



Roundtable Briefing With Taiwan Media

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DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Thanks for coming to this roundtable today. I'd like to deliver a brief statement before we start, after which I'll welcome your questions. The relationship between Taiwan and the United States generally remains very close and friendly, but there has been a set of issues over the last several months on which we have disagreed. Before I describe those differences, I'd just like to take an opportunity to restate our abiding aim, the United States' abiding goal in the region, which is to foster stable and peaceful relations across the Taiwan Strait.

We're opposed to unilateral moves to change the status quo by either side of the Taiwan Strait. Anything that makes Taiwan stronger and safer is good for the United States and good for the people of Taiwan. Anything that places Taiwan's peace and stability at risk, on the other hand, also runs directly against the interests of the United States and, we believe, runs against the interests of the people of Taiwan.

So while we continue to oppose the use of force in the in the Taiwan Strait, we look to Taiwan's leaders to leaders to adopt policies toward cross-Strait relations that combine strength with moderation. That's why we've expressed publicly and privately our special concern over the pursuit of a referendum on UN membership in the name of Taiwan.

This referendum appears designed to pursue a unilateral change in the status quo. Moreover, aspects of the referendum appear inconsistent with President Chen's inaugural pledges, which we see as pillars of stability in cross-Strait relations. As we've said in the past, we believe that the DPP referendum as currently worded is inconsistent with President Chen's pledges - his pledge not to pursue name-change during his term of office. President Chen, in his inaugural pledges, also promised not pursue referenda on topics related to unification with the Mainland or Taiwan independence. So we're also concerned by his recent statements that imply that the UN referendum drive provides the Taiwan people an opportunity to accept or reject unification with the Mainland.

The U.S. Government opposes the DPP UN referendum because, by unnecessarily provoking tensions in cross-Strait relations, it puts Taiwan's security -- and therefore U.S. interests -- at risk. This referendum cannot actually change Taiwan's status on the global stage. So it seems to promise the people of Taiwan international benefits on which it cannot deliver. The DPP referendum is unwise not only because it is provocative and dangerous, but also because it weakens rather than strengthens the hand of those who believe that Taiwan deserves a stronger role in world affairs. And I would include the United States in that group.

We're not opposed to the use of referenda in Taiwan, and we most obviously are not opposed to democracy in Taiwan. We have been the biggest supporters of democracy in Taiwan. But when bad policies are being pursued through democratic means, it does not matter that the democratic means are in play if the policy is a damaging one. We reserve the right to speak out against damaging policies, regardless of whether democratic means are being used.

The U.S. Government remains the steadfast partner of the people of Taiwan, as we have been for decades. We want the people of Taiwan to build on past successes in democratic development and economic growth, and we regret that we have to make our differences on the UN referendum in the name of Taiwan so plain. But we feel that we have a responsibility as friends of Taiwan to make very plain in a consistent, authoritative, and clear manner U.S. policy interests and U.S. policy concerns to our friends in Taiwan. We believe the people of Taiwan deserve no less from their friends in the United States.

I'll conclude my statement there, and I'm happy to answer your questions.

QUESTION: Tom, let me take the first. President Chen said the U.S. will modify its one-China policy once his referendum, his version of the referendum, is passed. So do you have any comments on that?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: No. First of all, our one-China policy is not made in Taipei. It's made in the United States, and we've had a consistent one-China policy for decades. We believe that that one-China policy has been beneficial to peace and stability in cross-Strait relations, and we believe that the biggest beneficiary of that policy has been Taiwan itself. So I would first say that we're not going to change our one-China policy. We have no intention of changing our one-China policy. I would also say that changes in our one-China policy would probably not be beneficial to Taiwan if they were to occur, because we believe that our current one-China policy has been so beneficial to Taiwan.

QUESTION: President Chen Shui-bian met Stephen Young today when he accompanied Faleomavaega, I mean Representative Faleomavaega, who visited him in the President's office. President Chen Shui-bian said if you ask Taiwan to put aside the differences -- Taiwan, no problem. But the problem is on the Mainland side, because they will never give up the one China principle. So if you want ask both sides to put aside the differences, you're asking both sides -- on the Taiwan side no problem, he said, but the Mainland side should stop their one China principle. Another question is --

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Can we do one at a time?

