

A Statement Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Hearing on China's Military Modernization and the Cross-Strait Balance
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I would like to thank the three Co-chairmen and the other distinguished members of the Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today. It is an honor to be invited.

In my comments today, I will focus on some basic strategic and conceptual issues about cross-Strait security trends and the challenges that China's recent military modernization creates for the deterrence strategies of Taiwan and the United States. I will concentrate on the challenges posed by the mainland's developments of weapons systems and doctrines that might be used in a coercion strategy. For our purposes, by coercion I mean a strategy that would involve military operations that fall short of an all-out invasion and occupation of Taiwan or the launching of a full-scale war with the United States. Such a strategy would target Taiwan and any foreign powers that were to come to Taiwan's assistance for the primary purpose of altering those actors' political calculations regarding relations across the Taiwan Strait. Such coercive scenarios are not the only security issues to consider looking forward, but I see them as the most likely scenarios for conflict across the Taiwan Strait in the next several years.

From a strategic point of view, the mainland's quickly expanding coercive capabilities complicate greatly the ability of Taiwan and the United States to maintain a robust and credible deterrent against mainland attack on the island. That deterrent will only be weakened further if Taiwan were to prove unable or unwilling to make energetic efforts to improve its own defense capabilities at home and in coordination with the United States. In a nutshell, all things being equal a Taiwan that appears weak at home or at odds with the United States in its security policy toward the mainland is a Taiwan that is more vulnerable to mainland coercion.

It should be noted that Taiwan recently has adopted some impressive reform programs in its national security establishment and has made some important adjustments in its defense policy in the face of increased Chinese threats to targets like airstrips and command and control facilities. It has also wisely agreed to purchase Kidd-class destroyers offered to Taiwan by President Bush in Spring 2001. Those ships will provide greater defense at sea and against air attacks on the island.

What is potentially quite dangerous to U.S. interests in East Asia looking forward, however, is the recent political in-fighting in Taiwan over weapons acquisitions and the resulting paralysis in Taipei on procurement of several other weapons systems approved for sale by the U.S. government in 2001. Above and beyond the inability to procure these particular weapons systems at this time, the political deadlock on national security

policy in Taiwan could become a dangerous precedent over the longer term, rendering Taiwan unable to respond in a timely fashion to fast-paced changes across the Taiwan Strait and sending a signal of weakness to the mainland regarding Taiwan's military power. What would be potentially of even greater importance would be the inability of Washington and Taipei to cooperate effectively in providing for Taiwan's defense. All things being equal, it is fair to assume that the less stable Washington's security relations with Taiwan seem to be, the less dangerous the option of coercive force will appear in Beijing.

This analysis holds true even if one accepts, as do I, that the current leadership on the mainland would very much like to avoid the use of force against Taiwan if possible. Beijing undeniably has a range of economic and political reasons to avoid conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Such a desire to avoid conflict does not, however, preclude the possibility of a mainland attack on the island. It is neither a coincidence nor a function of bureaucratic inertia on the mainland that, since 1999, Beijing has been intensively developing the capabilities to attack Taiwan militarily.

In my opinion, under certain extreme conditions the mainland would attack Taiwan regardless of the balance of military forces across the Strait or across the Pacific. In other words, there are circumstances in which the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would rather fight and lose militarily than to remain idle in the face of what they would define as Taiwan's provocations. This means that, under these circumstances, any strategy of deterrence adopted by the United States and Taiwan, no matter how robust, would simply be ineffective in preventing conflict. For example, I believe the CCP elites would almost certainly use force if Taipei passed a constitutional revision in Taiwan that would create permanent legal independence for the island from the Chinese nation. In my opinion, the deterrence strategies of the U.S. and Taiwan would not likely play a role in preventing a military attack in such a scenario.

The use of force by the PRC is still quite possible, however, even under less extreme circumstances in which Taiwan has not made such a legal declaration of independence. In those circumstances, the deterrent strategies of the United States and Taiwan will play an important role in either increasing or decreasing the likelihood of conflict across the Strait. Under those more complex political conditions, CCP leaders would have to undergo a more careful assessment of the costs and benefits of using coercive force either to alter trends in cross-Strait relations that Beijing finds dangerous over the longer-term or to gain acquiescence in Taiwan to mainland political demands. Calculations of the military balance across the Taiwan Strait and across the Pacific would almost certainly be an important part of mainland elites' decision process about whether the use of coercive force is preferable to more peaceful alternative policies (although calculations of the military balance will hardly be the sole determinant of mainland security policy, even under these circumstances).

