

Military might pave road to peace

Written by James Tzeng 詹志剛

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On Sept. 25, the US Department of Defense announced an arms sales package to Taiwan worth US\$330 million. The package involves a five-year supply of spare parts to support Taiwan's F-16, Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF) and F-5 warplanes, as well as C-130 cargo planes. The proposed sale is to take effect 30 days after official notification to the US Congress, marking the second such deal since US President Donald Trump assumed office.

It is worth noting that this sale mainly consists of individual items — different from the previous practice of selling a package solution — underlining the improvement in quality and quantity of Taiwan-US national defense cooperation.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly opposes the deal and has urged the US to cancel the sale.

In response, the US Department of State said the deal would not alter the military balance in the region, tactfully repelling the ministry's discontent.

The Presidential Office, in contrast, expressed the nation's gratitude for the US government's commitments to implementing the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and the "six assurances," and stressed that the nation would develop closer partnership ties with the US on defense and security issues.

US arms sales to Taiwan are based on the following political foundation:

First, China has not reduced military preparation targeting Taiwan since President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) replaced former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in 2016, and US arms sales to Taiwan can reduce the excessive risk posed by the cross-strait military imbalance and guarantee stability and a peaceful solution to tensions.

Second, the US is bound by the TRA to help Taiwan maintain its military deterrent capabilities.

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Third, US arms sales to Taiwan are in response to requests by political and military officials and an expression of support for the government.

Fourth, US arms sales will enhance Taipei's confidence in positive interactions with Beijing.

Fifth, US arms sales show other US allies in the Indo-Pacific region its determination and ability to pursue its Indo-Pacific strategy.

Sixth, the sales are a show of US political support for Taiwan, and also show its allies that it is trustworthy and is committed to follow through on its pledges.

If the US stops arms sales to Taiwan, it could force the nation to consider developing nuclear weapons, which would destroy the cross-strait "status quo," which is advantageous to the US.

The current dynamic military balance in the Taiwan Strait has shifted in favor of China.

The US Defense Department's recently published Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China suggests that Taiwan should focus its military planning and equipment purchases on developing innovative and asymmetric combat thinking, and strive to improve the combat capabilities of its reserve troops and the ability of its "total defense service" strategy.

The report says that only an economically strong, confident and free Taiwan that is not under military threat or intimidation will be able to gradually engage in peaceful dialogue with China from a strategically advantageous position and resolve diverging views to find a peaceful solution to the cross-strait sovereignty dispute.

In addition, the US government and US Congress have come to a rare strong consensus to

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provide Taiwan with arms to maintain its defensive capabilities and continue military cooperation under the framework of the Three Joint Communiques, the TRA and the “six assurances.”

At a news conference, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said that Taiwan and the US share a belief in freedom and democracy.

Furthermore, a stable and prosperous democratic Taiwan is in accordance with traditional US values and interests.

The US-China trade dispute is intensifying and spreading to the military sector. While nations in the Indo-Pacific region have mixed feelings toward China’s ascent, many of them deploy a two-pronged strategy — a pro-China stance economically, but reliance on the US for security.

Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, Singapore and India are enhancing their collaboration with the US on defense qualitatively and quantitatively. They also participate in joint military drills with the US.

Although Indo-Pacific countries welcome China’s economic rise, they share increasing concern over the threats posed by its military expansion.

This concern creates room for the US to develop its Indo-Pacific strategy and for the establishment of a new political foundation to enhance Taiwan-US national defense collaboration.

Mainstream opinion in US strategy circles is that Taiwan should develop a constructive relationship with Washington by enhancing national defense collaboration and attracting foreign investment to boost the economy, thus making Taiwan a partner to the US in the promotion of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

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Taiwan should avoid provoking China with radical independence activities, which would only add to the US' political and military burden.

If Taiwan develops concrete military capabilities, enhances the capacity of the “total defense service” strategy, demonstrates to China its determination to defend its democratic way of life and shows the People’s Liberation Army that annexation of Taiwan would cost more than it is worth, the US and Indo-Pacific countries would be willing to bend the rules to accommodate Taiwan, enhance defensive collaboration and jointly maintain regional stability and peace in the Taiwan Strait.

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Translated by Chang Ho-ming

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