

During the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum’s third leadership summit on Aug. 31, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun said that the US wants to partner with the other members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue — Australia, India and Japan — to establish an organization similar to NATO, to “respond to ... any potential challenge from China.”

He said that the US’ purpose is to work with these nations and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region to “create a critical mass around the shared values and interest of those parties,” and possibly attract more countries to establish an alliance comparable to NATO.

China has over the past decade heavily invested in its national defense. In addition to creating opportunities for the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to learn about modern military concepts, including joint operations and cyberwarfare, it has also provided it with more modernized weapons and equipment, to the extent that some of its advancements, such as the Chengdu J-20 fighter jet, have been completely integrated and entered service.

China has also been continually developing its nuclear weapons, space technology, aircraft carriers and information warfare capabilities.

It is thus on its way to becoming a world-class military power, while also posing a serious threat to US interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

The US Department of Defense on Sept. 1 published its *2020 Military Power Report*, which says that China has deployed about 200 nuclear warheads that could be launched from land, sea and air, and that it plans to further expand and modernize its nuclear weapons, at least doubling the number of its nuclear warheads within the next 10 years.

China’s military strength has already caught up with the US or even surpassed it in a number of key areas.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China Chad Sbragia has said that the PLA’s

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recent military exercises in the South China Sea show that it might be preparing to further harass neighboring countries.

Sbragia said that the US Department of Defense would demonstrate the US’ commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region by continuing to closely monitor China’s military drills.

For Biegun, as deputy secretary of state, to raise the strategic concept of an “Asian NATO” in an international public forum shows that the US has become alert to the fact that China’s nonstop military development in the past few years poses a serious threat to Taiwan and the stability and security of the entire Asia-Pacific region.

However, Biegun said that the Indo-Pacific region lacks strong multilateral security structures.

In other words, the existing multilateral mechanisms in the region lack the fortitude of NATO or the EU, and are not inclusive enough.

The US’ desire to establish an “Asian NATO” with its partners in the region presents Taiwan with a strategic opportunity that must be grasped.

To put it simply: In addition to continuing to develop its asymmetric warfare capabilities, Taiwan should work out the smartest and most appropriate way to take part in this possibly US-led Asian regional security mechanism. This task will be a challenging test for the wisdom of Taiwan’s national security team.

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Translated by Julian Clegg

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