

Taiwan must take control of its fate

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 15 June 2017 08:13

On May 28, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, unnerved by what she interpreted as US President Donald Trump's lack of commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty — which states that in the event one member of NATO is attacked, all other members will come to its aid — signaled a change in her approach to future security arrangements for Europe.

“We really must take our fate into our own hands,” Merkel said.

Her concern was that the lack of commitment to shared defense by an unpredictable US president made Washington, long a major mainstay of European security arrangements, dangerously unreliable, and that it would be wise to make other arrangements.

Similar concerns are being felt in the Asia-Pacific region, where the US has for decades underpinned regional security with its hub-and-spokes bilateral alliance system: The US is the “hub,” linked with security agreements to “spoke” countries in Asia, which are only connected to the hub, not to each other.

Trump pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and warming to China has other nations worried about a possible diplomatic vacuum in the region, amid concerns that the US might not always be as ready to exert its influence in this part of the world as it has been in the past.

Some have already attributed Panama's decision to change diplomatic recognition to China, at least in small part, to this shift in dynamics. There is a risk that other countries might follow.

Given the difficulty of major multilateral agreements — such as the Paris Agreement Trump has announced that the US will withdraw from — it is perhaps time to look more seriously at “mini-lateral” agreements.

Mini-lateral agreements are targeted deals by relatively few national actors to achieve specific ends within an existing framework. Within the hub-and-spokes system, this would entail “spoke” countries making bilateral agreements, strengthening the system, but also giving themselves

Taiwan must take control of its fate

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Thursday, 15 June 2017 08:13

more control. This would be done to supplement the existing security ties with the US as an extra guarantee; not intended to replace them.

From Taiwan's perspective, supplementary security agreements, beyond reliance on its own military and US commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act, would strengthen its hand as the balance of pure military power across the Taiwan Strait rapidly shifts in favor of an increasingly assertive China.

The most obvious regional partner with which to pursue an agreement is Japan, where Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been positive about reinforcing ties between the two nations. Abe was also behind domestically controversial constitutional amendments expanding the operational scope of Japan's armed forces.

Japan is also a good choice because of the established ties and amicable relations between the two nations, good levels of mutual trust between the governments and shared concerns about China's expansionary intent in the region.

Tokyo would be reluctant to enter a full-blown agreement with Taiwan, not because of the backlash from Beijing — which would most likely be directed at Taipei — but because of the risk of it becoming involved in armed conflict with China. However, China would be even more reluctant to attack Taiwan if such a move involved Japan.

Beijing might argue that this move would threaten the maintenance of the "status quo." However, it is constantly moving in ways that unilaterally change the "status quo," from the creation of its 2005 "Anti-Secession Law" permitting the use of military force against Taiwan to the poaching of the nation's diplomatic allies.

The government would have to expect a backlash from China. It would not be doing anything illegal, nor changing the — ambiguously defined — "status quo" to any degree greater than China has done. It is time for Taiwan to take its fate into its own hands.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2017/06/15](#)