

Taiwan's former President Tsai Ing-wen pays tribute to Václav Havel

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Tsai Ing-wen, former President of the Republic of China (hereinafter Taiwan), began her trip to Europe on October 12 after being invited to speak at the Forum 2000 Conference in Prague.

The Forum 2000 Foundation claimed to be carrying on Václav Havel's supposed legacy by "supporting the values of democracy and... assisting the development of civil society".

On October 14, Tsai claimed at the conference that she was inspired by dissident-turned-president Havel and that both Taiwan and the Czech Republic followed similar democratic paths. Taiwan, like the European Republic, was at the forefront of defending democracy against authoritarian threats. The two countries should deepen diplomatic ties to safeguard democracy, and it was critical for Europe to "define its own duties, not only for Europe, but for the entire world."

Anyone who has some acquaintance with history knows that Havel was a fervent advocate of the enlargement of NATO and an apologist for US-led imperialism. Despite being jailed multiple times under the dictatorship of the Czechoslovak regime, Havel was not the political nemesis of the Stalinist cabals. Instead they were brothers-in-arms in the sense that they shared a common fear of independent mobilisation of working people throughout Europe. And as events proved, they also shared a common interest in the liquidation of what remained of the October Revolution's conquests and the restoration of capitalism in former Soviet republics.

Tsai admires Havel precisely because they both portrayed genocidal forces with which they aligned as defenders of democracy and peace. They similarly opined that Russia and China had no reason for concern over their discourse of "peace" while preparing for further escalations and conflicts.

A *New York Times* commentator conceded on November 4, 1999 that many Czechs considered Havel as "something of a scold" or worse, a "joke", despite his being hailed in the West as "a symbol of Communism's magical implosion."

Havel worked hard during his presidency of Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic to rally support for his country's NATO membership, the overflight of NATO jets on Czech territory and the US-led NATO bombing of Yugoslavia for 78 days in 1999.

He made the case that NATO was "first and foremost an instrument of democracy intended to defend mutually held... political and spiritual values". The alliance was "a pillar of global security" and "a guarantor of Euro-American civilisation".

Havel asserted that the Czech Republic's entry into NATO would not endanger Russia in any way. Nor would it "bring the enemy closer to Russia". Rather, it would "bring democracy closer to Russia." The only way to bring about "the fall of the Iron Curtain" and to end "the

violent division of the world" would be for former Soviet republics to join NATO.

During the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia, the US deliberately targeted the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, killing three journalists. NATO not only indiscriminately bombed schools, hospitals, bridges and industrial facilities but also scattered between 9 to 11 tons of depleted uranium (DU) across the country. The major component of DU was uranium-238, which has a half-life of 4.468 billion years. This meant that the radiological toxicity of DU would continue to impact environment and public health even after the bombing ended. It is a harbinger of what is to come.

The violent breakup of Yugoslavia was not an isolated case. The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq again in 2003 under the bogus pretext of a "war on terror" and with the clear intention of restructuring the Greater Middle East.

Before the US re-invasion of Iraq, Havel stated in 2002 that "Evil must be confronted in its womb, if necessary, by force." Furthermore: "If the need to use force [to disarm Iraq] does arise... NATO should give an honest and speedy consideration to its engagement as an alliance."

The class nature and criminality of these words have become apparent. Prior to the Gaza Genocide, Israel viewed Palestinian women's fertility as a "security" threat. With the full backing of the US and the EU, Israel knows all too well how to "confront" pregnant women's wombs by subjecting them to starvation, thirst, displacement, constant bombardment, psychological stress, and infectious diseases to create the conditions for preterm births and caesarean sections without anaesthesia or even painkillers and induce deaths.

The disintegration of the USSR as well as the fall of the Iron Curtain did not result in peace, democracy and prosperity, as Havel, bourgeois intellectuals and corporate media claimed.

According to a 2009 study, "Mass privatisation and the post-communist mortality crisis: a cross-national analysis" published in the *Lancet*, "Rapid mass privatisation as an economic transition strategy was a crucial determinant of differences in adult mortality trends in post-communist countries".

The research defined mass privatisation programmes as "transferring at least 25% of large state-owned enterprises to the private sector within 2 years with the use of vouchers and give-aways to firm insiders". In Russia, the looting of state-owned enterprises at the expense of toiling masses was particularly devastating; "the population lost nearly 5 years of life expectancy between 1991 and 1994", the study indicated.

The restoration of capitalism only aggravated the already existing

social contradictions in all former Soviet republics.

As Karl Marx succinctly reminds us of what social relations and the so-called “civil society” under capitalism are all about:

Liberty... is the right to do everything that harms no one else.