In deterring the PRC from the use of force against Taiwan in such circumstances, Washington faces a challenge in balancing the two necessary aspects of any deterrence policy: 1) credible threats of effective military response if the target of the deterrent threat

were to act belligerently and; 2) credible assurances that the target nation's core interests will not be harmed if the target complies with the deterring nation's demands and refrains from belligerence. People commonly associate deterrence with only the first part of the equation above. This is a core conceptual error about coercive diplomacy that is quite dangerous when applied to analysis of cross-Strait relations. Deterrence is a bargain with the target, albeit a very tough bargain. The United States cannot expect the CCP to forego the use of force under conditions in which the CCP elite believes that to do so would threaten China's core national security interests or, perhaps more important, the stability of one-party rule in the PRC. Taiwan is one of those core policy issues that, unfortunately, CCP elites believe touch on both China's national security interests and state legitimacy. So, in order to deter effectively, the United States needs to assure the mainland that the purpose of U.S. security policies toward Taiwan is not to promote and protect a Taiwan independence movement on the island.

The difficulty for U.S. strategy is finding a way to balance these two often contradictory aspects of U.S. deterrence strategy. That difficulty increases sharply as the mainland increases its capabilities to attack Taiwan coercively. With the fast-paced increase in the military capacity of the PRC to coerce Taiwan since 1999, the United States has responded with offers of arms sales to Taiwan and increased defense cooperation with the military in Taiwan. Such policies are generally appropriate, but they carry an unintended cost, especially given trends in Taiwan national identity politics in the early part of this decade. All things being equal, many elites in Beijing tend to view these U.S. policies, especially increased defense coordination, as political signals that promote Taiwan independence by suggesting unconditional U.S. support to Taiwan regardless of Taiwan's political behavior toward the mainland. In other words these policies undercut the assurance part of the deterrence equation even as they bolster the credibility of threats.

The undercutting of assurances is consequential because, at any given time, long-term trend analysis about politics on the island and Taipei's relations with foreign powers will likely be a key part of mainland elites' calculations about whether or not to use force coercively in the near-term. Under conditions that fall short of an outright declaration of Taiwan's permanent legal independence from the Chinese nation, fears about future trends on Taiwan and in U.S.-Taiwan relations would be one of the most likely reasons that CCP elites would choose to use force in a limited fashion. If PRC strategic history is any guide at all, CCP elites could decide to use force to slow, alter, or halt trends that they believe are simply heading in the direction of such a declaration, particularly if Taiwan and its foreign security partners were to appear less prepared to defend the island in the present than they would likely be in the future.

There is no simple solution to this problem. The threat of credible and effective military response to an attack requires Taiwan and the United States to adopt defense policies that will almost by necessity worry mainland elites about long-term trends in the U.S.-Taiwan relationship. In order to deter attack and prepare to fight if deterrence fails, Taiwan will need to have more sophisticated weapons, command and control systems, etc., and the United States military will need to consult more closely with the Taiwan military about

plans for actual military operations in case of conflict. Not to do so in the face of growing PRC military power would simply be negligent.

An important factor that complicates deterrence of mainland coercive attacks against Taiwan is that, in most scenarios for conflict, the mainland is likely to adopt coercive strategies toward Taiwan and U.S. forces in theater instead of full-frontal assaults on U.S. forces or amphibious invasion of the island. The goal of such attacks would be to affect the political psychology on the island and to weaken relations between Washington and Taipei and perhaps between Washington and its regional allies. Such coercive attacks understandably might seem less frightening than full-scale invasion across the Strait or the PRC's launching of a toe-to-toe war with the United States, but from a policy perspective, PRC coercive strategies actually pose much greater challenges to the deterrence strategies of the United States and Taiwan than would those more aggressive strategies. Since the target of a coercion strategy is the mindset of the leaders and populations of the states in question, not the full destruction of the enemy military, the threshold of capabilities necessary to coerce is much lower than it would be for a full-scale invasion. By logical extension, the degree of demonstrated military superiority necessary for the defender to deter coercive tactics credibly is generally higher than it would be to deter a full-scale war. The defenders need to demonstrate not only that they can successfully fight and defeat attacking forces over time, but that they can do so at tolerably low costs to their armed forces, economies, and civilian populations. Especially given Taiwan's economic dependence on the outside world and its geographic proximity to the mainland, this is a tall order for Taiwan and, by association, the United States.

