

The Geopolitics, Politics, and Military Realities of the Past Year of U.S. Arms Transfers, Sales, and Authorizations to Taiwan

A Special Commissioned Report of *Real Context News* Intelligence

by Brian E. Frydenborg

August 29, 2023

I. Some Context of the U.S. Relationships with Taiwan and China

Unlike arms sales to all other foreign “entities” (a term used in large part because Taiwan receives much in U.S. arms sales but is not formally recognized as an independent country by the U.S.), arms sales to Taiwan are uniquely not covered by The Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961 and The Arms Export Control Act (AECA) of 1976, most of those handled through the *Foreign Military Sales* (FMS) program—in which the U.S. acts as an intermediary between vendors and foreign recipients and handles the sale and delivery of entire weapons systems and full support packages—and *Direct Commercial Sales* (DCS) licenses—in which U.S. vendors sell directly to foreign recipients. There are some other less common options, such as coming from existing Department of Defense stockpiles through Excess Defense Articles (EDA) provisions and Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA), the latter increasingly common in the current emergency climate and available to FMS-eligible entities. But all Taiwan arms sales are regulated by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which explicitly states that “the United States will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability” and restricts the factors that can play into the decision-making process of what to send Taiwan and when: “The President and the Congress shall determine the nature and quantity of such defense articles and services **based solely upon their judgment of the needs of Taiwan**, in accordance with procedures established by law” (emphasis added).¹

All this means that Taiwan is a special case when it comes to U.S. arms sales.

And the reasons for this are easy to understand: China is essentially the second most powerful nation on earth, thus overtly recognizing Taiwan as a fully independent, separate legal state from China could carry severe consequences.² As the last bastion of World War II-U.S.-ally Nationalist China, Taiwan held onto China’s seat on the United Nations Security Council even after it lost the Chinese Civil War in 1949, as the

¹ Christina L. Arabia, Michael J. Vassalotti, and Nathan J. Lucas, [Transfer of Defense Articles: U.S. Sale and Export of U.S.-Made Arms to Foreign Entities](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023); “[The U.S. arms sale mode of ‘Direct Commercial Sale’ influence on Taiwan Military Industry development](#)” (paper presented at International Studies Association Global South Caucus [GSCIS] Singapore, January 2015); [Foreign Military Sales FAQ](#) (Defense Security Cooperation Agency, n.d.).

² For a discussion of Russia’s power relative to China and the U.S., see my article: Brian E. Frydenborg, “[The Post-Putin World Will Be So Much Better than This One](#),” *Real Context News*, February 28, 2023.

U.S. did not recognize the Chinese Communist Party-led People's Republic of China's government in Beijing, but the Nationalist government in Taipei, Taiwan, as the legitimate Chinese government. But in the wake of The United Nations General Assembly installing the People's Republic of China in China's United Nations seats in the General Assembly and the Security Council in 1971 and around the time of Nixon's breakthrough visit to Mao's China in 1972, what would become known as the "one China" policy would emerge and come to be official U.S. policy of the Nixon Administration and every administration since.³ Following the emergence of that policy, the Carter Administration began to lay the groundwork in 1978 for formal U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Communist People's Republic of China as "China" in place of Taiwan on January 1, 1979.⁴ In response, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) later in 1979 to assure Taiwan that while it was recognizing the communist mainland Chinese government, it was not abandoning Taiwan and would empower the government in Taipei to defend itself from a military takeover at the hands of the government in Beijing with "defense articles and defense services" (e.g., arms). After a bit of wrangling, during the summer of 1982, the Reagan Administration would broaden and deepen the general "one-China" framework to include six general "assurances":

- 1.) In relation to specific language from an earlier Reagan Administration communique the same year stating a vague plan to eventually reduce and end arms sales to Taiwan with the culmination of a "peaceful," "final resolution" between Beijing and Taipei, it was stated that the U.S. had not agreed to set any specific date for ending arms sales to Taiwan.
- 2.) The U.S. had not agreed to consult the government in Beijing on any of these arms sales to the government in Taipei.
- 3.) The U.S. would not attempt to play any mediating role between Beijing and Taipei.
- 4.) The U.S. had not agreed to revise the TRA.
- 5.) The deliberately ambiguous assertion that U.S. had not changed its stance on sovereignty over Taiwan.
- 6.) The U.S. would not pressure the government in Taipei to negotiate with the government in Beijing.

These six assurances, the TRA, and three sets of communiqués—two the circumstances of which were touched on above in 1972 (Nixon Administration) and 1978 (Carter Administration) and a third in 1982 (Reagan Administration) stating U.S. policy was to support a "peaceful reunification" between Beijing and Taipei—are what the Biden Administration regards as its and America's main guidance for the "one China" policy, with the text of the "Six Assurances" clarified by Congress during the Obama Administration in 2016.⁵

³ The Learning Network, "[Oct. 25, 1971 | People's Republic of China In, Taiwan Out, at U.N.](#)," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2011; Name redacted, [China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2015); Winston Lord, Oriana Skylar Mastro, Timothy Naftali, and Douglas G. Brinkley, [President Nixon's Trip to China: Fifty Years Later](#) (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022); David Shambaugh and Robert Sutter, "[50 Years Later: Richard Nixon's Historic Visit to China](#)," *GW Today*, March 22, 2022.

⁴ Stephen Orlins, "[Lessons We Can Learn Today From President Carter's Legacy on China](#)," *The Diplomat*, March 11, 2023.

⁵ Susan V. Lawrence, [President Reagan's Six Assurances to Taiwan](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023); Caitlin Campbell, [Taiwan: Defense and Military Issues](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023).

Short of formally legally recognizing Taiwan as a fully independent country, Washington has had considerable freedom of action for decades, though as China has risen considerably in power and stature in recent years and seeks to be more assertive on the world stage, there is growing concern that, above all other issues, Taiwan may propel the U.S. and China onto a collision course resulting in war between the two most powerful countries on earth. Among the most prominent individuals who share this concern is noted scholar Graham Allison, renowned for decades for his now textbook analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis; Graham's famous analysis first appears in 1968 as a RAND Corporation paper, then in 1969 in *The American Political Science Review*, then in 1971 in a much-expanded book version, *Essence of Decision*, itself reworked in a new edition in 1999 once significant amounts of information on the event were declassified.⁶

Graham popularized what is now known as the Thucydides trap. The name of this trap refers to the fifth-century BCE ancient Greek historian Thucydides, considered the founder of the so-called "realist" international relations theory framework and who has become one of the great historians in human history for his chronicling of the great war between rising power Athens and established power Sparta ("The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made war inevitable" [1.23]).⁷ In this vein, a "Thucydides trap" refers to a situation where the rise of one power is confronted by a more established power and results in a direct war between the two powers, which Allison very much sees will be the case with China and the U.S.⁸

Not everyone is on board with the degree of concern broadcast by Allison, who is convinced war will happen unless there are "more radical changes in attitudes and actions, by leaders and publics alike, than anyone has yet imagined."⁹ While I would hardly dismiss his concerns, I find the likelihood far less:

⁶ For his Cuban Missile Crisis analyses, see Graham T. Allison: [Conceptual Models of the Cuban Missile Crisis: Rational Policy, Organization Process, and Bureaucratic Politics](#) (RAND Corporation, 1968); ["Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis,"](#) 63, no. 3 (September 1969): 689-718; [Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis](#) (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); and Graham Allison and Philip Zelickow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Reading: Longman, 1999).

