

Singaporean quake aid a rarity: expert

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A C-130 Hercules transport aircraft sent by the Singaporean government and loaded with relief supplies is unloaded after arriving at Hualien Airport on Friday to assist in the earthquake rescue efforts.

Photo: CNA

Despite the long history of military exchanges between Taiwan and Singapore, that the city-state sent relief supplies on a military cargo plane following a magnitude 6 earthquake in Hualien on Tuesday last week is still considered rare, Taiwan Thinktank researcher Tung Li-wen (鄧立文) said yesterday.

Singapore on Friday dispatched a Lockheed C-130 cargo plane laden with relief and medical supplies, tents and flashlights.

The Singaporean Ministry of Defense published photographs of its disaster relief mission in Hualien on its Web site.

Singapore has been trying to mend its ties with China after it in 2016 voiced support for a ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, that Beijing's claims to most of the South China Sea had no legal basis.

The case was brought before the court by the Philippines.

In this context, Singapore sending a plane to help disaster relief efforts is a "rare, yet remarkable" manifestation of its goodwill toward the nation, Tung said.

From the perspective of regional developments, Singapore's dispatch of the aircraft to Taiwan could be interpreted as the "fanning out" of the US' Indo-Pacific strategy, which shows that the US has been continuing its efforts to deepen its ties with its allies in the Asia-Pacific region, he said.

Singapore likely informed the US of its decision to join disaster relief efforts in Taiwan and obtained Washington's backing, because despite having participated in many military drills with Taiwan, the move was still audacious considering China's influence in the region, he said.

The Singaporean military's disaster relief mission, coupled with deepening military exchanges between Taiwan and the US, including prospective bilateral port-of-call visits, would likely give Taiwan more space to engage in military and other kinds of collaborations with the international community, he said.

However, having accepted a favor from Singapore, Taiwan will need to shoulder greater responsibility in the international community, he added.

Singapore had previously set a precedent by sending military equipment to Taiwan on cargo ships, Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Tsai Shih-ying (蔡啟芳) said.

Judging by the interactions between Taiwan and Singapore, bilateral ties have remained stable, despite Beijing pressuring Singapore to keep its distance from Taiwan, Tsai said.

In contrast to international military exchanges, which are often trumpeted, Taiwan was resigned to keeping a low profile due to Beijing's efforts to limit its international space, he said.

Taiwan should forge friendships with other nations by engaging in pragmatic exchanges and proactively extending a helping hand in their times of hardship, while being mindful of pressure from Beijing, he said.

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