

AIT to get US Marine security guards

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The US national flag flies over the American Institute in Taiwan compound in Taipei's Neihu District during the building's dedication on June 12.

Photo: CNA

The US is to station Marine security guards at the American Institute in Taiwan's (AIT) new complex in Taipei's Neihu District (新湖), which is to begin operations in September, sources familiar with the matter said.

The mission of Marine security guards is different from that of other US Marines, whose primary mission is combat, the sources said.

According to internal US mechanisms, before sending the guards overseas, the US assesses the safety conditions of the country and of the embassy facilities, and uses this information to determine how many guards to send, they said.

Rather than an increase in security standards, the stationing of the guards at the AIT could be considered a representation of how much the US values its relationship with Taiwan, they said.

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In response to media speculation that US Marines would be stationed at the complex, Presidential Office spokesman Alex Huang (黃珊珊) said that the AIT's internal security arrangements are its own affair and that the Presidential Office has no comment.

Based on reciprocity, the military hopes to resume stationing military police at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the US and at its Twin Oaks residence in Washington to show that military cooperation and exchanges between Taiwan and the US have entered a new stage, an unnamed senior government official said yesterday.

Military police were still stationed at the office and at Twin Oaks following the severing of diplomatic ties between the Republic of China and the US in 1979, sources said.

However, due to efforts by the Ministry of National Defense to streamline its organization, the number of officers stationed at the locations was reduced to five, the sources said.

In 2004, the five military police officers were withdrawn and since then, Taiwan has hired local security personnel to guard the two locations, they said.

Earlier this year, former AIT director Stephen Young said that a "marine house" would be established inside the new complex in Taipei and that this was something he fought for during his tenure.

The marine house is often the center of diplomatic activities, and the new complex represents the US' commitment to Taiwan, Young said at the time.

Asked in May about rumors that US Marines would be stationed at the complex, then-AIT director Kin Moy, who left office this month, said that the security plans for the complex remained unchanged.

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Citing two US officials, CNN last month reported that the US Department of State had requested that US Marines be sent to Taiwan to guard the compound.

“One US official said that while the request for Marine security guards was received several weeks ago, it has not yet been formally approved and coordination about its deployment is ongoing between the state department’s Diplomatic Security Service and the Marines,” CNN reported at the time.

Additional reporting by Lo Tien-pin

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