

Taiwan backs US-Japan strategy: official

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Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Wu Chih-chung, center, speaks at “Taiwan’s Opportunities under Indo-Pacific Security Strategies” forum organized by the Taiwan Think Tank in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Chang Chia-ming, Taipei Times

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Wu Chih-chung (吳志忠) yesterday reaffirmed the government’s commitment and readiness to working with the US and Japan to maintain regional peace and stability, adding that the country aims to be recognized as an important partner with countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

“We have been active and effective in developing new forms of cooperation and exchange with neighboring countries through the New Southbound Policy, showing that Taiwan is willing and able to contribute to regional peace and stability,” Wu said.

Wu made the remarks at the opening address of a Taipei seminar on opportunities available to Taiwan under an Indo-Pacific strategy, a strategic partnership jointly promoted by the US and Japan to counter the military and economic threats of China and North Korea.

This vision of the Indo-Pacific region is grounded in democratic values and would safeguard the region’s freedom and openness, Wu said, adding that Taiwan is ready to shoulder its responsibility, as a democracy in the region, to fulfill this vision.

Taiwan’s relations with the US and Japan have greatly improved since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) took office, with Taiwan and Japan’s renaming of the agencies handling ties between the two nations, a US\$1.42 billion arms sale promised by US President Donald Trump last year and the Taiwan Travel Act passed by the US Congress to facilitate visits by high-level government officials between Taiwan and the US.

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Taiwan is a vigorous, prosperous and sometimes raucous democracy operating a free-market economy and maintaining relations with countries around the world, which is the exemplar that the US is trying to promote, said Wallace “Chip” Gregson, former assistant secretary for Asian and Pacific security affairs at the US Pentagon.

The term “Indo-Pacific strategy” is not new, nor is its substance, Gregson said.

“What is new is perhaps India’s renewed interest in their ‘Look East’ policy and work in this direction, and their intent to be more assertive about their interests in the Indian Ocean,” he said.

“We can work with India because our big interests coincide with theirs: free and open access to the global commons, rules-based international order and the maintenance of the existing global operating system that we have worked so hard to create,” he said.

The Indo-Pacific strategy reflects the fundamental change in how the US views Taiwan, said Grant Newsham, a senior research fellow at the Tokyo-based Japan Forum for Strategic studies, adding that for the first time, there are US officials in positions of importance that do not view Taiwan as an irritant to be sacrificed for the larger benefit of working with the People’s Republic of China.

“That is a long overdue change,” he said.

Newsham is aware of Trump’s reputation as being unpredictable and mercurial, he said, but added that “sometimes a little uncertainty is good.”

Previous US administrations have been very predictable in their unrelenting accommodation to China, he said.

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The Indo-Pacific strategy presents a window of opportunity that will not stay open forever, Newsham said, adding that for Taiwan, it is important to move fast and develop concrete relationships with the US and Japan.

Taiwan not only plays a key role due to its location in Southeast Asia, but it can contribute through cyberspace, Toshiba Corp advisor Osamu Onoda said, adding that Taiwan and Japan must work together to secure the safety of East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

“Taiwan can provide and share information about its insights about mainland China and join non-traditional military exercises, such as disaster-relief operations, around the region. We can also cooperate with each other on capacity-building measures and tackle cyber-security issues,” he said.

Last year’s US National Security Strategy stated that the US should focus on the Indo-Pacific region and that the US, India, Japan and Australia — the so-called “diamond of democracies” — should work together during a crisis, said Lai I-chung (賴宜中), head of international cooperation at Taiwan Think Tank.

The report also recommended that Taiwan be included in this security partnership, he said, adding that this was different from former US president Barack Obama’s administration, which avoided mentioning Taiwan.

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