For these reasons, Taipei and Washington cannot afford to be so concerned about the second part of an effective deterrence strategy, credible assurances, that they forget to tend to the first part of such a strategy, credible threats to respond effectively in case of attack. In a nutshell, there is no simple arms control solution to the security dilemma created by recent trends in PRC military modernization. The development of PRC doctrines of coercion revealed by recent military writings on the mainland, the fast-paced acquisition of military capabilities to support such doctrines, and the serious training of PLA forces to carry out these missions all suggest the need for vigorous military preparation in Taiwan. The United States and Taiwan will need to respond to the growing challenge posed by military developments on the mainland while still remaining attentive to the dangers associated with undercutting assurances, as outlined above.

On the face of it the twin and rather contradictory requirements of deterrence might seem to create an impossible dilemma for U.S. policy. Fortunately, they do not. The U.S. government currently seems fully aware of how to resolve the dilemma and has attempted to do so through a tough defense posture combined with clear and reassuring diplomacy. On the latter score, the Bush Administration has publicly and repeatedly stated that the United States does not support Taiwan independence and has criticized certain provocative political proposals by top officials in Taiwan as unilateral changes in the status quo that are unwelcome in Washington. In my opinion, the Bush Administration has, thereby, helped reduce markedly the political controversy in Beijing regarding U.S. defense policies toward Taiwan, including the offer of a very large arms

package in 2001. One can never eliminate Beijing's concerns about the U.S.-Taiwan relationship entirely but those concerns can and have been limited by a well managed diplomatic policy. By adopting such a policy, Washington has bolstered assurances in Beijing that the goal of U.S. defense policies toward Taiwan is not to promote Taiwan independence. In the process, the administration has bolstered deterrence of conflict both by reducing the intensity of Beijing elites' reactions to U.S. defense policies toward Taiwan and, perhaps more basically, by helping shape a domestic political environment in Taiwan that reduces the likelihood that Taipei will now or in the near future take legal or political actions that might provoke a mainland military response.

The biggest problem at present, however, is no longer on the assurance side of the equation. Taiwan's security is threatened by Beijing's quickly expanding coercive capabilities---including submarines, cruise missiles, conventionally tipped ballistic missiles with high degrees of accuracy, information warfare capabilities, advanced air defense systems, and serious training programs that have accompanied these systems' acquisition. The challenge now is to maintain a credible threat of effective military response by Taipei, Washington, or both if: 1) CCP leaders were to become more aggressive and to pursue forced unification (as opposed to simply the prevention of permanent Taiwanese independence); or 2) if Beijing elites were to perceive or misperceive strategic or political realities across the Strait in ways that lead them to believe that the island is still heading toward an eventual declaration of legal independence from the Chinese nation down the road and that Washington and Taipei were in a worse political or military position to respond to a PRC attack at the time than they would be in the future (for example if U.S. forces were tied down elsewhere).

Alongside the mainland military build-up itself, among the most dangerous trends at present in cross-Strait relations is the relatively anemic effort being made by Taiwan to bolster its defenses in the face of the growing military challenge it faces. As stated above, Taiwan has done some impressive things to bolster its defense but in general Taiwan's response to the new challenges posed by the mainland has been too weak. The weakness is illustrated by several factors: 1) a falling regular defense budget both in real terms and as a percentage of GDP from 1998 to the present, a period in which the mainland's official defense budget has more than doubled in real terms; 2) the related inability or refusal of President Chen Shui-bian's administration to include in the regular defense budget a large portion of the arms sales package offered by the Bush Administration in April 2001 (for example, excluded from the regular budget proposals so far have been 8 diesel submarines, 12 P-3C maritime patrol aircraft and 12 minesweeping helicopters); 3) the recent refusal of opposition parties who control the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan to even allow floor debate of the special budget designed by President Chen's cabinet to cover the costs of many of those items in that arms sales package (including the submarines and the P-3C aircraft); and 4) the most recent rejection by the opposition parties of the concept of transferring the cost of PAC-3 missile defense batteries from the special budget to the regular budget, a rejection that seems cynically based on a rather strange and disingenuous interpretation of a failed referendum on missile defense held during the 2004 Presidential election. In a nutshell, there is a general sense on the island that defense policy is a political football in the tense battles between the island's pan-

Green political parties (mainly the Democratic Progressive Party and the Taiwan Solidarity Union) and pan-Blue political parties (mainly the Kuomintang and People's First Party). On the mainland, this cannot be seen as anything but a sign of long-term weakness in the island's security policy.

