

Taiwan must think globally: conference

Taiwan should diversify its engagements with nations in the region other than China to play a more active role as a good regional and global citizen, former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs Kurt Campbell said at an international conference held in Taipei yesterday.

"Alternatively, I would like to see a degree of diversification with respect to Taiwan's role in the region," Campbell said to attendees at the luncheon. "Taiwan has built much deeper ties with China in the last five years. We support that, but we would also like to see... stronger ties between Taiwan and Japan, [South] Korea, the Philippines, India and other countries in the world."

Chairman and chief executive officer of The Asia Group, Campbell was invited to deliver a keynote speech at a symposium titled New Asian Dynamics and the role of Taiwan that was jointly hosted in Taipei by the Taiwan Brain Trust and the Washington-based think tank the Project 2049 Institute.

In answering questions, Campbell sympathized with concerns regarding Taiwan's international status, saying: "I do believe that Taiwan has experienced a degree of isolation and a lack of strategic respect. That is problematic."

"It's important to treat Taiwan internationally with respect and to allow it to play an important role... and I believe that it can be done within the context of improving relations between China and Taiwan," he added.

At a panel, Project 2049 Institute chairman Randy Schriver praised Taiwan's offers of humanitarian aid to victims of attacks by the Islamic State, and in donating funds and equipment to combat the Ebola outbreak, saying that the US should continue to create ways to help Taiwan promote good regional and global citizenship.

In some cases, the US risks its relationship with China because China is often opposed to those activities, former US deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Schriver said. "But we need to do that, because we are better off when Taiwan plays a primary role in regional and global affairs."

The challenges China presents require a regional response, a common operating picture, integration of threat data, whether that be maritime, air, or subsurface, Schriver said, urging the US to provide Taiwan with diesel-electric submarines — in accordance with the decision the US made in 2001 — or to assist its indigenous submarine program, and promote Taiwan's role in regional security.

Madhav Das Nalapat, director of the Department of Geopolitics and International Relations at Manipal University in India, said that from an economic point of view, Taiwan, a knowledge-based economy, "is an extremely desirable partner for India to have."

"One problem we have seen here in Taiwan, quite frankly, is a lot of R&D [research and development] is now being utilized by China. A lot of Chinese R&D is sourced from Taiwan," Nalapat said.

Taiwan needs to interact with India as actively as with China, develop R&D facilities in India and have Indian R&D experts come to Taiwan, he said.

"Countries like India or Brazil, we can be as valuable an R&D partner for Taiwan as China has been," Nalapat said. "Even more valuable is that I have never heard of India having a missile that has ever been pointed at Taiwan."

National Tsing Hua University interim senior vice president and former director of the American Institute in Taiwan William Stanton brought up the issue of maritime disputes.