

US frigate sale to boost security: MND

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A file handout image released by the US Navy Media Content Service on June 6 shows US Navy Perry-class frigate the USS Elrod assisting in the rescue of distressed persons in the Mediterranean Sea.

Photo: EPA

Taiwan is grateful to the US for agreeing to sell four Perry-class guided missile frigates, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) said yesterday, adding that they would enhance the nation's defense capabilities and contribute to peace and stability in the region.

China reacted by lodging a formal complaint with the US and calling for an end to arms sales to Taiwan.

US President Barack Obama on Thursday signed into law a bill that authorizes the sale of up to four Perry-class frigates to Taiwan. The US Senate and House of Representatives had both passed the bill earlier this month.

The sale of the frigates demonstrates the Obama administration and US Congress' commitment to the Taiwan Relations Act and support for Taiwan's security, while also attesting to the mutual friendship and strengthening of bilateral ties between Taipei and Washington, ministry spokesperson Major General David Lo (羅先德) said.

The government has budgeted about NT\$5.5 billion (US\$174.8 million) to purchase two Perry-class frigates, Lo said, adding: "The navy will review its needs and decide whether to buy more frigates in the future."

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“The purchase program will follow the military’s arms procurement regulations. We shall be in close contact with our US counterparts to obtain the frigates’ shipboard architecture and weapons systems that are suited to our combat needs,” Lo said.

He added that the sale “will boost our military’s confidence and capability to defend the nation, and help maintain peace and stability in the region.”

The navy will send a team to the US next year in preparation for taking delivery of the frigates, which are expected to arrive in 2016 at the earliest.

The measure approved by the US government will allow the sale of four Perry-class frigates — the USS Gary, USS Carr, USS Taylor and USS Elrod — to Taiwan.

Ministry officials said they would replace the nation’s aging fleet of Knox-class vessels, which have been in service for about 50 years.

The 4,165-tonne Perry-class frigates are designed for marine-patrol warfare, with secondary anti-

aircraft and anti-ship capability.

US Representative Ed Royce, chairman of the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, said the arms sales would bolster Taiwan’s maritime security and its critical relationship with the US, as provided for in the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979.

“Few other pieces of foreign policy legislation have been as consequential as this act. With steadfast support from the United States Congress, Taiwan has become a thriving modern society that strongly respects human rights, the rule of law and free markets,” Royce said.

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The US measure drew an angry reaction from Beijing, with Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Qing Gang (閻青剛) saying: “China is strongly dissatisfied” with the bill.

“We are firmly opposed to arms sales to Taiwan by the US,” he added, reiterating Beijing’s longstanding position.

“We have launched solemn representations with the US side,” he said, using formal language for a diplomatic protest, adding that Taiwan “remains the most sensitive issue in China-US relations.”

He also called on the US to cut official and military exchanges with Taiwan.

Additional reporting by AFP

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