

No link between dispute, joining TPP: US official

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The current dispute over the cross-strait service trade agreement would not negatively affect the US' position on Taiwan's bid to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) spokesman Mark Zimmer said.

The student-led protest opposing the government's rushed handling of the pact's legislative review and the lack of an oversight mechanism has sparked concerns among Taipei officials that negotiations with China on trade in goods would be disrupted, causing Beijing to block the nation's efforts to take part in regional economic integration, including the TPP.

Zimmer said he did not see a direct relationship between the two issues.

"There is no direct relation. We just finished the TIFA [Trade and Investment Framework Agreement] talks and had some good discussions there in Washington," Zimmer said.

"We will continue to nurture this very important economic and commercial relation. I don't see a direct relation with the current dispute," he added.

Zimmer was referring to the eighth round of talks between Taiwan and the US on the TIFA platform held on Friday last week in Washington.

The US has explicitly welcomed Taiwan's intent to participate in the TPP, according to statements by US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel during a hearing in the US Congress on Thursday last week and by his deputy, Kin Moy, last month.

Zimmer declined to say how much bearing China would have on the US' stance toward Taiwan's TPP membership, saying it was a hypothetical question.

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“We don’t know if that would become an actual situation. We will deal with that when it comes,” he said.

Asked about the suggestions made by some academics, including US-Taiwan Business Council chairman Paul Wolfowitz, that the US could bring Taiwan into the regional trading bloc as soon as possible to help it reduce its economic dependence on China, Zimmer said that the current participating members are focused on concluding the first round of negotiations to reach an agreement.

“We will see what happens after that,” Zimmer said.

Meanwhile, Zimmer said, the US would not take sides in the dispute between the government and the student-led protesters because those were issues that Taiwanese need to work out.

“We are hoping to see a peaceful resolution,” he added.

Asked whether the broad disagreement among Taiwanese about the nation’s relationship with China as reflected in the protest would affect US policies toward Taiwan, Zimmer said that the US would not change its policy.

The US-Taiwan relationship is “at a very excellent place,” Zimmer said, adding that the US supports Taiwan’s democracy, values its ties with Taiwan and looks forward to continuing the relationship.

He added that the US encourages steps to deepen cross-strait ties.

Separately, scores of people representing about 10 groups yesterday filed a petition with the AIT in an attempt to draw US President Barack Obama’s attention to the forcible measures that the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) used to crack down on student protesters who broke into the Executive Yuan compound on March 24.

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