

Taiwan on Thursday received a welcome return on four decades of friendship when the Tuvaluan foreign minister said his nation would not only remain a staunch ally, but wanted to form an alliance with Taipei's three other Pacific-island allies to bolster resistance to Chinese encroachment and interference in the region.

In a not-unrelated move, the Solomon Islands' Malaita Premier Daniel Suidani on Thursday said that his administration would work with the US and others to develop a deep-water port at Bina Harbour.

It has also asked the US and Australia to be part of the province's security to help protect it from Chinese developers and illegal fishing in its waters, even though the central Solomon Islands government switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China in September, a move that Suidani said his administration did not recognize.

While it would be nice to think that Tuvalu's declaration and Malaita's resistance to Chinese investment are solely the result of years of Taiwanese friendship, and concern about Beijing's ulterior motives, they actually have more to do with a renewed interest in the South Pacific by the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan, who, however belatedly, have woken up to the threat posed not only to their national interests from Beijing's aggressive moves to poach Taiwan's allies in the region, but to the free flow of transportation, communications and commerce in the region.

Tuvalu and Malaita Province have been the focus of a renewed diplomatic push by Washington in recent months.

Officials from USAID, and the US departments of defense, state and commerce visited Malaita in August, while US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sept. 27 urged Tuvalu to work with Taiwan to push for democracy in the South Pacific, a call he repeated in his message congratulating the tiny nation on Oct. 1, the 41st anniversary of its independence.

Meanwhile, the US Congress wants to support Taiwan and its remaining diplomatic allies through the proposed Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative

(TAIPEI) Act.

The US Senate unanimously passed its version of the TAIPEI bill on Oct. 29, as did the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs with its version the following day, although the full House has yet to vote on it.

Washington watching Taiwan's back is nice, but the government cannot rely on that alone to combat China's economic and diplomatic offensive. It needs to build alliances with non-governmental organizations in the region and around the world instead of spending so much time and money focused on the UN and its bodies.

Taiwan's greatest strength is its democracy and commitment to human rights, which have made it a beacon of hope and an inspiration in Asia, something that has become ever more important in light of protests in Hong Kong and the growing exposure of Beijing's crimes in Xinjiang.

That Taiwan was chosen to host the 40th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights last month, the first time the group has met in Asia, is significant, just as was the decision by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) to open its first Asian bureau in Taipei.

The federation's members come from more than 120 nations, and the representatives who attended the congress had a chance to see firsthand the advances this nation has made, while every time RSF reports from Taiwan or issues a statement from Taipei, it is a reminder to the world that this nation is not part of China, regardless of Beijing's claims.

Tuvalu might be tiny, but it made its voice heard this week by saying no to China and backing Taiwan, just as Taiwan has been voicing support for the pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong and criticizing Beijing's abuse in Xinjiang and elsewhere.

China might be a big cat, but mice can roar.

Beware tiger, mice can roar

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