

Taiwan to be briefed on Trump-Xi talks

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This combination photograph shows US President Donald Trump, left, in Washington on Tuesday last week, and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Feb. 22 in Beijing.

Photo: AP

The US has agreed to brief Taiwan before and after US President Donald Trump's meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) in Florida on Thursday and Friday, a national security official said yesterday.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the US government has explained its policy arrangement to Taiwan on multiple occasions and has promised to give Taipei a report after the Trump-Xi meetings.

The briefing is to be made either by American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman James Moriarty to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) in Taipei, or by US government officials to representatives of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington, the official said.

The timing of the Trump-Xi meeting suggests that Xi intends to use it as proof of solid Sino-US ties in the run-up to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) 19th National Congress this fall, the official said.

"It is expected that the focuses of the meetings will be on North Korea, US-China trade and the South China Sea," the official said, adding that Taiwan might not be a focus.

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The National Security Council has met several times with other government agencies to analyze possible scenarios of the Trump-Xi talks and outline solutions, and Tsai has received regular briefings, the official said.

Taiwan has been receiving support from its US friends, with several US think tanks and pro-Taiwan members of the US Congress speaking out for Taiwan and reiterating the importance of the Taiwan Relations Act and the “six assurances,” the official added.

For example, US senators Robert Menendez and Jim Inhofe, co-chairs of the US Senate Taiwan Caucus, wrote a letter to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging Washington to stress its support for Taipei during its interactions with Beijing, the official said.

In addition, former AIT director Richard Bush, now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation senior research fellow Dean Cheng (鄭文) and Hudson Institute Center for American Seapower director Seth Cropsey have all published articles calling on Trump to reiterate the Taiwan Relations Act and the “six assurances” in front of Xi, the official said.

While the chance of Trump and Xi signing a fourth communique is low, there have been concerns that the two leaders could issue a joint statement unfavorable to Taiwan, similar to the 2009 one by then-US president Barack Obama and Chinese president Hu Jintao (胡錦濤).

The official said Beijing has a tendency to “twist the meanings” of the US’ words when it comes to China’s core interests, US arms sales to Taiwan and the “one China” principle.

“For instance, after Trump’s telephone call with Xi in February, some Chinese media and academics interpreted the US president’s remark that he will respect the ‘one China’ policy as Washington’s acknowledgement of the so-called ‘1992 consensus’ or the ‘one China’ principle,” the official said.

The “1992 consensus” refers to a tacit understanding between the Chinese Nationalist Party

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(KMT) and the CCP that both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge that there is “one China,” with each side having its own interpretation of what “China” means.

Former Mainland Affairs Council chairman Su Chi (蘇起) said in 2006 that he had made up the term in 2000.

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