What is perhaps even more dangerous still from the perspective of deterrence is that the unwillingness of Taiwan to purchase these systems has strained relations between Washington and Taipei. On both the threat and the assurance side of the deterrence equation, there is nothing that mainland elites pay more careful attention to than trends in U.S.-Taiwan relations. While the development of an apparently unconditional alliance commitment to Taiwan (a blank check) would dangerously undercut U.S. assurances to the mainland, the existence of real friction and lack of coordination in the U.S.-Taiwan security relationship can undercut the credibility of deterrent threats. In my opinion, we are not yet at a point of crisis on this score, as U.S.-Taiwan military relations have improved recently in some respects, including the recent stationing on Taiwan of U.S. Army Colonel Al Willner, a highly talented Foreign Affairs Officer. But the problems mentioned above certainly strain relations in ways that threaten both Taiwan's security and U.S. national security interests looking forward.

As my colleague and fellow panelist Dan Blumenthal argued in a recent publication, there is plenty of blame to go around for these problems both in Taiwan and the United States. The responsibility should not all be placed on the shoulders of President Chen. Although they did implement many needed defense reforms, the Chen Administration and its immediate predecessor, the administration of Pres. Lee Teng-hui, should be held responsible for overseeing the lowering of defense budgets since 1998 in the face of a growing military threat. The more recent policies of the opposition pan-Blue alliance in the Legislature are arguably the biggest problem at present. Those parties seem to be cynically refusing any cooperation with the Chen Administration including on bills related to the island's long-term security. The Bush Administration can also be held partially responsible for introducing in 2001 such a large arms sales package that included very expensive systems like diesel submarines that the United States does not currently produce. Even though all of the items had previously been requested by Taipei, the size and shape of the package offered complicated the Chen Administration's ability and willingness to push arms procurement bills through the Legislature. Taiwan's greatest strength is that it is a democracy but Washington arguably needs to be more sensitive to how democratic political constraints in a divided polity and society affect defense policy on the island. This will make Washington more realistic about what procurement policies can reasonably be expected of Taipei in the future.

In my opinion, one of the most disappointing aspects of the recent problems with approval of the weapons acquisitions is that some of the systems offered by Washington in April 2001 that would be most affordable and seem to me to be potentially most useful to Taiwan in deterring or countering mainland coercion strategies have often been lost in the public discussion and debate over the transfer of much more expensive and potentially less valuable systems. Those highly needed and relatively inexpensive systems include minesweeping helicopters and P-3C patrol aircraft. It is my

understanding that the 12 minesweeping helicopters included in the original arms package offered to Taiwan are currently not included in either the cabinet's special arms acquisition bill or the official defense budget proposals. Given recent PRC doctrinal writings about the possibility of using sea mines as part of a naval blockade and the severely limited mine-clearing capabilities of the U.S. Navy, this seems a very bad outcome. P-3C aircraft have proven to be effective in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and would be very useful to Taiwan in tracking and countering the mainland's growing fleet of submarines, a fleet that poses potential challenges not just to Taiwan's navy, but to the United States Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces. The P-3 aircraft would be more expensive than the helicopters, but based on some estimates available from media sources, the cost of 12 helicopters and 12 P-3 aircraft combined would likely be at most somewhere between \$3-4 billion US dollars, a fraction of the likely cost of procuring 8 diesel submarines and apparently somewhat less than the amount needed to procure the PAC-3 missile defense batteries currently sought by the Taiwan Ministry of Defense. So, it seems a shame that these systems have received less attention in public discussions than either the submarines or the PAC-3 batteries.

Given the missile threat to Taiwan, one can imagine useful roles for PAC-3 missile defense systems as point defense for specific targets. For example, such systems might complicate any mainland attempt to deal a political knockout blow to Taiwan by neutralizing key leadership or military sites early in a conflict with a limited conventional missile strike (a decapitation strike). Such a quick, limited strike might seem attractive in Beijing under certain circumstances because of the speed and stealth with which it could be launched and because a limited strike might seem less abrasive to China's neighbors and U.S. allies than attacks of a larger scope. That said, the likely ability of the mainland to saturate the PAC-3 defenses in all but the most limited strikes and the high opportunity costs of spending on these systems instead of systems like P3-Cs might suggest that either Taiwan, the United States, or both need to reconsider the priority apparently afforded missile defenses over systems like the P-3C aircraft (it would, of course, be good if Taiwan could acquire both systems, but I am assuming that there will be limited budgets and therefore stark tradeoffs in what is purchased).

