this until now, but it was quite emotional for me to call the mayors of Kyiv, Kharkyiv, and Bucha as well as other leaders to facilitate the donations.

Taiwan and the Taiwanese people have tremendous empathy for the people of Ukraine and have showered them with generous support. This is not because we had close political ties in the past; and certainly not because we expect anything in return. No. The Taiwanese people are helping because it is the right thing to do.

I have to tell you that the bravery of the Ukrainian people has been an inspiration to us. Your fight for freedom and democracy and the defense of your national integrity and sovereignty has moved the Taiwanese people. Though we are thousands of miles apart, our hearts are now closely connected. I want to thank the Ukrainians for demonstrating what it really means to have the determination to defend yourselves. You are truly inspiring.

III. China's military and diplomatic intimidation of Taiwan

Another reason Taiwan stands with Ukraine is because we are both on the front lines of defense against the expansion of authoritarianism. The international order is changing. We are confronted with the real threat of slavery under

autocratic rule. We have all seen the scale of the suffering that Russia is inflicting upon Ukraine. But this is much smaller in scale compared to what the People's Republic of China can do in the Indo-Pacific. Allow me to explain some more, so you can see the full extent of the problem that the world is facing.

In early August, the PRC tried to intimidate Taiwan with missile tests and large-scale air and sea exercises. Many of its aircraft and vessels crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait, which is a key symbol of the status quo. Then came cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion. Quite simply, the PLA was practicing its playbook for a future invasion of Taiwan. Even though the Chinese government announced it was ending its military exercises, in fact they have continued unabated. The PLA still engages in routine air and sea drills around Taiwan and many of its sorties continue to violate our air defense identification zone and cross the median line of the Taiwan Strait. In other words, the Chinese communists want to establish a "new normal" as part of their expansionist scheme.

The PRC is also striving to exercise its influence in international organizations, such as the United Nations, to suffocate Taiwan diplomatically. It deliberately misinterprets UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 to describe Taiwan as part of the PRC and is pushing its viewpoint through the whole UN system. This year, the

Chinese foreign minister said, in essence, that according to this resolution, Taiwan is a domestic issue of China, and no one can say anything if it exercises its right to use force. In other words, a UN resolution is now being used, or abused, by Chinese officials to legitimize the use of force against Taiwan.

IV. China's far-reaching ambitions

But is Taiwan the last piece in China's expansionist ambitions? I am afraid not. If we dial back the clock to 2020, when China imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong, depriving its citizens their freedom and political rights, we were asking the same questions: Would Hong Kong be the last victim? If not, who would be next? We did not make the Chinese communists pay for what they did to Hong Kong, and now the PRC is emboldened to turn the heat on Taiwan.

I am sad to say that virtually the same story played out in Europe in 2014, when Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea. We did not make him pay then, and now the whole of Ukraine is suffering the consequences. If Russia is not stopped now, the whole of Europe will be at risk. And if we do not push back against China's expansionism, its far-reaching ambitions will not stop at Taiwan.

In the East China Sea, our Japanese friends are extremely concerned about Chinese Coast Guard, naval, and air force activities. The PRC points to that vast stretch of water and

says, “That’s mine,” then try to grab it. Let me tell you that when our Japanese friends say that they oppose any unilateral change of the status quo by force, they really mean it.

Not too far from Taiwan in the South China Sea, the PRC conducts daily patrols with Coast Guard ships, naval vessels, and military planes. They also arm hundreds of fishing boats to serve as a maritime militia to supplement official vessels. You may recall that Xi Jinping visited Washington, DC, in 2015 and pledged not to militarize the South China Sea. Well, he did the opposite of what he promised. Several tiny rocks, including Subi Shoal, Firey Cross, and Mischief, have become large and fully functional military bases. Trust me, they are turning more rocks into military bases, totally ignoring the 2016 ruling of the Hague International Tribunal.

I wish I could end what I consider to be the danger to the free world at this point. But there is more. So much more. The PLA’s air and sea exercises these days regularly cross the first island chain to go deep into the Pacific. In June, China signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands, which is very far from China, but right at Australia’s doorstep. I hope this is enough to wake up our fellow democracies on how far Chinese authoritarianism is already entrenched in the Pacific and how much it has already eroded the rules-based international order.

In the Indian Ocean, China has utilized the Belt and Road Initiative to secure naval ports, including in Cambodia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and all the way to Jibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Wherever it goes, it leaves behind a trail of debt, corruption, and even bankruptcy. You can google “String of Pearls” to get a sense of what China has been up to in India’s vicinity. I could go on to talk about Chinese influence in Africa or Latin America. But for now, please just ask ourselves these two questions: Why is there still a place for authoritarian expansionism in our modern civilization? And has it already gone too far?

V. China’s oppression of its own people

While we see authoritarianism expanding abroad, it is in full force domestically using digital technology. The Chinese government has used its zero-COVID policy and city lockdowns to further expand a digital social credit system. In Xinjiang, as well as being under constant surveillance, more than one million Uyghurs have been incarcerated in reeducation camps and subjected to inhuman treatment. A UN investigation concluded that this may constitute crimes against humanity. Many countries, including the Czech Republic, have already called it genocide. But Xinjiang is no exception.

What Chinese officials have done to Tibetan Buddhists and followers of other religions has been horrifying. We have seen churches torn down, Bibles burned, crosses destroyed, and patriotic slogans and portraits put up in places of worship.

In a democracy, transparency means the government is open to the people; in China, the people are totally transparent to the government. This is the authoritarianism we face. It expands quickly, employs digital technologies to exert control, and conducts cognitive warfare against its enemies. This communist regime is more powerful and more dangerous than Russia under Vladimir Putin.

VI. Democracies must unite to combat the autocratic alliance

The world today is a very different place to just a few years ago. As well as rapidly extending their influence abroad, Russia and China have also started helping each other in the UN, on the economic front, and in other areas.

My dear friends, faced with this new geopolitical landscape, we are running out of options. Ukraine and Taiwan may be under the most intense pressure at the moment, but democracy as a whole is under assault. As the alliance of authoritarian regimes attempts to divide and conquer us, the only choice left open is to work together. As German Pastor Martin Niemöller wrote in his sad poem after the Second World War:

First they came for the socialists,
And I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
And I did not speak out because I was not a trade
unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
And I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Catholics,
And I did not speak out because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me.
And there was no one left to speak for me.

Democracies have shown remarkable unity in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We must keep up the momentum and continue to push back against the expansion of authoritarianism, not just in Europe but in the Indo-Pacific and all over the world. Democracies must cooperate to strengthen our shared values so that we can all stay resilient. Together we will safeguard the foundation of a free, open, prosperous, and secure international order.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a strong faith in democracy, and believe that it will prevail in the end. But before we fend off the onslaught of authoritarianism, we need to actively support one another to show that we are stronger together. On this, I would like to once again express my appreciation to Sinopsis and the Czech Senate Foreign

Affairs Committee for the invitation to speak to you, and to the Czech Republic for opening its arms to Taiwan. This is what unity is all about. And by working together, democracy will prevail, Taiwan will prevail, and Ukraine will prevail. Thank you very much.