

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Taiwan's Arms Procurement Policies in Context

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S*ummary*

To tackle the China threat, Taiwan has imported significant amounts of defence equipment from the US, among other countries, while also strengthening its domestic defence industrial base.

Taiwan has been at the receiving end of conventional and grey zone tactics by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and Air Force apart from cognitive warfare and cyberattacks.¹ In order to address the China threat, Taiwan has followed various policies over the years, including depending on arms imports from the United States (US).² The Taiwanese Armed Forces have also enhanced their military prowess through ‘Multi-Domain Deterrence and Resolute Defence’.

President Ma Ying-jeou in 2012 outlined a national security strategy resting on three pillars: cross-strait rapprochement; viable diplomacy; and a strong national defence to deter external threats.³ It was then emphasised in the 2017 and 2021 Quadrennial Defense Review. Taiwan has focused on improving its long-range strike capabilities, counter-air operations, sea control operations, homeland defence, IE/EW and cyber operations and command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) infrastructure. For any possible invasion by China, denial access is the mainstay of Taiwan’s asymmetrical defence.⁴

To increase the strength of its defence personnel, President Tsai Ing-wen on 27 December 2022 announced that Taiwan will reinstate its one-year compulsory military service policy beginning in 2024 for men born in or after 2005 to be eligible for military conscription. The recruitment is expected to bolster resources for the main combat force, garrison force, civil defence system and reserve system.⁵ Defense Minister Wellington Koo Li-hsiung in November 2024 pointed out that Taiwan has multiple channels for acquiring weapons, including domestic production, military purchases and commercial purchases.⁶ To aid its defence

¹ [“2021 Quadrennial Defense Review Republic of China”](#), Ministry of National Defense ROC, March 2021; [“Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China”](#), U.S. Department of Defense, 2024.

² [“The Many ‘One Chinas’: Multiple Approaches to Taiwan and China”](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 February 2023.

³ [“President Ma’s Inaugural Address”](#), Office of the President, Republic of China (Taiwan), 20 May 2012.

⁴ Shang-Su Wu, [“Taiwan’s Asymmetrical Defense: Policies and Alternatives”](#), *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Article 5, 2023, pp. 74–89.

⁵ [“Realigning Military Force Structure to Strengthen All-out National Defense”](#), Executive Yuan, 18 January 2023.

⁶ Kelvin Chen, [“Defense Minister Explains Taiwan’s Arms Procurement Process”](#), *Taiwan News*, 13 November 2024.

strategies and procurements, Taiwan has over the years increased its defence budget (Table 1).

Table 1. Taiwan Defence Budget 2015–2024

Year	GDP (US bn)	Defence Budget (US bn)	Defence Budget (% of GDP)
2015	523	10	1.91%
2016	530	9.9	1.87%
2017	573	10.5	1.83%
2018	590	10.9	1.85%
2019	611	11	1.80%
2020	668	13.9	2.08%
2021	775	16.2	2.09%
2022	760	15.8	2.08%
2023	752	18.9	2.51%
2024	792	19.7	2.49%

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Military Balance, Various Reports 2015–2024.

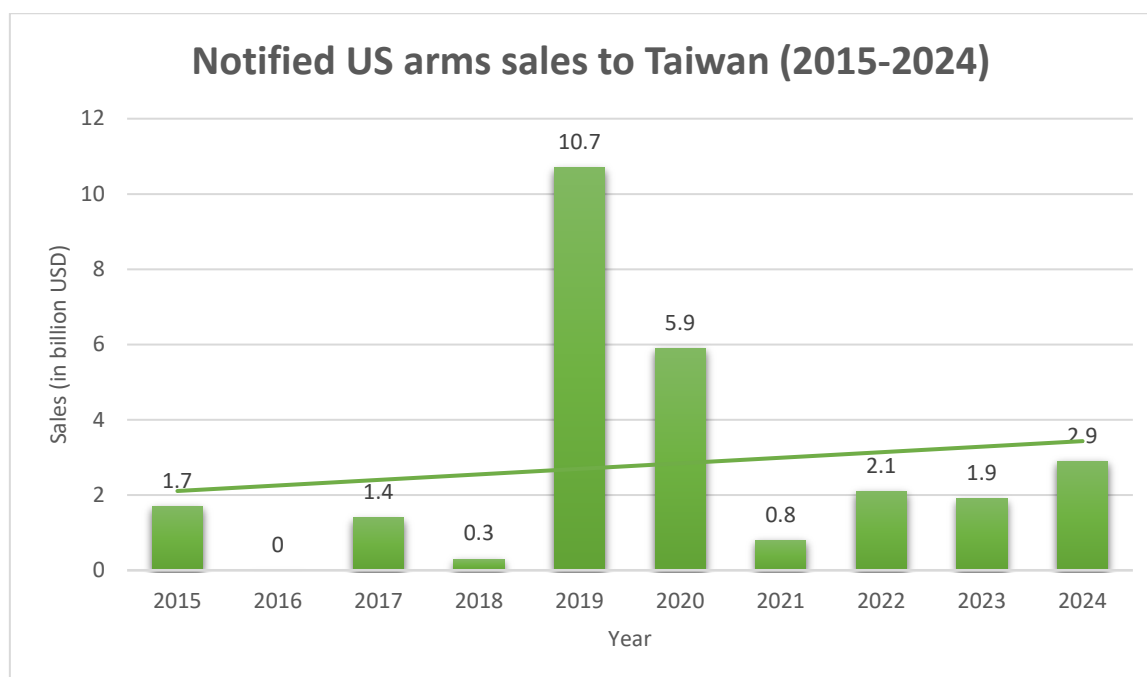
Arms Imports from US

The Reagan administration’s Six Assurances to Taiwan in 1982 included a significant section on US weapon sales.⁷ The US uses foreign military sales (FMS)