[...]

But, the right of man to liberty is based not on the association of man with man, but on the separation of man from man. [...]

The practical application of man’s right to liberty is man’s right to private property.

[...]

The right of man to private property is, therefore, the right to enjoy one’s property and to dispose of it at one’s discretion... without regard to other men, independently of society, the right of self-interest. This individual liberty and its application form the basis of civil society. It makes every man see in other men not the realisation of his own freedom, but the barrier to it. [...]

There remain the other rights of man: égalité and sûreté.

Equality... is nothing but the equality of the liberté described above....

Security is the highest social concept of civil society, the concept of police, expressing the fact that the whole of society exists only in order to guarantee to each of its members the preservation of his person, his rights, and his property.

Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO is hell-bent on reducing Ukraine to cinders in order to exhaust Russia while considering waging a nuclear war against Russia as a tool of “policing” imperialist “liberty.”

NATO has launched a two-week nuclear war drill code-named “Steadfast Noon” that began on October 14. It involves 60 aircraft, including German fighter jets capable of firing air-launched nuclear cruise missiles at Russia.

The proxy wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East are two fronts of an escalating global war.

NATO powers are also contemplating how to “bring peace and democracy closer to China”, to use Havel’s phrase. An article published by the Royal United Services Institute military thinktank on October 8, 2024, warned that NATO’s standoff in Ukraine called into question the ability of the US to simultaneously “deter” China and Russia.

For the NATO powers, “China is moving to a launch-on-warning posture akin to those maintained by Russia and the US. By the end of this decade, the Chinese arsenal is expected to grow beyond 1,000 operational nuclear warheads.” China’s emergence as “a nuclear superpower poses a challenge to the strategic nuclear forces that are the supreme guarantee of the security of all NATO allies.”

Given this, Britain and France must not see direct strikes against Russia as the main yardstick of nuclear deterrence, which lacked “sufficient deterrence value under nuclear multipolarity.” Instead, as China’s “nuclear shadow” spread to Europe, Britain and France must build up “theatre-level nuclear weapons” in response to “the interconnectedness between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres”.

Phrased differently, striking China with nuclear missiles is clearly part of NATO’s imperialist plan.

Going beyond Havel, who cloaked US imperialism in platitudes about peace and democracy, Tsai Ing-wen and her government worked hard to bring about US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan and literally doubled the island’s defence spending to approximately \$20 billion, or 2.5 percent of GDP, during her eight-year presidency.

Data from the Pentagon shows that Taiwan has been the fourth largest recipient of US arms sales, only behind Saudi Arabia, Israel and Japan between fiscal year 1950 and 2022.

Did this defence expenditure contribute to Taiwan’s security? As indicated in a 2018 report published by George Mason University--for which the researchers interviewed representatives of Taiwanese military circles, political establishment and realist specialists in international relations--some of them argued that the main purpose of the US arms sales was to “let China know America would intervene on our behalf in a conflict”. The researchers concluded that since the US raked in enormous profits on arms sales, this arms trade embodied a US president’s desire to bolster US defence industry.

The rapid increase in Taiwan’s military budget serves little purposes other than pledging loyalty to its imperialist backer, and cementing Taiwan’s sub-imperialist lie that military power is the ultimate tool for advancing democratic ideals.

No one, including US President Joseph Biden, believes that doubling, tripling or quadrupling Taiwan’s defence expenditure will make the island safer. In 1999, Democratic Senator Biden from Delaware explicitly repudiated the claim that “Taiwan’s security is primarily a function of its military capabilities.” In his opinion, “the reality is that no amount of weaponry alone can guarantee Taiwan’s security.” Taiwan’s security was eventually derived from “the United States’ abiding commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question.” Biden stated that “waving a red cape in front of Beijing and inviting China to charge” was just wrong. Pouring weaponry into Taiwan and supporting separatism was “a surefire way to spark such a [US-China] conflict”, he added. This is what Taiwan’s sub-imperialist bourgeoisie and the Biden-Harris administration pretend to forget.

To conclude, if Havel had lived to this day, he would have praised the US-NATO war against Russia, war drives against China, and the normalisation of the Gaza genocide as “saving Euro-American civilisation”, while justifying a broader war in the Middle East with Tsai, who had previously vowed to confront “discrimination, bigotry” and “the Holocaust” against Israel.

This like-minded duo could have then condemned the working people who have been horrified and enraged by the murders of Palestinian and Lebanese babies, toddlers, and children for promoting a modern-day “blood libel” about the State of Israel.



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