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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 1, 2011

FRANK G. LOWENSTEIN, STAFF DIRECTOR
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The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

The issue of U.S. defense equipment sales to Taiwan has now become an urgent matter. Taiwan has legitimate defense needs, and its existing capabilities are decaying. Replacement of its tactical aircraft is warranted, is not provocative and is justified.

While it has acquired some Mirage aircraft, Taiwan has acquired more than 400 tactical aircraft (F-16A/Bs and F-5s) sold and produced in Taiwan from the United States. But there have been no new sales of needed aircraft to Taiwan in many years. Approved transactions involved only lower-level sales and support for its Indigenous Defensive Fighter (IDF)—an aircraft that the Defense Intelligence Agency has assessed faces “limited combat range and payload capacity [which] restrict its effectiveness in air-to-air combat.”

Given the decrepit state of Taiwan’s F-5s, the service life issues associated with its IDF, and a growing problem faced by all recipient countries in obtaining affordable and sustainable access to spare parts for Mirages, I am very concerned that if the Administration does not act favorably on Taiwan’s outstanding Letter of Request (LOR) for sales of F-16C/D aircraft, Taiwan will be forced to retire all of its existing F-16A/B aircraft in the next decade, leaving it with no credible air-to-air capability. Since Taiwan already has many U.S. F-16 aircraft, replacement and augmentation of its existing fleet would not affect the qualitative and quantitative military balance in its region, and would also, in turn, greatly assist the U.S. industrial base.

Any reasonable approach to Taiwan's existing tactical aircraft requirements includes both sustainment of its existing F-16A/Bs, but also, sales of new F-16C/Ds. Limiting assistance only to upgrades of F-16A/Bs exacerbates both near and long term air-to-air challenges due to the fact that a substantial number of Taiwan's deployed F-16A/Bs would have to be removed from service in order to undergo upgrades.

Over a year ago, Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro assured the Committee on Foreign Relations that your Department would undertake an extensive and honest discussion with the Foreign Relations Committee regarding Taiwan. Such consultations have yet to occur. In my view, a sensible place to start would be with Taiwan's existing tactical aircraft capability, aside from its other air defense challenges.

I am still awaiting proposed dates from the Department for the initiation of these discussions. In order to be able to produce needed F-16C/Ds and deliver them by 2015, or even sooner should Taiwan move quickly, an Administration decision is needed in 2011 to act favorably on the F-16C/D request. I am particularly interested in the Department's responses to key questions: What are the major issues associated with approval of this LOR? Why is the Administration apparently unwilling to act on it? What are the risks and benefits in agreeing to the sale?

Presently, we have not received any clear and consistent information from the State Department regarding this matter, and I believe it is time to engage in a meaningful consultation with this Committee on Taiwan.

I look forward to your prompt consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard G. Lugar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Richard G. Lugar
Ranking Member

RGL/tmk