

US House includes provisions to help improve Taiwan's defenses in budget

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US Representative Ed Royce speaks during a hearing with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington on Wednesday.

Photo: Bloomberg

The US House of Representatives on Thursday passed its annual defense spending bill for fiscal year 2019, which includes provisions to help strengthen Taiwan's military capabilities.

The US\$717 billion National Defense Authorization Act cleared the House 351-66.

Section 1253, titled "Strengthening Taiwan's Force Readiness," would direct the US secretary of defense to conduct a comprehensive assessment, in consultation with their Taiwanese counterparts, on ways to enhance and reform Taiwan's military forces, particularly the reserve forces, the text of the bill published by the House says.

The assessment would also require the development of recommendations to strengthen bilateral cooperation and improve Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, it says.

The secretary of defense, in consultation with the US secretary of state, would be required to submit a report on the assessment and a list of recommendations and planned actions to the appropriate congressional committees no later than one year after the act is enacted, it says.

Section 1262, titled "Senior Defense Engagement with Taiwan," would express the sense of US Congress that, pursuant to the Taiwan Travel Act, a service secretary or member of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff should visit Taiwan for senior-level defense engagement.

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It would also require a briefing to the congressional defense and foreign affairs committees on any plans by the US Department of Defense to carry out senior-level defense engagement.

Separately on Thursday, several US lawmakers took to social media to express their concern and support for Taiwan after it lost another diplomatic ally, most likely because of China's influence.

Burkina Faso earlier that day announced that it was severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan, citing "the interests of Burkina Faso and its people in the concert of nations," Reuters reported.

US representatives Paul Gosar and Ted Yoho wrote in their posts that the US would stand with Taiwan in the face of Beijing's pressure.

Gosar highlighted the nation's virtues, calling it on Twitter "a strategic military and trade ally and a beacon in Asia," and pledged to stand behind Taiwan and "its right to diplomatic relations."

In addition to a message of support for Taiwan, Yoho also called out China for what he called its "two-faced aggression."

He wrote that China's minister of foreign affairs has said that the "US&China 'should properly handle Taiwan,'" yet it continues to destabilize the Taiwan Strait with provocations, such as blocking Taiwan's participation at this year's World Health Assembly and poaching two of its allies in less than a month.

US Senator Marco Rubio said it was "regrettable Burkina Faso folded to China's coercion and cut ties with Taiwan," but warned that Beijing's offers would come with strings attached, as it always puts its own authoritarian interests first.

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House Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairman Ed Royce said on the committee's Twitter account that he was "very concerned by concerted pressure campaign Taiwan is facing, including its exclusion from WHO."

In response to the outpouring of support, Taiwan's representative office in the US issued a statement expressing its thanks to Congress for its long-standing, firm support of the Taiwan-US friendship.

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