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Military Arms to Taiwan: Competing Agendas

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Abstract. This article explores competing cognitions about the advisability of the United States Government (USG) selling advanced weapons to Taiwan.

On the heels of the crisis about grounds for a People's Republic of China (PRC) military invasion of Taiwan comes another. The more recent crisis is about the advisability of the United States selling guided-missile destroyers equipped with the Aegis weapons system--among other military assets such as Patriot missiles, advanced long-range radar, diesel submarines, P-3 surveillance aircraft, and other US missiles. This crisis entails conflictual cognitions both about pertinent advisability criteria and how these criteria are to be met.

One criterion is that of a potential violation of China's national sovereignty. This criterion can be interpreted in at least three ways. First, is there a violation of the sovereignty of a "one China" entity by favoring one segment of that "one China"--Taiwan--to the detriment of the other segment--the PRC. Second, does the sovereignty violation comprise recognizing a constituent part of the PRC as a sovereign entity. Third, does the sovereign violation really comprise a violation of the national interests of a sovereign nation-state--the PRC.

A second criterion comprises the deterrent aspects of the USG selling military assets to Taiwan. Would the deployed assets--before, during, or after appropriate training of personnel--lead to an increase or decrease of the probability that the PRC would launch a military invasion of Taiwan? Calculating the probability would, in turn, depend on whether the present balance of PRC and Taiwanese forces (and those of allies and adversaries of the PRC and Taiwan) supports or detracts from deterrence--preventing a PRC military invasion of Taiwan and (to a lesser extent) a Taiwanese attack on the PRC. The calculation also would depend on how the assumed change (if any) in the balance of military forces led to an increase or decrease in Taiwan's probability of formally declaring independence, becoming the target of a military invasion of some third party (other nation-state or non-state actor), or prolonging unification negotiations or resistance to such negotiations. Still another part of the calculation would include the credibility of USG military support for Taiwan in the event of a PRC invasion of Taiwan and (to a lesser extent) a Taiwanese attack on the PRC. In the latter event, would the USG support the PRC?

A third criterion involves comparing the USG selling military assets to Taiwan in the context of germane USG legislation and formal and informal agreements between and among the PRC, Taiwan, and the PRC concerning military assets. For example, under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the USG can provide to Taiwan only defensive weapons enabling Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. But is any weapon truly defensive in nature without being potentially offensive? And how to assess the operational equivalent of sufficiency--a problem that used to bedevil USG nuclear war planners? And further is there not an implicit mechanism to continue to supply Taiwan in light of PRC military upgrades? This last question--if answered in the affirmative--seems to render a later agreement in the Reagan era not to increase the quantity or quality of arms to Taiwan as unusually suspect.

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A fourth criterion encompasses many domestic political issues in the US. These issues are exemplified by putative and actual effects on the belief systems of political supporters of Taiwan--focusing on effects on trade and investment and on anti-Communist residues and sequelae of the Cold War. As well, there are the effects on the belief systems of the PRC's political adversaries--the latter focusing on human rights, environmental and labor issues, and economic consequences. A third set of belief systems includes the PRC's supporters--especially representatives of military contractors.

In conclusion, participants in the advanced-weapons crisis conflict not only over how to "adjudicate" criteria but over which criteria take precedence in resolving the crisis. Participants might even differ in whether activist or passive strategies may more likely help achieve political objectives. In such an environment, can the legitimate security interests of the USG, the PRC, Taiwan, and all other relevant political actors be successfully addressed? (See Eckholm, E., & Myers, S.L. (March 1, 2000). Taiwan asks U.S. to let it obtain top-flight arms. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A12; Postma, A. (1999). The influence of decision criteria upon remembering and knowing in recognition memory. *Acta Psychologica*, 103, 65-76; Ruf, B.M., et al. (1998). The development of a systematic, aggregate measure of corporate social performance. *Journal of Management*, 24, 119-133; Stasser, G. (1999). A primer of social decision scheme theory: Models of group influence, competitive model-testing, and prospective modeling. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 80, 3-20; van Dijk, E., & Vermunt, R. (2000). Strategy and fairness in social decision making: Sometimes it pays to be powerless. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 36, 1-25.) (Keywords: PRC, Taiwan, Weapons Sales.)