

End at the Water's Edge? Taiwan's Domestic Debate over Arms Procurement from the United States*

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Taiwan's purchase of weaponry from the United States has been an intriguing question to scholars and practitioners in Taiwan as well as the United States. To date, despite the growing threat put forth by mainland China's military strength, the question of why Taiwan is somehow short of actions as revealed in its delay in defense procurement is still under contestation. This paper employs the neoclassical realist approach to explain why there seems to be a gap in practice between the U.S. "goodwill" to sell and Taiwan's seemingly delayed response under the Chen administration. In addition, the author further investigates Taiwan's considerations under the Ma administration. The author argues that this gap can be attributed to the thinking of political elites in Taiwan, such as their perceptions of China's resolve and capabilities to unify Taiwan and of U.S. determination to protect Taiwan, their political considerations

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that aim to prevent the rivals from gaining domestic and international support, and their views about the most cost-effective ways to allocate national financial resources. With the review of relevant debates in Taiwan between 2000 and 2012, the preliminary findings of this paper indicate that political elites have become more pragmatic in terms of perceptions of mainland China and of the U.S., and yet partisanship and resource allocation seem to dominate, if not determine, their views on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

KEYWORDS: Taiwan; national defense; national security; U.S. arms sales; neoclassical realism.

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Whether and how Taiwan should purchase weaponry for national defense from the United States have been intriguing questions to scholars and practitioners in Taiwan as well as the United States. For scholars and analysts, as a “shrimp between whales,”¹ to what extent the international and regional environment has affected Taiwan’s decisions regarding the procurement of weaponry from the United States deserves attention. In addition, as a full-fledged democracy, Taiwan’s domestic politics are considered to be an important factor that has an impact on its foreign policy, and yet how its domestic concerns hinder or contribute to the administration’s policy choices is a relatively underexplored issue with regard to its overall relations with the United States. To date, despite the growing threat put forth by mainland China’s military strength, the question as to why Taiwan is somehow short of actions as revealed in its delay in defense procurement is still under contestation.

For practitioners in Taiwan as well as in the United States, successive U.S. administrations’ deliberations on arms sales to Taiwan in the aftermath of the August 17th Communiqué of 1982 have been a salient issue for relations among the U.S., mainland China, and Taiwan. Many in policy circles in the U.S. and in Taiwan have channeled their efforts into exploring the conditions under which those deals can be made without a

¹Dennis V. Hickey, *Foreign Policy Making in Taiwan: From Principle to Pragmatism* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Chapter 3.

deterioration in the dyadic relationships between the three actors and in regional peace and stability. This, however, begs the question as to why, even though the U.S. has expressed its willingness to sell arms to Taiwan despite China's strong opposition from time to time, Taiwan has not submitted its request as a sensible response.

Scholars and analysts try to cope with these questions with deep policy implications. Michael Chase, for instance, conducted an in-depth case study to explain why the Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) administration could not make a timely response to President George W. Bush's approval of an arms sales package in April 2001.² He concluded that Taiwan's overconfidence in the U.S. security guarantee and an underestimation of China's intentions and capabilities to annex Taiwan, combined with highly contested domestic politics in Taiwan, were delaying the Chen administration's response to the U.S. This situation, according to Chase, was further complicated by the Legislative Yuan (LY) wherein the majority—pan-Blue legislators³ strongly opposed Chen's proposals. This “domestic politics matters” line of reasoning is echoed by others with specialties in U.S.-Taiwan relations.⁴ Another group of scholars has tended to emphasize the crucial role of the political leadership in overall U.S.-Taiwan relations. Su Chi, joined by others, maintained that the political leadership or Chen might be responsible for the tardiness to respond to the U.S. offer, for there seemed to be too many political calculations that in turn endangered

²Michael S. Chase, “Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate and the Demise of the Special Budget Proposal: Domestic Politics in Command,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 4 (July-August 2008): 703-24.

³The pan-Blue camp, at that time, was composed of the Kuomintang (國民黨, KMT), People First Party (親民黨, PFP), and New Party (新黨, NP). However, in recent years, the PFP seems to have alienated itself from the other two in the camp in several policy debates. The pan-Green camp includes the Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨, DPP) and Taiwan Solidarity Union (臺灣團結聯盟, TSU).

⁴For instance, among these views, three major books authored by American scholars are worth noting: Richard C. Bush, *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005); Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States-Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Shelley Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

the mutual trust between the U.S. and Taiwan.⁵ When Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) assumed the presidency in 2008, the factors that delayed Taiwan's request for U.S. arms sales under the Chen administration have somewhat changed but their effects have lingered. The pan-Blue camp now enjoys the majority in the LY as the Chairman of the Kuomintang (國民黨, KMT) assumes the presidency. However, several concerns in Taiwan continue to play a role in shaping Ma's decision to answer the U.S.'s previous approval of arms sales.

This research, positioned in the field where theory should meet practice, aims to provide a theoretical explanation for Taiwan's thinking on arms sales from the U.S. This paper firstly aims to explain why there seems to be a gap in practice between the U.S. "goodwill" to sell and Taiwan's seemingly delayed response under the Chen administration. In addition, the author further investigates Taiwan's considerations under the Ma administration. By examining Taiwan's domestic debate over its arms procurement from the U.S., this paper argues that Taiwan's responses to U.S. arms sales can be attributed to the thinking of the political elites in Taiwan, such as their perceptions of China's resolve and capabilities to unify Taiwan and of U.S. determination to protect Taiwan, their political considerations that aim to prevent their rivals from gaining domestic and international support, and their views regarding the most cost-effective ways to allocate national financial resources. In other words, perceptions, partisanship, and resource allocation are the three major factors that shape the political elites' views on U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The administrations in Taiwan, as in other democracies in the world, need to be responsive to these diverse views and to be able to make responsible choices accordingly. The preliminary findings of this paper indicate that political elites have become more pragmatic in terms of their perceptions

⁵Su Chi, *Taiwan's Relations with Mainland China: A Tail Wagging Two Dogs* (New York: Routledge, 2009); to a lesser degree, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker also made this point in her *Strait Talk*. Liu Shih-chung also touched upon this point in his *Lishi de jiujiu: Tai-Mei guanxi de zhangliu hezuo yu fengqi* (The ties of history: strategic cooperation and divergence in Taiwan-U.S. relations, 2000-2008) (Taipei: Taiwan Brain Trust, 2010).

of mainland China and of the U.S., and yet partisanship and the allocation of resources seem to dominate, if not determine, their opinions about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

This paper subscribes to the “domestic politics matters” argument, and therefore employs the neoclassical realist approach in international relations (IR) scholarship to examine the domestic debate over the arms procurement from the U.S. in Taiwan. The neoclassical realist camp shares the assumption of anarchy in the international system with neo-realists such as Kenneth Waltz, but counters the argument that state behavior is preordained by the international system. Instead, neoclassical realists maintain that the perception of threat is crucial to explaining state foreign policy, and therefore how political elites perceive and interpret the external environment is the key among other factors.⁶

With former research conducted by Chase and others in mind, this author bases this research within the time frame from 2000 to 2012, in order to review the views held by Taiwan's political elites. Taiwan's debates with regard to Presidents Bush's and Obama's respective arms sales notifications to U.S. Congress on October 3, 2008, on January 29, 2010, and on September 21, 2011 are under scrutiny in this paper. The data for this analysis are mainly drawn from public sources, including news reports and official statements both in Taiwan and the U.S. In addition, personal interviews help the author clarify certain points raised by the existing literature on this topic. The views selected are from the Chen and Ma administrations, the legislators in the LY, scholars, and advocates from both the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps, with the focus on the procurement of armaments but not to cover overall military transfers and cooperation with the U.S. However, certain radical views, for example those expressed by the Labor Party in Taiwan eagerly proposing the island's immediate political unification with mainland China, are introduced only on an as needed basis owing to their limited market in relation to other ideas

⁶Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 157-65; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000/01): 128-61.

or thoughts. In addition, U.S. considerations to sell or not to sell arms to Taiwan, and China's rhetoric and actions in response to the U.S. decision are beyond the scope of this research.

