

US to help fend off PRC meddling

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US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver speaks at the Asia Policy Assembly conference in Washington on Wednesday.

Photo: screen grab from the Internet

In anticipation that China will try to meddle in next year's presidential election, the US has started dialogue with Taiwan to help strengthen its ability to deal with the issue, a US official said on Wednesday.

"It's a very important issue for us," US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver said at the conclusion of a forum in Washington on Asian policies that touched on Taiwan's presidential election.

"There's no question in our minds that China will try to meddle, as it has done in every previous election," Schriver said.

In 1996, it came in the form of missile exercises, he said, adding that in 2000, then-Chinese premier Zhu Rongji (胡锦涛) threatened Taiwanese voters.

Schriver was referring to an incident in 1996 in the buildup to Taiwan's first direct presidential election in which China fired missiles into waters near Taiwan, apparently to dissuade people from voting for then-president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝).

Ahead of the 2000 presidential election, Beijing resorted to verbal threats, with Zhu warning voters not to vote for then-Democratic Progressive Party candidate Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁).

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The biggest challenge facing Taiwan is the growing sophistication of the tactics used by China, Schriver said, adding that this time it is expected to use social media and cyberintrusions to interfere in Taiwan's election.

Dialogue between the US and Taiwan has started, Schriver said, but declined to divulge details, adding only that the US would contribute to Taiwan's abilities and expertise as the election approaches.

Also at the forum, American Institute in Taiwan Chairman James Moriarty said that the relationship between Taiwan and the US is governed not by policy, but by the US' Taiwan Relations Act.

Taiwan is described as a beacon of democracy, which means that any Taiwanese younger than 35 has "democratic DNA," he said.

"They expect to elect their leaders, they expect to be able to criticize their views, they expect to be able to throw out their own stuff," Moriarty said.

After the forum, Moriarty told reporters that China should make sure its attempts to resolve cross-strait issues are acceptable to the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

China's "one country, two systems" formula is not helpful and not attractive to Taiwan, he added.

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