⁷ Probably the best edition of Thucydides' [History of the Peloponnesian War](#) is *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to The Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Free Press, 1996). For Thucydides as the father of realist international relations theory, see Gregory Crane ["Truest Causes and Thucydidean Realisms,"](#) in his *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁸ See Graham Allison, ["The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?"](#) *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015 and his much expanded argument in his book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) along with Harvard University's Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs [companion website](#), including [case studies](#) throughout history of other Thucydides traps (12 of 16 examples in the last 500 years have led to war) and many [additional insights from Allison and various collaborators](#).

⁹ While a whole separate briefing could be written on this subject, for larger discussions of Graham's views on this and the U.S.-China Thucydides trap in general, see Alan Greeley Misenheimer, [Thucydides' Other "Traps" The United States, China, and the Prospect of "Inevitable" War](#), National War College (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2019); Richard Hanania, ["Graham Allison and the Thucydides Trap Myth,"](#) *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 13-24; Michael Desch, [War Is a Choice, Not a Trap: The Right Lessons from Thucydides](#) (Defense Priorities, 2022); Michael A. Peters, Benjamin Green, Chunxiao Mou, Stephanie Hollings, Moses Oladele Ogunniran, and Fazal Rizvi, ["US-China Rivalry and 'Thucydides' Trap': Why this is a misleading account,"](#) *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 54, no. 10 (2022): 1501-1512; Yanzhong Huang, ["The Four Traps China May Fall Into,"](#) *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 30, 2017; Jonathan Marcus, ["Could an ancient Greek](#)

for me, it is hard to see or the U.S. or China gaining much from such a conflict but it is easy to see both losing much and their economies and, indeed, societies, are terribly intertwined even if their militaries and political systems are not.

Still, while the latest caches of arms going to Taiwan from the U.S. will hardly improve, and, indeed, will at least ostensibly harm Sino-American relations, even if there will hardly be a diplomatic break or a halting of trade, this latest arms transfers between Taiwan and the U.S. are worth looking into in some detail. But it can be confusing where to start. If a sale is announced, it may literally be years before it arrives. What about gifts that are not sales that will arrive in Taiwan far earlier than sales that happened earlier? Or financial grants for Taiwan to purchase weapons? What about training and support services? I was confused by all this myself, hence my longer-than-anticipated report on the *variety* of military support the U.S. is offering Taiwan, any of which could be counted among the “latest” arms or intended/future U.S. arms transfer to Taiwan.

To understand the latest transfers, it is important to understand that there are both *sales* and other types of assistance going to Taiwan. To start, we will begin with the sales.

II. U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan and Their Implications

The Biden Administration announced it intended to seek \$1.1 billion in Foreign Military Sales of U.S. arms and support services in early September 2022. The packages announcement came at a time of heightened tension with China shortly after then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan a month earlier, which resulted in angry denunciations from Beijing and aggressive military training exercises violating Taiwanese waters and airspace, the largest military exercises in China’s history.¹⁰ While a number of public figures condemned Pelosi’s act as irresponsibly provocative, I felt China’s reaction was more kabuki performance-theater (or *xiqu*, if you will) than anything else: was much ado about very little, but Chinese President Xi Jinping felt compelled to make a very public, “strong” reaction. Still, the fact that China reacted so theatrically and so symbolically (but not in any substantive, far-reaching ways) to the peaceful visit of a senior civilian legislator who was then an eighty-two-year-old woman to me hardly projected strength, but, rather, insecurity. In any event, over a year later there still have not been any far-reaching consequences from Pelosi’s visit.¹¹

The more than \$1.1 billion in arms was the largest yet proposed by the Biden Administration and included up to 60 anti-ship Harpoon missiles for \$355 million, up to 100 Sidewinder AIM-9X Sidewinder

[have predicted a US-China conflict?](#)” *BBC*, March 25, 2019; Win McCormack, “[The Thucydides Trap: Can the United States and China avoid military conflict?](#),” *The New Republic*, March 17, 2023. The quote is from Allison’s *Atlantic* article, cited earlier.

¹⁰ Oriana Skylar Mastro, “[China’s huge exercises around Taiwan were a rehearsal, not a signal, says Oriana Skylar Mastro](#),” *The Economist*, August 10, 2022; Lily Kuo, “[China’s military extends drills near Taiwan after Pelosi trip](#),” Lily Kuo,” *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2022.

¹¹ Jennifer Hansler, “[Biden administration approves more than \\$1.1B in arms sales to Taiwan](#),” *CNN*, September 2, 2022; [U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan](#) (Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023); For more views of Pelosi’s visit, see Thomas L. Friedman, “[Why Pelosi’s Visit to Taiwan Is Utterly Reckless](#),” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2022; Jonathan Guyer, “[The drama over Nancy Pelosi’s Taiwan travel plans, briefly explained](#),” *Vox*, August 4, 2022; and Isaac Chotiner, “[The Provocative Politics of Nancy Pelosi’s Trip to Taiwan What is the House Speaker’s high-profile visit really about?](#),” *The New Yorker*, August 4, 2022.

air-to-air missiles for \$85 million, and \$655 million in logistical support for Taiwan's early-warning air-defense radar surveillance systems.¹²

As Taiwan is an island China can only attack from air and sea, such a package would greatly increase the cost of any assault against Taiwan for Beijing's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Air Force (PLAAF), to say the least. With the Japan-and-South-Korea-allied U.S. Navy protecting the waters nearby and with China having only three aircraft carriers and only several dozens or the larger types of ships (cruisers, frigates, corvettes, destroyers, and amphibious landing ships) so essential for any major amphibious assault given those U.S. and its allies' navies nearby, even after a rapid buildup, the untested navy of China's that has not seen *any* combat in decades (over forty-four years ago it had a border war in 1979 that was a *loss* to Vietnam, besides that there was just a small skirmish since then in 1988) remains vulnerable. This is especially the case after seeing the damage that Ukraine—which barely has a navy of its own—has been able to do to the Russian Navy with relatively inexpensive anti-ship missiles (the same type as or similar to the ones the West is supplying to Taiwan) and drones, Russian vulnerability I was keen and early to point out in April, 2022.¹³ That is not to say PLAN is just like the Russian Navy: the Chinese ships are far newer than Russia's, yet have not been tested in combat. In any situation, though, the overall U.S. capabilities are far ahead of China's, factoring the interrelated systems each can deploy (China's larger number of ships is hardly the be all and end all), and that does not even get into how much some of the major U.S. allies in the region—especially Japan, South Korea, and to a degree France and even Australia—are also considerable naval powers in the region; even the U.K. plans to send a carrier strike group to the region soon, in 2025.¹⁴ And do not not forget all these sales and transfer are for Taiwan itself, which is also engaging in a rapid, impressive military buildup of its own, punching far above its weight in key areas, with rough ratios of 1 to 4 in fighter aircraft (set to increase), 1 to 2 in trainer aircraft (particularly important for producing high quality pilots), and 1 to 3 in attack helicopters against a China that is just shy of *sixty times more populous* and with a GDP nearly *24.5 times larger!*¹⁵

