

China spying aggressively: report

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Despite warming cross-strait ties, China continues to engage in “aggressive espionage activities” against Taiwan, says a report to the US Congress.

In the past year alone, Taipei officials have arrested five former military officers for spying.

One of these cases is particularly damaging, involving a former Taiwanese navy commander who is suspected of selling classified submarine nautical charts and other information about the waters surrounding the nation to China.

“These cases underscore the breadth and depth of China’s espionage activities against Taiwan and demonstrate Taiwan’s vulnerability to Chinese espionage,” the report says. A draft copy of the annual report by the congressionally appointed US-China Economic and Security Review Commission has been obtained by the Taipei Times. The final report will be formally released later this month.

Former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) director William Stanton is quoted in the report as saying that espionage cases have been harmful not only because of the loss of classified information, “but also because their success and frequency serves to undermine US confidence in security cooperation with Taiwan.”

Other AIT officials told the commission that the Chinese espionage threat to Taiwan was “a real concern” and that the US had raised it with Taiwan “at the highest levels.”

The draft report also says that China conducts extensive cyberoperations against the government and corporate networks. For example, the report says, China targeted the publicly accessible Web sites of Taiwan’s National Security Bureau 3.34 million times last year.

By way of defense, Taiwan is increasing its budget for cyberwarfare, integrating it into the nation’s routine training exercises and adding a fourth unit to the Communication Electronics and Information Bureau. In addition, Taiwan is building an experimental facility that will simulate

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cyberattacks on the nation's critical infrastructure to help train cyberdefenders.

The report says that warming ties between China and Taiwan are raising concerns for Washington and Taipei. Increasing cross-strait economic integration breaks down barriers and ties Taiwan closer to China, the draft report says.

"This could strengthen Beijing's bargaining power over Taipei and allow Beijing to make progress toward its long-term goal of unification," it says. "Responding to these concerns, officials from Taiwan's National Security Council insisted to the Commission that Taipei's economic engagement with Beijing is carefully calibrated to promote both Taiwan's economic growth and continued autonomy."

Nevertheless, the report stresses that counterintelligence risks to Taiwan and US military information in Taiwan are increasing as cross-strait ties expand and Chinese citizens visit in greater numbers.

"Chinese intelligence agencies now have greater access to Taiwan and better opportunities to conduct intelligence operations against Taiwan[ese] citizens both in Taiwan and China," the report says. "As the cross-strait military balance of power continues to shift in China's favor, Taipei may seek to develop closer political ties with Washington and to acquire additional US arms and related military assistance."

It concludes: "Taiwan's diminishing ability to maintain a credible capability could provide incentives and create opportunities for Beijing to take on greater risk in its approach to cross-strait relations, including pressuring Taipei to move toward political talks or using military force to achieve political objectives."

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