In pursuit of this line of inquiry, this paper is divided into five sections. In addition to the introductory part, the second section introduces neoclassical realism and explains its salience to our understanding of Taiwan's overall foreign policy. The third section reviews the existing literature with regard to this arms sales issue and the extent to which it has an impact on U.S.-R.O.C. relations. The fourth part describes the Ma Ying-jeou administration's policy toward arms procurement from the U.S. This section also examines the debate between Taiwan's political elites, together with the proposal that perceptions, partisanship, and resource allocation are the major factors which affect their views of arms procurement. Theoretical and policy implications of this research are provided in the fifth and final section.

Theoretical Foundation to Understanding Taiwan's Arms Procurement Policy

In IR scholarship, many scholars have explored the relationship between theory and policy. As Stephen Walt suggested, it is important for practitioners to take theory seriously because "a theory is a causal explanation—it identifies recurring relations between two or more phenomena and explains why that relationship obtains."⁷ In addition, it is also important for scholars to focus on "issue-oriented puzzles," because in so doing scholars can help to inform the essence of the policy debate and hopefully provide a range for policy choice.⁸ This research, positioned in the field where theory should meet practice, aims to provide a theoretical explana-

⁷Stephen M. Walt, "The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 8 (2005): 26.

⁸*Ibid.*, 28-34.

tion for Taiwan's thinking on arms sales from the U.S.

For foreign policy analysis, the issue of the level of analysis as proposed by J. David Singer and others serves as a point of departure. For instance, Kenneth Waltz proposed three "images"—the individual, the state, and the international system, that can help us to understand and explain international politics.⁹ However, he dictated that anarchy in the international system is the key among the three levels. Other scholars, while they may agree on the anarchical nature of the international system defined by the distribution of capabilities among states, tend to see other levels of analysis as important as the systemic explanation. Robert Jervis posited four levels of analysis and maintained that the state behavior may be the product of the mixture of these different levels of analysis.¹⁰

What determines state behavior has been explored for long and scholars seem to reach a preliminary conclusion that the international system does affect state behavior, but how to respond to the external factors is highly contingent on the domestic context of that given country. While structural realists such as Waltz maintained that power configurations among states in the international system dictate state behavior, neoclassical realist Randall Schweller argued that states, because of domestic factors, assess and adapt to structural-systemic changes differently.¹¹ State behavior can be based upon domestic factors such as whether the leaders can make prudent judgments and are capable of implementing their policies. In addition, these analyses of neoclassical realism demonstrate how structural realists overemphasize the effects of the international system on state behavior and overlook one of the basic assumptions of realism—the

⁹Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: McGraw-Hill, 1979), Chapter 6.

¹⁰Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).

¹¹Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10; and Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," in *Progress in International Relations Theories: Appraising the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Elman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 311-47.

elites' eagerness to remain in power.¹² Thomas Christensen proposed a domestic mobilization theory to explain state confrontational behavior.¹³ To Christensen, it is this goal of surviving internationally and domestically that made the Truman administration and the Maoist regime "useful adversaries." Even in the case of Soviet accommodation of the U.S., Gorbachev was using "new thinking" and economic reforms to cope with severe domestic problems, while political survival remained the driving force behind this change in policy. Unfortunately, his overconfidence and the Soviet dysfunctional domestic institutions failed the reforms and brought about the demise of the Soviet Union.¹⁴

With the acceptance of the importance of the domestic level, this paper argues that perceptions of political elites in the state under scrutiny can help to explain its international behavior. Robert Jervis indicated the importance of understanding elites' perceptions while analyzing policy outcomes.¹⁵ To Jervis, perceptions and misperceptions constitute the

¹²Schweller employs state-level variables, including elite consensus, regime vulnerability, and elite and social cohesion, to explain states' balancing or underbalancing, and concludes that it is the lack of elite consensus and social cohesion that leads to a state's underbalancing behavior. He concludes that when a crisis occurs, political elites have to deal with the internal-external nexus in terms of stability. Under these circumstances, incoherent and fragmented states are unwilling and unable to balance against threats because elites view the domestic risks as being too high, and they are unable to mobilize the required resources from a divided society. In other words, balancing is simply too costly to implement. See Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*. Another line of reasoning—domestic mobilization to strengthen the leaders' political base—is seen in Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹³Christensen investigates the strategic thinking of leaders and argues that the enmity between the U.S. and China during the early Cold War years was first driven by shifting distributions of power in the international system, and then by their own domestic policy priorities. Although in the immediate aftermath of WWII many people in the U.S. favored a normalized relationship with communist China, the need to mobilize the domestic population for long-term confrontation with the looming Soviet threat motivated the Truman administration to describe the Maoist regime as a threat. On the Chinese side, the U.S. also somewhat served as a straw man for rising Soviet hegemony. Both governments across the Pacific acted rationally given their larger strategic objectives and adopted confrontation as the suitable policy. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*.

¹⁴See William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perception during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁵Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*.

foundations upon which foreign policy is made, because “[it] is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-makers’ beliefs about the world and their images of others.”¹⁶ Misperceptions can also lead to incongruities between the perceived and objective environment, resulting in less satisfactory outcomes in foreign policy.¹⁷ Stephen Walt, based on Jervis’ research on perception and misperception, maintained that decision-makers’ perceptions and the capability of the state constitute intervening variables that explain state behavior in terms of balancing or bandwagoning.¹⁸ Others also contend that decision-makers’ perceptions of the international environment provide the “first cut” in the analysis of foreign policy.¹⁹ The neoclassical realist analysis of foreign policy emphasizes the role of leaders’ perceptions as a transmission belt in explaining the effects of the international system on state behavior.²⁰

Recently, a group of scholars interested in neoclassical realism broadened the research to test this theory.²¹ With cases mainly drawn from history, these authors demonstrate that how political leaders perceive

¹⁶Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 28.

¹⁷Robert Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” *World Politics* 20, no. 3 (April 1968): 454-79; Valerie M. Hudson and Christopher S. Vore, “Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (October 1995): 213-14.

