

Joint force makes bullies quake

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Sunday, 02 September 2018 04:37

Taiwan should vary its responses to Chinese patrols and simulate attacks on China's aircraft carrier Liaoning, according to an Aug. 22 article by retired US Navy admiral Dennis Blair on the Sasakawa Peace Foundation's Web site.

The nation's "intercept everything" policy is wasteful and allows China to study Taiwan's combat preparedness, he said, adding that making responses unpredictable would confuse the enemy and put less strain on limited budgets.

Japan has similarly been intercepting all patrols, which frequently pass through waters near Okinawa and the disputed Diaoyutai Islands (釣台), known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan. Scrambling forces to counter the patrols has put a strain on Japan's resources.

Cooperating on drills and unifying response measures would serve the interests of Taiwan and Japan. Drills could incorporate Japan's helicopter carriers in simulating attacks on the Liaoning, or employ islands in Japan's Okinawa Prefecture or in Penghu County in simulating responses to ground invasions.

Drills on Itu Aba Island (Taiping Island, 太平島) could be timed to coincide with US freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea, destroying mock facilities that mimic China's installations on contested islands in the South China Sea.

The drills would send a clear message to Beijing that China's patrols in East Asia are only serving to increase the defense preparedness of its neighbors.

Nations use invasion simulations to show aggressive neighbors that they will not be intimidated. In September last year, Russia conducted a simulated attack on NATO countries that represented the destruction of ports and other key infrastructure.

"The Kremlin is rehearsing aggressive scenarios against its neighbors, training its army to attack the West. The exercise is also part of information warfare aimed at spreading uncertainty

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and fear,” Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite said at the time.

Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea region is proof that it is not afraid to act on the threats presented in drills. Similarly, China’s unilateral annexing of contested islands in the South China Sea shows that it is willing to act. NATO must respond in kind.

Satellite photographs taken earlier this year showed that China’s expansion of a naval base in its Fujian Province’s Xiapu County included “the construction of 24 aircraft shelters, taxiways and additional buildings,” while the “semi-dispersed nature of the new aircraft shelters ... is likely to reflect the frontline nature of the air base,” a May 14 report on the Defense News Web site said.

An April 13 article on the Independent Web site said that in the 12 months leading up to the article, Japan scrambled its fighter jets 1,168 times in response to Chinese aircraft, a historically high number that was “well above the previous high of 944 incidents in 1984, when Russian, rather than Chinese, aircraft triggered most of the scrambles.”

China hopes to extend its influence in the South China Sea and the Pacific, and is actively probing Japanese air defenses to see how it can do that, the Independent said.

During the Martial Law era, plans to inevitably “retake the Chinese mainland” were part of the regular rhetoric of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government. Until May this year, when the Ministry of National Defense announced changes to its military posturing, the annual Han Kuang military exercises had included simulated attacks on China.

Taiwan is becoming increasingly independence-minded. People want to distance themselves from authoritarian China and protect their hard-won democracy.

However, Taiwanese — and Japanese — cannot afford to become complacent in the face of Chinese aggression. Cooperative drills and selective demonstrations of force must become regular measures.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/09/02](#)