

US, PRC plan joint defense task force

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US and Chinese defense officials plan to set up a joint task force to deal with issues of mutual concern, but weapons sales to Taiwan will not be part of the agenda, an unnamed Pentagon official said on Wednesday.

The official's statement came after Chinese media reported that the US has given a "positive response" to a proposal to discuss the arms sales with China.

Chinese media reports quoted Rear Admiral Guan Youfei (关友飞), who spoke to Chinese journalists on Tuesday in Washington, where Chinese Minister of Defense Chang Wanquan (常万全) had met with US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel a day earlier.

Guan reportedly said that arms sales to Taiwan would be one of three points of discussion between the US and China under a proposed joint problem-solving panel.

His remarks do not square with what the Pentagon official reported on Wednesday.

"I believe that the two sides, US and China, agreed to set up working groups to discuss issues of mutual concern, but I have not heard of any specific working group on arms sales to Taiwan being established as of now," the defense department official said.

The planned task force will focus on crime prevention, particularly in regard to arms proliferation, piracy and online crime, the official said.

The issue of arms sales to Taiwan did not come up during the meeting between Chang and Hagel, the official added.

The official also stressed that the US commitment to upholding the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) remains unchanged.

The TRA, the US law regulating relations with Taiwan in the absence of formal diplomatic ties, stipulates that Washington is obligated to provide Taiwan with arms necessary to defend itself.

The US government also issued the “six assurances” in 1982, in which it promised not to hold prior consultation with China regarding arms sales to Taiwan.

In Taipei, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Anna Kao (高英) yesterday also said the Chinese media report was “incorrect,” as the US has reaffirmed its commitments to Taiwan.

Kao said the US has clarified that the media reports about discussions between Chang and Hagel on US arms sales to Taiwan during the former’s recent visit to Washington were “not true.”

Taiwan has received thorough briefings from the US government on Chang’s visit, in line with normal practice, Kao said.

“The issue of US arms sales to Taiwan was not among the discussions [between Chang and Hagel] on issues of mutual concern,” she said.

Later yesterday, the ministry issued a statement saying that it was “nothing new” that Chang reportedly expressed the wish that the US would halt arms sales to Taiwan during his meeting with Hagel.

The US has clarified that a working group would be set up between the US and China to deal with issues related to US arms sales to Taiwan, as it said that the mechanism has nothing to do with the matter, the ministry said.

During the briefing, the US had reaffirmed its commitment to the security of Taiwan by

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promising to adhere to the TRA and the “six assurances” designed by former US president Ronald Reagan, it said.

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