¹⁸Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*; Robert Jervis, “Realism in the Study of World Politics,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (October 1998): 971-91; Stephen M. Walt, “The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition,” in *Political Science: State of the Discipline*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 197-230; Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” 132-36; Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 157-65; Randall Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72-107. Schweller also contributes to the discussion regarding the distinction between “status quo” and “revisionist” states, see Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹⁹Robert Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond,” in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 158-203.

²⁰Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 144-72.

²¹Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

and evaluate the distribution of capabilities among states is the key to explaining state behavior. In the process of decision making, they argue that political leaders need to pay attention to the opposition from both the political and societal fronts. In other words, the opposition parties will tend to coalesce with interest groups from society to bargain with the top leaders in democracies. They further developed their analysis on foreign policy choices along two dimensions: the clarity of the international system with regard to threats and opportunities; and the degree of information it provides on how best to respond to these external and structural conditions.²² Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Steven Lobell provided a 2×2 matrix to delineate the scope of neoclassical realism as shown in table 1.

These four “worlds” denote the validity of neoclassical realism in different cases, based upon how domestic actors perceive the external environment. In *World 1*, the international system provides clear information on the level of threats as well as on how to respond to them. When the international system presents threats and the best way is to balance against the perceived threats, it is usually the Waltzian logic of balancing that proves to be correct. Neoclassical realism thus provides an explanation for why some countries fail to respond with balancing despite clear structural incentives, as indicated in the 1930s when the British and French governments chose not to take decisive actions against Germany.

World 2 suggests that despite the international system presenting a clear threat, the response to the external threat is contested because domestic actors differ on how to weigh costs against benefits. Herein, domestic actors are able to determine policy choices while facing international challenges, and neoclassical realism becomes useful. As to *World 3*, without clear information on the nature of international challenges and on the suitable responses, the statement “anarchy is what states make

²²Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, “Conclusion: The State of Neoclassical Realism,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 280-87.

Table 1
Neoclassical Realism and the Four Worlds

	Clear information on threats	Unclear information on threats
Clear information on policy responses	<i>World 1</i> Consistent with realism. Domestic actors normally affect only the style or timing of policy. Neoclassical realism is useful only to explain dysfunctional behavior.	<i>World 4</i> Inconsistent with realism. Domestic actors can help determine national interests, but policy responses are largely determined by international institutions. Neoclassical realism is not useful for explaining the behavior of states.
Unclear information on policy responses	<i>World 2</i> Consistent with realism. Domestic actors can affect not only the style or timing of policy, but also the nature of policy responses to international challenges. Neoclassical realism is useful to explain foreign policy choices of states.	<i>World 3</i> Inconsistent with realism. Domestic actors help determine national interests and policy responses to them. <i>Innenpolitik</i> theories are more useful than neoclassical realism in explaining the behavior of states.

Source: Adapted from Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, "Conclusion," in Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 283, table 10.1.

of it"²³ describes that unit-level analysis is important and foreign policy choices are determined by basic traits of the state under scrutiny. *World 4* demonstrates the world regulated by other imperatives, such as rules proposed by international regimes, and states behave accordingly despite no clear information on external threats. Realism is not applicable to *Worlds 3* and *4*, while this research falls into *World 2*, in which domestic actors debate not whether, but how, to respond to the changing external environment.

In recent years, scholars and analysts in the United States have also employed different levels of analysis in general, and the domestic elec-

²³Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391-425.

toral politics to explore the case of Taiwan. For instance, Michael Swaine and James Mulvenon prioritized the significance of the domestic political context and structure in explaining Taiwan's foreign and security policy-making.²⁴ Dennis Hickey conducted a very thorough study on Taiwan's foreign policy, in which he found that factors at different levels more or less have an impact on the policy outcome over time.²⁵ Hickey went on to argue that the personality of the presidents, the process of democratization, and being geopolitically located between mainland China and the United States, would inevitably provide both challenges and opportunities for Taiwan's foreign policy. From a similar but slightly different vein, Shelley Rigger discussed Taiwan's foreign policy with a relatively deep historical background and yet attributed its international status to the impact of the leadership, political mandate/electoral politics, and power distributions between neighboring countries.²⁶

Scholars and analysts based in Taiwan share the same view when addressing the importance of the level of analysis in exploring its foreign policy. Su Chi explored the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China and that between Taiwan and the United States. With the detailed analysis in the regional and domestic context, Su ascribed the deterioration in relations between Taiwan and the two great powers during 2000 and 2008 to domestic political calculations of Taiwan's leadership.²⁷ Taiwan Brain Trust senior research fellow Liu Shih-chung (劉世忠), who once served as a high-level official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) under the Chen Shui-bian administration, underlined four levels to explain U.S.-Taiwan relations from 2000 to 2008: the leadership, bureaucracy, internal factors, and external factors.²⁸ These outstanding

²⁴Michael D. Swaine and James C. Mulvenon, *Taiwan's Foreign and Defense Policies: Features and Determinants* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001).

²⁵Hickey, *Foreign Policy Making in Taiwan*.

²⁶Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters*.

²⁷Su Chi, *Taiwan's Relations with Mainland China: A Tail Wagging Two Dogs* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²⁸Liu, *Lishi de jiujiu*.

works, despite placing emphasis on different levels of analysis, share the common ground that the process of domestic politics and elites' perceptions of threat have a crucial impact on the foreign policy output of Taiwan.

Along the same lines of reasoning that "domestic politics matters," this paper argues that how political elites perceive the external environment and debate policy choices is the key to explaining Taiwan's action or inaction in response to U.S. arms sales. This paper finds Steven Lobell's analysis on how interactions between the foreign policy executive (FPE) and other political and societal elites affect foreign policy output to be applicable to the case of Taiwan.²⁹ According to Lobell, the foreign policy executive (FPE) is defined to include the head of the government and the ministers and officials in charge of making foreign and security policy. In the case under scrutiny here, the FPE refers to the presidents of Taiwan, along with top officials such as National Security Advisors and high level officials in the MND who enjoy access to the information necessary for threat assessment. This author sides with Lobell in that the FPE, especially the president himself, plays a crucial role in Taiwan's action or inaction to U.S. arms sales offers. The FPE needs to negotiate with other political and societal leaders, including congress and leaders from the opposition political parties, interest groups, and civil society. However, as stated earlier, this research is limited to interactions between the FPE and other political elites that did influence the policy outcome over arms procurement.

To operationalize the neoclassical realist argument, this research focuses on how the FPE and other political elites perceive and assess the external environment put forth by a rising China, and their considerations on how to respond. Comments and discourse by the FPE and political elites are necessary to understand the process, and news reports and personal interviews serve as main sources for this research. The author qualitatively analyzes these comments.

²⁹Steven E. Lobell, "Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42-74.

The perceptual analysis of foreign policy, however, suffers certain limitations and we should not take it as a guarantee that the views of political elites would necessarily be adopted by the leadership and transformed into policy. In most cases, scholars have been unable to tease out clearly whether perceptions cause policy change, or whether academic and/or public debates only serve to justify the policy after the fact. It is an uneasy task to discern the causal relationship between perception and foreign policy in a democratic country where the process is more likely to be revealed through check-and-balance mechanisms.