QUESTION: The same question.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY: It's the same question? OK. I'll give you one answer then. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Just to follow up. He said the referendum into UN is not possible to withdraw now. If Mainland (inaudible) U.S. put pressure on Taiwan, it will just provoke Taiwan people's negative reaction and Taiwan people's displeasure. What comment do you have?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Well, I'll just say our policy is very clear on this score. We believe there should be peaceful relations across the Taiwan Strait and that differences across the Taiwan Strait should be worked out in a peaceful manner, in a way that is acceptable to both sides of the Taiwan Strait. We're not going to stand here and dictate to the two sides how they work out their differences. But we believe that those differences need to be worked out in a peaceful manner, and they need to be worked out in way that is acceptable to both sides. That's the reason we oppose unilateral changes in the status quo from either side of the Taiwan Strait.

In terms of the United States making its policy positions clear, again -- as I said earlier - - we believe we have a responsibility to the people of Taiwan to be very clear about U.S. policy towards cross-Strait relations, and that's all we're doing in this instance. That's what we've done consistently since this UN membership referendum in the name of Taiwan was raised in Taiwan, and we'll continue to do it. We believe that we owe that to the people of Taiwan, and we'll continue to do so.

QUESTION: Tom, much of what you have said is basically a restatement of what you have already said. What is it that you're getting at, because President Chen seems

to be doing the referendum after all. What is the purpose of reiterating a statement that basically seems to me to have very little impact on President Chen's thinking?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: You ask a very interesting question. There's been a lot of press speculation and comment about the purpose of our public statements and about whether they were "successful" or "unsuccessful." The purpose of our public statements, including my statement earlier today and statements that we'll make subsequently, are to make our policy position clear. I personally believe that the statements that were made by Deputy Secretary Negroponte, the statement that was made by Deputy National Security Advisor Jim Jeffrey, the statement that was made by Senior Director of the National Security Council Dennis Wilder, my speech -- I personally believe those were clear statements. If you see consistency in our statements, it's because our policy is consistent. If you see clarity and repetition, it's because the policy hasn't changed, and we continue to be clear.

But we think we owe it, again, to the people of Taiwan to be extremely clear about our policy position. That policy position hasn't changed. It is not our purpose -- we cannot hope -- to dictate to Taiwan leaders or to the Taiwan people what they can or cannot do. All we can do is make clear to them where we believe U.S. national interests lie and where we believe, frankly, where Taiwan people's own interests lie. And then they'll have to make decisions for themselves. Taiwan is a democracy. We celebrate Taiwan's democracy. But we believe that they ought to know where we stand, and they should make their decisions with that information on board.

QUESTION: Another question here. I remember Mr. Dennis Wilder said ROC is an unresolved issue, and also recently we heard some comment that U.S. does not recognize PRC sovereignty over Taiwan. I wonder, have you ever referred this to Chinese counterpart during your discussion? And can you explain what's the U.S. position on the sovereignty issue on Taiwan?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: We have a very consistent position on this. It's stated very clearly in the three communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act, which is the basis of our long-standing policy towards cross-Strait relations. That policy hasn't changed. Again, there's a lot of speculation about the individual statements of individual leaders in the Government and the details of their statements. I think if you want to ask Mr. Wilder about some aspect of one of his sentences, I think the best thing to do would be to ask him directly rather than to ask me. But I can say for sure that there is an interagency consensus on this and that no change has occurred in the recent past in our policy toward cross-Strait relations. Our position on cross-Strait relations is laid out in the three communiqués and in Taiwan Relations Act, and I will just refer you to those texts.

QUESTION: Tom, just one sentence. Does the U.S. recognize P.R.C. sovereignty over Taiwan? Yes or no?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Well, again, the policy is laid out in authoritative detail in this series of documents. So I would just refer you to those documents.

QUESTION: The momentum for the referendum seems to be unstoppable right now, and this is going to happen next March. Is the U.S. ready to face the consequence of the referendum, and are you worried that this will be seen as a failure on the U.S. side?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Again, this issue of failure or success is one I don't like to apply -- this standard of failure or success -- to our public statements on these policies. We oppose the referendum on UN membership in the name of Taiwan. We've said it before. I'm saying it today. We'll say it again. Our purpose in stating that is that we want to make clear to the Taiwan people, to the Taiwan leaders, what our position is. If the Taiwan people and the Taiwan leaders are clear what the United States thinks about the referendum, then we will have succeeded in this policy goal. It is up to the people on Taiwan to decide what to do with that information. Obviously, we don't like the fact that the referendum is taking place. We've stated that we don't like the fact that it's taking place. Obviously, we hope that others in Taiwan will recognize our points and understanding our analysis - that we believe that this isn't just bad for the United States, but this is bad for the people of Taiwan.

