

Speech by Rt. Hon Liz Truss at the IPAC Tokyo Symposium

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Introduction

Good afternoon colleagues, it's fantastic to be here in Tokyo. Japan is an essential bulwark of freedom and democracy in the Pacific. It's also a leading light in the network of liberty – free nations across the world fighting for our values. You have stepped up on trade, on defence and you have spoken out against Tyranny. As a fellow democratic island nation the bonds between the UK and Japan are getting stronger. We are also both working more closely with our freedom-loving allies. This nexus will be incredibly important for the future of freedom and that's what I want to talk about today. After serving in roles across Government for the past 10 years - most recently as Prime Minister – I am convinced that there is no more important issue of our time. And it is pressing – the coming years will be pivotal. IPAC It's great that so many parliamentarians from across the world are here to share IPAC's platform. I think it shows just how vitally important this agenda is. Although there are many things on which we disagree with each other we share a belief in freedom, self-determination and democracy. I know that we can make a great contribution by working together on a strong response to the strategic issues posed by the People's Republic of China. And we're here because of the hard work behind the scenes at IPAC by Luke de Pulford and Shiori Kanno here in Japan who have ensured a successful symposium today.

Let's be clear, the free world is in danger. We are living in turbulent economic times and have faced severe shocks from the financial crisis to the COVID pandemic. We have less of the world's population living in democracies than was the case 30 years ago. Meanwhile we have authoritarian regimes which are building up their armaments, as they build up their arguments to try and get their messages across not just to their own populations, but also to try and influence the global world order.

China

Nobody would love to see a prosperous, democratic, freedom-loving China more than me – of course I would. I'm a huge admirer of Chinese culture and civilisation. I have travelled to Beijing and Shanghai as well as Chungking and even Wuhan – long before the pandemic emerged. In classrooms, businesses and factories I saw the application, ingenuity and hard work of the Chinese people. But these people are being ill-served by a regime which is about control – not freedom. Some people say standing up to this regime is a hopeless task. That somehow the rise of a totalitarian China is inevitable. But I reject this fatalism. And the free world has a significant role to play in whether or not that happens – and how it happens. After all, we encouraged China to embrace economic freedom, in the hope that this would give its citizens political freedom. But the opposite has happened. Nixon became the first US President to visit the People's Republic of China. His handshake became known as the 'handshake that changed the world' and that was no understatement. Less than thirty years later, China was admitted to the World Trade Organisation. At the time, people didn't pay much attention to this but it catalysed China's rapid rise to be one of the world's largest economies. And it wasn't that long ago that the UK heralded a 'golden era' of UK-China relations. We rolled out the red carpet for the Chinese President – with all the pomp and ceremony that came with a state visit. I should know – I attended a banquet in his honour. Looking back, I think this sent the wrong message. A few years later China removed the two-term limit on the President. The one-party state strengthened its grip on power at home, and it gained ever more influence on the world stage. And we ignored too many warning signs. From the Tiananmen Square massacre... to the so-called Uyghur 're-education camps' not to mention the disgraceful dismantling of one country, two systems in Hong Kong. Much of the world has turned a blind eye to these actions – at least until recently. But since it was the free world which enabled China's rise it must be the free world which challenges its economic dominance before it's too late.

Taiwan

We know that President Xi has been very clear – it's his ambition for China to have control of Taiwan and in my view that would be disastrous. In 2022 China sent over 1,700 planes into Taiwan's air defence identification zone that's nearly double the

number in 2021. And 2023 has already seen live fire drills. The message needs to be heard loud and clear in Beijing that these incursions are not acceptable. So-called 'reunification' is a core project of President Xi's administration. And let's remind ourselves of his words in 2021: "The historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland must be fulfilled, and will definitely be fulfilled." Taiwan is a beacon of freedom in a world where civil liberties and human rights are often suppressed. It's a flourishing democracy with a thriving free press and an independent Judiciary and we should be doing all we can to strengthen our ties with Taiwan. We know that doing more now will help prevent tragedy later. NATO kept the peace in Western Europe and became arguably the most successful military alliance in history. And we have to ask ourselves if we had admitted Ukraine to NATO, would Putin have dared to invade? Or indeed if we had put stronger sanctions in place after 2014 or supplied weapons to Ukraine earlier? Could we have saved many lives and protected our security?

Defence

We must learn from the past. We must ensure that Taiwan is able to defend itself. And we must work together across the free world to do this. I would like to see a more developed Pacific defence alliance alongside even closer cooperation between NATO and our Pacific allies. I'm delighted that Japan and the UK have recently signed a new defence agreement. The UK is the first European country to have a Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan and only the third country globally to do so. This will accelerate defence and security cooperation... allow for larger and more complex military exercises and strengthen the UK's Indo-Pacific security pledge. I also congratulate Prime Minister Kishida for Japan's historic new defence strategy. Japan has backed this up by record defence spending this year and also takes a seat on the UN Security Council this year, And the G7 has stepped up... in 2021 led by the UK in 2022 led by Germany and I'm sure it will be on the agenda at Hiroshima. It's so important to do all we can to support Taiwan – because prevention is better than cure. If we build up the defence links now, if we build up the economic links now – that will help protect Taiwan and protect freedom.