Taiwan's Responses to U.S. Arms Sales from 2000 to 2008

In 2001, the Bush administration approved an arms sales package but Taiwan seemed to hold up its response until 2004 when the then administration chose to use the special budget rather than the regular budget request to the LY. This package offer approved by the Bush administration included eight diesel-electric submarines, twelve P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft, an integrated undersea surveillance system, and four decommissioned Kidd-class destroyers. Later that year, the Bush administration added other items such as tanks, helicopters, and PAC-3 missile defense systems to the list.³⁰ As the discussion that follows indicates, despite clear information on China's growing military capabilities, political elites in Taiwan heavily shaped the responses to the external challenge. This fits into the *World 2* explanation.

Perception of Mainland China

When Taiwan received the approval of the Bush administration in April 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the EP-3 incident between the U.S. and China, the Chen Shui-bian administration was surprised and did

³⁰Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 705-7; Shirley A. Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990," *CRS Report for Congress*, Washington, D.C., May 2012.

not respond in a timely fashion.³¹ In Chase's well-articulated research, he mainly attributed the inaction of the Chen administration to the domestic political squabbles between the pan-Blue and ruling pan-Green camp, and to a lesser degree to Taiwan's political structure wherein the opposition party enjoyed the majority in the LY. Both camps found that blaming the other side seems to have served their political interests. Chase further contended that the political elites' overconfidence in the steadfastness of the U.S.'s security assurance and underestimation of the seriousness of China's military threat fueled the already heated debate.³²

Between 2001 and 2008, Taiwan's domestic debate over U.S. arms sales focused on several issues. First, perceptions of China (and of the United States) provided the "first cut" to the political elites' assessment of this package. According to Lobell, a consensus between the FPE and other political elites is necessary for threat identification. My interviews with a former government official charged with formulating national security policy in Taiwan suggest that after the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis, political elites in two major parties seemed to agree that mainland China constituted a real danger.³³ As former KMT legislator and retired Army Lt. Gen. Shuai Hua-min (帥化民) reminded the author, he had pointed out the asymmetry in military capabilities across the Taiwan Strait as early as in 2000.³⁴ In other words, mainland China's continuous military modernization has been identified as a threat to Taiwan since the early years in the Chen administration.

However, mainland China's intention was not so clearly a threat to Taiwan's political elites.³⁵ Based on Chase's interviews, there were analysts who suggested that mainland China does not embrace such a strong

³¹Mark Stokes, "Taiwan's Security: Beyond the Special Budget," online paper, American Enterprise Institute, *Asian Outlook*, March 27, 2006.

³²Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 705-7.

³³Interviews with Dr. Chong-Pin Lin (林中斌), Taipei, April 1, 2013, and with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai (蔡明憲), Taipei, April 16, 2013.

³⁴Interview with Mr. Shuai Hua-min (帥化民), Taipei, April 12, 2013.

³⁵The author thanks one of the reviewers for bringing up the difference between rival perceptions over China's capabilities and intention in this case.

determination to militarily invade Taiwan, despite its military modernization in recent years.³⁶ Furthermore, some in Taiwan also believed that the U.S. will come to the rescue if China decides to resort to force for unification.³⁷ The pan-Blue camp seemed to prefer a relatively stable relationship with mainland China through negotiations, given the fact that the gap in terms of military capabilities was quite large on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. Nancy Tucker noted that some in the pan-Green also saw the disadvantages for Taiwan to defend itself only by military means, and echoed their pan-Blue counterparts' thinking that Beijing's priority seemed to be getting rich rather than invading Taiwan.³⁸ In my interview with former Minister of National Defense Dr. Michael Tsai (蔡明憲), I found that Tucker's comments might be far-fetched, because the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨, DPP) members in the LY demonstrated their full support for the Chen administration's defense programs.³⁹ Dr. Chong-Pin Lin (林中斌), former Deputy Minister of National Defense and Deputy Minister of the Mainland Affairs Council, aptly pointed out that mainland China in 2002 had forged a grand strategy to prioritize economic development over unification with Taiwan.⁴⁰ In mainland China's formulation, goodwill measures constituted a crucial part to shape Taiwan's perceptions of China.⁴¹ As a result, although government officials kept addressing possible negative outcomes due to the widening gap in military strength between Taiwan and China in order to justify the purchase, many political elites tended to underrate China's intention to threaten the island. This situation was further complicated by partisanship in Taiwan's domestic politics.

³⁶Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 708-9.

³⁷Ibid., 708-9; interview with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

³⁸Tucker, *Strait Talk*, 270.

³⁹Interview with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

⁴⁰Chong-Pin Lin, "Beijing's New Grand Strategy: An Offensive with Extra-Military Instruments," *China Brief*, December 6, 2006. <http://blog.yam.com/CPLin/article/20927047> (accessed April 1, 2013).

⁴¹Interviews with Dr. Chong-Pin Lin, Taipei, April 1, 2013.

Political Consideration

The second group of arguments centers on the impact of partisanship in Taiwan's domestic politics. When in the 1990s the KMT was in power, the Democratic Progressive DPP as the opposition had recurrently opposed military expenses. When the DPP came to power, the KMT and its allies, with the majority in the LY, began to block the Chen administration's proposal for arms acquisition.⁴² In June 2004, the Chen administration made the proposal for a special budget to the LY, as the first formal response to Bush's 2001 package of arms sales. This belated response is partly due to President Chen's political consideration, reflecting a shift to prioritize domestic issues over arms procurement, and to maintain "harmonious" relations with the Minister of National Defense Tang Yao-ming (湯曜明) in exchange for the whole military's support of the DPP President.⁴³

However, this gesture made by Chen was itself not part of the solution, but of the problem. For one, Chen seemed to be unprepared for the whole package of weaponry that the U.S. planned to sell. According to Su Chi, the government finally pinned down the detailed items after being tipped off by the American side. In addition, Chen's personal political calculations on the budget issue further alienated possible support from the pan-Blue camp, because the entire budget plan "was approved by Chen [only] in early March 2004, just weeks before the presidential election, and sent to the legislature only by June 2, 2004, more than three years after Bush's approval."⁴⁴ This made only a few in the pan-Blue camp in the LY believe in Chen's sincerity to pass the bill. The Chen administration was also believed to be trying to blame the pan-Blue alliance as the spoiler in the deal, while Chen was losing his own credibility in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and received negative feedback from Washington.⁴⁵

⁴²Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 710; Shirley A. Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990" (CRS Report for Congress, Washington, D.C., May 2012).

⁴³The author is grateful to one of the reviewers who shed light on this comment.

⁴⁴Su, *Taiwan's Relations with Mainland China*, 203.

⁴⁵Liu, *Lishi de jiuji*, 68-70; Wei-chin Lee, "Arms Twisting: U.S.-Taiwan Arms Transfers

In addition, controversies surrounding the 2004 presidential election made it more difficult for bipartisanship on this issue. The government held the referendum regarding the purchase of advanced PAC-3 missiles but could not acquire enough turnout to pass the deal, and therefore ruled out the question for three years in accordance with Taiwan's Referendum Law. This development provided a legal ground for the pan-Blue camp not to accept the bill. Furthermore, some in the pan-Blue alliance also questioned Chen's legitimacy due to the shooting incident, and thus opposed any proposal from Chen.