⁷ [“Declassified Cables: Taiwan Arms Sales & Six Assurances \(1982\)”](#), American Institute in Taiwan. The United States would not set a date for termination of arms sales to Taiwan. The United States would not alter the terms of the [“Taiwan Relations Act”](#). The United States would not consult with China in advance before making decisions about US arms sales to Taiwan. The United States would not mediate between Taiwan and China. The United States would not alter its position about the sovereignty of Taiwan which was, that the question was one to be decided peacefully by the Chinese themselves, and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China. The United States would not formally recognise Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan.

process, which includes congressional review, to provide Taiwan weapons to bolster its self-defence.⁸ Table 2 illustrates the value of the notified US arms sales to Taiwan from 2015 to 2024. The cumulative notified arms sales from the US over the period 2015 to 2024 amounted to over US\$ 27.7 billion. The years 2019 and 2020 marked a spike because of equipment such as 66 F-16V combat aircraft, Abrams tanks and stinger missiles worth over US\$ 10 billion.⁹

Table 2. US arms sales to Taiwan 2015–2024



Source: “Taiwan Arms Sales Notified to Congress 1990-2024”,
US Taiwan Defense, 29 November 2024.

Taiwan, though, in recent years has experienced extended waiting periods for critical defence equipment.¹⁰ For instance, Taiwan had placed a US\$ 8 billion order in 2019 for 66 F-16Vs initially scheduled for 2024, but the delivery date has been pushed to 2026.¹¹ About 108 M1A2T tanks were ordered in 2019. The first batch was delivered

⁸ Maiya Clark and Jonathan Harman, “[Identifying – and Fixing – the Real Reason Military Equipment Sales to Our Allies Are Lagging So Badly](#)”, RealClearDefense, 23 June 2023.

⁹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “SIPRI Yearbook 2020: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security”, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 87.

¹⁰ Maiya Clark and Jonathan Harman, “[Identifying – and Fixing – the Real Reason Military Equipment Sales to Our Allies Are Lagging So Badly](#)”, no. 8.

¹¹ “[Taiwan Expects US F-16V Jet Deliveries to be Completed in 2026](#)”, *Taiwan News*, 18 October 2024.

in December 2024 and deliveries are expected to be completed by 2026.¹² The purchase of MQ-9B SkyGuardian Drones, advanced surveillance drones designed for maritime and aerial reconnaissance, were approved in 2020 but will be delivered by 2027.¹³ Some of the delays have been due to issues with US defence production capacity, which have been exacerbated by global demand and supply chain challenges.

Indigenous Arms Development

Taiwan has also taken steps to bolster its domestic defence industry. Notably, Taiwan's missile production programme has achieved significant success.¹⁴ The Taiwanese government announced the ‘Sea-Air Combat Power Improvement Plan Purchase Special Regulations’ in 2021 for missiles, a special military budget of US\$ 7.4 billion. The budget is mostly focused on surface warfare and anti-ship systems, with the two main components making up over 62 per cent of the total spend. Surface-to-air missiles for anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missile applications, as well as further ground assault system acquisition, are secondary fields. The budget, which spans 2022 to 2026, aims to enable Taiwan's primary arms manufacturer, National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST), to produce over 1,000 missiles annually.¹⁵ Another achievement of the NCSIST was that in 2021 it ranked 60 in the SIPRI Top 100 arms-producing and military services companies in the world, with US\$ 2 billion in arms sales.¹⁶ In February 2024, as part of a US\$ 146 million programme, Taiwan fielded new anti-drone weapon systems across the country.¹⁷

Taiwan is building its first Indigenous Defense Submarine (IDS) Hai Kun (SS-711)/Narwhal, which was unveiled on 28 September 2023. The diesel-electric submarine is being built by Taiwan’s China Shipbuilding Corporation (CSBC Corp).¹⁸

¹² Wu Su-wei and Joseph Yeh, “[First Batch of U.S.-made M1A2T Tanks Arrives in Taiwan](#)”, *Focus Taiwan*, 16 December 2024.

¹³ “[Taiwan to Receive U.S. SkyGuardian Drones from 2026: Official](#)”, The Overseas Community Affairs Council, ROC (Taiwan), 22 March 2024.

¹⁴ Jonathan Harman, “[Taiwan’s Missile Production Program: A Success Two Years Ahead of Schedule](#)”, *Global Taiwan Institute*, Vol. 9, No. 20, 2024, pp. 8–10.