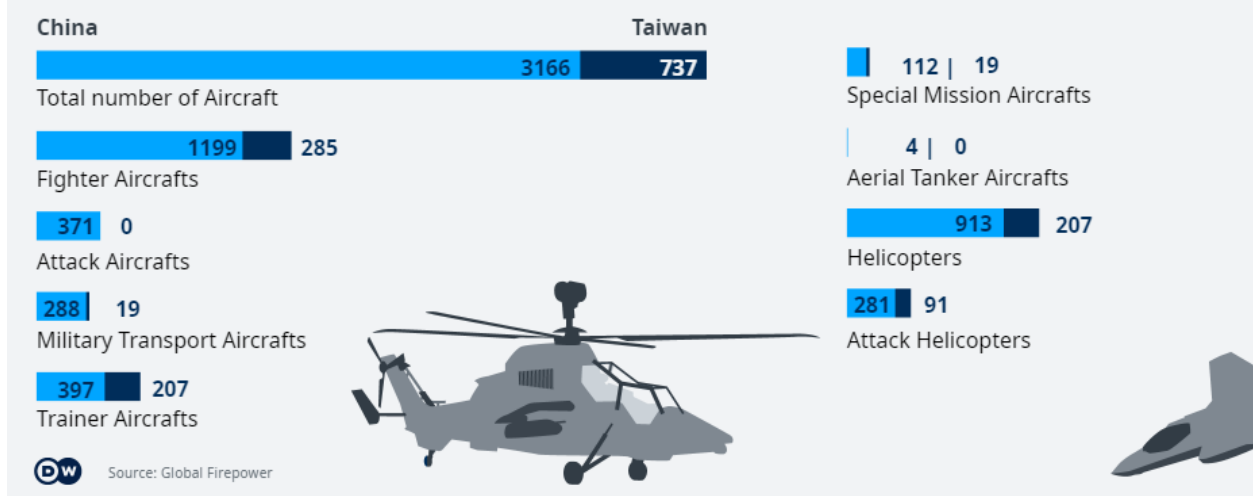
¹²Matthew Lee, "[US OKs \\$1B arms sale to Taiwan as tensions rise with China](#)," *Associated Press (AP)*, September 2, 2022; and Hansler.

¹³ On China's last non-minor battle in 1979 and skirmish in 1988, see Derek Grossman, "[Vietnam Is the Chinese Military's Preferred Warm-Up Fight](#)," *The Rand Blog*, May 15, 2019. On the numbers behind China's naval buildup, see [China Power Project: How Is China Modernizing Its Navy?](#) (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2022) for a very useful graphical representation of China's and all major global naval powers' fleets and recent histories. On my own prescient take on anti-ship missiles being a huge threat to a very vulnerable Russian Navy, in particular the Black Sea Fleet flagship and Slava-class cruiser *Moskva*, which now sits at the bottom of the Black Sea, see Brian E. Frydenborg, "[Ukraine Will Easily Destroy or Sideline Russia's Navy with Game-Changing Anti-Ship Missiles](#)," *Real Context News*, April 10, 2022. For a detailed albeit slightly outdated visual representation of the military strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. relative to each other overall as well as the rapid increase in China's military capabilities, see [Project Air Force: An Interactive Look at the U.S.-China Military Scorecard](#) (RAND Corporation, 2017). For a much more recent report on China's naval buildup relative to the U.S., see Ronald O'Rourke, [China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023).

¹⁴ Mike Ye, "[Britain, Germany give update on future Indo-Pacific naval deployments](#)," *Defense News*, June 5, 2023.

¹⁵William Yang, [How prepared is Taiwan for a potential Chinese attack?](#), *Deutsche Welle*, May 12, 2023; author calculations using data from: *International Database (IDB)*, [China and Taiwan selection](#), U.S. Census Bureau, 2023; and [World GP Ranking 2022](#), Knoema (2022).

Air force capability comparison between China and Taiwan



After this the package announcement in September, in early December the State Department announced that it intended to allow another package with the FMS sale of \$428 million in U.S. military aircraft spare parts—especially for F-16s and C-130 transports—and equipment especially as Taiwan’s military aircraft have seen heavy use with in patrolling all the aggressive Chinese military exercises nearby.¹⁶ To me, this sends a clear signal that the China cannot expect to wear out Taiwan’s aircraft through its aggressive exercises.

That announcement was followed upon at the end of the month by another of a \$180 million FMS sales package of Volcano anti-tank mine-laying systems and training, ammunition, and services for those systems.¹⁷ I feel this is a way of reminding China that even if it were to land troops on Taiwan, the fight would definitely continue on land at a cost to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

2023 saw the Biden Administration begin by announcing in early March that it intended to sell 200 medium air-to-air AMRAAM missiles and 100 AGM-88B HARM ground-radar-targeting missiles in a \$619 million FMS package.¹⁸ This would bolster both offense and defense for Taiwan’s combat jets.

Another FMS sales package for over \$440 million was announced late in June, including \$332 million in Bushmaster autocannon 30mm ammunition for some of Taiwan’s CM-34 wheeled infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) as well as \$108 million in spare parts for vehicles, small arms, and support systems and services.¹⁹ The way I see this package, if the Volcano package was a reminder that Chinese armor may

¹⁶ [“U.S. to boost Taiwan's stretched air force with \\$428 mln in spare parts,” Reuters](#), December 6, 2022; Kayleigh Madjar, [“Taiwan thanks US for military sales,” Taipei Times](#), December 8, 2022; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

¹⁷ Kapil Kajal, [“US approves sale of Volcano anti-tank systems to Taiwan,” Jane’s](#), January 2, 2023; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

¹⁸ Ben Blanchard [“Taiwan military to get \\$619 million U.S. arms boost as China keeps up pressure,” Reuters](#), March 6, 2023; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

¹⁹ Jon Grevatt, [“US approves 30 mm ammunition sale to Taiwan,” Jane’s](#), June 30; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

pay a price, this is a reminder that the Taiwanese infantry and their support vehicles would be well-equipped and well-supplied.

Finally, just last week, yet another FMS arms package was announced by the Biden Administration, this one \$500 million to equip Taiwan F-16s with infrared search tracking systems and related spare parts and equipment.²⁰ This is an added reminder that Chinese aircraft may pay a dear price in any attack on Taiwan. Just days after this sales package was announced and just days ago, China responded by sending dozens of combat jets towards Taiwan, with many violating Taiwan's airspace and causing Taiwan to scramble its own fighter jets to intercept.²¹

This year-long-period's worth of packages worth well over \$3.2 billion demonstrates to China that its forces at sea, in the air, and on land will potentially face a steep price as all three vectors are receiving substantial boosts from U.S. military arms and equipment sales to Taiwan.