The People First Party's (親民黨, PFP) strong opposition to the purchase was decisive in the failure of Chen's proposal. Many KMT legislators seemed to express a "conditional yes" for the arms sales, and the key issue was whether the deal could meet Taiwan's defense needs and be cost-effective, without leaving the debt to the following generations.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the then KMT Chairman Lien Chan indicated that Taiwan did need military strength in preparation for the negotiations across the Taiwan Strait in the future.⁴⁷ When the Chen administration announced in 2005 that the regular annual defense budget would gradually meet the 3% of gross domestic product (GDP) requirement in 2008, the then KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou seemed for the first time to be willing to endorse the idea with the term "no objection."⁴⁸ The PFP, however, tended to see

in the First Decade of the Twenty-first Century," *Issues & Studies* 46, no. 3 (September 2010): 162-67.

⁴⁶Shi Xiao-guang, "Lanying songkou: jungou you taolun kongjian" (The pan-blue camp: There is room for discussion on arms procurement), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), May 29, 2005, 6; phone interview with the KMT legislator, Dr. Lin Yu-fang (林郁方), Taipei, April 4, 2013.

⁴⁷Chen Shan-rong, "Zhichi jungou, Kuomintang gaoceng gongshi" (KMT high-level officials reached the consensus to support arms procurement), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), October 3, 2004, 4.

⁴⁸"Ma Ying-jeou bu fandui guofang yusuan zengzhi GDP 3%" (Ma Ying-jeou says "no objection" to increase the budget for national defense to reach GDP 3%), *Central News Agency* (Taipei), December 27, 2005. However, Chen's decision to abolish the National Unification Guidelines and Council in early 2006 literally dampened Ma's goodwill that might have narrowed the gap between the pan-Blue and pan-Green camps over the armament procurement issue.

the whole deal provided by the Bush administration as meeting none of the above conditions, and labeled the deal as “wastrel spending” (凱子軍購) on arms procurement.⁴⁹ One of the PFP legislators even complained that the Bush administration was asking for a “protection fee” from Taiwan.⁵⁰ From the FPE’s view, party politics seemed to prevail at that time, as the then Deputy Minister of National Defense Dr. Michael Tsai lamented, “I had personally made 400 visits to legislators with the revised budget, but still could not pass the bill in the LY. . . . Party politics is vital.”⁵¹

Resource Allocation

The third set of arguments in the debate focuses on the issues regarding Taiwan’s resource allocation. Among these arguments, even if political elites accept the common ground that China constituted a threat, they differed on how to deal with it. Most of the pan-Green legislators supported Chen’s proposal for arms procurement, and even some of them were relatively sanguine about U.S. security guarantees. For instance, DPP legislator Lee Wen-chung (李文忠) once expressed that through arms transfers and military cooperation, it is possible for Taiwan and the U.S. to build a “quasi-military alliance.”⁵² This seemed to be a confrontational approach to coping with China.

Another group of elites suggested that, considering China’s military strength, it would be a futile attempt for Taiwan to rely *only* on the purchase of weaponry for self defense if China really wanted to invade Taiwan. Despite the threat being real, this group contended that economic interactions and even negotiations might help to forge a relative stable relationship with China.⁵³ The idea of combining hard power/military

⁴⁹“Qinmin dangtuan: fandui kaizi jungou lichang weibian” (PFP caucus: opposition to wastrel spending has never changed), *Central News Agency* (Taipei), April 24, 2006.

⁵⁰Cited from Chase, “Taiwan’s Arms Procurement Debate,” 723.

⁵¹Interview with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

⁵²He Bo-wen, “Lee Wen-chung: Tai Mei queyou gaodu moqi” (Lee Wen-chung: Taiwan and the U.S. do have a high degree of tacit agreement), *China Times* (Taipei), October 1, 2002, A4.

⁵³Bush, *Untying the Knot*, 124-28.

defense capabilities and soft power/improvements in cross-Strait relations proposed by Su Chi seemed to be popular and influential.⁵⁴ In other words, the procurement of arms is not the only choice to cope with mainland China, and alternatives lead political elites to reconsider its necessity.

In the meantime, still others centered their concerns on the crowding-out effect that this big share of the government budget for national defense, be it regular or special, would inevitably shrink the share amount for pressing issues such as education or infrastructure. To them, the scale of the package might be too big for Taiwan, and whether the items the U.S. proposed would really meet Taiwan's defense needs was in question. For instance, PFP Chairman James Soong maintained that the government could budget the money not for weaponry but for water conservancy that could benefit the people.⁵⁵ Legislator Dr. Lin Yu-fang (林郁方) made it clear that "we need to say 'no' to the NT\$610.8 billion budget, but not to U.S. arms sales."⁵⁶ Chang Ya-chung (張亞中), professor in Political Science at National Taiwan University, also led the Democratic Action Alliance to object to "any increase in defense spending in light of more pressing domestic needs."⁵⁷ To them, Chen's claim to increase the national defense budget to 3% of GDP was missing the point because the government should put the people's need as the first priority. Furthermore, even high level officials in the Chen administration expressed their concern that this big chunk of arms sales would squeeze other government agencies to a significant degree.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Su Chi, "Ruanquanli + shoushi guofang = guo'an" (Soft power + defensive defense = national security), *United Daily* (Taipei), January 24, 2006, A15. In a similar vein, Lin Bih-jaw also suggested that interactions may help to produce a stable relationship with mainland China, see Lin Bih-jaw, "Yi ruanxing lilian, kaichuang liangan xinju" (Wielding soft power to open a new stage for the cross-Strait relations), *China Times* (Taipei), May 12, 2004, A15.

⁵⁵He Rong-xing, Xie Min-zheng, and Li Zhengzheng, "Jungou koushuizhan: Bian: juefei kaizi; Soong: yiyou huikou" (In rhetoric fight: Bian: not a wastrel; Soong: suspicious of a kickback), *China Times* (Taipei), September 10, 2005, A13.

⁵⁶Phone interview with the KMT legislator, Dr. Lin Yu-fang, Taipei, April 4, 2013.

⁵⁷Stokes, "Taiwan's Security."

⁵⁸Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 723.

With acknowledgement of the necessity to purchase, how to proceed and which items or programs should be prioritized became the question. Legislators in the LY questioned the utility of purchasing the PAC-3 systems, because “it needs two to intercept one offensive missile, and it’s not affordable given Taiwan’s financial limitation.”⁵⁹ Instead, as Dr. Chong-Pin Lin and Shuai Hua-min suggested, given mainland China’s grand strategy that prioritizes economic development, deterrence seems to be Taiwan’s best choice.⁶⁰ Mr. Shuai, with his background in the Army, contended that “Taiwan does need submarines to deter mainland China.”⁶¹ Procurement of submarines turned out to be based on a consensus, but some LY members argued that the government should strike a good deal to build indigenous production capability through cooperation with the U.S. from the procurement. Then PFP member Lin Yu-fang of the LY National Defense Committee requested that the Executive Yuan (EY) propose domestic submarine-building to the U.S., so that Taiwan can participate in building six of the eight submarines through the China Shipbuilding Corporation.⁶² Dr. Michael Tsai concurred with this view that indigenous development is crucial to Taiwan’s military buildups.⁶³ However, this request was rebutted for its high costs and possible risks by the then Minister of Defense Tang Yao-ming after consideration and consultation with Washington.⁶⁴ This demand from the LY reflected the fact that some of Taiwan’s political elites expect to see a more equal footing or partnership with the U.S. that could economically benefit the island.

