

The head of a prominent business group accused US President Barack Obama of compromising Taiwan's security to promote US ties with China.

Taiwan is watching "with increased exasperation," said Rupert Hammond-Chambers, president of the US-Taiwan Business Council.

Hammond-Chambers said the US departments of state and defense, as well as the US Trade Representative, appeared interested in building closer US ties with Taipei despite resulting complications in the US-China relationship.

"Regrettably, this effort runs smack into a White House that clearly views Taiwan as a barrier to US interests in Asia," he wrote in an annual year-end report dated Thursday and distributed on Friday.

Obama, much like his predecessor, former US president George W. Bush, has slowed the submission of proposed Taiwan arms sales to Congress, over fears, analysts say, of disrupting China-Taiwan rapprochement and to avoid angering Beijing.

"If the Obama administration balks at providing replacement F-16 fighters to Taiwan, China will have won a major victory in the Taiwan Strait without firing a shot," Hammond-Chambers said.

The updating of Taiwan's F-16 fleet was a "material response" to Beijing's own fighter modernization, he added.

The council's board chairman is Paul Wolfowitz, a former World Bank president and former US deputy secretary of defense. The group has long advocated arms sales to Taipei, including meeting its wish to buy 66 advanced F-16C/D fighter jets to update its F-16 fleet.

The council represents scores of companies doing business with Taiwan, including Lockheed Martin, the Pentagon's No. 1 supplier by sales, Boeing Co and Raytheon Co.

China strongly opposes all US arms sales to Taiwan.

Stating his belief that the "strong support for Taiwan strengthens both our own and Taiwan's standing with China," Hammond-Chambers listed in his report four priorities the business group has outlined as its work for this year.

The priorities include the council pushing for a full resumption of US-Taiwan trade and investment framework agreement meetings without preconditions and with an agenda that identifies areas of liberalization that can — in some way — counter China's efforts to challenge US economic interests in Taiwan.

Obama imperiling Taiwan: US group

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The council will also press for an end to the US administration's habit of notifying Congress of its decision to sell arms to Taiwan, as a package, and instead make one-by-one notifications on weapons that it deems ready to be sold to Taiwan. Congress has the power to stop the sales.

"Packaging" of arms sales, a practice begun by Bush in 2007 in "a vain attempt to reduce Chinese ire" over what it regards as interference in its domestic affairs, undermines US resolve to help Taiwan defend itself and significantly weakens Taiwan's defense modernization, Hammond-Chambers said.

The council will also support the acceptance of a Letter of Request for 66 F-16s to replace Taiwan's aging F-5s and Mirage 2000s and to offer some material response to China's ongoing investment in fourth generation fighters, such as the J-10.

The council will also support the resumption of visits to Taiwan by US Cabinet officials to promote US economic interests in Taiwan.

The White House declined to comment on the criticism, which echoed the group's unhappiness with Bush's delay in meeting Taiwan's arm requests. Washington has placed more importance in recent years on working with China, a veto-wielding UN Security Council member, including on such matters as North Korea, Iran and climate change.

Vance Chang (簡文彬), spokesman at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Washington, had no immediate comment.

Hammond-Chambers said several other arms deals that are in the works — including UH-60 Black Hawk tactical transport helicopters built by United Technologies Corp's Sikorsky Aircraft unit and PAC-3 missile batteries and missiles built by Lockheed and Raytheon — have been ready for notification to Congress for more than a year.

The business council had expected those sales would move forward after trips Obama made to China in November and a climate change conference in Copenhagen last month, Hammond-Chambers said.

"But it now appears as if that timetable is slipping," Hammond-Chambers wrote. "The Chinese government can view these extended periods of delay, angst, and commensurate half-decisions and non-decisions as important improvements in their position on this issue."

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