

US official denies China offered to redeploy forces

Written by Taipei Times

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US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg strongly denied on Thursday that China had offered to redeploy its forces facing Taiwan if Washington would stop selling arms to Taipei.

He was responding to a question about remarks made the day before by Senator Dianne Feinstein, chairwoman of the Intelligence Committee, concerning private talks she held with Chinese leaders earlier this month.

Steinberg, following a speech to a major Washington conference on Asia, was asked if redeployment of missiles in return for an end to arms sales had ever come up in talks between the US and China.

"We have not heard directly from the Chinese on any specific proposals along those lines and so I would be reluctant to delve into the hypothetical," he said.

"Clearly, we would welcome any steps that Beijing would take to reduce the threats to Taiwan and move towards what has been the clear, unequivocal position of the United States through many administrations, that the differences across the straits should be resolved peacefully and without the use of threat or force," he said. "And to the extent that these deployments represent an element of coercion, we think that if they were removed that would be a positive development. But beyond that, I am not prepared to speculate."

During Congressional testimony by US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on Wednesday, Feinstein talked of her visits to China and Taiwan earlier this month.

"I think there is the opportunity to consider where we go if this across-the-strait situation is stable," she said.

She then asked Gates: "What significant action could China take to ease its military posture in the Strait in a manner that was substantive enough for you to consider or reconsider the future arms sales to Taiwan, which are a substantial irritant and will continue to be a substantial irritant in my view?"

He replied that even though Taiwan had "reached out," there was an "extraordinary Chinese deployment of all manner of cruise and ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan on the Chinese side of the Strait."

Gates said that arms sales to Taiwan were a political decision, that they were mandated by the Taiwan Relations Act, and that any change in that policy would be up to the political leadership of the US and not the Department of Defense.

At that point, Feinstein said: "Perhaps some of this I should discuss with you privately, but in my meeting with some of the leadership it was mentioned that China had offered to redeploy back. Now I understand the word 'redploy' isn't 'remove.'"

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Senior sources at both the State Department and the Pentagon have told the Taipei Times that if Chinese officials were using Feinstein as a conduit to pass on a proposal about arms sales, they would have expected her to inform them immediately, which she did not.

One source said that he had talked with someone who accompanied Feinstein to most of her meetings with Chinese officials and this person never heard the Chinese suggest a deal concerning the redeployment of missiles.

While she was in Shanghai earlier this month, Feinstein talked with the Wall Street Journal about her meetings with former Chinese president Jiang Zemin (江泽民), former premier Zhu Rongji (朱镕基) and Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai (薄熙来).

Asked what were the problems in the US-China relationship, she said: "I think there's a problem over the US\$6.4 billion arms sales to Taiwan. I believe that's a mistake on our part."

Often described as one of the most powerful women in US politics, Feinstein and her investment banker husband Richard Blum are said to be worth in excess of US\$100 million. Blum has also been reported by US media as having extensive business with China.

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