III. Delays in Delivery of Sales to Taiwan

Unfortunately for Taiwan, supply-chain and manufacturing issues have led to a backlog for some \$19 billion in weapons deliveries of previous U.S. arms sales packages for Taiwan—including 66 F-16s, a proportionally major increase (see above graphic), HIMARS, and some 400 Harpoon anti-ship missiles and 100 Harpoon Coastal Defense Systems—and that was *before* all but one arms sales packages discussed above. Ukraine is also playing a role in somewhat competing for attention with Taiwan, but it is not playing the role that some like Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO) are claiming (see note 30 and discussion in IV). For the most part, the idea that FMS weapons *sales* to Taiwan are being affected by PDA *transfers* to Ukraine is a red herring: they are coming from two entirely different sources—U.S. private sector manufacturers producing orders for Taiwan and existing U.S. defense stockpiles for Ukraine, respectively, with only one recent existing stockpile PDA having been authorized for Taiwan, the first of this type for Taiwan—so they are not coming from the same pot and are therefore not in immediate competition with each other. That is why Ukraine has been able to quickly receive various weapons systems and Taiwan is facing a \$19 billion backlog, as the manufacturers are suffering from a number of production and supply-chain issues but the U.S. already has its stockpiles. Indeed, before Russia's February 2022 escalatory further invasion of Ukraine, the Taiwan arms sales delivery backlog was still a whopping \$14 billion, and most of the delayed items were purchased from 2015 to 2019. As Jennifer Kavanagh and Jordan Cohen noted in *War on the Rocks*:

Across U.S. arms deliveries to all clients completed between 2012 and 2021, the average time between sale and delivery was about four years for air defense systems, 3.5 years for aircraft, and 2.5 years for missiles. Sometimes these delays stretch up to almost 10 years. Taiwan's delays are in line with these figures. Notably, while clients of major U.S. adversaries like Russia and China often receive faster arms deliveries in general, they face similarly lengthy backlogs when it comes to more high-end systems.

²⁰ Matthew Lee, "[US approves new \\$500M arms sale to Taiwan as tension from China intensifies](#)," *Associated Press (AP)*, August 23, 2023; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

²¹ "[China sends aircraft and vessels toward Taiwan days after US approves \\$500-million arms sale](#)," *Associated Press (AP)*, August 26, 2023.

The same authors outline a number of major reasons for this:

- 1.) The U.S. industrial base has been unable to keep up with increasing demand
- 2.) Defense business sector consolidation has meant a smaller number of production lines and suppliers
- 3.) The supply chains are long and production methods are complex, vulnerable to geopolitical, weather, and economic disruptions
- 4.) The political instability in the U.S., particularly the budgeting shenanigans that have increasingly become a reckless norm, means contract authorizations are delayed and defense-contractors are becoming more averse to long-term investment (I will add my own thoughts to this later and name the perpetrators)
- 5.) We are still recovering from the issues in supply chain upheavals and production halts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
- 6.) Inefficiencies in the long process from sale to delivery are increasing because of increasing U.S. global arms sales, leading to the prioritization of bigger, more expensive systems being moved faster than some of Taiwan's more "asymmetric" items
- 7.) An outdated Department of Defense process for allocating funds for FMS is also slowing things down
- 8.) Delays from export controls can even occur after the deal is done, a result of byzantine legal rules that can slow things down
- 9.) (The authors also note a ninth general reason that has not that been the case with Taiwan: congressional committees can further put informal yet indefinite holds on delivery until the sitting administration addresses their concerns)

Numbers 6.) and 7.) are also affecting PDA transfers that until recently Ukraine benefited from and Taiwan did not (and number 9.) while not affecting Taiwan, is definitely affecting Turkey as Sen. Bob Mendez (D-NJ), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has put a hold on the Biden Administration's sale of F-16s there). As more and more PDA packages are considered for both Ukraine *and* Taiwan, there will be an issue of direct competition for resources from the same pot, but those have yet to truly present themselves in any significant way and that simply is not the case with the \$19 billion backlog for Taiwan. There are some other bandwidth issues related to Ukraine, and those will be discussed in section IV, but those are also unrelated to Taiwan's arms sales delivery delays. Thankfully, the Biden Administration and Congress are moving to mitigate some of these issues, including throwing substantial funding into shoring up and further developing and expanding many aspects of the industrial defense sector. Additionally, both the Department of State and Department of Defense are well aware of the problems and have announced specific plans to combat them in May and June of this year, respectively. While results generally remain to be seen, the Biden Administration has already opened and recently used the Presidential Drawdown Authority to speed up new transfers of weapons to Taiwan, and those betting against this administration when it puts its mind to something have often been objectively and severely guilty of underestimating it.²²

²² Jennifer Kavanaugh and Jordan Cohen, "[The Real Reasons for Taiwan's Arms Backlog — And How to Help Fill It](#)," *War on the Rocks*, January 13, 2023; Joe Gould, "[Slow arms deliveries to Taiwan blamed on US production bottlenecks](#)," *Defense News*, February 24, 2023; Nick Wilson, "[Ratner: Taiwan weapons transfers delayed by systemic industrial base issues](#)," *inside Defense*, July 20, 2023; Jack Detsch and Robbie Gramer, "[Taiwan Faces No](#)

IV. U.S. Arms Grants, Loans, Other Military Aid for Taiwan in an Era of Political Dysfunction

There are instances when Congress *authorizes* acts and *appropriates* money for them separately. Overall, there are three types of spending in Congress: mandatory, discretionary, and interest. That last one involves interest payments on the national debt, and mandatory spending involves programs that are budgeted for in their laws establishing them (healthcare costs and social security together account for 77% of mandatory spending in 2023). But discretionary spending involves programs established by law that are not funded for in their enacting legislation and that must be funded by one of twelve separate appropriations bills put together by House and Senate Appropriations Committees and Subcommittees, but some or all of those bills are often combined into *omnibus* bills (defense spending accounts for nearly half of discretionary spending this year).²³ What makes this year's non-sales Taiwan arms package interesting is that it is part of discretionary spending and there has thus far been more authorized in its enacting legislation than has been appropriated in the appropriations legislation due to a complicated debate and set of circumstances.

The Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act (TERA), sponsored by the aforementioned Sen. Menendez, was approved by Congress as part of the the \$858 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 and signed into law by U.S. President Joe Biden at the end of 2022.²⁴ TERA included up to \$10 billion in *grants* for military purchases—up to \$2 billion per year for fiscal years 2024-2027—and \$2 billion per year in *loans* for the same over the same period. It represents the first time Title 22 *Foreign Military Financing* (FMF) run by the State Department is being authorized for Taiwan. The bill also authorized deeper military training and collaboration between the U.S. and Taiwan, created a regional weapons stockpile, and fast-tracks weapons disbursement to Taiwan—allowing the same type of methods being used to deliver much of the U.S. weaponry going to Ukraine that permits disbursement from existing U.S. stockpiles, in this case, up to an additional \$1 billion in arms per year for

[Trade-Offs With Ukraine But Taipei is also getting tired of supply chain issues](#),” *Foreign Policy*, June 1, 2023; John Grady, “[U.S. Needs to Clear \\$19B in Arms Sale Backlog to Taiwan, says HASC member](#),” *USNI News*, December 14, 2022; Patricia Zengerle, “[US Senator Menendez says he has not changed opposition to Turkey F-16 sale](#),” Reuters, July 27, 2023; U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, “[FMS 2023: Retooling Foreign Military Sales for An Age of Strategic Competition](#),” May 18, 2023; U.S. Department of Defense, “[Department of Defense Unveils Comprehensive Recommendations to Strengthen Foreign Military Sales](#)” June 13, 2023. On the chronic underestimation of the Biden Administration, see my own thoughts in several *Real Context News* articles: “[A BIG F**KING DEAL: Biden’s Infrastructure Bill in Historical Perspective](#),” November 15, 2021; “[Media Keeps Portraying Democrats and Biden as a Mess, Ignoring Data Proving that Could Not Be Further from Truth](#),” July 11, 2022; and “[Biden’s and Democrats’ Historic Awesomeness Cannot Be Denied: Midterms Edition](#),” January 6, 2023.

