

The increasingly fractious beef row between Washington and Taipei will not impact arms sales or other aspects of the bilateral relationship, Assistant US Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell said on Thursday.

Asked if Taiwan's decision to ban some kinds of US beef would go beyond trade and economic relations and be linked to such vital issues as security and arms sales, Campbell said that it would not.

"There have been some contentious issues associated with the beef decision," he said. "We're trying to work closely with our -colleagues and friends in Taiwan on a resolution that allows this issue to move forward."

'VERY CLEAR'

Campbell said that the administration of US President Barack Obama remained "very clear" about its responsibilities under the Taiwan Relations Act and on "our larger commitments" to Taiwan and the maintenance of peace across the Taiwan Strait.

"We will continue to maintain a responsible and good unofficial relationship between Washington and Taipei," he said.

Campbell was speaking at a special press briefing in -Washington on US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's upcoming trip to Hawaii, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Australia.

He refused to comment on threats from China to punish the US if it sells more arms to Taiwan, as expected.

But he added: "I think you know what our long-standing position is, in terms of maintaining our responsibilities and following through on them."

Campbell was asked whether reports of arms sales to Taiwan, Obama's decision to meet the Dalai Lama and economic disputes meant this would be a difficult year for US-China relations.

He replied: "There was a recognition at the beginning of the Obama administration that there were going to be a number of issues that required closer and deeper consultation and cooperation between Washington and Beijing — climate change, issues on the Korean Peninsula, the necessary work to help sustain a fragile economic and financial recovery and hopefully assistance on problematic issues like Iran, Afghanistan and the like."

COMPLICATED

"Over the course of the last several months, there has been dialogue on these issues. The truth is that this is a very complicated relationship. Much of it is cooperative, based on mutual interest. It requires intense -interac-tion on a regular basis," he said.

Campbell said the US was committed to a “strong, durable relationship” with China, but inevitably there would be contentious issues.

“Our goal is to put in place enough mechanisms, enough consultative procedures that the unintended crises, the mishaps and mistakes, can be dealt with in a responsible and professional way,” he said.

Campbell said: “No one is under any illusions about how challenging the US-China relationship will be over the course of the next several years. But I will say there is also a recognition on both sides that it is incumbent on us to work as closely and as well together as possible.”

Later, Philip Crawley, an -assistant secretary for public affairs at the US State Department, was also asked during a press briefing about Chinese objections to US arms sales to Taiwan, particularly Patriot Missile batteries.

Crawley said: “I would reserve comment on any particular system that might be part of our foreign military sales program. But we continue to evaluate Taiwan’s defensive needs, and no decisions have been made.”

“We do make available to Taiwan defense articles and services necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability pursuant to the Taiwan Relations Act, and we will continue to do that,” he said.

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