If this type of analysis holds true for PAC-3 missile defenses it seems true in spades for diesel submarines. These systems will be very expensive and difficult to procure and may not come on line for Taiwan for a very long time (current cost estimates for 8 submarines range as high as \$12 billion US dollars and even these estimates might be too low). It is my understanding that, in the hands of most militaries, including Taiwan's, submarines would not be among the most efficient ways to counter mainland submarines. Moreover, those mainland submarines arguably would be the most dangerous elements of a mainland coercive strategy involving blockades of Taiwan and/or the blunting and delay of U.S. naval intervention into a cross-Strait conflict. Taiwan submarines would be very useful in attacking other mainland naval assets and for gathering intelligence, but the question remains whether that added value warrants the stark tradeoffs Taiwan faces in purchasing submarines. In a nutshell, the opportunity costs for Taiwan in pursuing diesel submarines, in my opinion, seem prohibitively high for Taiwan's defense. Moreover, the acquisition of the submarines might encourage an offensive military strategy by the

island that would, arguably, not serve the interests of the island or the United States. If adopted, offensive strategies would likely alienate U.S. and allied opinion from Taiwan as the lives and interests of actors friendly to Taiwan would be put at risk and Taiwan might appear less the victim and more the aggressor in any military standoff.

Assuming the President of the United States did indeed decide to intervene in a cross-Strait conflict, Taiwan's lack of sufficient preparations for anti-submarine warfare and mine-clearing operations would pose real challenges for the United States. If, after an initial mainland attack, Taiwan were able to hold out militarily and psychologically for a sufficient amount of time for US forces to intervene, elites on Taiwan would expect the U.S. military to help protect Taiwan's shipping and navy against PRC submarines. Although the United States is by far the best in the world at anti-submarine operations, these operations are still very difficult and resource intensive. Any help that the United States might be able to get from Taiwan in tracking PRC submarines therefore would seem very useful. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the United States has not traditionally spent a lot of its resources on maritime mine-clearing operations and PRC strategists are well aware of the difficulties sea mines pose for even the most advanced navies.

The United States has traditionally relied in part on allies, such as NATO countries and Japan, to assist in mine clearing operations and in ASW operations. Japan, for example, has many more mine-clearing ships stationed permanently in the Pacific than does the United States and the transfer to the Pacific of U.S. mine-clearing assets would take a good deal of time. Japan also has an advanced ASW capability and has successfully tracked Chinese submarines in the recent past. Especially if Taiwan were incapable of helping the United States sufficiently in these areas in a timely fashion, there might be a temptation in the future for Washington to ask Tokyo to assist directly in both ASW and mine-clearing operations near the island. While general Japanese support for any operations around Taiwan would be very important to the United States, particularly if the conflict were protracted, I believe it would be a mistake to ask Japan to intervene in a cross-Strait conflict in direct combat roles such as ASW and mine-clearing. There are two reasons. First, Japan will be quite likely to refuse, even under conditions in which it is willing to supply base access, logistics, and intelligence assistance to the United States. This refusal would place a major strain on one of the most important U.S. security relationships in the world. Second, if Japan were indeed to accept these roles, this could be even worse for the United States. Given the emotional history of Japanese imperialism in China and the ethnic animosity it has created against Japan among Chinese elites and the general populace, Japanese intervention in combat roles would increase greatly the risk of both near-term escalation and long-term instability in Sino-Japanese relations, neither of which are in the U.S. national security interest.

Similarly, reliance on offensive strategies by Taiwan also would carry potential costs to U.S. alliances and long-term stability. It will be difficult enough for the United States to keep its allies on board in a conflict over Taiwan, even in circumstances where Beijing appears clearly to be the aggressor and Taiwan the victim. If Taiwan appears either to have provoked a conflict through its political decisions or to have fueled escalation through the implementation of punitive or preemptive military strategies against the

mainland, the United States would likely find itself dangerously alone in the region in the near term and, perhaps, over the longer term as well.