²³James V. Saturno and Megan S. Lynch, [The Appropriations Process: A Brief Overview](#) (Congressional Research Service [CRS], 2023); [Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process](#) (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022); [Budget Basics: Spending](#) (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2023); [Budget Process](#) (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, n.d.).

²⁴Maegan Vazquez, “[Biden signs vital \\$858 billion defense bill into law, nixing military’s Covid-19 vaccine mandate](#),” *CNN*, December 23, 2022; Patricia Zengerle, “[U.S. military bill features up to \\$10 billion to boost Taiwan](#),” *Reuters*, December 8, 2022.

Taiwan. The bill goes further to authorize the setup of a fast-track FMS method to get Taiwan arms it has purchased more rapidly than it currently receives them.²⁵

As this was all discretionary spending, though, the funding was appropriated *separately* from the authorization in the \$1.7 trillion omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. And that bill did not include the \$10 billion in grants that would come from the State Department's FMF program. During the negotiations, the Senate leaders on the appropriations committee handling the State Department, Chairman Chris Coons (D-DE) and Ranking Member Lindsey Graham (R-SC), agreed that this large amount of \$10 billion might end up coming from other duly authorized military grants and humanitarian aid programs, as the State Department's entire funding level for FY 2023 was only set at \$59.7 billion. The \$2 billion per-year is no small amount, then, and other top FMF program recipients—Israel (\$3.3 billion) and especially Egypt (\$1.3 billion) and Jordan (\$425 million) all have much lower GDPs than Israel, with Taiwan has increasing its defense spending 13.9% in 2023 to \$18.3 billion. The two senators formed a strange bipartisan combination and faced other strange bedfellow sharing bipartisan concern for their bipartisan opposition to the grants, but especially with serious a serious global hunger crisis and the war in Ukraine, Coons, Graham, and others wanted to make sure other urgently needed aid is not impacted. The bill did include the \$2-billion-a-year in loan offers, but Taiwan has since stated is it not interested in taking out U.S.-offered loans.²⁶

But the bill with TERA has since resulted in the first of the Presidential Drawdown Authority disbursements, one worth \$345 million out of the \$1 billion authorized by the late December 2022 legislation. This drawdown from existing U.S. stocks was announced at the end of July, is expected to arrive in Taiwan fast faster than the previous FMS purchases, and is supposed to include missiles, firearms, MANPADS portable air defense systems, intelligence and surveillance equipment, training, and education.²⁷ And, according to *Politico* quoting one unnamed official, it is to include MQ-9 Reaper drones, though the details are being kept quiet from official, public channels for now because of "sensitivities" involving China.²⁸ If those drones are actually included, Col. Cedric Leighton, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)—who is one of *CNN's* go-to military analysts—wrote that this would be "noteworthy" in a Twitter direct message to me. He continued: "So far, only the U.S., U.K., France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the Dominican Republic fly this...so if Taiwan were to receive this system as part of this package it would immeasurably enhance its aerial surveillance capabilities." He further explained that "the system Taiwan would receive is the unarmed reconnaissance and surveillance version." When it comes to the

²⁵ Tami Luhby, "[Here's what's in the \\$858 billion defense bill](#)," *CNN*, December 15, 2022; Mark F. Cancian and Bonny Lin, [A New Mechanism for an Old Policy: The United States Uses Drawdown Authority to Support Taiwan](#) (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2023); Cambell, *Taiwan* CRS; Bryant Harris, "[Pentagon to use new Taiwan arms transfer authority, similar to Ukraine](#)," *Defense News*, April 6, 2023.

²⁶ Bryant Harris, "[Congress forgoes \\$2 billion Taiwan security grants in favor of loans](#)," *Defense News*, Dec 21, 2022; Bryant Harris and Joe Gould, "[Congress clashes on loans vs. grants for Taiwan military aid](#)," *Defense News*, December 15, 2022; Joe Gould and Bryant Harris "[Congress wants to arm Taiwan, but hasn't figured out how to pay for it](#)," *Defense News*, December 1, 2022; Russell Hsiao, "[The Security Assistance for Taiwan Debate: FMF Loans versus Grants](#)," *Global Taiwan Brief*, 8, no. 5 (March 2023): 1-3 [this source is a useful discussion but seems to be confused about the FMF aid being set up possibly as loans, but the [text of the TERA section of NDAA bill](#) is clear that there is FMF aid set separately as both loans *and* grants]; Patricia Zengerle and Michael Martina, "[Analysis: How a U.S. budget dispute imperils funding for Taiwan weapons](#)," *Reuters*, February 22, 2023; Campbell, 2023.

²⁷ Nomaan Merchant, Ellen Knickmeyer, Zeke Miller, and Tara Copp, "[US announces \\$345 million military aid package for Taiwan](#)," July 29, 2023; Forum on the Arms Trade, 2023.

²⁸ Lara Seligman, "[U.S. announces \\$345M weapons package for Taiwan](#)," *Politico*, July 28, 2023.

reaction from the other side, the former Air Force colonel commented that “China would undoubtedly find the addition of the MQ-9 to the Taiwan battlespace highly provocative, but it would serve to better integrate Taiwan’s intelligence capabilities with those of the U.S.” For Col. Leighton: “These systems would greatly enhance Taiwan’s ability to defend itself. There’s been no confirmation that Taiwan will actually receive four MQ-9As, but it’s difficult to fight today’s battles without such capabilities.”

My own analysis is that this is a big deal more symbolically than anything else, in that this represents a new way to get Taiwan military support in a way that bypasses the deeply backlogged FMS system. The \$345 million package is not game-changing as to the substance, but it does get Taiwan its first Reapers in its hands soon, and the point is that this new PDA method is important because the U.S. will keep sending smaller amounts of military weapons, ammunition, hardware, and training programs that will slowly but surely add up over time and amount to quite a lot over the course of the next several years. As Taiwan is not expected to be invaded in the next few years, the priority will be Ukraine in its current hot war, but even drops will eventually fill a bucket and make a large difference over a longer timespan. So few details of this package are known so far, and that will likely be the case with the next several that will very likely be announced for Taiwan. Breaking them up is also sound strategy: China is almost certainly not invading next year or the year after, and keeping the packages small traps China into looking ridiculous if it overreacts.

