

US lawmakers want data on weapons sales to Taiwan

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Senior members of the US House of Representatives have introduced a bill that would force US President Barack Obama to consult with Congress and keep it informed about potential arms sales to Taiwan.

Sources said that one immediate impact would be to pressure the White House to make a decision on Taiwan's request to buy 66 advanced F-16 C/D fighters.

Advisers to Obama have recently indicated that at this stage a decision is not likely to be made until well into next year.

The new bill — H.R. 4102 — was introduced by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who is the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Taiwan Caucus co-chairs Shelley Berkley, Phil Gingrey and Lincoln Diaz-Balart plus four other representatives.

If passed, it would require the Obama administration to provide detailed briefings to Congress on all US arms sales to Taiwan and would “mandate briefings no later than 90 days after the date of the enactment and at least annually thereafter.

In addition the secretary of state, in consultation with the secretary of defense, would be required to inform Congress about any discussions between any US government officials and the government of Taiwan.

The briefings must include any potential transfer of weapons or defense services to Taiwan.

The idea is to ensure that Congress is fully informed of the administration's arms talks with Taiwan and is not surprised — as has happened in the past — by White House decisions coming out of the blue.

The introduction of the bill was timely “because Taiwan supporters are disturbed by President Obama's statements in China,” said Bob Yang (楊伯), president of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs, a group based in Washington.

“He failed to mention the Taiwan Relations Act [TRA] while saying that the US respects China's sovereignty and territorial integrity through the three joint communiques. That's likely to embolden China to press even harder her spurious claim over Taiwan,” Yang said.

“Such statements seriously undermine US legitimacy to continue providing defense articles and services to Taiwan as codified in the TRA,” he said.

“For the past few years, members of Congress have been expressing strong concern about the stalemate in US arms sales to Taiwan. Their repeated appeals to the administration have gone unheeded. Annual briefings, as mandated by this bill, will reassert Congress' prerogative to co-determine with the president the nature and the quantity of defense articles and services sold to Taiwan,” Yang said.

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