The items to purchase became a pressing issue especially when the Chen administration failed to prioritize the programs necessary for na-

⁵⁹Interview with Mr. Shuai Hua-min, Taipei, April 12, 2013.

⁶⁰Interviews with Dr. Chong-Pin Lin, Taipei, April 1, 2013, and with Mr. Shuai Hua-min, Taipei, April 12, 2013.

⁶¹Interview with Mr. Shuai Hua-min, Taipei, April 12, 2013.

⁶²He Bo-wen, “Qianjian guozao ti’an, liwei relie xiangying” (Legislators warmly welcome the proposal for domestic submarine-building), *China Times* (Taipei), May 21, 2002, A6.

⁶³Interview with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

⁶⁴He Bo-wen, “Tang Yao-ming: qianjian guozao: ceshi churenming sheifuze?” (Tang Yao-ming: What if there is a loss of life in the domestic submarine-building project: who will be responsible?), *China Times* (Taipei), June 6, 2002, A4.

tional defense. Analysts, to a lesser degree, contended that inter-service rivalry between army, navy, and air force in Taiwan was responsible for this situation. As Liu Shih-chung indicated, when the Ministry of National Defense (MND) was led by Tang Yao-ming from 2002 to 2004, his background in the Army resulted in the MND's reservation on prioritizing the acquisition of submarines among other programs.⁶⁵ Tang was succeeded by retired admiral in the Navy Lee Jye (李傑) in 2004. Liu's comments suggested that parochial interests among different sectors in the military might be responsible. However, with his army background, former Legislator Shuai Hua-min provided the author with another explanation, "national defense is composed of two major parts, one is military buildup, including arms procurement, and the other is military preparedness. Since Mr. Tang's specialty was military preparedness, he might be a bit reluctant to procure new items. This is why it took three years for the budget plan to be sent to the LY from the MND."⁶⁶

The passage of the purchase of four Kidd-class destroyers in May 2003 significantly strengthened the ROC Navy's defense capability, but seemed to squeeze the limited financial resources for other programs.⁶⁷ Those items or programs to be affected included the Aegis-equipped destroyers and submarines, and PAC-3 batteries, etc. In 2005, the head of MND Lee Jye maintained that the PAC-3 missile defense system, P-3C Orion ASW planes, and diesel electric submarines were all "necessary for homeland security."⁶⁸ This statement seemed to ease possible rivalry within the military. However, several pan-Blue legislators were disap-

⁶⁵Liu Shih-chung also touched upon this point in his *Lishi de jiujiu*, 69. The author also thanks one of the reviewers for concurring with this view.

⁶⁶Interview with Mr. Shuai Hua-min, Taipei, April 12, 2013.

⁶⁷Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 707-9; Liu Ping, "Jidejian maimai, Tai Meiqesuoxu" (The deal of Kidd-class destroyers serves both Taiwan's and U.S. needs), *China Times* (Taipei), December 4, 2000, A2; He Bo-wen, "Tang Yao-ming: tisheng zhanli, quexu caigou 4 jidejian" (Tang Yao-ming: We do need to purchase four Kidd-class destroyers to strengthen our military capabilities), *China Times* (Taipei), October 17, 2002, A2.

⁶⁸Chase, "Taiwan's Arms Procurement Debate," 715.

pointed by the MND's lack of priority in these programs.⁶⁹ In April 2006, the Chen administration along with DPP legislators finally proposed to make submarines the first priority.⁷⁰

Inaction on the part of the Chen administration had a negative impact on Taiwan-U.S. relations. From the U.S. perspective, Chen's lack of priority in his request and his determination to safeguard budget plans led the U.S. to question Taiwan's determination to defend itself and its ability to evaluate the threat of China. For instance, the Special Budget for submarines, P-3C ASW aircraft, and PAC-3 missile systems was slashed from \$18 billion in 2004 to \$9 billion—for submarines only—in 2005 and yet turned out to be a failure. From March 2006 onwards, Taiwan's MND made several attempts followed by revisions to fund armaments. However, it was not until June 2007 that the LY passed the 2007 defense budget for P-3C planes, PAC-2 upgrades, and F-16C/D fighters. Then, in December 2007, the LY finally approved \$62 million to begin to fund the submarine project.⁷¹ The political elites' perceptions of China and of America, their (and Chen's) resorting to partisanship for electoral interest, and the public concerns about resource allocation were the factors contributing to the delay. However, given Taiwan's financial limitations and the growing capabilities of mainland China, resource allocation has become the foremost concern in the debate over arms procurement.

The Ma Ying-jeou Administration's Policy toward U.S. Arms Sales

When the Chairman of the KMT Ma Ying-jeou assumed the presidency in 2008, the factors that helped to shape Taiwan's domestic debate

⁶⁹Cheng-yi Lin, "Meiguo yu Taiwan junshi hezuo: weixie de pinggu yu yinying" (U.S.-Taiwan military cooperation: threat assessment and response), *Yuanjing jijinhui jikan* (Prospect Quarterly) (Taipei) 10, no. 2 (April 2009): 126-28.

⁷⁰Lee Wen-chung, "Minjindangtuan ban jungou shuotie" (DPP's special weapon purchasing budget explanation), April, 2006, <http://www.diic.com.tw/mag/mag260/260-8-2.htm> (accessed July 4, 2012).

⁷¹Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990."

over arms procurement from the U.S. changed to a certain degree. In his first term from 2008 to 2012, President Ma proposed a “diplomatic truce” and “viable diplomacy” to cope with the diplomatic issues between mainland China and Taiwan. In the meantime, the Ma administration expressed its determination to increase Taiwan’s defense capabilities and positively responded to the U.S. approval of the provision of weaponry. The Bush and Obama administrations notified Congress respectively in October 2008, January 2010, and September 2011 to approve sales of weaponry with a total value of US\$18.7 billion. However, Taiwan’s request for submarines and F-16C/D fighter jets are still pending or yet to be formally accepted by the U.S. Details of these sales are presented in table 2.

For analytical purposes, this section still discusses the three factors fueling the debate between political elites in the following order: perceptions of the threat of China, partisanship, and considerations regarding resource allocation. Since 2008, the locus of the debate has seemed to be more inclined toward resource allocation, and the public’s and elites’ perception of a threat from China toward the ROC government has declined while partisanship seems to have given way to pragmatism over time.