Going back to the gaps in the two late-2022 bills, to make matters a bit confusing, a top Pentagon official—Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner—reiterated the Department of Defense’s position that all NDAA authorizations should be appropriated for after Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman had demurred to committing to requesting funding for those FMF grants, her State Department being the body overseeing FMF and not the Department of Defense; those grants were not requested in the State Department’s budget request for 2023 and have not been included in 2014 but were added by the TERA legislation for 2023 within the NDAA for 2023. So there are dueling committees in Congress, one inserting authorization for grant funding and the other declining to include appropriations for that grant funding, which the Department of State oversees but has not explicitly asked for and seems not inclined to push for but which the Department of Defense supports as a result of its authorization.²⁹

But now it is time to talk about the Republican Party. In my own view (though I am hardly alone), there is something of an issue in the Republican Party, with many in the extreme right even being pro-Russia or anti-Ukrainian and anti-foreign humanitarian aid, some of those folks contrasting that with their staunchly anti-communist, anti-Chinese views; there is an effort on the part of some of these Republicans (Sen. Hawley just being one example) to divert money from Ukraine to Taiwan, as opposed to Democrats in general or Republicans like Sen. Graham who want to forcefully support both Ukraine and Taiwan, just the latter more once the Ukraine situation is much improved or even after Ukraine wins.³⁰ With recent budget brinksmanship flirting with a shutdown, there is almost certainly concern that there could be a faction of Republicans who would push for funding for Taiwan now and then not

²⁹ *Evaluating U.S-China Policy in the era of Strategic Competition*, 118 Cong. (2023) ([statements](#) of Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, and Wendy Sherman, Deputy Secretary of State, February 9, 2023).

³⁰ For a prominent example an either-or thinking wanting to divert Ukraine aid to Taiwan, see the [Dec. 6, 2022, letter from extremist Sen. Josh Hawley \(R-MO\) to Sec. of State Blinken](#).

ensure the U.S. had enough funding to meet obligations for Ukraine or humanitarian aid elsewhere. The language of both Sens. Graham and Coon from the first few months of the year suggests that it is not so much that they oppose grants to Taiwan but want to seek additional funding to ensure those grants would not impact other programs and would be properly appropriated in concurrent legislation. Ukraine faces a far more immediate threat in a hot war at the moment, China's attack (if it comes) is not expected in the immediate future, and the U.S. has demonstrated an ability to move air defense systems and other equipment relatively quickly once it decides to do so. So Ukraine for now will remain a more immediate priority and in later 2022, those grants for Taiwan were set aside to give funding to more pressing needs elsewhere. Yet Taiwan still is getting a substantial boost in aid, especially for a wealthy country. There is also the simple fact that the different sections within the State Department that are coming up with their own policies and priorities that are not currently exactly the same as the committee that drafted all the details of TERA, and then you have the Department of Defense commenting on FMF funding that is not its responsibility. Some of this just seems to be bureaucratic complications, as the State Department staff working on FMF and the Defense Department Indo-Pacific Security Affairs staff are, by design and the natural bureaucratic way of things, not generally working together but with others in their own departments, with policy being approved up the chain to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin up at the top, respectively, and then with senior national security staff in the White House. There was the whole political mess in which the legislation was also, simply, rushed at "the eleventh-hour to avoid a government shutdown, very much increasing the likelihood of disconnect and incidents like this one. If anything, then, this issue really would seem to be the product of the political brinksmanship on the part of Republicans departing from normal procedural and political practice, manufacturing crises and leaving officials and lawmakers without enough time to smooth over details that take time, meetings, and long negotiations to review and finalize (this is me naming names as to who is responsible item 4. from the earlier *War on the Rocks* list; Republicans are far more to blame for the climate of current delays than Ukraine aid has had any affect by far). Normal procedure was not the case of the process at all with the bills passed at the end of 2022, and we are seeing here its implications for national security policy and why Fitch downgraded the U.S. credit rating from AAA to AA+ first and foremost because of an "erosion of governance."³¹

But the situation geopolitically and politically is, nevertheless, complex. Ukraine is not only a situation competing with Taiwan for U.S. officials' and lawmakers' attention as well as weapons, but it is also competing for attention among U.S. media outlets and analysts. Very little discussion of some aspects of this legislation and weapons transfers situation has appeared until the past few months even though the bills were signed into law in December 2022. Between the war in Ukraine, the 2024 election cycle, extreme weather events, and, perhaps most of all, the first federal and state indictments—four thus far—of a former president of the United States for crimes related to cheating or overturning an election, obstruction of constitutional procedure and justice, and trying to maintain presidential authority over classified documents after leaving office, all on top of the declining business environment for many media outlets, there is just not much bandwidth left to cover many stories in their proper context and giving them their proper depth. The author of this very report found it challenging to put all this

³¹ Ali Zaslav, Ted Barrett, and Clare Foran, "[Senate passes \\$1.7 trillion government funding bill to avert shutdown](#)," *CNN*, December 22, 2022; Fitch, "[Fitch Downgrades the United States' Long-Term Ratings to 'AA+' from 'AAA'; Outlook Stable](#)," August 1, 2023.

information together and had to find bits and pieces spread out over a great many months of coverage just to ascertain the exact provisions and ramifications of two major bills passed at the end of 2022.³²

V. The Current Pending Legislation Enmeshed in an Epic Culture War Showdown

The House and the Senate each passed their National Defense Authorization Acts for Fiscal Year 2024 this July, both for \$886 trillion. And yet, there is perhaps an even more absurd form of brinksmanship (hard to imagine in other times but not these) than that of last year occurring in the context of the differences between the two chambers' bills that will have to be resolved in conference committee—a committee of members from both the House and Senate that will have to agree on a single version to be presented back for approval to both chambers (last year, the House and Senate approved their versions in July and June, respectively, and issues were forebodingly not resolved until December).³³

When it came to Taiwan, there are yet again some differences. Senate appropriators are pushing for much more funding for Taiwan than House appropriators, meaning “the Senate’s move...again puts Republican defense hawks at odds with deficit hawks in their own party.” The Senate appropriators want \$1.1 billion for FY 2024 to replenish stockpiles that would be transferred to Taiwan under PDA, but as to the previously authorized \$2 billion in FMF grants (the late December 2022 NDAA did this for 2023–2027), Sens. Graham and Coons only relented from no FMF funding for Taiwan to just \$113 million in the current appropriations framework, incidentally or perhaps purposefully, the same amount the State Department has requested for all FMF grants *worldwide*. Those opposing larger FMF grants to Taiwan in the Senate are doing so in the context of House Republicans on the appropriations side, who ironically are seeking to appropriate \$500 million for Taiwan from the FMF grants but are trying to overall drastically cut the State Department budget from where that FMF funding would come from by 24% from what the Biden Administration requested on top of cutting the foreign aid budget and domestic spending, so any and all funding shifts or cuts will carry risk and drama.³⁴ The NDAA committees in both

³² As an example of the delays, the Cancian and Lin CSIS briefing did not come out until August 2023. The relatively lesser-known *Defense News* covered this well throughout, and I have relied on it for some of the details, but there was little major news or major institutional coverage until more recently. On the general crisis of the U.S. news media, see [State of the News Media \(Project\)](#), Pew, n.d.; Lauren Harris, “[Five big findings from the Journalism Crisis Project](#),” *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2021; and Penelope Muse Abernathy and Tim Franklin, [The State of Local News 2022 Expanding News Deserts, Growing Gaps, Emerging Models The State of Local News 2022](#) (Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communication, 2022). Currently, there are very few reporters covering the details about Taiwan in the current NDAA and appropriations fights, so my regrettable overreliance on Harris of *Defense News* (who is usually solid, but it is always regrettable to rely so much on one source and corroboration of his details are few and far between in other sources). Perhaps the more confusing current coverage is a result of resources being spread thin among so many outlets/institutions covering major stories happening at once at a time of shrinking newsrooms and resources. It would take a lot more time for me, writing this report, to go into more detail on this subtopic in large part because of this.

