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US sells arms to Taiwan, confronts China

The US announced on Monday that it has approved another large arms sale to Taiwan in a move that will further inflame tensions between Washington and Beijing. The arms sale worth \$330 million comes as the Trump administration is intensifying the US confrontation with China on all fronts—diplomatic and military, as well as a battery of trade war measures.

The proposed arms deal, which is yet to be finalised, covers parts for Taiwan's F-16, C-130, F-5, Indigenous Defence Fighter and other military aircraft. A Pentagon statement declared that the sale would contribute to US national security by boosting Taiwan's military capacities. It hailed Taiwan as "an important force for political stability, military balance and economic progress in the region."

In fact, the reverse is the case. Taiwan, which China regards as a renegade province, has always been one of the world's most volatile flashpoints. The Trump administration is provocatively strengthening diplomatic and military ties with Taiwan as part of its broader efforts to undermine and encircle China and prepare for war.

The arms deal is the second since Trump took office last year. In June 2017, the US agreed to the sale of \$1.4 billion worth of arms, including MK-48 torpedoes, high-speed anti-radiation missiles and early-warning radar surveillance technical support, which will significantly enhance Taiwan's military.

The US is also providing assistance to Taiwan as it seeks to develop its own diesel-powered submarines. In April, the US granted military contractors licences to sell submarine technology to Taiwan, including a submarine combat management system. A

separate technical assistance agreement provides for the sale of sonar, modern periscopes, and weapon systems.

As he assumed office last year, Trump threatened to abrogate the so-called One China policy that has formed the basis of US diplomatic relations with China for three decades. Under the arrangement, Washington effectively recognises Beijing as the government of all China including Taiwan, while opposing any attempt by China to forcibly take control of the island.

The US has also boosted ties with Taiwan through the passage of the Taiwan Travel Act in March that authorises visits and contact between top level Taiwanese and US diplomatic and military officials. It also opened a new building and compound this year for the American Institute in Taiwan, which functions as a de-facto embassy in Taipei.

On Monday, Taiwan backed away from a suggestion that it would send its defence minister to attend the annual US-Taiwan Defence Industry Conference in Maryland, amid concerns that upgrading its presence at the meeting could further raise tensions with China.

China criticised the latest arms sale, declaring that it undermined Chinese sovereignty and security. Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang urged the US to “immediately withdraw the arms sales plan and stop military to military relations between the United States and Taiwan so as to avoid further damage to Chinese-US relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.”

The Trump administration, however, has no intention of backing off. Trump used his speech at the UN General Assembly on Tuesday to denounce China and to hail the tariffs imposed by his administration on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods. Washington has already foreshadowed a further escalation of the economic war on China with threats to not only raise existing tariffs but extend them to the remaining \$267 billion of Chinese exports.

Yesterday Trump against lashed out at China, accusing it of interfering in the US mid-term elections in November. The outburst was all the more remarkable as it was while he was chairing a session of the UN Security Council that was meant to be addressing weapons proliferation.

Referring to China, Trump declared: “They do not want me or us to win because I am the first president ever to challenge China on trade and we are winning on trade, we are winning at every level. We don’t want them to meddle or interfere in our upcoming election.”

Trump has been under siege himself from the Democrats and sections of the US military/intelligence apparatus over unsubstantiated allegation of collusion with Russia to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election campaign. Yet he had no qualms about using the same deceitful methods, providing no evidence for any of the allegations in his 10-minute address.

Later Trump tweeted: “China is actually placing propaganda ads in the *Des Moines Register* and other papers, made to look like news.” China, however, is far from being the only government that buys advertisements in the media in the US and other countries in order to promote their wares. Like the allegations of “Russian meddling,” the evidence of “Chinese interference” is threadbare.

China’s top diplomat Wang Yi told the UN Security Council: “We did not and will not interfere in any country’s domestic affairs. We refuse to accept any unwarranted accusations against China.”

Nevertheless, Trump’s remarks are no accident, but rather signal the start of a propaganda offensive to poison relations with China as the US instigates trade war and prepares for military conflict. A senior Trump official told the media that Vice President Mike Pence plans to make a speech next week detailing allegations that China uses political, economic, military and other means to influence US public opinion.

At the same time, the US is ramping up its military provocations against China in the South China Sea. According to the *Business Insider*, the Pentagon flew four nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers across the contested waters on Monday. “The United States military will continue to fly sail and operate wherever international law allows at a times and places of our choosing,” Pentagon spokesman Dave Eastburn declared.

While the US military claims that such operations are routine, the presence of US warplanes and warships close to the Chinese mainland is part of the US military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region, begun under the Obama administration and continued under Trump.

Separately Pentagon spokesman Eastman told the media that US B-52s had also flown over the East China Sea on Tuesday as part of a “regularly scheduled, combined operation.” Japan and China have a longstanding and tense territorial dispute over uninhabited rocky outcrops in the East China Sea, known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

Amid rising tensions with the US, China recently denied a request for a US warship to visit Hong Kong. China also summoned the US ambassador to Beijing last weekend to

protest a US decision to sanction a Chinese military agency for its purchase of Russian fighters and surface-to-air missiles.

The US decision to authorise another arms sale to Taiwan can only further fuel a dangerous confrontation with China that has the potential to escalate from trade war to war.