



# The Dynamics of US Arms Sales to Taiwan: From the F-16 C/D Fighter Jets Rejection to F-16 Viper Fighter Jets Sales

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## Abstract

This research aimed to analyze the dynamics of United States arms sales to Taiwan. Taiwan as a country that is facing threats from China needs military technology weapons in maintaining its country's security. The conflict between China and Taiwan, namely territorial disputes, brought Taiwan to the United States as an ally and carried out defense cooperation by increasing arms sales to Taiwan. The United States has been carrying out arms sales since the era of President Jimmy Carter through the Regional Law, namely the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) as the first step in cooperation in arms sales to Taiwan. The implementation was rejected by President Barack Obama over Taiwan's request for the sale of F-16C/D fighters. Using the Power and Influence theory The research focused on looking at how the United States sold the more advanced F-16 Viper fighter but previously rejected the sale of F-16C/Ds to Taiwan. The research methods used are descriptive qualitative methods and data collection through library research. The results of this study show a change in policy that there is a Security Dilemma in rejecting the F-16 C/D and selling an even more sophisticated F-16 Viper because there is Power and Influence through the actors involved and want to bring the United States to become an influential country in the world.

**Key Words:** Defense Cooperation, China-Taiwan Conflict, Power and Influence, Arms Transfer

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## INTRODUCTION

Defense serves as an instrument of a nation in achieving or maintaining its national security, which refers to the sovereignty of the state and its citizens. Sovereignty can be defined as "the ability of a state to govern itself and ensure that this ability is not hostage to outside pressures or internal tensions" (Tara, 2001). Sovereignty is intrinsically linked to national defense; without sovereignty, a nation struggles to achieve the independence necessary to control its territory, its people, to legislate independently, and to make autonomous decisions in international relations (Victoria, 2018). Every nation devises strategies to uphold its sovereignty as part of fulfilling its national interests. These strategies in security and defense can be observed through the military assets a country possesses; strengthening a nation's armament capabilities enhances its defense in maintaining security. One country currently bolstering its armament capabilities is Taiwan.

The discussion of Taiwan in this research is prompted by scientific publications where many International Relations experts consider that territorial disputes like the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have the potential to trigger conflicts between superpowers (Er, 2016; Franck & Melese, 2003; Irwin Crookes, 2016; S. Lee, 2022; O'Hanlon, 2019; Scobell, 2018). Taiwan is striving to secure its nation by enhancing military armaments to counter threats from China. The Taiwan-China conflict involves the separation of Taiwan from mainland China. China has pursued reunification through peaceful means and by threatening Taiwan (Alam, 2016). Taiwan's strategy to confront China's threats includes military defense cooperation and arms transfers with China's rival, the United States. As a superpower, the United States possesses significant military, economic, and technological strength. This superpower innovates in technology, nuclear weapons, and fighter aircraft. The United States, as a global observer, participates in various conflicts, including the China-Taiwan conflict.

The security relationship between Taiwan and the United States in military armaments has existed since the enactment of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in 1979, which stipulates that the United States will assist and protect Taiwan, including through the sale of arms to strengthen Taiwan's defense (Anggraini, 2019). Under this act, the United States has long been a supplier of weapons to Taiwan. The United States also played a crucial role in Taiwan's foreign aid to other countries in its early stages as a diplomatic tool (Atkinson, 2014). Under the TRA, the United States is obligated to provide defense articles to Taiwan. Essentially, Taiwan's defense strategy has long envisioned air and naval battles against the People's Liberation Army, involving surface ships, fighter jets, and tanks in symmetrical warfare (Shushen, 2022).

In implementation, under the Taiwan Relations Act, President George H.W. Bush approved the sale of fighter jets to Taiwan in specific circumstances, including the sale of 150 F-16A/B fighter jets to Taiwan to boost his domestic approval before the 1992 presidential election (Tiezzi, 2014). Despite harsh criticism from China, this move countered allegations that George H.W. Bush had been appeasing China (Tiezzi, 2014). The sale of F-16A/B fighter jets was beneficial for the American company General Dynamics, the F-16 manufacturer, creating 6,000 new jobs during an economic downturn (Tiezzi, 2014). However, during President Clinton's era, a policy was implemented to avoid selling fighter jets to Taiwan, as China was deemed more crucial to the United States economically and politically at that time (Tiezzi, 2014). While the United States did not abandon Taiwan, it only sold non-fighter aircraft. For approximately 20 years, the United States did not sell fighter jets to Taiwan. In 2011, after a presidential transition, during President Obama's term, there was a four-year hiatus in arms sales to Taiwan, which resumed only at the end of his presidency (Wolf, 2011).

Taiwan sought to purchase F-16C/D fighter jets to replace its aging fleet, urgently proposing the sale to President Obama. However, several months later, the Obama administration ignored and did not approve the F-16C/D fighter jet sale (Kan, 2014). The United States only offered upgrades to the F-16A/B jets but not the sale of F-16C/D (Wolf, 2011). American authorities did not approve Taiwan's request, stating that policy decisions regarding the issue had not been made. In this context, the President of Taiwan also pressed for the sale of F-16C/D to Taiwan.

During President Donald Trump's era, Trump's transactional administration sought to leverage any opportunity to influence China towards U.S. objectives (Townshend, 2017). After the F-16C/D sale was rejected during Obama's era, Trump approved the sale of F-16 Viper jets to Taiwan. The F-16 Viper, an upgraded version of the F-16A/B, was ordered by Taiwan, featuring advanced avionics, weaponry, and an Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar system. On August 16, the Trump administration approved the sale of 66 F-16 Viper jets valued at \$8 billion to Taiwan (Wong, 2017). The sale of F-16 Viper jets under Trump marked the most significant and substantial arms delivery to Taiwan in decades since George H.W. Bush's 1992 sale of 150 F-16 jets, surpassing both in quality and quantity by a considerable margin (USC Annenberg, 1992).

This study focuses on the shift in U.S. policy regarding the sale of F-16 Viper jets to Taiwan. The sale is particularly noteworthy given the previous U.S. policy of rejecting the sale of F-16C/D jets to Taiwan. This research posits that changes in U.S. policy on arms sales to Taiwan involve internal actors within American institutions considering such policy shifts.

