

## US officials promise arms for Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 15 January 2010 07:51 -

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The US aims to expand its involvement in East Asia amid concerns that China may use its growing military clout to coerce its neighbors or move against Taiwan, US military officials told Congress on Wednesday.

The officials also promised to provide Taiwan with weapons to protect itself from a possible Chinese attack, despite Beijing's warning that such sales are meddling and could lead to conflict.

Speaking to US lawmakers at a congressional hearing, they said that China was boosting preparations for a short, intense fight against Taiwan. Its military buildup, which includes more than 1,000 ballistic missiles deployed opposite Taiwan, is in stark contrast to the improved ties between the rivals since the March 2008 election of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

The comments come as the US prepares for an expected announcement of arms sales for Taiwan and follows China's announcement on Monday that its military intercepted a missile in mid-flight in a test of new technology.

The commander of US forces in the Pacific, Admiral Robert Willard, said that Beijing's military advancements had worsened the already heavy combat imbalance between China and Taiwan.

Willard told lawmakers that the US military was trying to reconcile China's claims that its forces are defensive with a military capability that is growing more powerful and outward-looking.

That "can only occur through continuous, frank conversations and a strong and mature military-to-military relationship — a relationship that does not yet exist with the People's Liberation Army," Willard said, referring to China's army.

US-Chinese military ties are only just now improving after Beijing cut contact following the announcement by the administration of then US president George W. Bush in 2008 of a US\$6.5 billion arms sale to Taiwan.

The upcoming arms sales to Taiwan will test whether the efforts of the administration of US President Barack Obama to establish greater trust with China's leaders will keep Beijing from cutting military ties in retaliation.

The US officials also urged China to be more open about its growing military and its intentions.

Willard said China was seeking to deploy its first aircraft carrier, an important way to project power far beyond its shores. China purchased an unfinished former Soviet Kuznetsov class

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aircraft carrier in 1998 and began renovations in 2002.

“I expect this carrier to become operational around 2012,” Willard said.

US Assistant Secretary of Defense Wallace Gregson said some aspects of China’s military could restrict US access to the region or allow China to attack or coerce its neighbors.

“China’s growing capabilities also entail greater responsibility,” Gregson said.

He said the US saw risks that China might “one day calculate it has reached the tipping point in the Taiwan Strait and issue an ultimatum.”

The Obama administration needs to make sure China clearly understands US interests and does not challenge them, Gregson said.

“China can and should do more” to help Washington address crises in North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and other global hotspots, he said.

Source: [Taipei Times 2010/01/15](#)