

Tsai to avoid ‘U-shaped line’: source

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A staffer browses a paper near a map of the South China Sea with “nine-dash line” claims under Chinese territory on display at a maritime defense educational facility in Nanjing, China, on Tuesday.

Photo: Chinatopix via AP

President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) administration has reached an internal resolution on Taiwan’s territorial claims over the South China Sea, which stresses the nation’s sovereignty over islands in the area, but makes no mention of the so-called “U-shaped line” and “historical waters,” a Presidential Office source said yesterday.

The government wants to differentiate Taiwan’s claims from China’s and avoid the impression that Taipei and Beijing have a unified stance on the issue, said the source, who asked not to be identified.

The U-shaped line — also known as the “11-dash line” — was featured in the “Location Map of the South China Sea Islands” drawn up by the Republic of China (ROC) government in 1947. After the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) lost the Chinese Civil War and fled to Taiwan, the Chinese Communist Party changed it to a “nine-dash line.”

After the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, on Tuesday ruled that Beijing’s claims of historical rights over the area based on its nine-dash line were invalid, the Ministry of the Interior and the Mainland Affairs Council issued statements stressing the ROC’s sovereignty over the South China Sea islands.

However, neither statement mentioned the U-shaped line or historical waters, although both referred to the map. That sparked speculation that the government has dropped the U-shaped

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line claim.

The source said the government's position is clear: The ROC has sovereignty over South China Sea islands, including Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island, 太平島), and there is no need to mention the U-shaped line or historical waters to assert that position.

Another source said that when the map was drawn in 1947, it only marked the names and locations of the South China Sea islands and 11 demarcation lines, but terms like the "U-shaped line" or "11-dash line" did not exist then.

The demarcation lines were later referred to as the "11-dash line," and after China proposed the "nine-dash line," academics created the term U-shaped line to stress the similarity between Taiwan's and China's claims.

The term, like the so-called "1992 consensus," was created and fashioned in retrospect, the source said.

A report by the US Department of State mapped the nine-dash line and 11-dash line and found that they represented different coordinates, suggesting they were different demarcation lines, the source said.

The Presidential Office source questioned the nature of the 11 demarcation lines on the map, saying there are no clear definitions on whether they represent national boundaries, island demarcation lines or historical territorial waters.

Neither the 11-dash line nor the U-shaped line is official terminology or a legal term, the source said.

When asked whether the Tsai administration has made it a policy not to mention the U-shaped line, Presidential Office spokesman Alex Huang (黃alex) did not give a direct response at a

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routine news conference yesterday afternoon.

“The ROC government stands firm on its claim of sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea and their relevant waters, which are rightfully our rights in accordance with international law,” Huang said.

Huang said that all relevant documents, including those dating back to 1947, when the ROC government drew the map, show that the official name used is “islands in the South China Sea (南海群島).”

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