To sum up, Taiwan needs to enhance its defensive capabilities against mainland attack while eschewing highly offensive strategies aimed at the mainland. Such a robust, defensive strategy will bolster deterrence by enhancing the credible threat that Taiwan can withstand and respond to any mainland attacks on the island for at least long enough for the United States to intervene if the President were to so choose. At the same time Taiwan needs to avoid asserting permanent sovereign independence from the Chinese nation, a move that will almost certainly provoke a conflict across the Taiwan Strait, regardless of the military balance, and spell likely ruin for the island even if the United States and Taiwan were able to prevail militarily in such a conflict. The United States has a key role in this process in terms of enhancing Taiwan's defense capabilities to bolster its deterrent threat, discouraging the adoption by Taiwan of counterproductive and potentially escalatory offensive strategies targeting the mainland, and dissuading Taiwan from adopting legal postures on sovereignty issues that might provoke a conflict that nobody, including Beijing, is presently seeking.

The Bush Administration has adopted an admirable deterrence strategy toward cross-Strait relations overall and it has done so at a challenging time, when politics on Taiwan have been changing quickly and PRC coercive capabilities have increased sharply. On the side of enhancing credible deterrence Washington has made strong commitments to assist Taiwan in bolstering its own defenses, has warned the mainland repeatedly against the use of force to settle differences across the Strait, has enhanced U.S. capabilities in the Pacific, and has improved defense ties with Japan. On the assurance side of the equation, the Administration has publicly and repeatedly distanced itself from and criticized political statements by leaders in Taiwan suggesting that Taiwan is already permanently and legally independent of the Chinese nation or that it should achieve such a status through constitutional reform. By so doing, the Administration has successfully reassured the mainland to the extent possible that the goal of U.S. strategy toward Taiwan is not to support permanent Taiwan independence from the Chinese nation. At the same time, the Administration has also limited the political space on Taiwan for political actors who would pursue such independence through constitutional reform.

It seems safe to assume that Washington will not fundamentally alter this strategy and that Taiwan political realities will not suddenly shift in a way that will allow for a formal declaration of Taiwan independence in the constitutional revision process over the next two or three years. The problem in cross-Strait security relations arguably, then, is not currently on the assurance side of the equation (as it arguably was just two years ago). Problems instead lie primarily on the deterrent threat side. For the reasons cited above, Taiwan needs to do more to secure itself against potential future military attack from the mainland. Even if Beijing elites are currently relatively optimistic about trends in cross-Strait relations and prefer peace to conflict across the Taiwan Strait (and I believe both conditions currently hold), there are no guarantees regarding the future. The United States needs to help in the process of assisting in Taiwan's defense by carefully examining the military threats Taiwan faces and the most appropriate response to them.

In the process of crafting workable responses, leaders in Washington need to understand what policy adjustments and budgetary expenses Taiwan domestic politics can bear.

The United States can also influence the tone of the political debate on defense in Taiwan. Washington is much more than a passive actor in Taiwan politics as the Bush Administration demonstrated before the Legislative Yuan elections in December 2004. In my interview research on Taiwan just after the election, there seemed to be a consensus across elites in the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps in Taiwan that the Bush Administration's public criticism of various statements by President Chen Shui-bian regarding Taiwan's sovereignty during the election campaign alienated moderate voters from pro-independence, pan-Green candidates for the legislature. Such voter alienation helped secure a continued majority in the legislature for the pan-Blue opposition, which opposes Taiwan's independence from the Chinese nation.

Washington might also then be able to play a positive role in helping to break the deadlock on defense procurement in Taiwan. If the United States makes it clear to Taiwan's public that foot-dragging on defense procurements is harmful to U.S.-Taiwan relations overall, this might have some impact on the future calculations or political fortunes of legislators currently stonewalling on defense spending bills. In such an instance, the United States would not be weighing in on one side or another in an election, but rather simply presenting clearly and publicly U.S. security interests and letting Taiwan's democracy process that information, as it apparently did in December 2004. It would likely help Washington's leverage in such an effort if the United States were to reconsider, in consultation with Taiwan elites, the apparently prohibitively large set of defense items that have been on the table since April 2001. Otherwise, domestic accusations in Taiwan about U.S. profiteering and lack of American understanding of Taiwanese realities, however unfair, might continue to stick and thereby assist politically those on the island who would choose not to respond seriously to the growing mainland military challenge.