

Richard Bush warns on PRC coercion

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The greatest danger facing Taiwan is intimidation from China, former American Institute in Taiwan chairman Richard Bush said in Washington on Tuesday.

The greatest danger was not military attack — “a bolt from the red” — but rather that Beijing might exploit its growing power to “intimidate Taiwan into submission” on China’s terms, he said.

The best thing China could do to achieve its political objective of unification would be to offer Taiwan a better deal and “create a real convergence between itself and Taiwan on fundamental issues,” said Bush, who is the director of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution.

However, until that happens, Taiwan has got to strengthen itself in a variety of ways, including militarily, he said.

“If Taiwan is prepared to strengthen itself in the context of a non-provocative policy towards China, I think we should continue to help, including with arms,” he told a conference at the Wilson Center covering a study, *Proposals for US and Chinese Actions on Arms Sales to Taiwan*, which was published by the EastWest Institute last year.

The study, reported in the *Taipei Times* in November last year, proposes a number of compromises, including one to “calibrate” US arms deliveries to Taiwan so that in any given calendar year the value does not exceed US\$941 million. This would entail a small decrease on the inflation-adjusted average over the past 30 years.

The study also calls on China to reduce its short-range ballistic missiles now pointed at Taiwan by one-sixth.

Bush said that a major reason Taiwan was unwilling to negotiate with China was that Beijing’s

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“one country, two systems” formula was not acceptable.

“There is a broad consensus on the island — both blues and greens — that ‘one country, two systems’ is fundamentally flawed as far as Taiwan is concerned,” he said.

“It is incompatible with Taiwan’s interests, and that would seem to be a very good reason for Taiwan[’s] leaders not to negotiate on the fundamental dispute,” he said.

The US transfer of advanced weapons has a political character for both Beijing and Taipei, he said.

“US weaponry is not trivial in a military sense,” he said. “From a US perspective, arms sales, whatever their political value to Taiwan, should also contribute to Taiwan’s ability to deter mainland attack or threat of attack.”

If the US decided to come to Taiwan’s defense in the case of such an attack, it would need Taipei to hold on “for several weeks while we did all that was needed to mount our defense,” he said.

If Taiwan has the capability to hold on, Beijing is less likely to consider an attack in the first place, he said.

“There is growing concern that Taiwan’s past defense strategy on which its arms requests to the US have been based is no longer appropriate for the threat environment — thus reducing the deterrent effect of the capabilities it has or might have,” he said.

Bush said that the danger of setting a cap on arms sales — as suggested by the study — was that the cap could become a “hard ceiling” rather than a “floating average.”

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It was important to look at arms sales not in dollar terms, but in their value militarily, he said.

“How much does what we sell to Taiwan contribute to deterrence and to creating an environment in which, on the political level, the two sides can find a way to work out their differences,” he said.

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