

Taiwan is a “vital” partner of the US and Washington is committed to supporting the nation’s “confidence and freedom from coercion,” a senior US Department of State official said on Thursday, adding that Washington welcomes Democratic Progressive party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) visit next month.

In a speech that seemed geared toward boosting the relationship prior to Taiwan’s next presidential election, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton heaped praise on Taiwan as a “society worthy of emulation and envy.”

“We look forward to another dazzling display of Taiwan’s robust democracy in action,” she said.

Thornton said that Tsai, who is the DPP candidate for president, would soon be visiting Washington and that “we welcome her visit and look forward to a productive exchange.”

Regardless of who becomes the next president of Taiwan, Thornton said: “We hope to continue our close cooperation and it must be said that an important ingredient of that close cooperation in recent years has been the stable management of cross-strait ties.”

Thornton said that cross-strait relations would be an important part of Tsai’s Washington discussions.

She said that, as far as Tsai’s visit goes, the US is not in the business of supporting a particular candidate or a particular candidate’s positions.

“We hope during the visit to make clear the US’ interest is in cross-strait stability,” Thornton said. “Close communication, no surprises and a low-key approach have been the key to success in recent years and we hope to see that continue.”

Thornton said that the US hoped to learn from Tsai about her vision for taking Taiwan and US-Taiwan relations forward.

“We want to see continued stable, positive interactions across the [Taiwan] Strait. We believe there has been a firm basis established for those interactions and dialogue, and we are interested in seeing that continued because of the benefits it has brought to Taiwan and the US,” she said.

The US remained committed to the “one China” policy based on the three communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act, she said.

Despite repeated questioning, Thornton refused to characterize, define or comment on the so-called “1992 consensus.”

The “1992 consensus,” a term former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) admitted making up in 2000, refers to a tacit understanding between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese government that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means.

“We are proud of what Taiwan has accomplished and proud of the role the US has played in Taiwan’s success,” Thornton said.

She told a packed meeting at the Brookings Institution that US President Barack Obama’s administration had worked to “reconceptualize and reinstitutionalize” US-Taiwan relations and build a “comprehensive, durable and mutually beneficial partnership.”

She said that the US was committed to promoting Taiwan’s economic prosperity and to elevating Taiwan’s “profile and dignity” through its contributions to global challenges and the international community.

Taiwan a vital partner for US: official

Written by Taipei Times

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Thornton said that US arms sales to Taiwan supported improved relations across the Strait by providing Taiwan with the confidence to pursue constructive interactions with China.

“We also support Taiwan’s efforts to develop innovative and asymmetric capabilities to deter coercion or intimidation,” she said.

Bilateral and military exchanges have nearly doubled in recent years, increasing the quality of interactions.

“We have increased our prosperity, improved our security and strengthened international partnerships and ties between our peoples,” she said.

“We encourage authorities in both Beijing and Taipei to continue on the basis of dignity and respect,” Thornton said. “Our policy on cross-strait relations is not directed at one side of the Taiwan Strait or the other — there should be no unilateral attempts to change the status quo.”

Thornton said that the US encouraged Beijing to demonstrate flexibility and restraint.

“The benefits that stable cross-strait ties have brought to both sides and to the US and the region are enormous,” she said. “It is important that both sides of the Strait recognize the importance of these benefits and work to establish a basis for continued peace and stability.”

Efforts made over the past six years to reconceptualize relations with Taiwan have allowed the US to deepen the bonds of friendship, she said.

“Taiwan shares our values, has earned our respect and continues to merit our support — we look forward to continuing our work together in the years ahead,” she said.

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Thornton alluded to continuing trade problems, saying that Washington has worked hard to solve ongoing “market access issues” with Taiwan, but that a great deal remained to be done.

“We will work on outstanding items, such as bringing Taiwan’s regulations into line with science-based international standards,” she said.

On the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, Thornton said that the US was aware that Taiwan wanted to join and that it would be “helpful” if Taipei would move on its own volition to address some of the “troublesome market access issues that have been the subject of discussion for many years.”

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