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U.S. senators call for swift passage of TAIPEI Act to help Taiwan

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Marco Rubio (left), Cory Gardner (right); CNA file photo

Washington, Sept. 16 (CNA) Several U.S. senators have called for the swift passage of a draft bill in the U.S. Congress in an effort to help Taiwan keep its diplomatic allies, a day after Taiwan announced the severing of ties with the Solomon Islands in the wake of the Pacific country's decision to switch allegiance to Beijing.

Taiwan has cut diplomatic ties with the Solomon Islands as the South Pacific island-nation has decided to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) announced Monday.

Earlier that day, the Solomon Islands' Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement voted 27-0, with six abstentions, to establish diplomatic ties with China. The decision was later approved by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare.

The severing of ties leaves Taiwan with only 16 diplomatic allies.

Commenting on the Solomon Islands' decision, Taiwan-friendly U.S. Senator Cory Gardner denounced Beijing's action in a tweet and called on the Senate to pass the legislation he introduced to help Taiwan amid China's increased efforts to poach its diplomatic allies.

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The main opposition Kuomintang ([#KMT](#)) demanded Friday that President [#TsaiIngWen](#) ([蔡英文](#)) sack Minister of Foreign Affairs [#JosephWu](#) ([吳釗燮](#)) and other responsible officials, after Taiwan lost its second diplomatic ally in less than a week.

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"China's hostile actions toward Taipei will be met with resolve by the free world. I urge the Senate to immediately consider my TAIPEI Act, which would impose consequences on nations downgrading ties with Taiwan in favor of China," Gardner tweeted.

Gardner was referring to the draft Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative Act, or the TAIPEI Act, which he, Marco Rubio, John Cornyn and Chris Coons reintroduced to the Senate earlier this year.

The bill, once passed, will require the U.S. government to engage with governments around the world in a bid to support Taiwan's diplomatic recognition and strengthen unofficial ties with Taiwan.

Meanwhile, Rubio made a similar statement in a separate tweet, in which he criticized the Solomon Islands' "shameful" decision.

"It's shameful that the Solomon Islands is bending to Beijing's pressure to sever ties with Taiwan. Congress should pass the TAIPEI Act and send a strong message that the U.S. will not stay silent as the Chinese govt aggressively moves to isolate Taiwan," he tweeted.

The draft bill, which was first introduced in September 2018, states that 90 days after its enactment and every 180 days thereafter, "the Secretary of State or a designee of the Secretary shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report on actions taken by the United States to reaffirm and strengthen Taiwan's international alliances around the world."

The draft legislation authorizes the U.S. State Department to downgrade U.S. ties with any government that takes adverse actions with regard to Taiwan, and allows the State Department to suspend or adjust U.S. foreign assistance to governments that take actions unfavorable to Taiwan.

According to the draft bill, the U.S. government should also help Taiwan gain participation in international organizations, either as a member or an observer, and express its support for Taiwan's international participation when it interacts with Beijing.

Since its reintroduction earlier this year, the draft bill has been read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate in May. But no progress has been made since.

Vincent Yao (姚金祥), head of the Department of North American Affairs at Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), said during a press conference Tuesday that Taiwan is glad to see further developments on the proposed act, expressing its appreciation for Gardner and Rubio's support.

Yao said that Taiwan and the U.S. government maintain close communication and cooperation, be it in the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) or the recently

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Taiwan and the U.S. have many shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region and both sides will continue related-measures to maintain those common interests, he said.

In the lower chamber, Republican congressmen Ted Yoho of Florida and Michael McCaul of Texas both expressed disappointments over the severing of ties.

"It's unfortunate the #SolomonIslands govt would break their long-standing diplomatic ties with #Taiwan in favor of the #PRC. Taiwan is a trusted partner to the Solomons & an important democratic partner in the Indo-Pacific. This move undermines Taiwan & emboldens the #CCP," Yoho tweeted.

"Disappointed to see one of the largest nations in the Pacific choose #China's Belt and Road to serfdom over Taiwan, a longstanding democratic ally and friend." McCaul said in his tweet.

Meanwhile, asked to comment on Taiwan losing yet another diplomatic ally to China, former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Richard Bush told CNA that it is not really a "fair fight" between the two sides.

"China has resources that Taiwan and the US do not," he said in an email.

But he also said it is debatable whether stealing more diplomatic allies from Taipei is an effective means or not for Beijing in its ongoing suppression of Taipei.

"On the question of whether stealing allies is effective or not, we will see from the results on January 11th," he said, referring to Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections next year.

The Solomon Islands is the sixth diplomatic ally Taipei has lost to Beijing since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) assumed office in May 2016.

Beijing has taken a hardline stance on cross-strait relations since Tsai refused as president to accept the "1992 consensus," a tacit understanding reached in 1992 between the then-Kuomintang (KMT) government of Taiwan and the Chinese government.

Under the consensus, both sides of the Taiwan Strait acknowledge that there is only "one China" with each side free to interpret what "China" means, according to the KMT interpretation. However, Beijing has never publicly recognized the second part of that interpretation.

(By Chiang Chin-yeh, Joseph Yeh and Emerson Lim)
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