

Obama lauds Taiwanese democracy

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US President Barack Obama acknowledged Taiwan as a “thriving” democracy for the first time on Saturday in a speech on the US’ policy in Asia that he gave at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, where he was attending the G20 summit.

In the speech, Obama said that Americans believe in democratic government and “that the only real source of legitimacy is the consent of the people.”

“There are times where, when we speak out on these issues, we are told that democracy is just a Western value. I fundamentally disagree with that. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, they have built thriving democracies,” he said. “And so here in Asia and around the world, America supports free and fair elections, because citizens must be free to choose their own leaders.”

“We support freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, a free and open Internet, strong civil societies, because the voices of the people must be heard and leaders must be held accountable — even though it’s uncomfortable sometimes,” he said, adding that “people in Hong Kong are speaking out for their universal rights,” in a reference to the pro-democracy protests there.

Obama said that when he took power, the leaders and people of the Asia-Pacific region voiced a “desire for greater American engagement” in the area.

“So as president, I decided that — given the importance of this region to American security, to American prosperity — the United States would rebalance our foreign policy and play a larger and lasting role in this region,” he said.

“Our rebalance is not only about the United States doing more in Asia, it’s also about the Asia-Pacific region doing more with us around the world,” the president added.

In the areas of economics and finance, Washington is looking to help nascent powers, such as Vietnam, instigate reforms of their economies and enhance their maritime capacity, while

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working with APEC member nations to “tear down barriers to trade and investment” and fight corruption, Obama said.

The US is also committed to fostering ties to regional blocs and institutions, such as by helping make the East Asia summit the Asia-Pacific area’s “leading forum for addressing political and security challenges,” and by supporting ASEAN’s effort to strike a code of conduct agreement with China that would bolster international law in the disputed South China Sea, Obama said.

Washington wants to continue seeking a symbiotic relationship with Beijing, since China is set to “by virtue of its size and its remarkable growth ... inevitably play a critical role in the future of this region,” Obama said.

He concluded the talk by saying that the US is dedicated to building a future in conjunction with not only the region’s nations, but also its people, based on shared values and vowing that in the pursuit of security, prosperity and dignity, the region “will have no greater friend than the United States of America.”

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