³³ Patricia Zengerle, [US Senate backs sweeping defense policy bill, sets up clash with House bill](#),” *Reuters*, July 27, 2023; [Actions Overview: H.R.7776 - James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023](#),” U.S. Congress, 2022; Fareed Zakaria, [U.S.’s political madness takes place against a backdrop of astonishing strength](#),” *The Washington Post*, 26, 2023; Julia Horowitz, [Denmark has a debt ceiling, too. It’s never been a problem Julia Horowitz](#),” *CNN*, May 10, 2023.

³⁴ Quote from Bryant Harris and Leo Shane III, [Senators rally to boost defense spending, with \\$1 billion for Taiwan](#),” *Defense News*, July 27; Bryant Harris, [Taiwan military aid granted by once-reluctant appropriators](#),

chambers have also been working on steps to address a number of factors crippling the speed of arms delivery, but it will remain to be seen what makes into the final bill that goes to conference.³⁵

Yet in the end, all the NDAA and appropriations bills are in doubt because of deeper divisions in the never-ending all-out culture war consuming American politics these days: the House FDAA only narrowly passed as extremist Republican elements succeeded in removing abortion access, transgender care, and diversity training for military personnel, utter brinkmanship conflating deeply controversial issues with defense and international security authorizations.³⁶ Sadly, while more extreme than any time in my life, the politicization of national security by Republicans is not a new trend, but, as I have noted before, one that began just after the end of Cold War.³⁷

Then there is the issue of the first PDA transfer from the Biden Administration to Taiwan. As discussed, TERA as passed with the NDAA for 2023 opened this drawdown as an option for Ukraine. This is the first drawdown from stocks that would also be available for Ukraine, the first time where there is hard, direct competition in immediately available stockpiles.³⁸

At the same time, the drawdown is not that large and the priority is currently Ukraine, so it seems likely Ukraine will keep getting more and larger drawdown transfers than Taiwan, with a minimal loss or perhaps none at all to Taiwan if more funding is appropriated, whereas given the Ukraine situation, Taiwan's wealthier status compared to Ukraine, and that Taiwan has now a well-over-\$19-billion-in-sales-delivery backlog that will eventually make its way to Taiwan, Taiwan will not be "losing" much if anything in the end to Ukraine, since the PDA arms going to Taiwan are primarily being rationalized as a temporary stopgap (at least for now) to address the FMS delays and speed up delivery of weapons for Taiwan in this massive backlog context. As noted, some have misleadingly attempted to portray things in a zero-sum way, but the less dramatic reality is what I have outlined herein. And the numbers being talked about are not terribly large when it comes to PDA numbers for Taiwan—\$1 billion authorized for FY 2023, \$1.1 billion in reimbursement to replenish stockpiles related to potential Taiwan PDA transfers for FY 2024—that it is more so the unwillingness of many House Republicans to further fund Ukraine or the State Department—the budget of the latter from which FMF money comes—that is the real issue.

Defense News, June 22, 2023; Bryant Harris, "[House narrowly passes defense bill after Dems defect over abortion](#)," *Defense News*, July 14, 2023; Various sources present different numbers for the NDAA bill totals, which is odd; for examples, *Roll Call*, extremely reliable on Congressional matters, has the [Senate NDAA at \\$874 billion](#) and relatively deep-diver Harris for *Breaking Defense* had [\\$874 billion for the House NDAA](#); but *CNN*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Times* had [\\$886 billion](#) for both [House and Senate](#), so I went with that number. Some of the confusion may be due to differences between what relevant committees passed before the full chambers approved the NDAAs. The lack of detailed coverage and conflicting numbers suggest a news media spread thin as much as anything else considering how big these bills are along with the fact that most detailed discussions of the two large bills passed in late 2022 did not occur until months later. But it also a cry for this basic information to be clearly presented within the bills in question, perhaps a total figure broken down into components at the top or bottom, Congress?

³⁵ Bryant Harris, "[Congress aims for faster arms sales with defense bills and task force](#)," *Defense News*, June 28, 2023.

³⁶ Justin Katz, "[Ducking the culture wars, Senate passes NDAA 86-11](#)," *Breaking Defense*, July 27, 2023; Karoun Demirjian, "[Senate Passes Bipartisan Defense Bill, Setting Up a Clash With the House](#)," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2023; Dan Balz, "[House Republicans wage 'woke' culture wars with the military](#)," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2023.

³⁷ See my piece: Brian E. Frydenborg, "[9/11 Marked Continuation, Not Beginning, of Politicization of Foreign Policy & National Security](#)," *LinkedIn Pulse*, September 15, 2016.

³⁸ Cancian and Bonny, *New Mechanism* CSIS; Kavanagh and Cohen, *Real Reasons for Backlog*.

But if there is one thing the House Republicans under Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) in the era of Trump excel at, it is creating hurricanes of drama out trivial matters or manufactured issues.

VI. Concluding Analysis

As we have seen with the war between Ukraine and Russia, single shots from modern Western anti-air/air defense (e.g., Stingers and NASAMS), anti-ship (e.g., Harpoons), anti-tank weapons (e.g., Javelins), and rocket artillery (e.g., HIMARS) paired with modern effective targeting systems can effectively destroy or severely limit the use far more expensive and larger planes, ships, and ground vehicles of all types, even the most advanced Russian surface warships and jet aircraft. Compared to the Russians, Ukraine makes every shell count far more, and a similar edge may end up with Taiwan against Chinese weapons untested in any heavy-use, sustained combat operations. That is not to say I am an expert or up to speed on the military hardware of China, but at least against Russia, we have seen the huge edge Western weapons have over their Russian counterparts, and their ability to perform well under heavy use and with proper maintenance is not in dispute. If anything, Taiwan will be able to benefit from lessons learned from similar weapons or even the same as being used in Russia's imperialist war against Ukraine. As Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling, U.S Army (Ret.) noted about a year ago, "Make no mistake, China is watching" Russia's performance in Ukraine with consideration for Taiwan.³⁹ And it is not just the battlefield there that should worry China: Russia's performance on the battlefield has left Putin's position at home not just weak, but in a state of near-certain doom over time, if not sooner, no matter who Putin shoots down in a plane flying on the outskirts of Moscow.⁴⁰

A concern for Taiwan and Ukraine has to be the political brinksmanship and dysfunction of the American political system, much as it been for the Fitch credit rating agency. At least the ridiculous backlog Taiwan has been going through has received enough attention that wheels are in motion undertake some serious reform aimed at speeding up its related processes. China, to be sure, is a threat, but it seems almost certain China will not invade this year or next and there is time to get not just the \$19 billion of arms sales that is backlogged to Taiwan, but the several billion offered since then and some stocks that PDA would access in the meantime, in addition to billions more that will be authorized in the future. By the time all this equipment arrives, Taiwan will be substantially better equipped with substantially more arms of the very types that have proven so effective in Ukraine in essentially destroy the Russian Military 1.0 that was arrayed against Ukraine in February 2022. Very little of that force still exists, with Russia dragging half-century old tanks and century-old rifles out of storage and handing them to raw recruits that are getting slaughtered on the battlefield.

