

Security experts warn on China threat

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An expert on cross-strait relations yesterday emphasized the need for openness and transparency, as well as for the ruling and opposition parties to reach a consensus in formulating government policy on relations with China.

“There should not be secrecy ... there should be a broad national debate, and nothing should be done until a consensus of both parties is reached about what the ultimate goals are,” said Arthur Waldron, an international relations professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Waldron made the remarks during the afternoon session of the International Symposium on 50 Years of US-Japan Security Alliance and the Security of Taiwan organized by the Taiwan National Security Institute and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

Waldron, who had been a classmate of Present Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) at Harvard, said he did not think Ma intended to surrender Taiwan to China.

However, “it is not enough simply to wish that things should go well,” he said. “It is important to think with great rigor and to bring in the government the finest experts that Taiwan has.”

“In nearly every field, Taiwan boasts experts of absolute world quality. [However,] frankly, I do not see that happening in the current administration,” he said.

Waldron said the Ma administration didn’t seem to have a well-thought-out strategy. Everybody, including the US, which has been remarkably supportive of Ma and was never supportive of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), should think about this, he said.

“It is now clear that China is not a big cuddly panda bear. China is potentially a source of problems for all her neighboring countries — and ... that includes the United States,” Waldron said.

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Even if some people believe that Taiwan is part of China, it is still possible for Taiwan to align itself with the strategic interests of Japan and the US rather than with those of China, he said.

On the US-Japan security alliance, Waldron said he did not believe in the viability of the existing security treaty, nor did he believe the US would engage in an all-out war with a -nuclear-armed China if Japan were attacked.

In the morning session, former Japanese minister of defense Gen Nakatani, now a member of the House of Representatives, said that with a rising China at loggerheads with Japan, the best way to resolve disputes in East Asia would be to establish a regional security system.

Beijing's recent stance on the disputed Diaoyutai Islands (釣台) has raised apprehensions in Japan about the growing military imbalance with China, Nakatani said, adding that if the issue was allowed to fester, it could deteriorate.

Nakatani called for the creation of an Asian equivalent of NATO, which he said would provide regional powers with a platform for conflict resolution.

In the meantime, a relatively weakened US would have to rely more on Japan and Taiwan to ensure security in the Asia Pacific, he said.

Dan Blumenthal, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, said the US-Japanese security alliance in the 21st century would likely be as important as, if not more, than the US-UK alliance was for Europe during the Cold War.

"China poses problems for the US-Japan alliance probably not seen since 1945," Blumenthal said.

In the past year, with Taiwan partly neutralized, Beijing has "unmasked itself and shown that its military modernization is not only about 'reunification,' but also regional claims," he said.

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“Modernization does not happen in a vacuum ... [the Chinese leadership] has a clear goal [and is] not happy with current arrangements in the Asia Pacific.”

“The initial policy of the US of reassuring China that it did not seek to contain it didn’t work and encouraged Beijing to ask for more concessions,” he said.

As a result, Beijing has “rejected the ‘status quo’” in the Taiwan Strait, “rejected customary international law in Southeast Asia,” resorted to emotions in settling disputes in the East China Sea and sided with North Korea in the March 26 sinking of the South Korean vessel Cheonan.

Blumenthal said the US should encourage Japan to end its economic stagnation and adopt more coherent and independent strategic policies, adding that Beijing’s perception of a declining Japan had allowed China to think it could act more forcefully.

On the impact of the US--Japanese alliance on Taiwanese security, Blumenthal said that only through a strong US-Japanese alliance — to which Taiwan is “inextricably tied” — would Taipei have the confidence to face China from a position of strength.

“What’s often overlooked is what an insecure Taiwan could do if it feels isolated and without strong allies,” he said.

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