## ***Literature Review and statement of art***

Previous researchers examining the sale of U.S. F-16 Viper jets to Taiwan have looked at the broader impact of the U.S. as an arms supplier on Taiwan's defense, instilling confidence in Taiwan to counter potential threats from China (Ningrum, 2022). This perspective aligns with the impact of U.S. involvement as a supplier, facilitating Taiwan's military modernization (Anggraini, 2019). Taiwan's modernization efforts correlate with studies discussing the surge in Taiwan's military budget for purchasing weapons from the U.S. (Darmawan, 2015). As a nation influencing and aiding other countries, the U.S. has interests in protecting Taiwan through arms sales while simultaneously seeking to extend its geopolitical influence by supporting Taiwan. The U.S., acting unilaterally based on core American policy values, exercises its power (Cheng, 2011). Analyzing the arms transactions and aid provided by the U.S., the military cooperation policy between the U.S. and Taiwan serves as a deterrence against China and a means to balance power in the Asian region (Azizah, 2018).

Previous studies have discussed the arms race between China and the U.S. resulting from U.S. arms sales, particularly fighter jets, to Taiwan, leading to numerous conflicts and heightened tensions between the two nations (Aitken, 2013). Research on arms transfers views them as a rivalry to strengthen national capabilities within a region (Wang, 2019). Thus, earlier studies perceived U.S.-Taiwan defense cooperation through fighter jets as an arms race driven by threats. These studies, however, face criticism, particularly regarding the perspective that U.S. arms sales to Taiwan benefit economically or escalate conflicts by protecting Taiwan from threats (Azizah, 2018). These studies also indicate that the sale of advanced fighter jets like F-16C/D and F-16 Viper could provoke China, exacerbating bilateral tensions. Consequently, the U.S. has refrained from new fighter jet sales, offering only upgrade measures.

Addressing this criticism, the current research aims to elucidate gaps previously unexplored. Forming alliances not only balances power but also ensures preparedness against external threats to national and regional security. Previous studies did not explain why policy shifts occurred within U.S. governmental institutions regarding fighter jet sales. Therefore, the focus of this research is on understanding the policy change due to internal actors influencing U.S. decisions to reject the sale of fighter jets and then proceed with more advanced sales. This study argues that U.S. policy shifts impact Taiwan's survival, influenced by prior presidential policies aiming to maintain good relations with China. The author explains U.S. policy changes using the Power and Influence approach.

## METHOD

### ***Theoretical Framework: Power and Influence Theory***

Arms transfer is a multidimensional process characterized by a complex network of relationships, interests, and outcomes. Political and diplomatic influences are integral parts of the motives behind arms transfers from supplier countries to recipient countries. Historically, post-Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union used arms supplies as crucial tools for creating dependency, establishing patron-client relationships, and forming alliances. Arms supplies are considered a principal instrument of international influence, involving benefits in the strategic and political interests of the supplying nations (Paul, 1992).

In International Relations Theory, the Theory of Power and Influence is central. Neorealism incorporates this theory, viewing interactions between strong and weak states as fundamental. One primary definition of power in this context is the capacity of a state to oversee the behaviour of other states, utilizing its power to exert influence. This approach divides power and influence into three main conceptual categories: Decisional Influence, Structural Influence, and Hegemonic Power.

Decisional influence refers to how an actor can influence another's foreign and domestic policy decisions through negotiation. Decisional Influence is instrumental, tangible, direct, and has short-term bargaining power, often seen in arms supply. The success of such influence can be measured by whether the recipient modifies its policies in line with the supplier's preferences before or concurrently with the arms agreement. If the recipient does not alter its policies, the influence attempt can be deemed unsuccessful.

Structural Influence has three dimensions. First, Long-Lasting Interaction Patterns: Between states with asymmetric power and resources, where arms suppliers are not easily replaceable, leading to significant structural influence over recipients. Second, Asymmetric International System: The broader systemic context where influence patterns are shaped by structural factors such as the distribution of power and the intervention of major states in this distribution. The outcomes in inter-state relations are influenced by the system's structure and the behavior of major powers. Consequently, major states that are principal arms suppliers to smaller states will have structural influence derived from their superior power position in the international system.

Third, Multipolar Supply Patterns: In arms trade create a dimension where recipients' influence over suppliers can develop through arms transfer relationships.



Supplying arms to developing countries can enhance strategic influence by offering something tangible to superpowers. Structural influence is derived from the asymmetric international system. Structural power can be exercised by providing or withholding specific types and quantities of arms to facilitate or hinder certain military strategies (Krause, 1991).

Hegemonic Power, unlike Decisional and Structural Influence, in arms transfer policy, is not related to achieving specific or general goals regarding regional security interests or the foreign policy stance of client states. Instead, it primarily concerns global interests and superpower confrontations. Hegemonic Power aims to increase influence. It involves control over concepts governing military state behavior and security policies, including the nature of threats faced by a state and the best approaches to achieving security protection. Autonomous decision-making does not become irrational; rather, what is considered rational is partly determined by choices made at the level of Hegemonic Power (Krause, 1991).

Hegemonic Power aims to increase influence through elites whose political orientation aligns with the hegemonic power, created and exercised by changing the composition or views of the ruling elite so that perceived interests align with those of the patron. This can occur if a patron supplies a group that takes power or more subtly through the socialization of the ruling elite (Krause, 1991). Thus, Hegemonic Power is a state or empire leading a military-political hierarchy consisting of subordinate allied states, commanding compliance through superior military strength (Molchanov, 2012).

The influence in arms supply is based on the dependency relationship between the recipient and the supplier. According to Albert Hirschman's view on influence through trade, the influence gained by country A over country B through arms supply depends on the total benefits received by country B from the trade. Ultimately, the equivalent of total impoverishment will result if trade cessation occurs, creating arms dependency, which becomes a non-autonomy element in the recipient country's relationship with the supplier (Paul, 1992). This situation arises where a country's defense program is significantly determined by the policy-makers of another country. External dependence on arms varies with the intensity of regional conflicts and the size of the countries involved. Therefore, countries with minimal external threats tend to rely more on supplier countries and are consequently more vulnerable to influence attempts.

