

US states urged to resist pressure on Taiwan

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, left, and National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien walk outside the White House in Washington on Thursday.

Photo: Bloomberg

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Saturday urged US governors to resist Chinese pressure to shun Taiwan, as he warned that Beijing was increasingly taking its diplomatic battle to the local level.

In an address to the National Governors Association in Washington, Pompeo said that US President Donald Trump's administration would step up communication with state and local governments about dealing with China.

"Don't make separate individual deals and agreements with China that undermine our national policy," Pompeo said. "I know none of you would do so intentionally. Let us help you make sure we're getting it right."

Pompeo pointed to a threat last year sent to Mississippi's governor that China would cancel investment over his visit to Taiwan.

"When it comes to doing business, I'm asking you to adopt a cautious mindset. In the words of [former US] president [Ronald] Reagan, when you are approached for introduction or a connection to a deal, 'trust but verify,'" he told the governors representing the 55 states and territories.

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He also cited a letter by a Chinese diplomat urging state governments not to congratulate President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on her re-election last month and a case in which a high school in Chicago withdrew an invitation to a Taiwanese representative to take part in a climate discussion.

“It’s one thing to pressure the secretary of state of the United States of America. It seems quite something else to go after a high-school principal,” Pompeo said. “It shows depth. It shows systemization. It shows intent.”

“While these might seem like local matters to some, the cumulative effect is of enormous national importance and international significance,” he said.

Pompeo also warned of Chinese pressure on local leaders not to meet the Dalai Lama, and voiced concern about state governments’ financial choices, saying that Florida’s pension fund has invested in a company with ties to surveillance in Xinjiang, where Beijing has detained more than 1 million Uighur and other Turkic-speaking Muslims.

China was pursuing a policy of exploiting US freedoms to “gain advantage over us at the federal level, the state level and the local level,” he said.

“It’s happening in your states, with consequences for our foreign policy and for citizens that reside in your states ... and affects our capacity to perform America’s vital national security functions,” he said.

Pompeo said the Chinese approach was organized and methodical, adding: “I’d be surprised if most of you in the audience have not been lobbied by the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] directly.”

Beijing has denounced Pompeo’s comments targeting the CCP as vicious attacks and said any attempts to smear China or obstruct its growth were doomed to fail.

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