

With a bill passed on Tuesday, the government is now authorized to draft a budget of up to NT\$240 billion (US\$8.64 billion) for arms procurements over the next five years. This would include mostly indigenous weapons to upgrade existing anti-air and anti-surface capabilities.

The news is welcome, not just for what it says about Taiwan's ability to defend itself, but because it creates the perception that it is taking its defense seriously and not just relying on promises of assistance from allies, predominantly the US.

This year's Global Firepower (GFP) review ranked Taiwan 22nd out of the 140 countries considered, with a "powerindex" score of 0.4154. A score of 0.0000 is considered "perfect." By comparison, the US has a powerindex of 0.0718 and ranked first, while China ranked third with an index of 0.0854.

There is clearly a wide margin between Taiwan and the top ranking countries, but there is another element key to the integrity of a nation's national defense capabilities: its level of corruption, and the ability of its institutions and mechanisms to identify, root out and prevent corruption. All advanced Western countries regard removing military corruption as an administrative priority, as they know that severe corruption will, for example, make military officers and officials susceptible to enemy coercion. This makes the issue even more pertinent in Taiwan, with the ever-present risk of espionage and infiltration from China, and the often-questioned loyalty of members of the armed forces, including retired generals.

However, corruption in the realm of national defense needs to be looked at more broadly.

The Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI), compiled by Transparency International UK's Transparency International Defence and Security program, uses five categories: political risk, financial risk, personnel risk, operational risk and procurement risk to assess a country's overall resistance to corruption in its military.

A GDI report released on Nov. 16 last year places Taiwan in band B of a six-band system, in which band B designates a "low risk" of and a robust institutional resistance to corruption. Band F designates a critical high risk. China is in band E: very high risk of corruption.

## Ending national defense corruption

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According to the report, in resilience to corruption at least, Taiwan is punching above its weight. It gives Taiwan an overall country score of 70 out of 100. It scores highly in the categories of political risk, financial risk and personnel risk, but things start to look less impressive with operational risk, where it scores 48 out of 100, and procurement risk, where it scores 58.

Despite the high overall score for personnel risk, where the majority of individual items are placed in band A, two items placed in band D in this category let the side down: whistle-blowing and objective appointments, both of which score 42 out of 100.

The report evaluates the protection of whistle-blowers in three sections: legal provisions, prioritization and effectiveness. The first two receive scores of 50; it is the final section, effectiveness, that drags the average down, with a score of 25 out of 100.

Former minister of justice Chiu Tai-san (邱太三) said in 2018 that the government should offer personal protection for whistle-blowers brave enough to reveal potential breaches of law, and that same year the government announced a draft whistle-blower protection act. That law has yet to be enacted. Lawmakers interviewed for the GDI report doubted that the law would be effective, leading the Transparency International assessor to give a low score in that category.

The government should pass the whistle-blower protection legislation as soon as possible, as part of a robust and comprehensive system to ensure that whistle-blowers are encouraged to reveal corruption to their superiors and are protected after having done so.

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