The relationship in arms transfer has two alternatives where military governance can produce desired outcomes. First, arms transfer can be directed to achieve general objectives that facilitate specific goals. Second, they can be directed to

establish or change the "rules of the game" to facilitate achieving specific goals without visible influence. In this view, the United States, as a weapon supplier, has "rules of the game" in its fighter aircraft transactions with Taiwan.

### ***Research Method***

This study employs a qualitative method. The primary distinction between qualitative and quantitative research lies in the data collection techniques. Qualitative research focuses on descriptive and unstructured data in the form of words, whereas quantitative research emphasizes numerical data. Qualitative research also reflects social characteristics that emerge from interactions between individuals and the researcher's subjective interpretation of the world. Thus, the qualitative method is more suitable for writing processes, as quantitative methods may not provide conclusive insights (Bryman, 2016).

In this research, the author will use secondary data as the primary data source. This includes public documents, such as statements from government officials, relevant actors covered in mass media, official presidential statements, public responses, and discussions. Using qualitative data collection in the form of documents will facilitate the research process by providing accessible information without significant difficulties. However, this type of data collection has its limitations, such as the difficulty in accessing certain documents and the inability to verify the authenticity and accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2014).

Once the data is collected, the author will conduct an analysis using thematic analysis techniques. The data will be analyzed according to theoretical indicators related to the Power and Influence Theory, which includes three conceptual elements: Decisional Influence, Structural Influence, and Hegemonic Power. Additionally, Robert Jervis's Security Dilemma concept, with its three conceptual elements—Offensive-Defensive Balance, Geographical Factors, and Technological Factors—will be applied. The identification results can be concluded through the patterns that emerge more frequently in the analysis.

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## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### *The Dynamic of U.S. – Taiwan Relations*

The East Asia region has a long history of state development, with China as one of the hegemonic nations. China's influence extends beyond East Asia, establishing its power in various other regions. Historically, before becoming a superpower, China experienced a long history of conflicts, notably the Chinese Civil War, a power struggle between the Nationalist Kuomintang and the Communist forces led by Mao Zedong (Kompas, 2021). The civil war began in 1927 and lasted until 1949, when the conflict between the two factions culminated. The defeat of Japan in World War II played a key role in establishing the Republic of China (RoC) (Wiratama, 2017).

The defeat of Japan led the United States and the United Kingdom to agree that Taiwan should become their ally. Chiang Kai-shek became the leader of the Republic of China, which then controlled most of China. This relationship became strained when Communist forces led by Mao Zedong defeated the Nationalists, taking control of Beijing. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The rivalry between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong resulted in the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Following further clashes, the Communists emerged victorious, and the Nationalists fled to Taiwan, establishing a separate government in Taipei by the end of 1949 (Wiratama, 2017).

Entering a new era, the United States began supporting Taiwan through various agreements to maintain its security, becoming Taiwan's ally. The US viewed Taiwan as ideologically aligned and pro-Western, beneficial to its interests. Taiwan's strategic position in the South China Sea provided the US with advantages, including facilitating resource and trade routes for its allies. Economically, Taiwan's free social and economic system aligned with US interests. Additionally, the presence of US military bases in Taiwan served as a deterrent to rivals and helped propagate US ideology, preventing its allies from adopting communist ideologies (Syahbuddin, 2019).

During World War II, the US began providing military aid to Taiwan, marking the beginning of Taiwan's dependence on the US. From 1941-1942, the US supplied military aid through the American Volunteer Group, known as the Flying Tigers, supporting Taiwan against Japan (Syafiqa, 2016). In 1951, the US provided Taiwan with 300 light tanks. By 1954, after the Korean War, the US and Taiwan signed agreements, with the US having previously supported the Nationalist Kuomintang in their separation from the PRC. As a pro-Taiwan country, the US influence led to conflicts with China, as both nations possessed nuclear weapons, raising the risk of



nuclear war. However, China prioritized its issues with Taiwan over conflicts with the US.

The US became Taiwan's unofficial ally through the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979, solidifying US-Taiwan relations. The TRA established substantive but non-diplomatic relations, allowing the US to maintain trade, cultural, and other unofficial connections with Taiwan (Kompas, 2021). Taiwan's security needs relied on US military support, with both the President and Congress committed to Taiwan's defense. President Carter insisted on continuing arms sales to Taiwan. The TRA aimed to ensure peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific. Any attempts to determine Taiwan's future through non-peaceful means, such as boycotts or embargoes, were seen as threats to regional peace and security, concerning the US (Chang, 2000).

The TRA also aimed to maintain the US's capacity to resist any form of pressure or coercion that could endanger Taiwan's security, social system, or economy. It supported Taiwan's further contribution to the region, aligning with US interests. Under the TRA, the US ensured Taiwan had the capability to defend itself, balancing the increasing Chinese military budget (Mubah, 2014).

For nearly three decades after the TRA was enacted, the US continued selling arms to Taiwan. Approaching the 35th anniversary of the TRA, 52 US senators urged President Barack Obama to increase arms sales or aid to Taiwan (Mubah, 2014). Under Obama's administration, the US maintained its defense ties with Taiwan. In 2013, President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to the TRA, ensuring the provision of defensive weapons to Taiwan. US officials noted a combat capability gap between Taiwan and China, alongside the growing military threat to Taiwan (Hickey, 2013).

In 2010, the US sold PAC-3 "Patriot" missiles essential for Taiwan's air defense. In 2011, the US provided upgrades to Taiwan's aging fleet of F-16 A/B fighter jets, enhancing their combat capabilities (Hickey, 2013). Since 2006, Taiwan had shown interest in acquiring new F-16 C/D fighters to bolster its existing fleet. The Ministry of Defense requested funds from the Legislative Yuan to acquire 66 F-16 C/D fighters and increase the defense budget for 2007. The Legislative Yuan approved a \$488 million defense budget for the F-16 C/D by the end of 2007, though President Bush's decision remained uncertain (Kan, 2014).

