

US president urged to protect Taiwan

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As US President Barack Obama launched his four-nation tour of Asia this week he received two strong pleas to protect Taiwan's interests. One came from four members of Congress and the other from 16 Taiwanese-American organizations acting in concert.

The congressional letter, signed by members of Congress Shelley Berkley, Gerald Connolly, Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Phil Gingrey, urged Obama to keep Taiwan's security uppermost in his mind when meeting Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛).

It said: "In the event that matters concerning Taiwan are raised, we urge you to emphasize to President Hu that the United States' position remains clear — the United States will support Taiwan's security and will continue to provide it with arms. The PRC [People's Republic of China] has engaged in a large scale military build-up over the past few years and has not abandoned the threat of force. It is of the utmost importance that President Hu understands the United States' firm commitment to ensuring that Taiwan has the tools it needs to defend itself."

The four members of Congress also asked Obama to raise the issue of Taiwan's participation in international organizations, particularly the International Civil Aviation Organization and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Bob Yang (楊伯璽), president of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs, who initiated the second letter, said: "There is an anxiety among Taiwan supporters that President Obama might make concessions on Taiwan for the sake of obtaining Chinese cooperation on a host of international issues during his trip. We know from experience, and from China's past statements and actions, that Taiwan is China's top concern on its foreign policy agenda."

Yang said that he wanted Obama to urge the Chinese government to remove its military threat from the cross-strait equation and renounce the use of force against Taiwan.

"No one should be allowed to bring a gun to the negotiating table," Yang said.

Among the signatories to the second letter were Terri Giles, executive director of the Formosa Foundation; Mary Helen Cruz, president of Friends of Taiwan, Inc; Lin Ing-hour, president of the North America Taiwanese Professors' Association; Ben Liu, president of the Professor Chen Wen-chen Memorial Foundation; and James Chen (陳伯璽), chairman of World United Formosans for Independence-USA.

Meanwhile, in Taipei, several pro-independence groups yesterday also urged Obama not to repeat the "three noes" on Taiwan and not to issue a fourth joint US-Sino communique regarding policy or Taiwan's sovereignty.

In a statement titled "Peace, not at the expense of freedom and democracy," the groups said they sincerely hoped Obama, the winner of this year's Nobel Peace Prize, would put human rights and democracy above politics and money.

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The statement urged Obama to be cautious because his words and deeds could hurt Taiwan's democracy and freedom when he meets Chinese leaders and to honor Washington's longstanding policy of supporting the Taiwanese people's fight against China's threat and coercion, and their right to decide their country's future.

"President Obama, please make yourself a deserving laureate," the statement said.

The "three noes," publicly stated by former US president Bill Clinton during a visit to China in 1998, are no support for Taiwanese independence, no support for "one China, one Taiwan" or "two Chinas," and no support for Taiwan's membership of international organizations that require statehood.

"We hope that the 'three noes' will never be mentioned again. We also oppose a fourth joint communique on the Taiwan issue," said Lo Chih-cheng (羅智強), secretary-general of the Taiwan Society, at a press conference held yesterday to publicize the statement.

Lo said the groups hoped that Obama would declare a new "three noes" — no ignoring the opinions of the Taiwanese when he holds talks with Hu, no sacrificing the benefits Taiwanese enjoy in terms of freedom, safety and national security, and no underestimating China's ambitions and the threat it poses to Taiwan and East Asia.

The groups also called on Obama to publicly state his assurance that he supports a peaceful resolution to the cross-strait issue, would provide Taiwan with the necessary arms to defend itself and that he would encourage the whole region, including China, to move toward democracy, freedom and to respect human rights and safeguard Taiwanese right to self-determination.

Chen Po-chih (陳博之), chairman of Taiwan Thinktank, urged Obama not to underestimate the damage done to the Chinese by the authoritarian regime.

"In the past, the US and others argued that engagement with China would lead to Beijing embracing democracy, freedom and human rights as its economy developed, but over recent years what has actually happened is China has attempted to use its economic clout to destroy these universal values," Chen said.

"In the biological world, small species need protection, not out of sympathy but because the whole biological system would collapse if they became extinct," he said. "Likewise, if Taiwan is annexed by China, freedom and the democratic system will be on the verge of collapse."

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