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Imbalances and Balance Theories: Israel, Taiwan, and The United States

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Abstract. This article highlights the imbalance in simple balance theories addressing the attitudes of allies and adversaries.

Many political analysts in the United States (US) have been attacking Israel for installing advanced aerial reconnaissance radar in a Russian-built aircraft for the People's Republic of China (PRC)--and planning to install several more. The argument is that if Israel engages in behavior that increases PRC military prowess in relation to that of Taiwan, the US should not continue to maintain a qualitative military edge for Israel in the Middle East. The rationales behind the argument suggest that, if Israel does something against US interests in one part of the world, then the US should not do something for Israeli interests in another. Such rationales are seemingly balanced but mask a host of imbalances.

First, increasing PRC military prowess in relation to that of Taiwan may not necessarily be against US interests. Too little PRC prowess might embolden Taiwan to approach ever closer some functional or formal independence--a step that the PRC government has vowed would lead to war with consequences difficult to anticipate. Increasing PRC prowess, then, might actually be in US interests.

Second, Israeli arms and weapons-related exports allow the development and maintenance of domestic industries supporting Israeli security interests. Israel can then need and request less aid and other resources from the US. The US sanctioning of Israel then becomes the consequence of Israeli acts in the US interest.

Third, the installation of radars can lead to a closer intelligence relationship between the PRC and Israel. This relationship can lead to better information on the part of the Israelis as to the weapons and missile proliferation activities of North Korea. This information is crucial to one of the primary national security interests of the US and suggests the need to reassess cooling the relationship.

Fourth, even if Israeli actions are tipping the military balance significantly in the PRC's favor in relation to Taiwan and contrary to US interests, is this contrariness more significant than what would result from contributing to a loss of Israel's military edge in the Middle East? After all, the US presence in the Middle East is more than just social work and mindless behavior directed by political action committees and--following US Presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan--an associated amen corner.

In the world of international security, arguments based on simple balance models mask imbalances even as they serve as handy propagandistic vehicles to garner political support. However, such support further tips the balance of an argument away from a fair assessment of strategic, moral, and domestic concerns. (See Braithwaite, V. (1998). The value balance model of political evaluations. *British Journal of Psychology*, 89, 223-247; China denies it bought Israeli radar. (November 17, 1999). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Lavine, H., Thomsen, C.J., & Gonzales, M.H. (1997). The development of interattitudinal consistency: The shared-consequence model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 735-749; Myers, S. L. (November 11, 1999). U.S. seeks to curb Israeli arms sales to China Air Force. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Orme, W.A., Jr. (December 2, 1999). Chinese

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official visits Israeli aircraft plant. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Zinni, F.P. (1995). The sense of injustice: The effects of situation, beliefs, and identity. *Social Science Quarterly*, 76, 419-437.) (Keywords: Israel, People's Republic of China, Taiwan.)