Under Obama, the US offered Congress a proposal to upgrade Taiwan's old F-16 A/B jets instead of selling new F-16 C/Ds, indicating a preference to reduce tensions with China. Some accused Obama of refusing arms sales to Taiwan to avoid

damaging US-China relations (Parameswaran, 2015). In November 2016, President Obama, through the US Air Force and Lockheed Martin, signed a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) contract to replace about 140 F-16 A/Bs in Taiwan (Frontier India News Network, 2021).

Under President Donald Trump, US-Taiwan relations shifted dramatically from the Obama administration. Trump's America-centric policies emphasized national interests through power, viewing countries that did not benefit the US as threats. Trump's administration pursued dominance, reshaping US-China relations into a competitive stance. Trump introduced the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, framing US-China relations as competitive. Trump prioritized economic and security issues for domestic benefit (Zubaidah & Herningtyas, 2019).

During Trump's administration, the US adopted a policy of Strategic Ambiguity regarding Taiwan. This concept involves actively managing perceptions in international relations to influence policy. Strategic Ambiguity, aligned with the Security Dilemma concept, pursued dual deterrence against China and Taiwan. It remains uncertain whether the US would use its power to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.

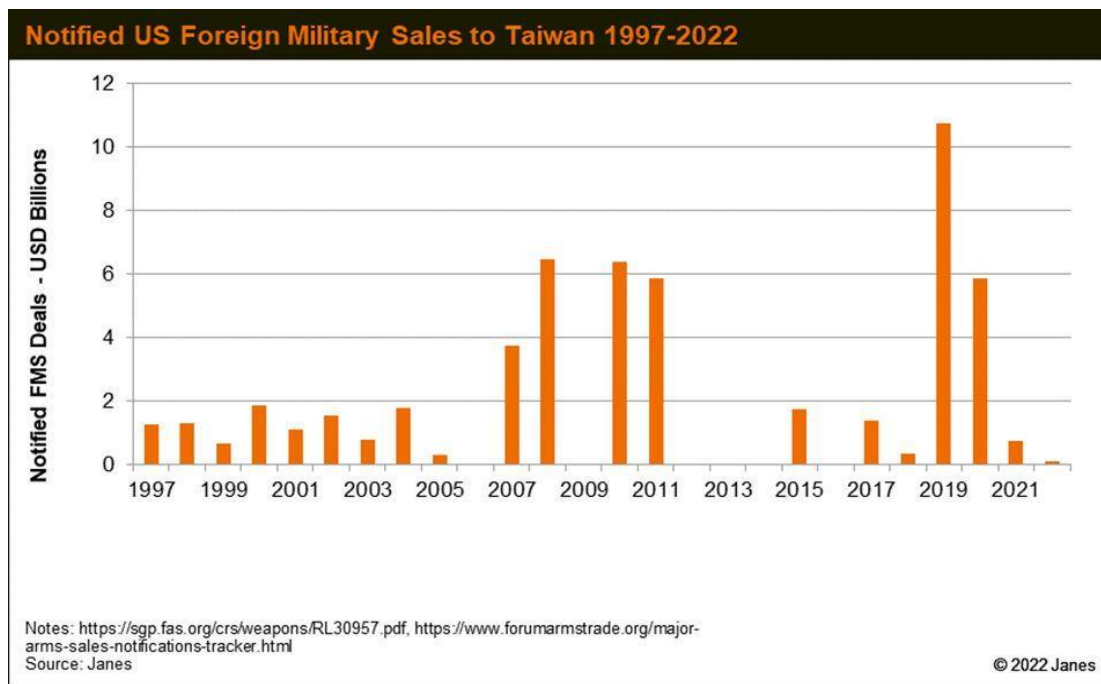


Figure 1. U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan (1997 – 2022)  
Source: IHS Janes

Under President Donald Trump's administration, arms sales to Taiwan increased tenfold, with the quality and quantity of weapons sold exceeding the standards set by the previous administration under President Barack Obama. Trump faced the threat of China crossing the Taiwan Strait and, to address the military imbalance in the Taiwan Strait, advanced his first arms sales to Taiwan at the beginning of his term in 2017 (Research, n.d.). The chart indicates that the arms sales were particularly significant during President Donald Trump's era, especially in 2019. The value of U.S. Foreign Military Sales notifications to Taiwan between 2017 and 2022 was approximately USD 18 billion, with the majority of agreements announced in 2019 and 2020 (Grevatt, 2022).

In 2017, Trump sold weapons to Taiwan worth \$1.4 billion, marking the first sale under his administration (Reuters Staff, 2019). This sale included three offensive weapons systems: AGM-88B anti-radiation missiles, AGM-154C (JSCOW) long-range standoff weapons, and MK-48 Mod6 AT heavy torpedoes, as well as upgrades to MK46 torpedoes and Standard Missile-2 reserves. During his term, President Donald Trump supported Taiwan's formal request to purchase 60 advanced F-16 Viper fighter jets. The U.S. Congress still needed to approve this sale, which would be the first major aircraft purchase from the U.S. for Taiwan since 1992. In 2019, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen visited Hawaii to confirm that Taiwan had submitted the request to purchase new fighter jets from the U.S. (J. Lee, 2019).

The Trump administration demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to increase tensions with China due to political, strategic, and economic differences. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence delivered a speech at the Hudson Institute and National Security Strategy, clearly identifying China as a comprehensive rival to the U.S. If the sale of F-16 Viper jets succeeded, it would indicate a shift in U.S. policy towards Taiwan, showing less acceptance of China (J. Lee, 2019).

In less than four years, arms sales by the Trump administration to Taiwan surged significantly compared to the previous 40 years, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Sales included combining MS-110 external pods with F-16 fighter jets, which could capture high-resolution reconnaissance photos in various weather conditions. The MS-110, derived from the DB-110, added multispectral functions to infrared capabilities, addressing low efficiency at night. Trump also made significant changes to the procedures and frequency of arms sales to Taiwan. A total of ten arms sales were made to Taiwan: one in 2017, one in 2018, three in 2019, and five in 2020.

