

No change to arms policy: US officials

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Two senior members of US President Barack Obama's administration spelled out aspects of White House policy toward Taiwan on Friday and made it very clear that despite Chinese objections arms sales would continue.

Jeffrey Bader, senior director for East Asian Affairs in the National Security Council, and US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg were speaking at separate briefings on Obama's eight-day Asian trip, which starts this week and includes talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛).

Bader, in a keynote address at the Brookings Institution, said that Obama intended to follow the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and to ensure the defense of Taiwan.

He said that the improvement of cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan was one of the world's "good news stories" because the Taiwan Strait was "the potentially most explosive issue" in US-China relations.

"We think that Presidents Hu and Ma [Ying-jeou (馬英九)] have done an excellent job in reaching out to each other and building a framework that we hope will be durable and that will lead to the resolution of differences," Bader said.

"Our policy on arms sales to Taiwan has not changed. And that will be evident over the course of our administration," he said.

Bader said that US policy on Taiwan's status was based on the three US-China joint communiques and the TRA.

"That framework is unalterable — we are not going to touch it — and there will be nothing we say or do on this upcoming trip that will go in a different direction," he said.

"There are some areas where it is good not to innovate. And this is an area where we have a tried and true basis for a stable relationship and we are not going to tamper with it," he said.

Steinberg, speaking soon afterwards at the Center for American Progress, another think tank, said that US commitment to Taiwan was very clear under the TRA and that the Obama administration would continue to respect the act.

"That means we are committed to make appropriate arms sales to meet Taiwan's security needs. There is no question that Beijing doesn't like it, and there is no question that it is our responsibility. And not just because of the TRA, although we obviously have a legal obligation under the TRA. But because we actually think it is the right thing to do," he said.

Steinberg said that US policy toward Taiwan was "appropriate" and that the US' defense and

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security support for Taiwan contributed to cross-strait security.

“Each sale [of arms] needs to be evaluated in terms of Taiwan’s specific needs. We take that responsibility very seriously and we will continue to proceed on that basis,” he said.

During his talks in China, Obama will try to find ways to address policy differences without actually changing the policies, Steinberg said.

“If a country is convinced, as we are convinced in respect to arms sales to Taiwan, it should be prepared to have a serious conversation about it and to listen to the PRC’s [People’s Republic of China] concerns about it,” he said.

“We will try to explain why we believe that it is consistent with the interests of both countries. In this case, with arms sales, we believe that it enhances stability by giving Taiwan the confidence to enter into dialogue with the PRC,” he said.

Another difficult issue to be addressed during Obama’s trip was Chinese military modernization, he said.

“We don’t exclude the legitimacy of modernization, but there are aspects of it that concern us and we would like to understand it better and hear a strong case from the Chinese about particular elements of their modernization. That’s the kind of dialogue that needs to take place if we are going to develop a strong relationship of trust and confidence,” Steinberg said.

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