Perception of Mainland China

In terms of Taiwan’s perception of mainland China, the general public have changed their views on Beijing’s hostility toward Taiwan. As figure 1 shows, from 2002 to 2008, the overall perception of China’s hostility toward Taiwan has changed over time. The percentage of the public who find the Chinese government’s attitude toward the ROC government as “unfriendly” has decreased from 61.9% in 2002 to 49.7% in 2008; and that of those who find the Chinese government’s attitude toward the ROC people as “unfriendly” has slightly increased from 38.3% to 45.7% within the same time frame.

In the meantime, due to the mitigation of cross-Strait political relations as indicated in the resumption of cross-Strait talks between the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and mainland China’s Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) and later on the first annual

Table 2
Major U.S. Arms Sales as Notified to Congress, 2008-2011

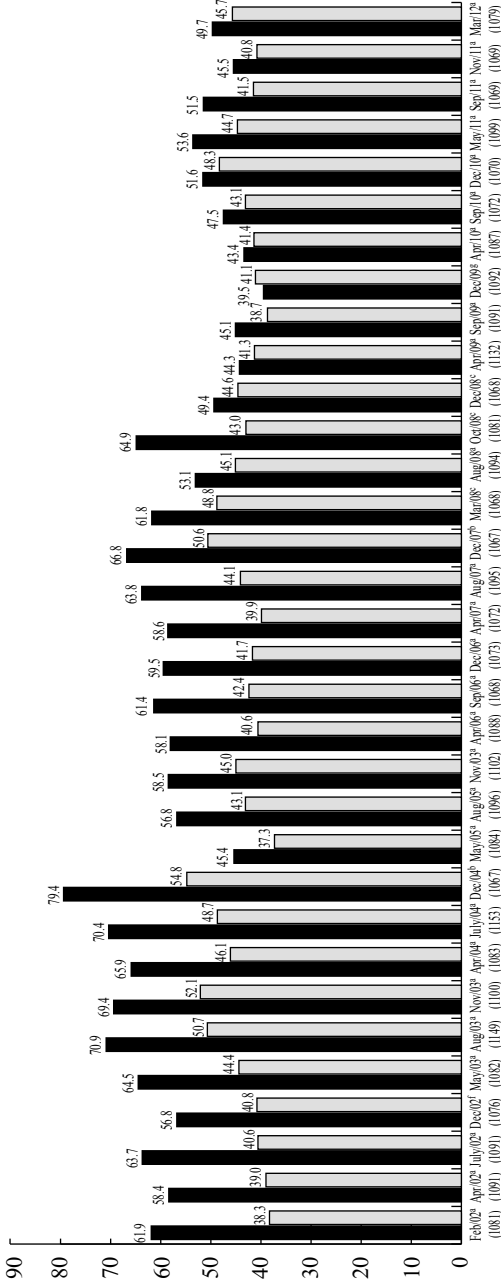
Date of Notification	Major Item or Service as Proposed (usually part of a program with related support)	Value of Program (in US\$ Million)
10/3/2008	(330) Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC)-3 Missile Defense Missiles	\$3,100
10/3/2008	(32) UGM-84L Sub-launched Harpoon Anti-ship Missiles	\$200
10/3/2008	Spare Parts for F-5E/F, C-130H, F-16A/B, IDF aircraft	\$334
10/3/2008	(182) Javelin Anti-armor Missiles	\$47
10/3/2008	upgrade of (4) E-2T Aircraft (Hawkeye 2000 configuration)	\$250
10/3/2008	(30) AH-64D Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters	\$2,532
1/29/2010	(114) PAC-3 Missile Defense Missiles	\$2,810
1/29/2010	(60) UH-60M Black Hawk Utility Helicopters	\$3,100
1/29/2010	(12) Harpoon Block II Anti-ship Telemetry (training) missiles	\$37
1/29/2010	(60) MIDS (Follow-on technical Support for Po Sheng C4 Systems	\$340
1/29/2010	(2) Osprey-class Mine-hunting Ships (refurbished and upgraded	\$105
9/21/2011	Retrofit of 145 F-16 A/B Fighters with 176 AESA Radars, JDAMs, etc.	\$5,300
9/21/2011	Continuation of Training of F-16 Pilots at Luke Air Force Base	\$500
9/21/2011	Spare Parts for F-16 A/B, F-5E/F, C-130H and IDF Aircraft	\$52

Source: Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990," 64.

Forum between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a group of political elites in Taiwan also seemed to find mainland China not so threatening. Then KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung (吳伯雄) in June 2008 suggested: "I felt it was unlikely that Beijing would launch a missile attack against Taiwan."⁷² Then KMT Secretary-General Wu Den-yih

⁷²Wu Ming-jie, "Guofangbu: zhanji qianjian jungou bubian" (MND: arms procurement

Figure 1
Taiwan's Perception of Mainland China's Hostility, 2002-2012



Survey conducted by: (a) Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, Taipei (886-2-29387134)

(b) Burke Marketing Research, Ltd., Taipei (886-2-25181088)

(c) China Credit Information Service, Ltd., Taipei (886-2-87683266)

(d) Center for Public Opinion and Election Studies, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Kaohsiung (886-7-5252000)

(e) Survey and Opinion Research Group, Dept. of Political Science, National Chung-cheng University, Chiayi (886-5-2720411)

(f) e-Society Research Group, Taipei (886-2-27213658)

(g) Center for Public Opinion and Public Policy, Taipei Municipal University of Education, Taipei (886-2-23113040)

Respondents: Taiwanese adults aged 20-69 accessible to telephone interviewers

Source: Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) of Republic of China (Taiwan), released April 2012, <http://www.mac.gov.tw/public/Attachment/24249412649.gif> (accessed May 30, 2012).

(吳敦義) also opined that he believed the Chinese leadership “would deliberate on the (missile) issue with goodwill and sincerity.”⁷³ To a certain degree, this view from the pan-Blue camp also represented the economic attractiveness in China, especially since the 2008 global financial crisis—despite its growing military muscles. However, it is worth noting that, for the KMT, the aim was to further institutionalize interactions between both sides of the Strait.⁷⁴ The KMT’s view on mainland China’s intention was soon challenged by the DPP. For instance, DPP caucus whip Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) complained that Wu’s remarks could only “further numb the public, making people less vigilant, and that the comments posed a danger to national security.”⁷⁵ In other words, a group of DPP political elites deeply questioned China’s ill intention of the annexation of Taiwan, and warned that the KMT’s Chairman Wu would possibly be politically exploited by mainland China.

The issue which centered on how the financial crisis of 2008 has affected Taiwan’s perception, however, remains to be seen in the debate between Taiwan’s political elites. Instead, Taiwan’s analysts from both the media and academia seem to be more attentive to these international structural factors than on how those political elites do in their debates. To these analysts, the U.S. decisions on whether, when, and how to sell weaponry to Taiwan are highly contingent on U.S.-China relations and U.S.-Taiwan relations, and to a degree, to the development of cross-Strait relations. For instance, Nadia Tsao of Liberty Times contended that

on fighter jets and submarines remains unchanged), *China Times* (Taipei), June 5, 2008, A05.

⁷³Rich Chang and Flora Wang, “Wu’s Comments Fire Missile Row,” *Taipei Times*, June 3, 2008, 3.

