

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2018

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write today to urge your administration to commit to providing new, U.S. made fighters to aid in Taiwan's self-defense. Since the early 1950's, the United States has promoted peace by ensuring that Taiwan has the means to defend itself. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), states that the US should, "maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan," which codifies the U.S. policy of robust support for Taiwan's self-defense into law.

After years of military modernization, China shows the ability to wage war against Taiwan for the first time since the 1950's. However, with your leadership, it is possible to help Taiwan remain a democracy, free to establish a relationship with China that is not driven by military coercion. Taiwan has a legitimate requirement to field a modern fighter fleet to address a myriad of defense contingencies. Therefore, Taiwan is requesting U.S. support in their procurement of the F-35B.

In 1993, the U.S. sold Taiwan 150 F-16s to bolster its air defenses, ensuring that Taiwan pilots flew U.S. made fighters to defend Taiwan's sovereign airspace. Those F-16s have been the backbone of Taiwan's air force for over 20 years. Taiwan currently has approximately 144 F-16 fighters in its inventory; 15 are in the U.S. for training, and an additional 24 will be offline on a rolling basis in their ongoing upgrade program that runs through 2023. At a reasonable operational rate, Taiwan is likely able to field only 65 F-16s at any given time in defense of the island. In my opinion, this is not enough to maintain a credible defense.

I understand that Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen has requested to purchase the F-35B vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) aircraft to bolster Taiwan's air defense. The survivability of the F-35B and modern long-range sensors could help Taiwan intercept Chinese missiles, promoting deterrence well into the next decade. The F-35B would not only provide a modern fifth-generation fighter, but would also bolster their capabilities in next-generation warfare.

However, if determined that release of the F-35B to Taiwan is premature, we hope that you will instead make available additional F-16Vs to address the quantitative and qualitative challenges confronting Taiwan's fighter fleet. Taiwan already fields the F-16, and this would represent a cost-effective solution to Taiwan's legitimate defense requirement for additional fighters.

If Taiwan's air defense fleet is allowed to degenerate in number and quality, I am concerned that it would be destabilizing and would encourage Chinese aggression to ensue. Additionally, I am concerned that Taiwan's military weakness and the inability to mount a credible air force would place an undue burden on forward-deployed U.S. forces in North East Asia.

Taiwan is rightly criticized for not investing enough in its own self-defense. However, we can make a significant impact on our longstanding commitment by partnering with Taiwan to provide replacement fighters that positively impact force modernization efforts.

I recommend that your administration make a commitment at the earliest possible date to support the procurement of the F-35B or the F-16V for Taiwan's air force. These fighters will have a positive impact on Taiwan's self-defense and would act as a necessary deterrent to China's aggressive military posture across the Asia-Pacific region.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator



JAMES M. INHOFE
United States Senator