

Becoming U.S. Fortress Against China Does More Damage than Good for Taiwan

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The \$1.4 billion increase in Taiwan's military spending next year is still not enough to achieve effective defense, said David Helvey, Principal Director for East Asia in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs. He made the comments during a two-day video conference hosted by the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Industry.

Reuters [reported on October 7](#) that Helvey asked Taiwanese authorities to invest in “large numbers of small capabilities” that would signal to China that an “invasion or attack would not come without significant cost.” This was in reference to mainland China supposedly wanting to militarily capture Taiwan as Beijing considers the island to be a “rebel province” of the People’s Republic of China. A U.S. Department of Defense official listed the following weapons that they can sell to Taiwan: cruise missiles used to defend the coast, water mines, fast ships, self-propelled artillery, and modern surveillance and reconnaissance equipment.

It was learned in September that the U.S. plans to sell several weapon systems to Taiwan. [Reuters today](#) broke further news, claiming that pending Congressional approval, the U.S. is moving forward with three sales of advanced weaponry to Taiwan.

“The informal notifications were for a truck-based rocket launcher made by Lockheed Martin Corp called a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), long-range air-to-ground missiles made by Boeing Co called SLAM-ER, and external sensor pods for F-16 jets that allow the real-time transmission of imagery and data from the aircraft back to ground stations,” Reuters reported earlier today.

This in turn has sparked a war of words with Taiwanese foreign ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou saying

“China continues to use military provocation to undermine cross-strait and regional stability, highlighting the importance of Taiwan’s strengthening of self-defense capabilities.”

In turn, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian stated that Beijing will respond “appropriately and necessary in accordance with the development of the situation,” without giving further explanation what a response could be. The Chinese spokesperson also pointed out that Washington should “fully recognize the serious harm” the U.S. arms sales to Taiwan has, abide by the one-China principle, immediately cancel any arms sales to Taiwan and end U.S.-Taiwan military contacts.

This is unlikely to occur because arms sales are very beneficial to the US as Taiwan's military industrial capabilities can only produce a small part of the range of weapons listed. The economic benefit to the U.S. will be huge, whilst simultaneously pressurizing Washington's main 21st century geopolitical rival, China. The U.S. is determined to contain China, and of course is interested in using Taiwan as an outpost for this containment policy. Therefore, everything the Americans allow Taiwan to purchase is in line with the overall strategy of confronting China, especially at sea.

If Taiwan helps block the Chinese navy, it will be in support of U.S. strategy. The Americans are therefore deliberately pushing Taiwan to confront Beijing. This policy has been implemented for more than a decade and precedes President Donald Trump, and will likely continue after him, whether that will be after the 2020 elections or after the 2024 elections. The Americans are trying to force Taiwan to bear most of the costs of serving this strategy to contain China, but leaders in Taipei are showing signs they are more than willing to pay.

The idea of building a "Fortress Taiwan" is in the U.S.' own interests but is actually not feasible for Taiwan today. Not only do Taiwanese companies continue to get rich by trading and investing with China, but using profits and taxes to build a "fortress" aimed against China will not be tolerated by Beijing. Taiwan increases its participation in policies to contain China, however its benefits from trade with the mainland will begin to decline significantly.

The production of weapons will not help Taiwan to ensure its security from a perceived mainland Chinese threat either. Many of Taiwan's rational politicians and analysts understand that if things develop unfavorably, the price to further strengthen Taiwan's security from a perceived threat will be a heavy cost on its economy whilst enriching American military corporations.

Despite this reality, at a two-day meeting hosted by the U.S.-Taiwan Business Council, Taiwan's Deputy Minister of National Defense Zhang Guanqun stated that Taiwan needs U.S. weapons and equipment to meet its combat needs. Judging from the content of his speech, Taiwan and its defense projects on the island, including the construction of submarines, fighter jets, and warships, depend on a large extent on strengthening its defense capabilities through U.S. assistance.

However, although this may antagonize Beijing, the truth is that it still cannot prevent Chinese activities and power projections in the South China Sea. Rather, Taiwan's ambitions can see it lose trade deals with the mainland which will be far more devastating and impactful than the island's conversion into an American fortress to pressurize China.

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