

Remarks for the U.S. - China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing
Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart
March 18, 2010

I was privileged to visit the Republic of China (Taiwan) in April of last year to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Taiwan Relations Act, the cornerstone of U.S.-Taiwan relations. The Taiwan Relations Act makes clear how dear the security of Taiwan is to the Congress and the people of the United States, and it has been a key factor in preventing military aggression against Taiwan.

I was pleased when the Obama Administration announced its plan to sell weapons totaling about \$6.4 billion in anti-missile systems, helicopters, minesweeping ships and communications equipment to Taiwan. However, we must not forget that Taiwan's top priority remains the purchase of F-16 C/D fighters.

The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2009 Report to Congress explains the threat to Taiwan's ability to live free of threat and coercion posed by the PRC's increasing military capabilities in the face of Taiwan's waning capabilities. Specifically in regard to air capabilities, the USCC Report states:

The success of seizing air superiority is critical in determining the outcome of any large-scale use of force against Taiwan. Over the years, Taiwan's air capabilities relative to China's have begun to shrink (p241-42).

And later:

In contrast to the growing size and quality of the PLA's fighter force, Taiwan has not substantially upgraded its fighter force in the past decade and may not do so in the near future. Although Taiwan requested the sale of sixty-six F-16 C/D fighters from the United States, these aircraft were not part of the Bush Administration's October 2008 notification to Congress of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. Although these fighters are still

desired by Taiwan, it is unclear whether the Obama Administration will agree to sell these, or other, modern aircraft to Taiwan (p242).

The January 21, 2010 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report further underscores the importance of these fighters to Taiwan's security with its conclusion that Taiwan's air defense is showing increasing vulnerability due to its aging fighters in contrast to the PRC's rapidly increasing military capabilities. As Taiwan's fighters age, Mainland China continues to fortify its military posture and devote increasing proportions of its GDP to modernizing its weapons while continuing to aim over a thousand missiles directly at Taiwan.

Since 2006, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan has budgeted billions of dollars for the purchase of additional F-16s to boost Taiwan's air defense capabilities. Meanwhile, the production line of F-16s is scheduled to close over the upcoming year to make way for the more advanced F-35 fighter.

The time to provide these fighters is now. The military and strategic imperatives for Taiwan are real and urgent. If we fail to show the necessary resolve, it would mean missing a significant opportunity to ensure peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region – a vital U.S. interest.

In addition to being irresponsible, it makes no sense to continue to deny Taiwan modern fighter aircraft. Mainland China will protest anyway. In fact, by protesting so vociferously to the weapons sale announcement on January 29, 2010, the Communist Chinese are seeking to pressure the United States into not selling advanced fighter planes.

I would also like to address another issue of utmost importance to the people of Taiwan. By participating in international organizations, Taiwan has worked diligently to combat the international isolation that Communist China has tried to impose on it by bullying and threatening international organizations and Taiwan's allies. I have often spoken in support of Taiwan's participation in international organizations such as the World Health Organization, and

we in the U.S. Congress must support Taiwan in its current attempts to participate in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Taiwan has achieved marked economic successes such as a flourishing market-based economy and one of the highest standards of living in the world, but the U.S.-Taiwan friendship rests on much more than shared economic interests or trade. Our friendship stems from a shared commitment to the fundamental ideals of the Rule of Law and freedom, and opposition to totalitarianism. We in the U.S. Congress must continue to support our friend and ally Taiwan in its most critical pursuits.