## ***Approval of F-16 Viper Fighter Jet Sales During the Trump Presidency***

During Donald Trump's presidency, the United States moved to counter China by supporting Taiwan's isolation efforts. The Trump administration advanced approval for the sale of F-16 Viper fighter jets, totaling 66 jets, to Taiwan, marking one of the largest single arms deals between the U.S. and Taiwan. The U.S. State Department informed Congress shortly after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed the memo approving the sale (Wong, 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Defense website, the U.S. Air Force awarded Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer of F-16s, a contract for 90 aircraft as part of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales, confirming that Taiwan's order had been approved by the Trump administration as part of the deal (Lendon, 2020). The sale of F-16 Viper fighter jets represents the largest agreement between the United States and Taiwan during President Donald Trump's era.

The F-16 Viper sale is well-suited to support Taiwan's air defense efforts without confronting China, thus maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait (Lendon, 2020). Taiwan has officially introduced upgraded F-16 Viper fighter jets and has become the first operator to deploy them in combat. President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan has underscored this deployment as a symbol of Taiwan's close cooperation with the United States in strengthening its national defense (Newdick, 2021). Taiwan is also set to receive an additional 66 Lockheed Martin F-16 Viper jets scheduled for delivery in 2026 (Airforce Technology, 2020), bringing Taiwan's total fighter aircraft inventory to 200.

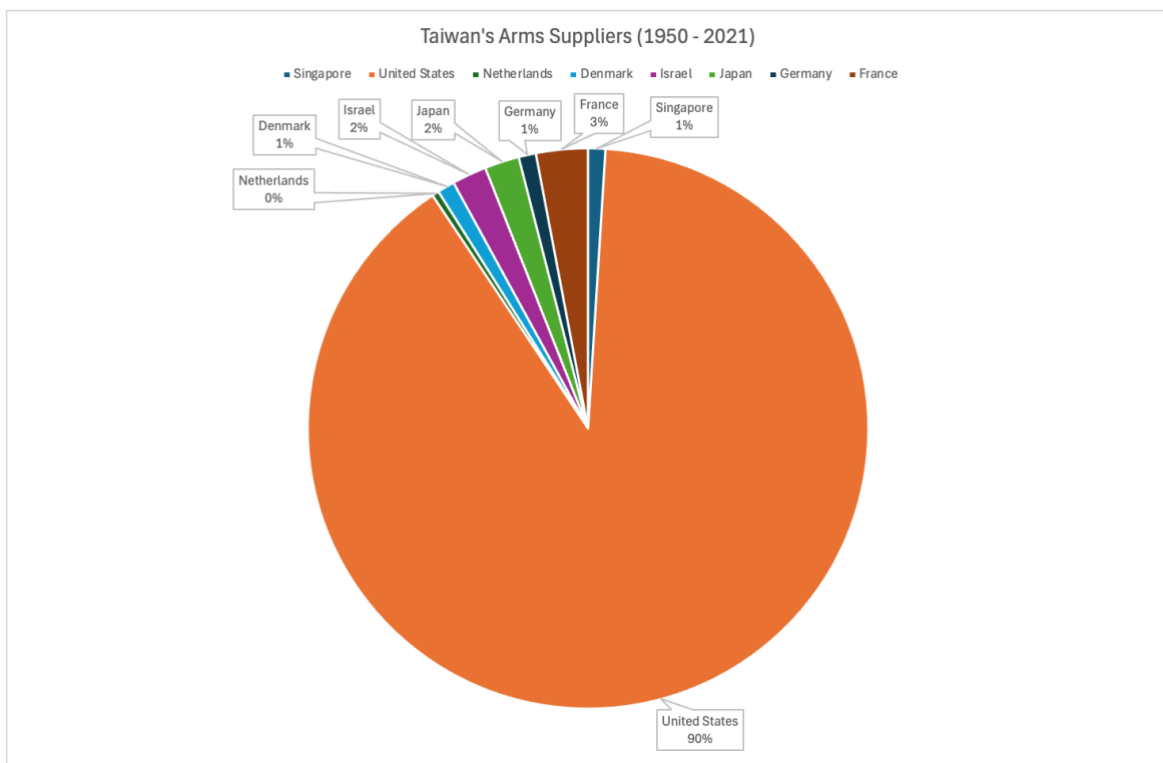
### ***Decisional Influence***

Decisional Influence, one of the three dimensions of the Power and Influence concept by Krause (1991), describes how bargaining power operates. Decisional Influence involves offering influence from the supplying country to the recipient country. This influence is wielded by the supplying country to shape foreign policy and specific decisions according to its preferences in exchange for the military assistance provided. The implementation of Decisional Influence can be observed when the influence held by the United States prompts Taiwan to make decisions aligned with U.S.-specified conditions.

The influence exerted by the United States is evident in the increased arms sales to Taiwan aimed at bolstering its defense. The United States shifted its defense focus from Europe to the Asia-Pacific region to counterbalance China's military capabilities (Syafiq, 2016). As a major arms supplier, the United States views Taiwan as crucial in curtailing China's dominance in Asia, offering arms under the

condition that Taiwan aligns itself as a U.S. ally. The United States seeks coalitions to avoid facing China's ambitions alone (Colby, 2022), with Taiwan serving as a bargaining chip against China (Aryodiguno, 2022).

Decisional Influence is employed by the United States through defense assistance to Taiwan, exemplified by the sale of F-16 Viper fighter jets. This sale is utilized by the United States to influence Taiwan's foreign policy, positioning the U.S. as a regulating or contributing force in Taiwan's decision-making. The United States has become the world's largest arms exporter (Shushen, 2022). However, it's not just the United States; several other countries have also participated in selling their weapons to Taiwan. Below is a chart depicting the countries exporting arms technology to Taiwan. U.S.



*Figure 2. Taiwan's Arms Supplies (1950 – 2021)*  
 Source: Author's own calculations based on SIPRI Database

From 1950 to 2021, the graph indicates that the United States has been Taiwan's number one arms supplier, accounting for 90% of its military technology. Taiwan's reliance on purchasing weapons from the United States is influenced by several factors, including training and maintenance of familiar technologies, handling of

technology malfunctions, and the adaptation required when using American technologies compared to those from other countries (An, 2019).

The process of purchasing weapons involves lengthy procedures such as acquisition, delivery, technology maintenance, spare parts updates, inspection, and repair, all linking back to the supplying nation. Additionally, Taiwan has a higher likelihood of receiving US approval to purchase new aircraft (An, 2019).

