

Taiwan has a strategic role to play in region

Written by Rong-i Arthur Hong 洪榮義

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On Oct. 11, former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) director William Stanton delivered a talk in Taipei that was open to the public, titled "The Strategic Significance of Taiwan." In addition to talking about well-known themes such as Taiwan's economic development and democratic transformation from a geostrategic perspective, Stanton also examined the special strategic position the nation occupies in the first island chain to provide a reinterpretation of Taiwan's strategic importance to the US as an unsinkable aircraft carrier and as a supply station for submarines.

The US has never viewed Taiwan as its unsinkable aircraft carrier. Instead, the US is worried that if Taiwan falls under the control of one of its "enemies," Taiwan will become a military base that would affect maritime lines of communication in the west Pacific. If this were to happen, the nation would be forced into aligning itself against the US-Japan security alliance and Taiwanese would once again become hostages of conflicts between more powerful countries.

In the same vein, China is worried that with the support of their enemies, the safety of China's maritime lines of communication would be compromised and the safety of the four provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian and Jiangsu would be threatened, which would impede China's development.

However, due to the end of the Cold War and changes in the way war is waged, an independent, autonomous, stable and prosperous Taiwan is now in the common interest of all of Taiwan's neighboring countries.

Taiwan has gone through a democratic transformation and is no longer some sort of "reactionary power" that will threaten development, as once believed by China. On the contrary, an independent, autonomous, stable and prosperous Taiwan provides a buffer zone and a place for reconciliation in the geopolitical competition going on between China and the US-Japan security alliance and helps create a safe environment for steady development in the Asia-Pacific region.

So to which country does Taiwan represent an unsinkable aircraft carrier? In terms of the overall safety and stability of the Asia-Pacific region, the only way to assure the safety of maritime lines of communication in the west Pacific, and guarantee continued peace and

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development in the Asia-Pacific region, is to have an independent, autonomous, stable and prosperous Taiwan.

While Taiwan's strategic importance is undeniable, it is often overlooked.

In order to establish a more stable environment in the west Pacific, Washington should do more to assist Taiwan in playing a more active role in the Asia-Pacific region security mechanism. At the same time, Washington must be more active in assisting Taiwan to re-engage with the international community and to benefit from a more favorable cost-performance ratio with military upgrades.

At the same time, Beijing must also realize that only by having an independent, autonomous, stable and prosperous Taiwan can the strategic environment in the west Pacific be made stable, which is also the only way China can continue to experience peaceful development.

The nature of cross-strait relations is not dependent on politicians' sound bites, but rather in how to go about using pragmatic approaches and taking actions beneficial to all Taiwanese to build common interests for the entire Asia-Pacific region.

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Translated by Drew Cameron

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