

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2017

The Honorable Mr. Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Since 1979, when Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States has maintained a policy of robust support for Taiwan's self-defense capabilities. Our One China policy, based on the Act, the Three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances originally expressed by President Reagan, provides the basis for our enduring relationship with Taiwan. Congress has on numerous occasions reaffirmed the Taiwan Relations Act, which remains in force, and there is bipartisan commitment that we must not waiver in providing necessary support for Taiwan to defend itself in the face of China's ongoing military aggression and the cross-Strait military imbalance.

Historically, the United States provided Taiwan with needed defensive capabilities based solely on our assessment of the cross-Strait military imbalance and on Taiwan's legitimate defensive needs. Other considerations, including those related to other regional concerns or diplomatic engagement with Beijing, did not factor into consideration. For almost four decades, this policy has been bold and effective in promoting our interests in the region. We urge you to adopt a policy of regular and consistent support for Taiwan's self-defense efforts and not allow concerns about China to take precedence over Taiwan.

Following the election of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, China has intensified its economic coercion and military intimidation tactics, thereby stoking cross-Strait tensions and threatening peace and security in the Taiwan Strait. Given these circumstances, our support for Taiwan is more important than ever.

There are three areas that require your attention. First, we understand that there are presently a number of small Taiwan arms sales programs awaiting Congressional notification. We urge your Administration to send these notifications to Congress immediately. While modest in scope, they represent an important marker in maintaining consistent U.S. support for Taiwan.


Second, since 2008 the U.S. has attempted to reduce tensions with China by bundling Taiwan arms sales notifications and sending them to Congress as a group, submitting them at a time viewed to be "least problematic" for broader diplomatic interests. We do not believe that in practice such an approach has served either U.S. or Taiwan interests. The result has been a process of supplying arms to Taiwan that has become overly politicized, driven by considerations beyond the scope of the requirements of the Taiwan Relations Act. We therefore also urge you, as a matter of policy, to end this bundling of arms sales and instead establish a regular and routine process for arms sales to Taiwan, sending notifications to Congress when they are ready.

Finally, Taiwan has significant and legitimate future defense requirements, including replacement fighters, new submarines, new missile defense and electronic warfare capabilities, as well as support for its cybersecurity efforts. We urge your Administration to address Taiwan's evolving defense requirements quickly and with robust engagement between Taiwan and the United States, so that Taiwan's civilian and military leadership can develop a holistic approach to procurement, deployment, and doctrine for new and necessary capabilities in a timely manner.


Taiwan has its share of responsibilities as well – namely increasing its defense budget and taking steps to professionalize and modernize its armed forces. The United States should not overlook these requirements. Instead, the United States should fulfill its own responsibility, including, arms sales, military technology development, and symbolic gestures such as port calls and exercises. Our relationship with Taiwan—a vibrant democracy, an important economic partner, and a loyal friend—is of vital importance to the United States, now and in the future.

In closing, we note that the Taiwan Relations Act calls for regular consultations between the executive and legislative branches on Taiwan arms sales issues. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss with your Administration how best to support Taiwan's self-defense needs.


Sincerely,

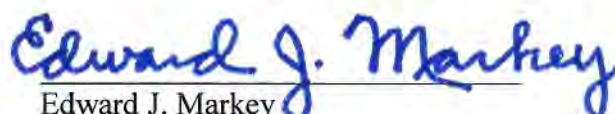

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

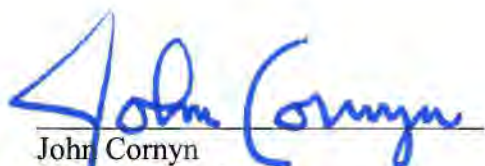

John McCain
United States Senator

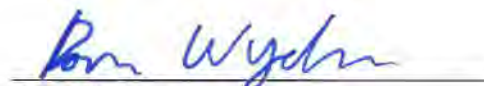

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