

Taiwan's coordination body for the US renamed

Written by Taipei Times
Sunday, 26 May 2019 08:11 -



>Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu's Twitter message is pictured in a screen grab yesterday.

Screen grab from Twitter

The Coordination Council for North American Affairs has been renamed the Taiwan Council for US Affairs, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) said yesterday, hailing the move as a breakthrough in Taiwan-US relations.

The names of Taiwan and the US appear alongside each other in an agency's title for the first time, symbolizing the affinity and reciprocal trust between the two nations, Tsai wrote on Facebook.

Based on the US' Taiwan Relations Act, Washington in 1979 established the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) to deal with affairs related to Taiwan, and Taiwan established the coordination council as a reciprocal agency, she wrote.

Taiwan used the phrase "North American" instead of the US due to special historical conditions at the time, showing the difficult situation Taiwan faced in international relations, she said.

Despite past obstacles, the two sides agreed to rename the council after long-running negotiations to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the TRA, Tsai said, thanking Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs personnel for the achievement.

With Taiwan and the US becoming closer over the past few years, the two would work more closely on regional peace and Indo-Pacific security, the ministry said in a news release.

National Security Council Secretary-General David Lee (李達志) visited US academics and officials from May 13 to Tuesday to discuss security challenges that Taiwan and the US face together, it added.

Lee met with officials from the US National Security Council and other government agencies, as well as Asian policy experts from think tanks, including the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Brookings Institution and Georgetown University, it said.

Lee also met with government officials from Taiwan's diplomatic allies, who reaffirmed their support for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region, the ministry said.

"Times, they are a-changin'," Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) wrote in English on the ministry's official Twitter account yesterday. "Really got to love the new name!"

The move follows a similar name change in May 2017, when the Association of East Asian Relations was renamed the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association.

Lin Wen-cheng (林文程), a professor at National Sun Yat-sen University's Institute of China and Asia-Pacific Studies, said the renaming signals that Taiwan and the US are moving toward establishing semi-official ties.

The previous title was unilaterally decided by the US when it switched recognition to Beijing in a bid to downplay its links to Taiwan, he said, adding that nonetheless, the renaming is a positive sign showing the US' increasing support for Taiwan and the positive development of bilateral ties.

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Meetings between Taiwanese and US national security officials were often kept confidential in the past, while the ministry's revelation of the meetings demonstrates that bilateral relations have been improving, said Alexander Huang (黃國昌), an associate professor at Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies and a former Mainland Affairs Council deputy minister.

Additional reporting by Peng Wan-hsin

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/05/26](#)