

Taiwan Needs U.S. Arms Now

di Seth G. Jones

By dragging its feet on a \$14 billion arms package to [Taiwan](#), the U.S. risks emboldening China and undermining American deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan desperately needs these air-defense systems, missiles, drones and other weapons to defend itself against China. Even more concerning, there is an additional \$30 billion backlog of U.S. approved arms to Taiwan that need to be delivered—fast.

China presents the most serious threat to the U.S., as the Trump administration’s National Defense Strategy concludes. President [Xi Jinping](#) is bent on expanding Chinese power throughout the Indo-Pacific and beyond, not only swallowing up Taiwan. To do this, China is rapidly arming, expanding its global network of bases, and building weapons at a massive scale in all the major domains of warfare—air, land, naval, space, cyber and nuclear capabilities. China also presents a serious ideological threat. The Communist Party’s core principles and values are antithetical to those of the U.S. and its democratic allies. Beijing stifles democracy, brutally represses dissent and eviscerates freedom of speech.

U.S. policymakers have long insisted that China and Taiwan need to agree mutually and peacefully on a resolution of the status of Taiwan. The Taiwan Relations Act, which President Jimmy Carter signed into law in 1979, legally commits the U.S. to provide “such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.” While China wants to reunify with Taiwan, the situation has become complicated because Taiwan is democratic, its government supports freedom of the press and religion, and its people increasingly view themselves as culturally and politically distinct from China.

But Mr. Xi has been bellicose about the island. The People's Liberation Army has conducted exercises that rehearse a blockade and invasion of Taiwan involving missiles, drones, ships, bombers and fighter aircraft. Last month Mr. Xi warned President Trump that any U.S. missteps on Taiwan could lead to war. Chinese leaders have also indicated that one of their top requests of the Trump administration is to prevent additional U.S. arms sales to Taiwan—particularly if Washington wants a closer trade and diplomatic relationship with Beijing.

Beijing's approach is blatant extortion: a promise of greater trade in exchange for U.S. appeasement on Taiwan. This threat may be working. The U.S. has held off announcing a critical \$14 billion arms deal for Taiwan that includes PAC-3 air defense missiles, National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, counterdrone systems and other materiel crucial for Taiwan's defense.

America's \$30 billion backlog of arms deliveries to Taiwan dates at least to the Biden administration. The backlog includes Harpoon coastal defense systems, M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, F-16 fighter jets and Altius drones. Taiwan's National Defense Ministry reported this year that out of 23 main U.S. defense items promised over the past 10 years, five have been completely delivered, three have been partially delivered, and 15 haven't yet been delivered.

The failure to deliver key defensive systems undermines a core logic of preventing war in the Indo-Pacific, known as deterrence by denial, which involves convincing China that it can't achieve its military or political objectives through war. Deterrence by denial hinges on providing Taiwan with the weapons and other equipment it needs to defend itself—and thus deter Chinese aggression.

In addition, arms sales and deliveries are a tangible signal of U.S. political commitment to Taiwan and U.S. credibility in a region where countries are worried about China's growing capabilities and intentions. U.S. delays have caused concern in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and other regional countries about U.S. commitment.

Mr. Xi and the Communist Party have ordered the People's Liberation Army to be ready to conduct a successful invasion of Taiwan by next year. The U.S. is delivering

roughly \$4 billion of arms to Taiwan a year, which means that it could take a decade at the current pace to deliver all promised aid. That is too late to help Taiwan.

The solution is straightforward. The Trump administration needs to approve the \$14 billion arms package and accelerate delivery of the promised \$30 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. Otherwise, the U.S. will undermine deterrence in the region and increase the prospect for war.

Mr. Jones is president of the Defense and Security Department at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and author of “The American Edge: The Military Tech Nexus and the Sources of Great Power Dominance.”