This explains why Taiwan experiences a dependence on US arms. Taiwan is accustomed to and knowledgeable about American technologies, which grants the United States influence over Taiwan's dependency. This influence is useful for projecting US interests globally (An, 2019).

Therefore, with 90% of Taiwan's military technology originating from the United States, it can be said that Taiwan has developed a reliance on purchasing its military technology from the United States. This reliance operates under the Taiwan Relations Act, through which the United States provides defense articles to Taiwan. This dependence is part of the function of how much a nation should rely on foreign suppliers for military technology, depending on the available foreign resources to assess current regional and global security constellations (Kinsella, 1998).

Taiwan's limitations in military technology and defense industries have made it a country dependent on foreign arms. Thus, Taiwan has long purchased weaponry from the United States to maintain its defense capabilities (Shushen, 2022). Essentially, weapons can symbolize support in the bilateral friendship, thereby creating influence (Pierre, 2015).

The influence gained is used to affect the foreign policy decisions of the recipient country. As a supplier nation, the United States makes decisions or requirements for the recipient country in arms sales. Arms sales are an implementation of real foreign policy with potential long-term implications for regional security. In conducting arms sales, the United States considers political, military, economic conditions, arms control, and human rights to determine the provision of military technology equipment and commercial sales licenses directly to the recipient country. Each arms transfer is reviewed on a case-by-case basis and approved if it aligns with US foreign policy and the national interests of the recipient country (White House, 2021).

The United States imposes conditions for arms sales: first, the recipient country may not retransfer equipment to third parties without prior written authorization from the US government; second, defense articles may not be disposed of or used



for purposes other than agreed upon without written permission from the US government; third, security for any technology must substantially match that provided by the US government (White House, 2021). In implementing arms sales, the United States ensures that military technology originating from the United States is used in accordance with the agreement or license under which the weapon was shipped (White House, 2021).

Therefore, the US government has repeatedly urged the Tsai Ing Wen administration to enhance the protection of advanced military equipment and technology provided to Taiwan. In response to US requirements, Taiwan, through the Tsai Ing Wen administration, amended laws to tighten control over sensitive military technology, restrict travel to mainland China for personnel working on high-tech or sensitive technologies, and increase penalties for violations (Shushen, 2022).

These steps were agreed upon and implemented by Taiwan to address US concerns about proliferation and technology leaks. In this regard, Taiwan as the recipient country agrees to decisions in arms transfers, consistent with the requirements of all applicable export control regulations and obligations and commitments with the United States. Taiwan as the recipient country is not allowed to use arms transfers to contribute to violations of weapons or international humanitarian law. Taiwan also commits to enhancing transparency and combating corruption in its technology acquisition system, avoiding risks that could have negative political, social, or economic impacts on its country, including those impacting human rights protection, fundamental freedoms, or civil society activities (White House, 2023).

In considering the requirements set by the United States, Taiwan has made significant progress in several areas, such as political corruption remaining an issue but impunity gradually decreasing among public officials, and the role and prevalence of organized crime in elections. Furthermore, respect for the rule of law and constraints on formal political institutions have significantly improved, including Taiwan's judiciary, prosecutor's office, and constitutional court gaining increased independence and legitimacy (Templeman, 2022).

Therefore, the United States as the supplier of the F-16 Viper is obligated to monitor appropriately as part of its efforts to ensure that Taiwan uses the F-16 Viper responsibly and in accordance with the terms and agreements provided by the United States (White House, 2023). Decisional influence is evident in the requirements set by the United States for arms sales, which have been implemented by Taiwan as a form of compliance with the United States. The F-16 Viper falls into

the category of high maneuverability weapons technology, and as the supplier nation, the United States exercises control, restraint, and transparency over arms.

Taiwan has accepted these conditions, evident in the graph indicating that 90% of Taiwan's weapons come from the United States, as well as the amendments made by the Tsai Ing Wen administration as a form of influence exercised by the United States on Taiwan. The principles applied by the United States will enter into the influence of Taiwan's foreign policy, restraining and regulating Taiwan's decision-making. Therefore, when Taiwan uses the F-16 Viper fighter jet, the United States will monitor it as part of its foreign policy, ensuring that the weapons it sends are used responsibly and in accordance with the requirements of both countries (White House, 2023).

### ***Structural Influence***

Structural Influence is derived from the unbalanced order of the International System; global order uncertainties present national interests, thereby fostering cooperation or competition among states in the international world order. Influence can be observed when purchased weapons provide advantages to the recipient country, such as basic facilities, or when the supplying country gains benefits in fostering good relations with the recipient country to promote its global or regional interests.

Within the three dimensions of Structural Influence, the United States as the supplier and Taiwan as the recipient country, the first dimension will elucidate the interaction patterns between the United States and Taiwan. The second dimension will explain the position of the United States in the International System, and the third dimension will describe the influence that Taiwan will receive as the recipient of weapons. The conclusion of this dimension also reveals the condition of US influence in Taiwan as the supplier country after selling weapons, namely the F-16 Viper fighter jets, to Taiwan.

### ***Pattern of interaction between arms supplier and recipient country***

The United States exerts influence over Taiwan, evident from its substantial contributions in armaments. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), from 1979 to 2018, Taiwan imported 77% of its weapons from the United States (Fengyuan, 2020). During President Barack Obama's tenure from 2009 to 2017, foreign military sales to Taiwan amounted to \$14 billion USD (Fengyuan, 2020). Continuing into Donald Trump's administration, within just five

months of his victory, weapon sales to Taiwan were active. From 2017 to 2020, the Trump administration informed Congress about potential foreign military sales exceeding \$13.2 billion USD to Taiwan, with the largest deal being the sale of 66 F-16 Viper fighter jets totaling \$8 billion USD, finalized in August 2019 (Fengyuan, 2020).

Examining the longstanding interaction pattern between the United States and Taiwan, the protection provided by the United States to Taiwan as a major arms supplier demonstrates its continuous support. Both countries share common reasons and objectives, as Taiwan and the United States have strained relations with China (Ningrum, 2022). The United States' interest in Taiwan illustrates that Taiwan is a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region, essential for the United States to develop substantive relations and intervene in Taiwan Strait security (Shushen, 2022).

