

Improving military cooperation with Japan

Written by Shogo Lim 林 翔

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This year is the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Japan and China, even though it seems like Beijing would not mind letting the relationship plummet to a new low.

After the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, it has been widely acknowledged that a “Taiwan emergency” is not just possible, but highly probable. It is also known that Taiwan is not well-prepared.

However, is Japan ready? Some Taiwanese hope that the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) would come to Taiwan’s aid if the nation is attacked. Such an expectation is closer to fantasy than reality. Without any precedent or law, it would be a problem for the SDF even to evacuate Japanese from Taiwan, not to mention help Taiwan defend itself.

Some Japanese politicians have even said they hope that if an emergency occurs, Taiwan would provide airplanes to help evacuate Japanese expats. That way, Japanese politicians would not have to deal with organizing such an operation and could evade subsequent responsibilities.

Besides the legal issues that constrain the actions of the SDF, the reality is that Taiwan’s armed forces lack a channel of communication with their Japanese counterparts. Under a Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association plan, only one SDF civilian officer is to be sent to Taiwan.

However, if Taiwan and Japan are to discuss ways of communicating and collaborating in an emergency, the contact person for Japan must be a military officer.

It has been said that Japanese Minister of Defense Yasukazu Hamada intends to send a military officer to Taiwan. What Taiwan can do now is arrange a liaison as soon as possible to facilitate communication with Japan. The training of such personnel must start immediately.

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Japan's bureaucracy is conservative. All must comply with laws. Should there be a lack of legal basis, everything must be done in accordance with precedent. Without a precedent, nothing is done. In this sense, it is imperative to establish rules when it comes to Taiwan-Japan relations.

The "Know-Taiwan Faction" in Japan, following the example of the US Congress' Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), has been advocating for creating a Japanese version of the US law, despite a great number of difficulties.

Kazuo Asano, who proposed such legislation, said that Taiwan does not have much time left after the 20th National Congress. Asano recommended that Taiwan and Japan keep communication as close as possible before the enactment of a "Japanese TRA."

At the same time, an agreement that specifies pragmatic ways of addressing urgent situations should be signed by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association and the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association.

Given the pressing circumstances, neither Taiwan nor Japan can afford to wait any longer. At a legislative level, it is important to continue endorsing a Japan-Taiwan relations act. At a practical level, Taipei and Tokyo must establish close ties built on mutual trust, to conduct scenario planning for a Taiwan emergency.

For Taiwan, the only way to avoid war is to let the enemy know that the price would be high should it attack. It is therefore crucial to enable a framework of trilateral cooperation and security that involves Taiwan, Japan and the US.

In this way, the enemy would realize the real price for waging a war against Taiwan.

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