China will be better equipped than Russia, to be sure, but they have less combat experience now than the Russian military did in February 2022 and far less than that losing Russian military has now. A military fighting on the offensive against a well-equipped, well-trained enemy fighting for his home on his home turf is a nightmare for any invading army. To do so across the sea or by air against an island

³⁹ Mark Hertling @MarkHertling "[Make No Mistake, China is Watching](#)", Twitter, August 4, 2022, 10:54 A.M.

⁴⁰ See my Russia-Ukraine war articles at *Real Context News*: "[Russia's Defeat in Ukraine May Take Some Time, But It's Coming and Sooner Than You Think](#)," July 30, 2022; "[Russia's Pyrrhic Advances at Soledar Near Bakhmut Setting Up Ukrainian Counteroffensive, Not Russian Victory](#)," January 13, 2023; "[Why Putin Has Doomed Himself with His Ukraine Fiasco](#)," September 27, 2022; "[Putin's \(and Russia's\) Naked Weakness](#)," June 28, 2023.

nation with a significant mountain chain running down the length of its island through the middle, where artillery can easily be entrenched in mountain bunker positions that can have the whole coast facing China easily covered is one thing. But to do so while the U.S. arms that country with anti-ship missiles that can make any amphibious landing a nightmare, with anti-air missiles and air defenses that can make airstrikes and air support a nightmare, and with mines and anti-tank missiles that will make it difficult for any troops that survive the crossing or the jump out of the plane to advance further inland or even survive on a beachhead, well, that is, to paraphrase the U.S. Civil War Union General William Tecumseh Sherman, "hell." China would need to spend a lot of time trying to soften up positions before landing or its troops would get slaughtered (and they may even after). And that time buys time for the U.S. and others, maybe even the powerful militaries of Japan and South Korea, to come Taiwan's aid and for world diplomatic pressure to come down hard on China and severely damage its economy and other interests. And that does not even account for the small Taiwanese-controlled Islands between the main Island of Formosa and the Chinese mainland—the Penghu islands near Formosa and the Kinmen islands near the Chinese coast—also being major obstacles to any invasion and serving as early warning stations. China would likely need to neutralize them first and that only prolongs the time between the beginning of hostilities and getting large numbers of troops to land on Formosa. There is a reason why Mao and China after the end of the Chinese Civil War never tried to outright take Taiwan by force.

The large number of relatively inexpensive, proven-effective weapons that the U.S. and other Western partners have flooded into Ukraine partnered with some smaller numbers of more expensive systems have dashed Russia's hopes of imperial revanchism for all the world to see, and, at a smaller pace and over time, the U.S. is doing the same flooding, if at a smaller scale or at least a slower pace, in Taiwan (indeed, has been doing this for many years before Russia's escalatory 2022 further invasion). The costs for China could be incredibly severe should they opt for an invasion and there is hardly any guarantee of victory. Just ask Russia.

Thus, the arms packages—sales and the first of the Presidential Drawdown Authority releases—laid out here may just be a bit over \$3.6 billion in military aid in the span of a year, but they include incredibly effective weapons with significant amounts of ammunition, support equipment, servicing, and training to ensure they can remain operable over time, and this is not an end, but just another drop in a bucket of years of support from the past and years to come in the future, with more than \$19 billion in backlogged equipment on its way. To use just one example, if we go back to that *Deutsche Welle* infographic, currently, China outnumbers Taiwan in fighter jets about 4.2 to 1—1199 to 285. But Taiwan has 66 F-16s on order, already paid for: once they arrive, that ratio drops to about 3.4 to 1, an advantage for China that decreases by about 19% with that one order and that increases the number of Taiwan's fighter jets by 23%. And, again, *this is just the effect of one delivery of one weapons system*. There are so many more that came before and will yet come. China is not the only one building up, and the U.S. has been careful to offer full-spectrum support: air, land, sea, ammunition, surveillance, support equipment, training, and logistics. Thus, the \$3.6 billion in specific packages are a microcosm of the steady support of the U.S. in augmenting Taiwan's ability to defend itself, and other U.S. efforts to fix its own supply chain, delivery, and manufacturing issues represent a desire and ability to do better. That the U.S. still keeps trying to find more and better ways to stand by Taiwan even amidst serious dysfunction at home and while supporting Ukraine with a major active war in Europe that is the largest on that continent since World War II speaks to the strength, rather than the weakness, of the American commitment to Taiwan's defense.

About the Author



Brian Frydenborg has a cross-disciplinary background of two decades in humanitarian aid/relief, international development, international affairs, government, public policy, politics, writing, journalism, research, and consulting. He grew up in a suburb of New York City called Weston, Connecticut, and attended Canterbury School in New Milford, CT. As an undergraduate at Washington and Lee University, he engaged in a rigorous double major program of Politics and History. His main abroad experience in college was in Japan, but he also had more minor experiences in Cuba and Europe. Upon graduation, he volunteered for several political campaigns in Boston, including the 2004 Democratic National Convention, where a chance meeting with then-Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr., and his Chief-of-Staff eventually led to an internship in the Senator's Washington, DC, office in 2006.

After doing substantive work in the United States Senate while just an intern, and after some time in the private sector, he began his graduate studies at George Mason University's School of Public Policy. While also working part-time, he completed his Master of Science (M.S.) in Peace Operations, with his program defining a peace operation “as an intervention into a complex contingency [due to conflict and/or natural disaster] for the purpose of maintaining or restoring peace.” The completion of his degree included studying abroad in Liberia—evaluating the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)—and also included studying abroad in Israel and the West Bank, Palestine, examining the conflict there.

During 2014-2019, he was based in Amman, Jordan, freelancing mainly as a writer and a consultant, a career in which he recently has had over 200 articles published and been featured by a wide range of different outlets, including *Newsweek*, *The Jerusalem Post*, the Modern War Institute at West Point, The London School of Economics and Politics Middle East Centre, *Real Clear Defense*, *Real Clear History*, *The Jordan Times*, *MSN*, *Venture Magazine*, *Al Bawaba*, *Business Insider*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Iranian Student News Agency*, *War Is Boring*, *Mic*, *Movie Pilot*, the Russian International Affairs Council, Global Risk Insights, *Hidden Remote*, *Dork Side of the Force*, *Winter Is Coming*, *Harvard Law & Policy Review*, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, *USA Today*, and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, among others. He furthermore had an academic book chapter published: “[The Roman Republic in Greece: Lessons for Modern Peace/Stability Operations](#)” and also wrote the eBook [A Song of Gas and Politics](#): How Ukraine *Is at the Center* of [Trump-Russia](#). He can be found on Twitter (follow him there at [@bfry1981](#)) and also on linked [LinkedIn](#). His news site *Real Context News* has been a “[Top 60](#) Foreign Policy Blogs & Websites to Follow” for the last four years. Contact Brian to produce commissioned reports for your organization.