

Exclusion of Taiwan is weak link in security

Written by Chen Po-wen 陳柏文

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The terrorist attacks in Paris are reverberating around the world. At the closing ceremony of the APEC summit on Wednesday last week, all APEC leaders vowed to fight against terrorism by facilitating more international cooperation. However, because of China's perpetual attempts to isolate Taiwan, the country has been marginalized from the international security regimes. Without Taiwan's participation, there is a major blind spot in international cooperation in this area.

According to a report published in January by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a well-known think tank in the US, Taiwan's absence from international counterterrorism regimes would diminish the effectiveness of the initiatives and pose risks to other countries. Moreover, Taiwan is an important international transportation hub and economic center; its exclusion constitutes a significant loss for the international community.

For example, millions of people visit or pass through Taiwan every year. However, Taiwan does not have full capacity to discover and act over suspicious people and international criminals since it does not have access to the Interpol database, which provides a continually updated list of such people.

That being so, Taiwan can only build its own database by collecting information from other friendly countries, meaning such information is often late and incomplete. Meanwhile, Taiwan cannot share its information with the family of nations through this channel. This makes Taiwan a blind spot in international counterterrorism initiatives and poses risks both in Taiwan and across the globe.

In addition, as an international economic hub, Taiwan needs to work with international organizations to combat the financing of terrorist organizations and money laundering. Taiwan has participated in two regional organizations — the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering and the Egmont Group — and has played an active and important role in regional cooperation therein. However, Taiwan has been excluded from the Financial Action Task Force, which is the most important international body on this issue, and hence it can only acquire information through its foreign counterparts.

At the international level, the UN has established a complex and multi-layer structure to strengthen the coordination and coherence of counterterrorism. The UN Counter-Terrorism

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Implementation Task Force plays a coordinating role; it hosts several working groups that seek to bring together stakeholders and partners and provide most up-to-date information on these issues. However, Taiwan's lack of membership in the UN impedes it from accessing these resources.

At the regional level, organizations like APEC have established a few counterterrorism mechanisms as well. In response to the events of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on the US, APEC established the APEC Counterterrorism Task Force to enhance counterterrorism cooperation. However, although Taiwan is a long-standing APEC member, its participation in these mechanisms has also been blocked by China.

Members of the international community have become aware that international security cannot be fully achieved without Taiwan's participation. For instance, the US just passed legislation to promote Taiwan as an observer in Interpol.

However, if the international community wants to enhance safety and security in the region, its needs to move forthwith toward acceptance of Taiwan in international organizations, and particularly those that deal with safety and security.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Chen Po-wen is a student at the London School of Economics and Political Science's Center for the Study of Human Rights.

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