

Washington approves large arms package to Taiwan

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The Pentagon has announced that the US State Department approved an arms sale to Taiwan on Monday worth over \$2.2 billion. The deal is broken up into two packages with additional sales likely to come. It is also one of the largest between Washington and Taipei and serves to deepen US preparations for war with China.

The first part of the deal is worth an estimated \$2 billion and includes 108 M1A2T Abrams tanks, machine guns, and heavy transport vehicles. The second part includes 250 Block I-92 Stinger missiles valued at an estimated \$223.56 million. Taiwan confirmed on June 6 that it had submitted a request for the weaponry. Taiwan's Defense Ministry also stated at the time that it sought to purchase 1,240 TOW missiles and 409 Javelin anti-tank missiles, which would increase the value of the deal to \$2.6 billion.

Taiwanese presidential spokesman Chang Tun-han stated after the deal's approval, "Taiwan will speed up investment on defence and continue to deepen security ties with the United States and countries with similar ideas."

The Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) has also notified Congress of the deal, with US lawmakers able to raise objections within 30 days. None is likely to do so, indicating the broad support in US ruling circles for the increased militarization of the Asia-Pacific region and preparation for war with China.

In March, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen stated that her government hoped to secure tanks and fighter jets from the US, without giving details. A *Bloomberg* article citing sources in the White House stated that advisors to Trump urged Taipei to submit a request for 66 F-16 fighter jets. Tsai said, "We will keep on strengthening our self-defence capabilities (and we

will also keep on being a contributor to regional peace."

The statements by Tsai make clear that Taiwan is lined up squarely behind the United States and is prepared to go to war against the Chinese mainland while painting Beijing as the aggressor.

China's Foreign Ministry pointed to this as it denounced the latest deal and called on Washington to "immediately cancel" it. Spokesman Geng Shuang stated the deal "grossly interferes in China's internal affairs and undermines China's sovereignty and security interests."

The US is trying to offset its relative economic decline by encircling China militarily and attempting to force Beijing to accept a trade deal that subordinates it to US interests. Since Trump came to office, his administration has sharply increased pressure on Beijing, with White House sources telling the *Wall Street Journal* in June that Trump "sees the value in using Taiwan as a bargaining chip in his (trade) talks with China."

In criticizing the proposed sale as insufficient, the online military magazine made revealing comments about the actual US military plans for the island. The magazine stated the weaponry "would be fine if Taiwan were preparing for a ground war, but the real conflict if China invades will be at sea and in the air. Taiwan should focus on acquiring the most cost-effective methods of stopping a Chinese invading force before it lands."

In reality, the US is preparing not for a defensive war, but for an aggressive attack on the Chinese mainland, a short distance across the Taiwan Strait. Due to its strategic location, Taiwan would become a base of operations in any US war against China. In the 1950s, US General Douglas MacArthur referred to Taiwan as

an unsinkable aircraft carrier—a key asset in any conflict with China.

Washington has tried to conceal this fact. The US Defense Department’s DSCA claimed that this latest weapons sale will not alter the military balance in the region. Even if that were true, the sale is part of a broader military buildup among US allies in the region.

This latest deal with Taiwan is the fourth significant military agreement under the Donald Trump administration. In June 2017, Washington sold Taiwan \$1.42 billion worth of missiles and torpedoes. In September 2018, it sold \$330 million worth of spare parts for fighter jets, and a deal involving pilot training was completed in April of this year for \$500 million.

During a visit to Japan in May, Trump confirmed plans to sell 105 F-35 stealth fighter jets to Tokyo. Washington also intends to sell 70 F-35s to Australia and 40 to South Korea. Zhou Chenming, a Beijing analyst, stated at the time, “This is bound to upset the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, given the large quantity of warplanes ordered by Japan.”

These increased sales have been part of Trump’s agenda since coming to office, but they were codified in the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, which Trump signed into law at the end of last year. It calls for increased transfers of military weaponry to Taiwan and other countries and high-level official visits between Washington and Taipei. The Taiwan Travel Act, also signed last year, similarly ratified high-level contact between the two.

As a result, Beijing is growing increasingly concerned that Washington is in effect violating its adherence to the One China policy, which states that Taiwan is a part of China. In the latest example, the US Defense Department provocatively referred to Taiwan as a “country” in its June 1 “Indo-Pacific Strategy Report.” Since the “1992 Consensus” Beijing and Taipei have agreed to the One China policy, though accept differing interpretations on which is the legitimate ruler of China.

The Trump administration’s stoking of tensions with Beijing is the intensification of the previous Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia.” Washington has enflamed tensions over long-simmering territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea and goaded Beijing by sending warships through the region, including increasingly sending warships through the

Taiwan Strait. Beijing has repeatedly stated that it will use military force if Taiwan ever declares independence or if other military red lines are crossed, such as if a US warship were to dock at a Taiwanese port.

These reckless US moves run the risk of a catastrophic war breaking out in the Asia-Pacific, one that would involve two nuclear-armed powers.



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