But all we can do in the United States is make clear our policy position. Again, Taiwan is a democracy. We have tremendous respect for that democracy. We don't pretend and we have no pretense of dictating to Taiwan the details of its political choices, and we respect the intelligence and farsightedness of the Taiwan people. We hope that they support policies through their democratic process that are good for cross-Strait stability, because we believe that those policies are the best policies for the people of Taiwan. And the U.S. has an interest in the peace and stability of the cross-Strait relationship -- in large part because we care so much about Taiwan's peace and security, its ability to build its economy, and its democracy moving forward.

QUESTION: What consequences if Taiwan goes down this path? And how much pressure have you gotten from China?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Obviously, Beijing is not happy about the referendum. I think they've made that very clear. What are the consequences? We believe that peace and stability should be the standard in cross-Strait relations. We think the referendum is a force for tension and instability. Where tension and instability leads is difficult to predict. But we think that, all things being equal, actors on both sides of the Taiwan Strait should adopt policies that enhance and foster peace and stability -- and not adopt policies that unnecessarily raise tensions. We believe that the UN membership referendum in the name of Taiwan is just such a policy that unnecessarily raises tensions.

QUESTION: How do you sense what will happen? I mean, do you think the referendum will pass? And what will be your interpretation of failure or success?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: I'm a professor, and I came into the government, as you know, last year. One of the first things you learn when you enter this type of profession is to say that hypotheticals are not very constructive approaches to adopt as a government official. And the more time I spend in the government, the more I understand why. I don't think it's going to be very helpful for me to hypothesize about what might happen, whether or not a referendum will take place, whether it will pass, what would happen if it does pass.

I think it's just important for us to lay out where our policy interests lie and, again, share those views with the Taiwan people - so that they can make decisions that we hope are decisions that are positive for cross-Strait peace and stability and enhance cross-Strait relations rather than harm them. I don't want to get into the game of scenario-building for you.

QUESTION: So far we've been hearing only words, and words in this instance so far have not been producing any effect on the DPP government or President Chen himself. So my question is, is the U.S. contemplating any action? Actions always speak louder than words. So action in the sense of some kind of measures trying to stop him, trying to make him change his mind, but so far I haven't seen any action. One last thing. Recently he said he might even contemplate declaring martial law, although later he retracted that statement. But given President Chen's unpredictable inclinations, we don't know. We're not sure whether before the election we see a declaration of martial law by the President. That would be very, very serious.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: OK, let me talk about U.S. policy and move your analysis of his psychology aside. (Laughter) I don't want to get involved in speculating about such things.

QUESTION: Any actions? Second, your comment on his statement about martial law?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: We take actions all the time that we believe are supportive of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Our public statements themselves are in fact actions. We believe that they express U.S. policy in a clear way. And, again, I think there's often too much focus on whether the Taiwan leadership has decided to change course on some specific action that they have proposed, based on what we have said or not said in response to things that are happening in Taiwan.

I think that the purpose of our public statements on these issues is to engage the Taiwan people, to engage the Taiwan democracy as a whole. To my mind, my

understanding is, from what I understand about Taiwan, that people in Taiwan understand our position. We've been quite clear about it; we'll be clear about it again. To the degree that they do, we have been successful in expressing our views. And we believe that does have an impact, because we believe that the people of Taiwan care greatly about the long and very positive history of U.S.-Taiwan relations. They take our views seriously, and they'll listen to us seriously. So I think we have been successful. And we'll continue to be successful as long as we're clear, consistent, and we offer these types of opportunities to you to ask us questions and to make our public position clear.

QUESTION: So this is an action?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: This is an action. I think it's an action. I hope it's a pleasant action. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Do you have anything to say about martial law?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Martial law? I would say that we were appreciative of the statement that he rescinded the earlier comments on martial law, and I'll say why. Again, we have tremendous respect for Taiwan's democracy. It is the aspect of Taiwan that is most attractive to Americans, inside and outside of the U.S. Government. Anything that would harm Taiwan's democracy would be seen extremely negatively in the United States, and anything that bolsters and enhances Taiwan's democracy is seen very positively in the United States. So we've already spoken about this publicly. But that's our position, and that position - like our policy towards cross-Strait relations -- is not going to change. It's certainly not going to change based on something dictated to us by someone in Taiwan or anywhere else. It's going to be consistent because it's based on U.S. national interests, and we'll make our policy here -- not elsewhere.