The approval of the sale of the F-16 Viper fighter jets showcases how the United States implements Structural Influence through one of its dimensions: the interaction pattern between the United States and Taiwan. As the dominant defense supplier to Taiwan, the United States contributes significantly to Taiwan's defense capability. The United States has provided Taiwan with heavyweight fighter jets, including the most advanced F-16 Viper, thereby enhancing military relations between the two countries (Tempo, 2021).

In its implementation, the United States provides advantages to the recipient country. The United States also benefits from maintaining control over the F-16 Viper fighter jets. This control is demonstrated through requirements such as Taiwan's agreement not to resell the F-16 Viper without US approval and strict control over the use of sensitive technology by the recipient country (Shushen, 2022). Thus, Taiwan as the recipient country has no choice but to comply with the supplier country's requirements as a necessity for acquiring the F-16 Viper.

The seriousness of Taiwan in acquiring the F-16 Viper to defend itself is evidenced by President Tsai Ing Wen's approach to the United States, discussing the enhancement of Taiwan's defense capabilities and collaborating to prevent China's forced reunification (Shushen, 2022). Taiwan successfully approached the United States, prompting assistance in arming Taiwan to bolster its defense technology. Consequently, Taiwan will continue to rely on the United States, its top arms supplier.

Taiwan benefits from the sale of the F-16 Viper, a sophisticated fighter jet exclusively available from the United States, especially given China's threats to

sanction any country cooperating with Taiwan. This reality solidifies the United States as Taiwan's largest supplier of defense technology. In conclusion, the United States effectively exercises Structural Influence through its interaction pattern with Taiwan.

### ***The position of the supplying country in the international system***

The United States has dominated global arms trade, with data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) showing a rapid increase in U.S. arms sales over the last five years, from 2018 to 2022. Based on figures, the United States accounted for 40% of total exports during 2018-2022, up from 33% in the previous five years (Lawler, 2023).

The United States pursues a foreign policy that seeks hegemonic leadership. It utilizes its economic and military positions to shape the post-war order. Currently, the U.S. Military Hegemony has been evident in recent years, with an annual military budget averaging over \$700 billion, constituting 40% of the global total, and involving deployments of 173,000 troops worldwide across around 800 military bases (MFANews, 2023). This demonstrates the United States as a superpower capable of influencing the foreign policies of recipient nations.

Since 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as a unipolar power, creating conditions for increased surveillance of arms sales and even encouraging violations of human rights (Johnson & Willardson, 2018). Power provides the prerequisite for influence and leadership. According to Tallberg (2018), a state with great power can convince, persuade, or pressure other nations to comply using economic or military means to change their behavior (Hillebrand, 2019). The United States has employed its substantial military power to become the world's largest arms supplier.

Arms sales occur frequently as if they were a non-controversial economic feature of U.S. relations with most countries worldwide (Gregor, 1997). U.S. arms sales policy surged after 2002, with the United States selling major conventional arms worth over \$197 billion and military support to 167 countries (Thrall & Dorminey, 2018). U.S. arms sales aim to enhance its security by bolstering the military capabilities of its allies and influencing the behavior and policies of recipient countries. This policy also enhances the U.S. economy and supports its defense industry base (Thrall & Dorminey, 2018).

The United States employs military power to exert influence without deploying its troops abroad (Thrall & Dorminey, 2018). Foreign Military Sales (FMS) are a major U.S. foreign policy tool, engaging the country in military activities without adequate scrutiny (Thrall & Dorminey, 2018).

As evidence of its dominance, U.S. arms exports span from Europe and Asia to the Middle East and Oceania. From 2012 to 2016, U.S. arms exports increased by 14%, and from 2017 to 2021, U.S. arms exports also grew its global share from 32% to 39%. U.S. arms exports from 2017 to 2021 doubled those of its nearest competitor (SIPRI, 2022). The United States ranks as the world's largest arms exporter, followed by Russia at 18.6% (SIPRI, 2022), with France in third place and Germany in fourth (Anwar, 2022).

The global influence of the United States stems from its dominance in international institutions like the UN and NATO, which promote American values of democracy, capitalism, and liberal social order (Hillebrand, 2019). According to Destradi (2010), the United States has successfully created an informal Western empire where it controls and leads without territorial annexation or formal authority over its allies (Hillebrand, 2019). This is reflected in the high value of U.S. arms exports within the international system.

Considering the United States as a hegemonic state at the pinnacle of the international system, it plays a significant role as a global arms supplier. The United States, with its considerable military capabilities, is proven as the world's foremost military power in 2021 (Annur, 2022). It also ranks as the world's largest economy, reaching \$22.9 trillion in 2021. China follows in second place and Japan in third (Dihni, 2022), making the United States an influential global player.

Taiwan is one of the countries in East Asia that partners with the United States. The United States sees Taiwan as central to security in East Asia. The United States agreed to supply the F-16 Viper fighter jets requested by Taiwan, with the agreement implemented in 2019 for delivery to Taiwan. The U.S. role with Taiwan demonstrates that the United States' position in the international system influences the behavior of the recipient country, Taiwan.

## ***Benefits received by the recipient country from the arms supplier***

As a recipient of arms from the United States, Taiwan gains several benefits, just as the United States as a supplier country benefits, impacting its foreign policy. Gradual relaxation of the transfer of offensive weapons has become a new characteristic of U.S. policy regarding arms sales to Taiwan (Shushen, 2022), which will benefit Taiwan from the advanced technological specifications that will help strengthen Taiwan's defense.

In the sale of weapons to Taiwan, the F-16 Viper falls under the category of Offensive weapons, exceeding the Taiwan Relations Act's requirement that the United States sell defensive weapons (Shushen, 2022). Because the F-16 Viper is a fighter aircraft categorized as Offensive. In 2018, the U.S. Department of State approved marketing licenses that allowed U.S. defense companies to sell sensitive technology to Taiwan (Shushen, 2022). This was done because President Donald Trump wanted to make Taiwan a key component of his foreign policy, using arms sales as a means to advance U.S. commitment to Taiwan's security and to enhance Taiwan's defense capabilities (Shushen, 2022).

