

Taipei, Nov. 30 (CNA) The United States' "no position" on Taiwan's international status is in fact a position, which has drawn objections from Beijing, American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt said Tuesday in Taipei.

"We take no position on the political status of Taiwan. That may sound like a dodge but it's a position. Taking no position is itself a position because that means you're not taking their (China's) position," Burghardt said in a question and answer session after delivering a speech in an event organized by the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Taipei.

The U.S. position has been consistent since 1979, and it is a position that infuriates Beijing, he said, adding that "they (China) know it and complain about it."

Burghardt compared studying Taiwan's "unusual and unclear" international status to studying theology. "It's not terribly productive to spend time on it, because each way you go, you get yourself in more trouble."

In response to another question on U.S. arm sales to Taiwan, the veteran diplomat underlined the fact that the Obama administration had notified the U.S. Congress of a US\$6.4 billion arms sale in January and on its US\$320 million commercial sales of equipment.

One weapons system that the U.S. has yet to approve for sale to Taiwan, however, is the advanced F-16 C/D fighter jet, leading many in Taiwan to speculate that the proposed purchase was dead and the U.S. commitment to the country's defense was on the wane.

But Burghardt insisted that saying that the U.S. has declined to sell Taiwan F-16 C/Ds or to upgrade the F-16 A/Bs is incorrect because the U.S. government "hasn't said yes or no and hasn't announced anything."

He also stressed that Washington's defense commitment to Taipei goes well beyond the sale of arms, he said.

Burghardt said his experience of working with the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii in the capacity of the AIT chairman had provided him with a special perspective on overall U.S.-Taiwan military cooperation, which includes training activities, and exchanges of information and intelligence.

That was why judging the commitment "by how fast decisions are made on F-16 C/Ds is a skewed analysis," he said.

Current U.S.-Taiwan relations are "excellent," he said. The U.S. government has found it easier to interact with the Ma Ying-jeou administration, which he described as making decisions in a more pragmatic and rational way and did not spring "surprises."

He also highlighted the importance of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in great length, saying

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that the U.S. law "sometimes doesn't get the credit it deserves" because it's more than the U.S. defense commitment to Taiwan.

The TRA set up the entire AIT-TECRO (Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office) relationship and enabled the U.S. to continue its economic and political relationship with Taiwan, he said.

"And the way we set up the AIT in 1979 ended up being the model for so many other countries" to deal with cross-Taiwan Strait relationships, he noted.

Burghardt has a long history of involvement with Taiwan. He served as director of the AIT, which represents the interests of the United States in Taiwan in the absence of diplomatic ties, from 1999- 2001. He also studied for a year in the central city of Taichung at the U.S. State Department's Chinese Language School in the mid-1970s. (By Chris Wang) enditem/ls

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