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## WHY TAIWAN'S SECURITY NEEDS TO BE ENHANCED

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Congress passed the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) to ensure that Taiwan's security would not be compromised as a result of the termination of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Since then, the United States has continued to sell defensive arms to Taiwan. Nevertheless, this democratic state's security is still threatened by China's escalating military modernization and buildup across the Strait. Today, Taiwan suffers from the inability to participate in (or even observe) advanced joint military exercises. And the United States is failing to faithfully implement the legislative intent of the TRA.

To address these concerns, Senators Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) cosponsored S. 693, the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act (TSEA), to bridge the gap between the legislative intent of the TRA and the implementation of its key provisions. The measure calls on the U.S. government to recognize Taiwan's changing defense needs in light of the Mainland's determined military modernization and the more general revolution in military affairs from which Taiwan is diplomatically isolated. The bill's complement in the House, H.R. 1838, has a long and impressive bipartisan list of cosponsors. Yet the Clinton Administration is opposed to the bill, and supporters fear they may not be able to secure the two-thirds majority necessary to override a veto.

**The TRA's Intent.** Section 3(a) of the TRA instructs the U.S. government to make available "defense articles and services" to Taiwan, and "in

such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability." Section 3(b) notes that, "The President and the Congress shall determine the nature and quantity of such defense articles and services based solely on their judgement of the needs of Taiwan."

The legislative history of the TRA makes clear that these two provisions were intended to ensure that Taiwan was not relegated to using second-class military hardware and technology, that its defense needs would be determined without regard to the views of the Mainland, and that the President would at least consult with Congress in making this determination.

**Taiwan's Military Disadvantage.** Taiwan clearly is at a disadvantage *vis à vis* China. Today, the People's Republic of China has a 65 to 4 advantage in submarines and a 4,500 to 400 numerical advantage in aircraft, an edge increased by its acquisition of advanced foreign technology primarily from Russia, but also from Israel and the United States. According to a February 1999 Department of Defense

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report, China's buildup means that, "By 2005, the PLA will possess the capability to attack Taiwan with air and missile strikes which would degrade key military facilities and damage the island's economic infrastructure."

**What the TSEA Would Do.** The TSEA would re-establish congressional oversight of arms sales to Taiwan and empower the President to make available to Taiwan advanced defensive weapons systems and training. In the end, it aims to improve Taiwan's self-defense capability.

To address Taiwan's hardware needs, the TSEA would increase the technical staff of the American Institute in Taiwan, and it would require the Administration to report on Taiwan's requests for defense articles. In addition, it would authorize, but not mandate, the sale of satellite early warning data, missile defense systems, modern air defense equipment, and naval defense systems (including submarines).

To address Taiwan's software needs, the TSEA instructs the Secretary of Defense to devise a plan to enhance programs with Taiwan's military "for operational training and exchanges of personnel for work in threat analysis, doctrine, force planning, operational methods, and other areas."

These provisions are consistent with U.S. obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act, and they are clearly appropriate, given the Mainland's changing military posture. But the TSEA is meeting strong resistance from the Administration and even some Members of Congress.

**Security Promotes Peace.** Taiwan will never be China's military equal. But parity with China is not Taiwan's objective, and it should not be the objective of the United States. Nevertheless, the United States remains obliged under the Taiwan Relations Act to sell Taiwan defense articles and systems based solely on Taiwan's defense needs. Taiwan's defense needs require an increasing reliance on advanced military software (technology, training,

and strategy) in order to counter the Mainland's overwhelming hardware advantage.

To promote U.S. interests by deterring aggression and promoting freedom in the Taiwan Strait, the United States should:

- **Faithfully implement Section 3 of the Taiwan Relations Act.** Congress should exercise its legal right to participate in the determination of Taiwan's defense needs, and ensure that consideration of the Mainland's views does not hinder Taiwan's self-defense capability.
- **Improve Taiwan's self-defense capability.** Given Beijing's overwhelming hardware advantage, emphasis on missile modernization, and willingness to use missiles to intimidate Taiwan, Taiwan needs to increase its reliance on high technology—including missile defense. The alternative is near total vulnerability or total reliance on U.S. intervention.

Policymakers should discount arguments that warn that enhancing Taiwan's security will encourage "moves toward independence" and a regional arms race. Such alarmist views ignore the history of cross-Strait dialogue, which progresses when Taiwan feels secure. For example, production talks took place in 1993, after the 1992 F-16 sales and in 1998, after the 1996 U.S. aircraft carrier deployment.

Given the Administration's opposition to the TSEA, enhancing Taiwan's security will be an uphill battle for Congress. Nevertheless, the people of Taiwan demand that their government use every reasonable means at its disposal to protect them from an attack or coercion by the Mainland. For America, enhancing Taiwan's security, rather than increasing its vulnerability, is most conducive to peace and stability as well as freedom and prosperity for both sides of the Strait.

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