

## US port calls benefit Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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The Ministry of National Defense on Wednesday confirmed that a US warship had earlier in the week sailed through the Taiwan Strait, the ninth such transit this year.

The US Seventh Fleet said that the transits were part of “operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region,” while analysts suggested that the transits might be in response to China’s increased pressure on Taiwan.

As the US is committed to regional peace and stability, and to countering China’s challenges to this stability, it might be a good time to revisit the issue of port calls in Taiwan by the US Navy. US representatives discussed the issue in July 2017, when the US House of Representatives was passing the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018. US Senator Ted Cruz and others raised the issue in 2016, when US-China relations first became strained over China’s militarization of the South China Sea. Cruz at the time said that the USS *John C. Stennis*

aircraft carrier could make port calls in Kaohsiung, as China had refused to allow the carrier strike group to make a port call in Hong Kong. Last year, China again denied a port call to the amphibious assault ship USS

*Wasp*

, and in August this year denied a port call to two US warships.

Ministry of National Defense officials in 2016 said that the Port of Kaohsiung was deep enough to accommodate the *Stennis*, but lacked facilities for such a large ship to dock. The government would need to invest in the port if the US Navy were to make calls in the future, but the payoff would be worth the investment.

Former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) director Stephen M. Young in an opinion piece in the *Taipei Times*

on Jan. 1 described how US Navy ships would frequently visit Kaohsiung in the 1960s. He said that the city was bustling with naval officers, some on R&R and some stationed there as advisers. These officers needed facilities and services in the city that catered to them, which would have generated economic productivity.

Upgrading port facilities for carriers would also create jobs, in the construction of facilities and their maintenance, as well as in the staffing of those facilities by specialized personnel.

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Of course, China would object to US Navy visits, but given that the Seventh Fleet was again denied permission to make a port call in Hong Kong, the US is fully justified in making port calls in Taiwan.

Beijing cited the ongoing protests in Hong Kong as the reason for denying the port call to amphibious transport dock USS *Green Bay* and guided-missile cruiser USS *Lake Erie*, but analysts have also cited the ongoing US-China trade dispute as a possible cause. Either way, the situation was a big disappointment for the US Navy and Hong Kongers.

“The US Navy has a long track record of successful port visits to Hong Kong, and we expect them to continue,” AIT Director Brent Christensen was cited as saying in a Bloomberg report on Aug. 13.

“As Consul General to Hong Kong from 2010-13, my staff and I looked forward to the regular visits there by US warships. So did the government and merchants of Hong Kong,” Young wrote.

While China would complain if the US Navy made port calls in Taiwan, it is unlikely to risk any action. Calling the US back to the table for trade negotiations is evidence that even Beijing sees the limits of its rhetoric. Young said he knew “firsthand that defense planners in Washington and at Pacific Fleet Headquarters in Honolulu have long maintained specific operational plans to respond to a direct threat to Taiwan,” and China knows this.

Taipei should engage the US on possible port calls. Doing so would be economically productive and would reassure Taiwanese of Washington’s commitment to the nation.

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