¹⁵ John Dotson, “[Taiwan’s New Special Defense Budget Emphasizes Indigenous Anti-Ship Weapons Production](#)”, *Global Taiwan Institute*, Vol. 6, No. 21, 2021.

¹⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "SIPRI Yearbook 2023: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security", Oxford University Press, 2023, p. 200.

¹⁷ Joe Saballa, “[Taiwan Completes Fielding of New Anti-Drone Weapons](#)”, *The Defense Post*, 21 February 2024.

¹⁸ Eric Cheung, “[Taiwan Unveils First Domestically Built Submarine as China Threat Grows](#)”, *CNN World*, 28 September 2023.

Some of the significant equipment supplied by the domestic defence industry include corvettes, patrol boats, unmanned aerial vehicles such as Albatross II, loitering munitions and armoured personnel carriers.¹⁹ Taiwan’s Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) has also produced multi-role fighter aircraft such as AIDC F-CK-1 Ching-Kuo and the AT-5 Brave Eagle, an advanced jet trainer and light attack aircraft.²⁰ Although Taiwan has made significant progress in producing its own weaponry, there are still certain obstacles to be addressed. Vital weaponry components, like air defence systems,²¹ drones and related equipment²² and advanced tanks,²³ continue to be imported from other nations.

China’s Reaction

China has consistently opposed US arms sales to Taiwan through diplomatic protests and counter-measures, viewing them as a violation of its sovereignty and a challenge to the ‘One China’ principle. China's increasing military exercises near Taiwan, including air and naval operations, and deployment of military assets in the Taiwan Strait, signal China's resolve to safeguard its claims over Taiwan.²⁴ China strongly opposes official US–Taiwan interactions, emphasising the Taiwan question as its "first red line" in US–China relations.²⁵ In December 2024, for instance, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced that it had sanctioned seven military-industrial firms and associated top personnel for US arms sales and assistance to Taiwan.²⁶

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning criticised US arms sales to Taiwan, stating they are rooted in a "Cold War zero-sum mentality and ideological bias" and urged the US to "immediately stop arming Taiwan in any form" and adhere to the one-China principle and three China–US joint communiqués. Mao warned such

¹⁹ Matt Yu, [“Military Debuts Latest Indigenous Armored Combat Vehicle Prototype”](#), *Focus Taiwan*, 25 June 2024.

²⁰ Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation ([AIDC](#)).

²¹ Mike Stone, [“US Approves \\$2 billion Arms Sale to Taiwan Including Ukraine Tested Missile System”](#), *Reuters*, 26 October 2024.

²² Simina Mistreanu, [“US Approves New \\$360 million Arms Sale to Taiwan for Drones, Related Equipment”](#), *Associated Press*, 19 June 2024.

²³ Joyu Wang, [“Taiwan is Getting Its U.S. Weaponry—But Years Behind Schedule”](#), *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 December 2024.

²⁴ Amrita Jash, [“China’s Military Exercises Around Taiwan: Trends and Patterns”](#), *Global Taiwan Institute*, Vol. 9, No. 19, 2024.

²⁵ [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Remarks on Leader of China’s Taiwan Region Lai Ching-te’s ‘Stopover’ in the US”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 1 December 2024.

²⁶ Liu Xin, [“China Sanctions 7 US Military Companies and Relevant Executives Over Arms Sales to Taiwan Region”](#), *Global Times*, 27 December 2024.

actions would "only backfire" and emphasised that China will "continue to take all measures necessary to firmly safeguard our sovereignty, security, and development interests".²⁷

In certain instances, China has also suspended bilateral talks with the US in response to arms sales to Taiwan. For example, in July 2024, China halted nuclear arms control talks with the US, citing Washington's weapons sales to Taiwan as the reason.²⁸ The last round of consultation on arms control and non-proliferation was held in November 2023. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Lin Jian said:

the US has continued to sell arms to Taiwan and done things that severely undermine China’s core interests and the mutual trust between China and the US ... Consequently, the Chinese side has decided to hold off discussion with the US on a new round of consultations on arms control and non-proliferation.²⁹

Conclusion

Taiwan's emphasis on asymmetric defence and indigenous arms development underscores its determination to safeguard sovereignty amid mounting pressure from the PRC. Through its emphasis on technical innovation, multi-layered deterrence and international collaborations, Taiwan is striving to tackle both short-term and long-term security issues, through arms procurement from key sources such as the US as well as by indigenous development. However, significant hurdles remain, including delays in arms procurement, resource constraints and the complexities of regional geopolitics. Taiwan's efforts to enhance its defensive posture not only reflect its commitment to self-preservation, but also set a precedent for smaller nations navigating similar existential threats.

²⁷ [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Regular Press Conference on December 27, 2024”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 27 December 2024.

²⁸ Andrew Roth, [“China Suspends Nuclear Talks with US Over Arms Sales to Taiwan”](#), *The Guardian*, 17 July 2024.

²⁹ [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference on July 17, 2024”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 17 July 2024.

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