QUESTION: Eight years ago one of your predecessors said - I think that was on the eve of the Taiwan elections. He said, when asked if the DPP candidate became the real president in Taiwan how the U.S. will be dealing with this, he said -- this Stanley Roth, by the way -- he said the U.S. supports Taiwan democracy and is prepared to deal with whatever consequences that democracy will bring out. The question that I'm going to ask you is, as you say, people in Taiwan and leaders in Taiwan understand your statement, understand your policy, understand your position. What if the referendum pass? That shows that not just the leaders of Taiwan, but also the people of Taiwan reject your policy, reject your position. Is the U.S. in that particular circumstance contemplating changing your policy?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: OK. I'm afraid I don't want to -- You waited so patiently for your chance to ask your question, but unfortunately you asked me another question about a hypothetical. If this happens, if this happens, what will the United States do? And those are the types of questions we have reason not to delve into.

QUESTION: I understand

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Again, we support Taiwan's democracy. We want to make clear to the Taiwan people what our position is. This is important for a range of the questions around the table, and I'll just reiterate: We have no pretense of dictating outcomes. Taiwan is not a colony of the United States. Taiwan is not being dictated to by the United States. We are trying to make clear our policy, and we respect Taiwan's democracy. We respect the intelligence and farsightedness of the Taiwan people. And we think we have a responsibility to make that clear, our policy clear, to the Taiwan people.

QUESTION: Tom, I know you don't have a crystal ball, so I'll cut the second half of my question. Would you comment on what your predecessor said. He said eight years ago that the U.S. supports Taiwan democracy and is prepared to deal with whatever consequences that democracy will bring about.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: OK. That's my boss's predecessor, first of all. (Laughter)

QUESTION: Well, the general range.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Stanley Roth is a very wise man with a lot of experience, and I respect him greatly. But, honestly, I'm not quite sure what he's referring to. I'd have to speak with him personally and try to get a better sense of what he meant. But I don't think I should speculate about his meaning from a third party about his conversation.

We believe that we have a very good posture in the region. We believe that we have a very good policy in the region. We believe that provides us a great deal of flexibility to respond to challenges. But I'm not sure exactly what Mr. Roth was referring to.

QUESTION: Can I ask an arms sales question?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Yes, please. Sure.

QUESTION: Recently we have several visitors from China asking or calling for the U.S. to stop arms sales or stop military exchanges with Taiwan. The recent visitor is Marshall (inaudible). I believe you already heard this. I don't know what is U.S.'s response to Chinese anger and question. And the other is, the latest development is China announced a new aviation route very close to the middle line of the Taiwan Strait, which might be provocative, or a conflict may happen if there is a misunderstanding because they didn't consult with Taiwan authority for this new aviation route. I wonder, U.S. is concerned about this or not?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: The second thing I'll address in a second, but the arms sales issue -- it's an excellent question you raise, and I hope I can give you a good answer. The excellent question is, does the Mainland express concerns about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan? Absolutely. They do so publicly and privately. I think that's widely known. They express concerns about these things. We base our decisions on arms sales to Taiwan on the Taiwan Relations Act and our concern over Taiwan's long-term defensive requirements. We believe that a strong Taiwan is a force for stability in cross-Strait relations, and we're going to continue to adopt that policy. I think you saw in recent months that we announced arms sales to Taiwan of a rather significant nature based on that policy.

So we do listen to Beijing's concerns about Taiwan. We believe that those concerns are important, and we should listen to them. We base our policy on our own calculations of our own national interest. I think it's important for everybody to engage in this type of discussion, where you listen to the other side's concerns and you take them on board. That's one of the reasons that we believe that there should be more dialogue across the Taiwan Strait. We believe that there should be a sharing of concerns across the Taiwan Strait. We've urged such a dialogue, and we believe that Beijing should engage the duly-elected leadership in Taiwan. We're hopeful that, if this can't happen in the near-term, that perhaps the next election cycle will provide an opportunity to improve relations across the Taiwan Strait and that there can be engagement.

