

US Military Threats Force China to Boost Its Defense Budget

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It would be justified and proper for China to increase military expenditure as the US has posed a threat and challenged China's core strategic interest by planning a \$6.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan, Chinese experts said.

"The US action gives China a justified cause to increase its national defense expenditure, to enhance the development and purchase of weapons, and to accelerate its modernization process in national defense," said Luo Yuan, a senior researcher with the Academy of Military Science, in an interview with the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV.

"China is being pressured by the US which is posing a threat to its core interests," Luo said.

Within 17 hours of the Obama administration notifying US Congress on Friday of the plan to sell Taiwan an arms package that includes Patriot missiles, Black Hawk helicopters and minesweepers, China announced countermeasures.

The Defense Ministry said it would suspend scheduled military exchange visits with the US and closely monitor the situation and take further actions as required.

Exchange visits were arranged for this year during Vice-Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Xu Caihou's visit to the US last Oct 24 to Nov 3, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullen's visits to China, and Chinese military's chief of the general staff Chen Bingde's visit to the US.

These arrangements were confirmed in the Joint Statement issued during US President Barack Obama's visit to China last November.

However, similar steps were taken by China in 2008 after the former Bush administration announced a multibillion-dollar arms sale to Taiwan, but eight months later military dialogues were resumed.

"This sent the US a signal that China's actions only operate for a limited period of time, and later on everything will return to as before," said Luo Yuan.

But the international community should know this is not "China threats", but "the US threats". "China did nothing to threaten the US, why should the US challenge our core strategic interests?" said Luo.

Luo said China should play tougher cards to terminate US arms sales to Taiwan, which

fundamentally means building a stronger army and national defense.

In 2009, China's national defense budget was over 48 billion yuan, up by 14.9 percent than the previous year. But its defense expenditure takes up about 1.4 percent of the total GDP, while the figure in the US is over 4 percent, and over 2 percent in UK and France.

Jin Canrong, an expert in international affairs at Renmin University of China, said the Chinese army should carry out more tests in high-tech weapons, to accelerate military modernization, and the military expenditure this year should be increased by over 10 percent.

Since China and the US established formal diplomatic ties in 1979, the US has continued to sell arms to Taiwan, and China has consistently made representations.

Guo Xiaobing, a researcher with the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, pointed out that military relations between China and the US have been lagging behind their economic and political relations.

"What the US did this time will further impede possible improvements in their relationship, and the US hopes to learn more about China, its biggest competitor, through exchanges and communication," Guo said.

But for China, which does not have many technical exchanges with the US in defense building, suspending exchanges will not affect it much, said Guo.

However, by not including the F-16 fighter in the sale package this time, which concerns Beijing most, the US shows that it did not intend to irritate China beyond redemption, Guo said.

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