

Taiwan to host US at defense event

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A mobile Tien Chien II medium-range missile launcher is displayed at Taipei Aerospace and Defense Technology Exhibition at the Taipei World Trade Center on August 17, 2017.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

The US-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference is to be held in Taiwan for the first time, a senior official involved in the conference said, adding that as a result of the US' Taiwan Travel Act — which is yet to be passed — that would remove restrictions on visits by high-level US officials, the likelihood of important US government officials attending is very high.

The conference was first held in 2002 and had always been hosted in the US. The event, cohosted by the US-Taiwan Business Council and the Taiwan Defense Industry Development Association, is scheduled for May and is expected to span five days.

Which level of US government officials would attend and whether meetings with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan (冯世宽) would be arranged has not been decided, the source said.

Taiwan would respect the US' decisions, as these are not plans that Taiwan can make unilaterally, the source added.

Several international defense companies have reportedly expressed an interest in Taiwan's defense manufacturers and visits to the manufacturers are to be included in the conference.

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During a question-and-answer session at the Legislative Yuan last year, Feng said Taiwan has been striving to hold the conference for a long time, and that a proposal for the US and Taiwan to alternate hosting the conference each year had been raised.

However, according to a senior official familiar with the matter, the US' latest plan is to hold the conference twice a year — in Taiwan in the first half of the year and in the US in the second half.

The conference is to focus on exchanges between manufacturers at the technical level, with communication between the US and Taiwan a secondary focus, the source said.

The conference would be dedicated to discussions about the US' and Taiwan's national defense industry policy, the source added.

Taiwan's most important defense policy is its domestic shipbuilding, aerospace and information security strategies, the source said.

Taiwan hopes to achieve a breakthrough in the development of its national defense industry and effectively bolster national security, the source added.

Kaohsiung is to host the event because the majority of Taiwan's defense manufacturers are in the region, the source said, adding that balancing development between northern and southern Taiwan was also taken into consideration.

Taiwan and the US are discussing the details, the source said, adding that if everything is confirmed, the timetable is expected to be announced next month.

Hosting the event could help boost international confidence in Taiwan's defense industry, a source said.

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The local defense industry is aiming to gain entry into the US defense industry's supply chain to spur Taiwan's overall economy, the source said.

The industry's desire to enter the US' supply chain is not an easy task, as military specifications for products and equipment are much stricter than industrial specifications, a senior official who has participated in the development of Taiwan's defense industry said.

The weaponry must pass a series of tests and be certified by the US, the source said, adding that the cost must be competitive.

Only by establishing its own certification standards would Taiwan be able to bridge the gap, the source said.

The creation of a certification process would also allow Taiwan to enter the international defense industry supply chain, the source said.

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