I want to touch on one issue that John raised in his question before -- which is, we respect Taiwan's democracy, and we are ready for any outcome. I'm not sure what Mr. Roth meant by that, as I said. But I will say as a positive statement, regardless of whether this is what was meant by Mr. Roth or not, that we have no chosen candidate in elections in Taiwan. We don't prefer one over the other, and we'll work with whoever the people in Taiwan elect. That is a steadfast, principled position, and we'll continue to hold that position.

On cross-Strait relations we have this view -- and, again, it's a very clear view -- that it's up to the people on the two sides of the Strait to work out the types of differences. I think this might touch upon the question that you raised before, Nadia. I saw that you were not entirely happy with my response. (Laughter) But, again, our policy has been clear -- dating back to the initial engagement on these issues -- that it's up to the two sides of the Taiwan Strait to work out their differences in a way that's peaceful and acceptable to both sides.

QUESTION: You mean the aviation --

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: No. I'll just leave it at that in general. In general, and that touches on a range of issues.

QUESTION: Well, Tom, you know Ambassador Young said in a speech in Taipei that President Hu Jintao's remarks regarding Taiwan in the 17th Congress might signal an opportunity for the resumption of cross-Strait dialogue. But President Chen denounced it the next day by saying that whoever gets elected next May, there will be no dialogue. What do you think?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: Director Young you're talking about, right? Director Young gave an excellent speech, and I think he was expressing his own personal opinion of the meaning in the 17th Party Congress Work Report. I think I have the full title correct. You know, that's his opinion of what it may have meant. I'll just say, as a policy position -- and this isn't just my opinion; this is our policy position -- we are for dialogue across the Taiwan Strait, and we believe that Beijing should engage the duly-elected leaders of Taiwan. Of course we hope that any event -- whether it be an election or anything else in cross-Strait relations -- will provide an occasion for such a dialogue to begin. So I would agree with Director Young's hope that this would provide an opportunity, and I would look to people on both sides of the Strait to look for opportunities to start such a dialogue across the Strait and to try not to reject these possibilities out of hand. I would just put it that way.

QUESTION: So do you believe President Chen's denunciation of his remarks?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: I understand that he said this. But, again, we want, would like to see dialogue. So we would support anything that would foster that.

QUESTION: President Chen said today that he learned from his sources that when Yang Jiechi met Bush a few days ago he asked the U.S. Government to have its top leaders -- President Bush himself and Condi Rice -- to state publicly their opposition to Taiwan's referendum on UN in Taiwan name. Can you confirm that?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: I'll say two things about this. First of all, I think you should ask the White House about meetings of this nature. I would say, second of all -- and maybe this will dissuade you from asking -- these conversations between foreign elites and our government are confidential in nature, and I don't think it's helpful for us to discuss the details -- certainly not in the State Department. It's up to the White House if they would like to share some of the things that may have happened there. I certainly wouldn't, and it's not my position to do so.

QUESTION: Chen Shui-bian also said that Beijing already learned and experienced that the road from Beijing to Taipei, the shortest road is through U.S., through Washington, DC. That means co-management. Can you confirm that you have a co-management with Beijing on Taiwan affairs?

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: It's interesting, this question. These statements from President Chen, I didn't see this report.

QUESTION: It just came out.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY: I didn't see that. I'll look at the statement. I'll study the statement. No, co-management is not the rule. Again, we take Beijing's concerns about cross-Strait relations seriously, and we believe that Taiwan leaders and the Taiwan public should take Beijing's concerns about cross-Strait relations seriously as well. It's one of the factors in maintaining peace and stability across the Strait, and we think it's our responsibility to take their concerns seriously. But no, we don't co-manage, and we don't allow anybody -- either in Taipei or Beijing -- to dictate to us what our policy ought to be toward cross-Strait relations. I think you'll see that if you ask people in Beijing whether they are determining our policy toward cross-Strait relations, I think you would understand that they don't believe they are determining our policy towards cross-Strait relations. And I think you've seen evidence that we have adopted policies with which they are not entirely satisfied and about which they complain. So that's our norm, and we'll continue to do that.

I appreciate all of your time. I'm sorry I have to run off so quickly, but I also have another --

QUESTION: We also have to run. (Laughter)

QUESTION: We hope that this is not the last time.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: We hope we can engage you again and appreciate your coming.

QUESTION: Thank you for letting us have this opportunity.

QUESTION: We should do this more regularly.

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY CHRISTENSEN: We'll see what we can do.

