

US Arms Sales Policy towards Taiwan since the August 17 Communiqué

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Abstract

US foreign military sales policy have political, military, and economical purposes. Through arms sales to Taiwan, Washington could indicate that the US is not abandoning Taiwan even though no diplomatic relations have existed since 1979. In its military aspect, Washington could express concerns, through the maintenance of a balance of power in the Taiwan Strait, that the future of Taiwan be settled peacefully by the Chinese themselves. Last but not least, the US has economic interests in keeping US military and industrial corporations competitive in a shrinking global arms market

Even though the US signed the August 17 Communiqué with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and pledged to reduce its arms sales to Taiwan, Washington has taken steps to compensate Taipei's grievances since 1982. For example, the US has agreed to assist Taiwan to develop the Ching-kuo Indigenous Defensive Fighter through technology transfer and to sell new types of weapon system to replace those in Taiwan's inventory that are no longer being produced. President Bush's decision to sell F-16s to Taiwan reversed Washington's long-standing policy not to sell such advanced fighter aircraft to Taiwan and has triggered tensions between Beijing and Washington. The F-16 arms sale antagonizes Beijing's leaders and complicates US-PRC relations, but it has not hindered the development of cross-strait relations. The first high-ranking semi-official negotiations between Taiwan and the mainland were conducted in Singapore in April 1993, and this event indicated that Taipei and Beijing did not want the F-16 sale to become an obstacle in cross-strait relations.