

US to sell drones to Taiwan in provocative intelligence-sharing plan

Peter Symonds
11 June 2023

The *Financial Times* (FT) revealed last week that plans are well underway in the US to sell four MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones to Taiwan to provide intelligence on Chinese naval movements, to be shared in real time with both the American and Japanese militaries. The US Department of Defence approved the sale of the drones in May but has not commented on the intelligence-sharing arrangement, reportedly disclosed to the FT by four sources.

The decision is a further step in integrating Taiwan into US war plans against China and underscores the absurdity of US claims that it still upholds a “One China” policy under which it de facto recognises Taiwan as part of China. Washington is not only supplying military hardware, as it has done in the past, but drawing Taipei into its framework of military alliances in the Indo-Pacific directed against China.

The US is well aware that this move is highly provocative. “The sharing of data between Japan and Taiwan, between Taiwan and the Philippines, between the US and all three of them, is so crucial, but it’s also one of the big taboos because China will see it as escalatory,” an unnamed senior US military official told the FT.

According to the article, the US manufacturer, General Atomics, is due to deliver the drones to Taiwan, starting in 2025. The MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones are used for the surveillance of warships and submarines but are also able to carry what the manufacturer terms “a kinetic payload” that could include missiles and anti-submarine torpedoes.

If the surveillance from the Taiwanese drones were linked to the intelligence networks of the US and its allies, it would provide what is euphemistically called “a common operational picture”—that is, an overview of military operations in the Taiwan Strait and

surrounding waters in the event of war with China.

Following the publication of the FT article, a US defence department spokesman declared that the US was “not currently planning to facilitate MQ-9 data sharing between Taiwan and Japan.” He did not deny, however, that information sharing is taking place between the US and Taiwan and would be greatly augmented by the drones.

Taiwan’s defence ministry declared it had “not yet been informed of plans to share real-time data from naval reconnaissance drones with the US and Japan.” However, National Security Bureau (NSB) director Tsai Ming-yen told the island’s legislature in late April that Taiwan was already sharing intelligence with the top-level Five Eyes spy network that includes the US, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Tsai explained that Taiwan was upgrading its computer technology to “connect with the Five Eyes alliance through a confidential system.” Questioned about the intelligence exchanges, Tsai said Taiwan was already sharing intelligence “in real time” and had allocated funding to create an “instant online reporting and communication mechanism” to the five countries.

While Japan is not a member of the Five Eyes network at present, it already shares intelligence with the US and discussion is underway to upgrade the relationship. In January, an article entitled “How Might Japan Join the Five Eyes?” published by the US think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, noted: “There are increasing calls from inside both governments—and outside government—for the United States and Japan to increase intelligence sharing since war planning requires a much higher level of information sharing between militaries.” That also raised the question of Japan joining the Five Eyes, it stated.

As the US intensifies its provocations and preparations for conflict with China, the integration of intelligence and closer military cooperation with Taiwan, in particular, has come to the fore in strategic and military circles.

The right-wing US magazine, *National Interest*, in February noted the significance of the appointment of Tsai as NSB director, with wide international experience as well as in Taiwan's own intelligence operations. His ascension, it declared, "could reflect a shift in Taiwan's approach to intelligence collection and sharing, which has responded to escalating and rapidly evolving threats to the island's security."

In an interview with the *Nikkei* last July, US congressman Steve Chabot said: "I do think that we need to coordinate military intelligence very closely and very cooperatively, between the United States and Taiwan." He noted that the two sides were already working together in this area, but "that needs to be improved and developed even further." Chabot is co-chair of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus and was ranking Republican on a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asia.

The US focus on Taiwan is not accidental. Biden, following Trump, has deliberately undermined the One China policy by forging closer diplomatic and military ties with Taipei and stepping up provocative naval passages through the sensitive Taiwan Strait. While China has emphasised that it seeks reunification with Taiwan by peaceful means, it has not ruled out the use of military force should Taipei formally declared independence from Beijing.

Responding to the FT's revelations last week, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called on the US and Japan to "stop creating military tensions and causing trouble for stability in the Taiwan Strait... We firmly oppose military contact between Taiwan and countries that have established diplomatic ties with China."

The US, however, has no intention of easing tensions with China, which it regards as the chief threat to its global economic and strategic dominance. Just as it goaded Russia into launching its invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration is seeking to provoke a conflict with China by deliberately inflaming what is arguably the most dangerous flashpoint in Asia—relations across the Taiwan Strait.

The moves to establish real-time intelligence sharing between Taiwan and the US and its allies to create a "common operational picture" is a warning of the very advanced character of the Pentagon's plans for war with China—a conflict with disastrous consequences for humanity as a whole.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact