



## DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT US-TAIWAN ARMS SALES

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According to the US Department of Defense's [Indo-Pacific Strategy Report](#), Taiwan is one of the US's main partners in Asia. Situated on the first island chain in the Pacific Rim, Taiwan holds a strategic position for defending against China's aggression. The Indo-Pacific Strategy has promulgated a new era of diplomatic closeness in US-Taiwan relations, as evidenced by the passing of several pieces of pro-Taiwan legislation and major arms sales, including F-16V fighter jets and M1A2T Abrams tanks.

Despite the progress in US-Taiwan relations and a shared commitment to Taiwan's defense, US arms sales to Taiwan have come under attack by media in both Taiwan and China. Potential presidential candidate [Terry Kuo](#) and Taipei Mayor [Ko Wen-Je](#), have openly cast doubt on Taiwan's defense policy. These critiques do not rely on fact and, if spread widely among the public in Taiwan, could create a rift

in US-Taiwan relations. This article identifies several of the widespread misperceptions and disinformation about US arms sales to Taiwan and explains why they do not hold water.

One critique notes that, compared to other countries that purchased F-16Vs, Taiwan paid an [exorbitant price](#). A widespread disinformation [picture](#) has been rebutted by Taiwan's Ministry of Defense on two separate occasions ([here](#) and [here](#)). Arms sales often include a variety of items such as logistics and training. As a result, it is often unreasonable to directly compare the total price of the purchases. Yet even in such comparisons, publicly available information shows that, among all countries that have purchased F-16Vs in recent years, the unit price for Taiwan's purchase is not unreasonable, and could even be the lowest, at \$122 million, when compared to Bahrain's \$147 million, and Morocco's \$152 million. Bulgaria and Slovakia both paid over \$200 million for an F-16V and its associated equipment. There is no evidence to say Taiwan squanders money by purchasing F-16Vs.

Another version of this charge states that arms sales are "protection money" the US charges to benefit its military-industrial complex. If the US is trying to maximize the business interests of its military industries, Washington should sell the most expensive weapon system to Taiwan, such as the F-35B. However, since such a sale could upend the military balance in the Indo-Pacific region, the US opted for the F-16V deal. In short, arms sales are a way for the US to advance its national interests and not to obtain profits from a trusted ally like Taiwan.

Second, critics claim that the US dupes Taiwan with old and ["useless" weapons](#). For example, in the claim mentioned above, Taiwan is said to be acquiring a two-decade-old, outdated model of the F16. That is a lie. The F16V is the latest generation of its series. It would be fairer to say that decades ago, the US tended to sell weapons to Taiwan that were not the "most" advanced. A major reason for this was that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was not as capable as it is today, so the US considered older weapons that Taiwan purchased sufficient to the task of self-defense. Additionally, US military technology is constantly evolving, so just because the US is phasing out of a

weapon system does not make it “obsolete” or “useless.” For example, the US Army transitioned from the M60A3 battle tank to the next-generation M1 Abrams in 1997. In 1995, Taiwan procured 160 M60A3 tanks from the US. The M60A3 has proven to be adequate to this day, and is still used by several of the top 25 military powers in the world.

Although US arms sales to Taiwan often take a long time to negotiate and are constantly delayed due to Chinese government protests, Taiwan has acquired efficient and modern military equipment in these arms sales. Since the early 2000s, Taiwan has received numerous state-of-the-art systems including Black Hawk helicopters and AH-64E Apache attack helicopters. Under the Trump administration, in addition to the recently authorized purchases of F-16V fighter jets and M1A2T tanks, Taiwan will also secure advanced missiles such as the AIM-9X Block II, [AGM-88B HARMs](#), AGM-154C JSOW, and FIM-92 Stinger missiles, all on Taiwan’s wish list.

Finally, critics argue that Taipei purchases weapons to shore up US-Taiwan relations and to win [public approval](#) for reelection. This claim, again, is not substantiated. First, every arms sale is evaluated and proposed by Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense, then undergoes negotiation and evaluation by the US government. The first time Taiwan’s Army proposed the purchase of the M1A2 was in the early 2000s, and the F-16 in 2003. Under the Trump administration, Taiwan has successfully closed several deals, a significant improvement compared to three sales during the Obama administration. The regularity in sales has prompted discussion of making Taiwan a “normal” foreign military sales partner with the US. Again, the growing strength of the US-Taiwan relationship is based on long-term efforts from both sides, not because of electoral considerations.

These false claims about US-Taiwan arms sales could reflect a Chinese strategy to use false information to influence the public in democracies. The lack of knowledge and resources to validate those claims could make the Taiwanese public fall prey to false accusations and create negative political repercussions. The rumors hurt the image of the US and shake the ground for cooperation between the US and its allies.

To disabuse misperceptions about US-Taiwan arms sales, Taiwan’s Ministry of Defense has set up a [news factchecker](#) on its website. Recently, officials of the American Institute in Taiwan (the de facto US embassy in Taiwan) have held public events [with Taiwan’s military](#), which contributed to public discussion of these issues. It is too early to determine if such efforts will alter the campaign of misinformation. As Taiwan moves closer to the presidential election next year, it is likely that China will continue to use information warfare to influence the Taiwanese public. We hope that this article will help raise awareness that false information is a threat to our shared democratic values and strategic interests.

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