The benefits received by the recipient, Taiwan, include ensuring its military defense in developing adequate capabilities to defend itself under direct threat from China. Furthermore, the sale of weapons serves as a conventional barometer to gauge U.S. willingness to commit to Taiwan's security in the event of Chinese aggression. The sale of weapons also opens doors for additional diplomatic support and foreign aid, offering Taiwan more influence in its independence compared to China (CIP, n.d.).

Taiwan also benefits from the assurance of its security from the United States. The U.S. Department of State has stated its strong commitment to Taiwan and will continue to support Taiwan's self-defense capabilities in line with the Taiwan Relations Act (Shushen, 2022). Taiwan gains access to procurement and training in weapons that must align with the development of asymmetric capabilities to counter China. U.S.-provided training will have a significant impact on its military or even its society, with various joint security cooperation programs with the United States offering long-term strong benefits, allowing allied and partner militaries to address security issues together (Vergun, 2020).

Consistently working with allies to facilitate military capabilities rooted in American values, the United States also focuses on minimizing civilian harm from operations and expanding training. The United States controls the use of sensitive



military technology to ensure its security and that of the recipient country (Vergun, 2020).

Considering the benefits Taiwan gains in buying weapons from the United States, the specifications of the technology purchased include the F-16 Viper equipped with various missiles, including the AIM-9X Sidewinder air-to-air missile and the AGM-84 Harpoon anti-ship missile. Taiwan's benefit in purchasing fighter jets is seen in the widespread deployment, lower prices, known training, and maintenance possibilities, along with a higher likelihood of U.S. approval to sell new aircraft (An, 2019). Taiwan is also given the opportunity to develop domestic maintenance facilities for repairing and maintaining F-16 Viper in Taiwan, saving costs compared to sending the aircraft back to the United States for repairs (An, 2019).

However, in this arms trade, the United States as a supplier country also benefits its own interests. Arms sales to Taiwan are essential for U.S. government in developing substantive relations with Taiwan and intervening in Taiwan Strait security issues. In general, U.S. policy aims to achieve several benefits in this arms trade, including strategic significance to demonstrate the availability and capability of the United States to intervene in Taiwan. In terms of military significance, to maintain the dynamic relative power balance across the Taiwan Strait. In terms of political significance, to demonstrate U.S. commitment to meeting relevant provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act. In terms of economic significance, to provide economic supply benefits into the U.S. defense and military industry, supporting the defense industry and increasing employment (Shushen, 2022).

The benefits received by the United States also include spreading U.S. influence, as arms sales help the United States exert influence over the behavior and foreign policies of the recipient country, Taiwan. In terms of its national security benefits, this arms sale provides economic benefits to the United States and fiscal benefits in terms of unit costs, helping to stabilize the U.S. defense industry base (Thrall & Dorminey, 2018).

Not only the recipient country, Taiwan, benefits, but the supplying country, the United States, also benefits from the success of its country to intervene and control Taiwan's foreign policy in decision making, because the United States also imposes some conditions in the sale of fighter aircraft

## ***Hegemonic Power***

Hegemonic Power plays a role in enhancing its influence by shaping the policies and security arrangements of a state. This occurs when an actor supplies groups that can assume power through socializing ruling elites (Krause, 1991). Hegemony denotes the domination of one group over others, also involving the dissemination of ideas to exercise authority (Rosamond, 2016). Hegemonic Power is used by a state to augment its influence over other states or regions.

The sale of F-16 Viper fighter jets is employed as a means to uphold United States hegemony in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Observing that the United States provides advanced technology to Taiwan, it enables the United States to control Taiwan's policies, placing Taiwan under its influence due to their military arms sales dependency. The influence the United States wields over Taiwan is used to counterbalance China's influence globally, as Taiwan has become a focal point for China to reunify its territories. The United States seizes this opportunity to contain China's power, with Taiwan serving as a key to curb Chinese influence in East Asia (Azizah, 2018). Beyond restraining China's hegemony in the region, the United States also utilizes Taiwan to mobilize its allies, legitimizing its military arms sales to Taiwan and reinforcing US hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region (Shumei & Yelu, 2021).

The United States expands its hegemony using Taiwan for various purposes related to major power rivalry. It employs the China threat theory to deter China's mainland development, thereby promoting the rationale for US presence in the Indo-Pacific region (Shumei & Yelu, 2021). Furthermore, the United States utilizes value-based diplomacy by contrasting China's nondemocratic nature with Taiwan's democracy. Domestically, US politicians exploit Taiwan for their own political interests (Shumei & Yelu, 2021).

The sale of the F-16 Viper by the United States not only assists Taiwan but also advances US national interests. Hegemony remains the primary goal for the United States, aiming to wield influence across various regions and the global sphere, positioning itself as the foremost global power. Supported by Donald Trump's speeches, which emphasized increasing US influence worldwide (Beckwith, 2016).

## CONCLUSIONS

During President Barack Obama's administration, there was a rejection of the sale of F-16 C/D fighter jets due to significant Chinese responses opposing the sale. However, with the presidency of Donald Trump, a stark contrast in leadership emerged. President Trump pursued American superiority to advance national interests, viewing power as crucial to the success of the United States. The most notable breakthrough during Trump's era was the approval of the sale of F-16 Viper fighter jets to Taiwan. In 2019, during Trump's administration, the US announced the sale of 66 units of F-16 Viper jets to Taiwan valued at \$8 billion to bolster Taiwan's defense.

This study also found that the rationale behind the US selling F-16 Viper fighter jets to Taiwan was grounded in the theory of Power and Influence. Power and Influence theory was applied to understand China's advancing responses, prompting Taiwan's need for advanced technology to balance China's technological developments and safeguard its sovereignty, supported by the United States. Based on the analysis of why the US sold F-16 Viper fighter jets to Taiwan, supported by Power and Influence theory, it can be concluded that the US recognized China's defense advancements, assisting Taiwan amid its Security Dilemma, while leveraging its influence for national interests and maintaining control over Taiwan as a key global player. In conclusion, the issue explored in this study concerning the rejection of F-16 C/D sales but subsequent approval of more advanced F-16 Viper sales highlights a shift in national policy by state actors.

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