

Groups petition Obama to help Taiwan

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A large group of Taiwanese American organizations is petitioning US President Barack Obama to dramatically increase the US' ability to stop a Chinese military takeover of Taiwan.

Over the past three months, the group has collected 17,000 letters of support from Taiwan, Japan, Canada and across the US.

They met on Tuesday in Washington with Ted Mann, director of the US State Department's Office of Taiwan Coordination, and Barbara Schrage, managing director of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), to present a petition to be passed on to Obama at the White House.

"There was a cordial exchange of views," a State Department source said later.

The petition asks Obama to reaffirm the US' Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and to "voice concern about the erosion of freedom of speech and assembly and the loss of judicial independence on Taiwan."

It also asks Obama to send a Cabinet member to Taipei, allow US Navy ships to call at Taiwanese ports and deploy two aircraft carrier task forces to the Western Pacific to maintain the capacity to resist any Chinese attack on Taiwan.

While it is unlikely Obama will agree to any of these moves, analysts say the petition will help remind the State Department of the anxiety felt by many Taiwanese over the possibility of a Chinese takeover.

Among the groups presenting the petition were the Formosan Association for Human Rights; the Formosan Association for Public Affairs; the North America Taiwanese Professors' Association; the North America Taiwanese Women's Association; the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan; the Taiwan Hakka Association of Public Affairs in North America; the Taiwan Association of University Professors and the Taiwanese American Association.

The letter to Obama says that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has been pursuing a policy of "incremental capitulation" by reducing the budget and size of Taiwan's military, deepening the dependency of the nation's economy on China and downgrading Taiwan's international status.

"Taiwan is being delivered into Beijing's grasp by stealth," the letter says.

Following Tuesday's closed-door meeting at the AIT offices, Jay Loo (劉傑), spokesman for the petition project, told the Taipei Times that the US would suffer a "geostrategic disaster" if China took over Taiwan.

He said sea lanes and airspace around Taiwan were critical to the survival of Japan and South Korea and that if those two countries fell under Chinese domination, "the US would be forced to retreat all the way back to Hawaii."

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