

No mention of Taiwan situation in Obama speech

Written by Taipei Times

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US President Barack Obama delivered his first major policy speech on China without mentioning Taiwan or even mildly challenging Beijing on its human rights record.

Addressing the opening session of a two-day “Strategic and Economic Dialogue,” he described the meeting as “an essential step forward in advancing a positive, constructive and comprehensive relationship between our countries.”

Obama went out of his way to avoid anything controversial or upsetting to Beijing and appeared to be paving the way for a politically profitable trip to China in November.

Lee Edwards, a professor of politics and a Distinguished Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, told the Taipei Times that by ignoring human rights and Taiwan, Obama was ignoring US history and that he was sure that members of Congress would bring it to the attention of the White House staff.

“You can’t build bridges to new friends by burning bridges to old friends. I just can’t say that emphatically enough. It is very unfortunate and ill-timed,” Edwards said.

“The president’s approach shows a misreading of China. We know from history that if you kowtow to them they are going to take advantage. He should stand up for certain things. On his agenda should be human rights and the relationship we have had with Taiwan,” he said.

June Teufel Dreyer, an expert on US-Asian relations at the University of Miami, said: “He does not want to introduce contentious issues at the moment because the priority is to get some kind of cooperative relationship going. Of course these issues cannot be ignored indefinitely and at some point will have to be addressed. But I am pessimistic about it.”

In his speech, Obama said: “I have no illusions that the United States and China will agree on every single issue, nor choose to see the world in the same way. But that only makes dialogue more important — so that we can know each other better, and communicate our concerns with candor.”

He said: “My confidence is rooted in the fact that the United States and China share mutual interests. If we advance those interests through cooperation, our people will benefit and the world will be better off — because our ability to partner with each other is a prerequisite for progress on many of the most pressing global challenges.”

Obama listed four priorities for US-China relations: economic recovery; clean, secure and prosperous energy; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; and confronting transnational threats.

“Support for human rights and human dignity is ingrained in America. Our nation is made up

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of immigrants from every part of the world. We have protected our unity and struggled to perfect our union by extending basic rights to all our people. Those rights include the freedom to speak your mind; to worship your God; and to choose your leaders,” he said.

“These are not things that we seek to impose — this is who we are. It guides our openness to one another and to the world,” he said.

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