

Taiwan's head of Chinese relations says U.S. distracted by crises

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Associated Press, September 8, 2006

LOS ANGELES - Taiwan's top official on relations with China said Friday the United States' involvement in many world crises could give China the opportunity to increase its influence and punish Taiwan.

Joseph Wu, the chairman of Taiwan's Cabinet-level body in charge of relations with China, noted America's involvement in trying to get North Korea to scrap its nuclear program, keep Iran from developing nuclear capacities, maintain a fragile peace between Israel and Hezbollah and its involvement in the Iraq war.

"We are concerned that the United States might be caught by those crises, and they do not have sufficient attention to pay to the cross-strait situation," he said of Taiwan's relations with its huge neighbor.

"China might take advantage of that," Wu added in an interview with The Associated Press. While in Los Angeles, Wu planned to visit with Taiwanese community leaders. Earlier this week, he met with Bush administration officials in Washington, D.C.

He said China has already begun taking advantage of various distracting world crises, citing Chad's switch of diplomatic alliance from Taiwan to China last month.

Taiwan has charged China with using its status as a member of the United Nations Security Council, and its ability to influence events in neighboring Sudan, to push Chad to cut diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

China and Taiwan split amid civil war in 1949, but China still considers the small island nation part of its territory.

The governments of both countries engage in a sort of "dollar diplomacy" in which they try to win diplomatic alliances with other nations by offering aid packages and reconstruction projects. Taiwan only has diplomatic ties with about two dozen countries, mostly in Africa and Latin America.

Wu said the best way to mend relations with China is by improving business ties and allowing thousands more Chinese tourists from the mainland to visit Taiwan.

"There is a lot of bad blood between Taiwan and China at this point," said Wu. "The best way to promote mutual understanding, with the background that China suppresses its media reporting on Taiwan, is to bring the Chinese to Taiwan directly."

Currently, tourists from both sides have to travel through a third point, usually Hong Kong.

In June, Taiwan and China announced plans to launch direct charter passenger flights between the two countries during major holidays. In August, Taiwan said it would allow multinational corporations to bring in more employees from China for regional company meetings.

Wu said many Taiwanese worry that they already have too many economic ties with China, but he believes more can only improve relations.

"With more outside forces going into China, including investment, it may make China evolve" toward democracy, he said.