Economic cooperation

We need to make sure we are economically successful for the sake of our populations but also to make sure we have the wherewithal to promote freedom and democracy and show that it works. Together there is huge strength in our economies and in our economic model – one based on freedom, not coercion. And deeper economic integration between the Taiwanese and world economies will go a long way to preventing conflict. The G7 represents over 40% of global nominal GDP – and if you add the EU, that's over half. Now that is a hugely powerful position to be in. That economic weight means that we can influence other countries. It means we can make decisions about how we trade... who we invest in what technology we export and we need to use that leverage to ensure that the G7 plus allies act as an economic NATO. Supporting freedom and not allowing it to be undermined. This opportunity will not be there forever. China is clearly building its domestic market in anticipation of a harder line. But at present it is reliant on exports to the West. Now is the time to make sure trade and commerce is free and not coercive. There are ways this can be done... we could move to an economic Article 5, where the 'one for all, all for one' principle is wielded in defence of fundamental values. There are three areas we should focus on: supply chains, investment and trade. On critical minerals and supply chains, we should work together to ensure we have trustworthy suppliers – so-called 'friendshoring'. That's what we in the UK are already doing by eliminating Russian energy and by banning Huawei equipment from being installed into our 5G network. Free countries need to collaborate to protect our economic security in areas like chips and technology exports. And we need democracies to commit together to audit and reduce dependency throughout critical industries. We cannot have a situation where Beijing has the power to turn off the lights.

On investment, we should work together to ensure it is not used to undermine freedom and democracy. China's Belt and Road initiative is far-reaching and has been used to buy influence around the globe. Last year the G7 launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, an alternative that is free from strings attached. By stepping up this effort – and I know it is on Japan's G7 agenda – we can bring more countries into the orbit of free economies. And while we're

talking about developing countries, might I ask why China is still defined as a developing country at the WTO? This means it is not subject to the usual rules on transparency and cannot be held to account for aggressive practices. This needs to change.

On trade, we should work together to ensure it is a force for freedom, not coercion. Japan has led the way on positive free trade with the CPTPP. The UK is currently in accession talks. Expanding this agreement to more countries who want to play by the rules will also help counter unfair trade practices from others. The free world should be seeking more bilateral trade and investment with Taiwan. And we should rush to the defence of any nation that is picked on by targeting their trade. During Prime Minister Scott Morrison's time in office, China imposed tariffs on Australian wine because it didn't like what the Government was saying. And China went even further with Lithuania and completely blocked imports from there – a brazen attempt to bully a smaller country. All of this was done as punishment for holding China to account and standing up for Taiwan. Our strength is in numbers. I support Japan's efforts to create a mechanism that enables us to join forces when one of our number is targeted. This applies to doing business with Taiwan. The more economies that do business with Taiwan... the more difficult China will find it to pressurise countries to change tack. Other support for Taiwan There are other ways in which Taiwan deserves our support. Many countries have limited diplomatic and ministerial ties to Taiwan due to agreements negotiated with China. The world has changed since then and some of these arrangements are being rethought.

We should find ways to elevate Taiwan's status that reflects its global value. Meanwhile, Taiwan still remains excluded from many international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation. This isn't just bad for Taiwan – it also damages our access to information. This lack of status was very unhelpful during the COVID pandemic. We had a lot to learn from Taiwan, but the appropriate channels simply weren't there to benefit from their experience. Righting this wrong wouldn't only be in our interests. It would help to ensure that the people of Taiwan are able to speak for themselves, rather than being spoken for.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Confucius warned: "Study the past, if you would define the future." We need to learn the lessons of the past if we are to ensure a safer and freer future. Putin's appalling war in Ukraine serves as a stark reminder of why we must stand up to threats by authoritarian regimes early. Our response to Russia since the invasion of Ukraine one year ago next week has been good and effective. Just last week I met President Zelenskyy as he thanked us in the UK for all we have done thus far to support him and his fellow countrymen. But I regret that we in the West were not tougher, earlier in response to aggressive and hostile actions from Moscow. So when it comes to China, a failure to act now could cost us dearly in the long run. Our governments must signal to the PRC that military aggression towards Taiwan would be a strategic mistake. The international community should agree a package of coordinated defence, economic and political measures to support Taiwan. We need this first and foremost to protect the interests of the people of Taiwan but also to protect our interests, to ensure trade and free navigation with Taiwan can continue unimpeded. Most importantly, we need it now, before it is too late. Free democracies need to work together if we are to live in a free and peaceful world.

Thank you.