⁷⁴Other pan-Blue legislators, for instance Chang Hsien-yao, also made these comments. President Ma also presented the same view later. How the institutionalization of interactions can help to stabilize the cross-Strait relations can be explained by Alan D. Romberg, “Cross-Strait Relations: First the Easy, Now the Hard,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 28 (May 2009), <http://www.gees.org/documentos/Documen-03407.pdf>; Kwei-bo Huang, “In Pursuit of Gradual Stabilization and Peace Dividends: Cross-Taiwan Strait Relations and Their Influence on the Asia Pacific,” *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, no. 3 (2011).

⁷⁵Chang and Wang, “Wu’s Comments Fire Missile Row.”

Bush's decision regarding the US\$6.4 billion sale to Taiwan in October 2008 was, in addition to the restoration of a relatively positive relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan, the outcome of deliberation in terms of maintaining the overall U.S.-China relations (therefore not approving the Black Hawks and reducing the total amount of the sale) and on helping Taiwan to build confidence to interact with mainland China (therefore approving five out of eight requests).⁷⁶ In other words, the U.S. tried to strike a delicate political and military balance between mainland China and Taiwan.

With the increase in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan under the Obama administration in 2010 and 2011, however, analysts from academia warned against the U.S.'s continuing rejection of the F-16C/D sale to Taiwan. Chen Chia-sheng opined that the changing nature of current U.S.-China relations contributed to this U.S. decision. The increase in China's military and economic power vis-à-vis the U.S. led the latter to ponder how to elicit China's cooperation on global, regional, and bilateral issues, and when the U.S. prioritized its military-to-military exchanges with China, the sale of the F-16C/D seemed to have a slim to zero chance of being considered.⁷⁷ One researcher at Taiwan Thinktank Lai I-Chung predicted that Taiwan would be further marginalized given the mounting emphasis on U.S.-China relations in U.S. overall foreign policy, and the rejection of Taiwan's request for the F-16C/D was just a case in point.⁷⁸ When the

⁷⁶Nadia Tsao, "Zhengzhi kaoliang, Mei pao suoshuiban junshou" (The shrinkage of arms sales is due to U.S. political consideration), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), October 5, 2008, A03.

⁷⁷Chen Chia-sheng, "Mei-Zhong guanxi gaibian xia de dui Tai junshou" (The changing context of U.S.-China relations and arms sales to Taiwan), *Zhanlüe anquan yanxi* (Strategic and Security Analyses) (Taipei), no. 76 (August 2011): 3-9.

⁷⁸Yong-yao Su, "Lai Yizhong: 'junshou Taiwan cheng Tai-Mei-Zhong zhuyiti'" (I-chung Lai said, "Arms sales to Taiwan has become a principle issue among Taiwan-US-China relations"), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), January 21, 2009, <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2009/new/jan/21/today-p1-2.htm> (accessed April 30, 2012); Zou Li-yong, "Lai Yizhong: 'junshou wenti, Tai bei bianyuanhua weiji xiangdang mingque'" (I-chung Lai said, "The issue of arms sales to Taiwan shows the threat of marginalization is looming"), *China Review* (Hong Kong), September 24, 2011, <http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/1018/4/5/2/101845284.html?coluid=93&kindid=2931&docid=101845284> (accessed April 30, 2012).

Obama administration brought up this F-16C/D issue in May 2012 by saying that it “might sell” the fighter jets to Taiwan, many analysts in Taiwan maintained that this may constitute a dilemma for Taiwan given current relations between the U.S., China, and Taiwan.⁷⁹ In general, during the debate over arms procurement from the U.S., Taiwan’s political elites, especially legislators, have been relatively inattentive to these structural aspects that seem to have little to do with their constituencies. As a result, Shelley Rigger’s description that China constitutes “an opportunity full of threats” to Taiwan may be sustained and even more so in the near future.⁸⁰

Political Consideration

Another factor that shapes political elites’ view on armament procurement is political consideration from major political parties in Taiwan. The KMT’s majority in the LY and the DPP’s experience from ruling the country from 2000 to 2008 helped to lower the tension between the two. President Ma’s political determination to support the 3% of GDP military expenditure target, though it has yet to be achieved, also helped to steer the debate away from political quarrels toward pragmatism.

President Ma, as early as in December 2005 or early 2006 when he was chairing the KMT, began to accept the goal of a 3% of GDP defense budget. The amount of military expenditure has been seen as an indicator of Taiwan’s commitment as well as determination for self-defense. More importantly, it is a means to demonstrate to the U.S. that Taiwan is not “free-riding” on U.S. security assurances. In December 2007, the pan-Blue camp decided to pass the budget for arms procurement.⁸¹ Taiwan’s defense budgets over the past two decades are summarized in table 3.

As indicated in Table 2, Taiwan’s defense budgets decreased in terms of the percentage of GDP over the years, especially when Taiwan began

⁷⁹“Arms Sales to Taiwan: Fighter-fleet Response,” *Economist*, May 1, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2012/05/arms-sales-taiwan> (accessed May 14, 2012).

⁸⁰Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters*, 117-32.

⁸¹Yao Ying-ru, “Fanlan fangxing, sanda jungou yusuan jietao” (Pan-Blue agreed to the three packages), *China Times* (Taipei), December 12, 2007, A5.

Table 3
ROC's Defense Budgets, 1994-2012

Fiscal Year	Military Budget (NT\$ billion)	Military Budget (US\$ billion)	Percentage of GDP (%)	Percentage of Total Government Spending (%)
1994	258.5	9.8	3.8	24.3
1995	252.3	9.5	3.5	24.5
1996	258.3	9.5	3.4	22.8
1997	268.8	9.4	3.3	22.5
1998	274.8	8.2	3.2	22.4
1999	284.5	8.8	3.2	21.6
2000	402.9	12.9	2.9	17.4
2001	269.8	8.0	2.9	16.5
2002	260.4	7.5	2.7	16.4
2003	257.2	7.6	2.6	15.5
2004	261.9	7.8	2.4	16.7
2005	258.5	8.0	2.3	16.1
2006	252.5	7.8	2.1	16.1
2007	304.9	9.2	2.4	18.7
2008	341.1	10.5	2.5	20.2
2009	318.7	9.6	2.7	17.6
2010	297.4	9.3	2.2	17.3
2011	294.6	10.2	2.1	16.5
2012	317.3	10.6	2.2	16.4

Source: Kan, "Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990," 34.

Note: Readers should note that this table was compiled by Kan using data on the regular, annual defense budgets provided by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, Kan's consultation, news reports, with GDP and spending converted with exchange rates reported by Global Insight. The FY2000 budget covered the 18-month period from July 1999 to December 2000. Taiwan also has separate funding for indirect defense related spending, for instance for retired veterans, military construction, etc.

to face economic downturns since 2000. When Chen declared his proposal of 3% of GDP for national defense, Ma explicitly conveyed that he would have "no objection" to this. President Ma assumed the office and made it clear that this was the goal he would continue to uphold during his tenure. For instance, in an interview with the American-based Cable News Network (CNN), President Ma stated that "we will never ask the

Americans to fight for Taiwan.”⁸² In the meantime, President Ma also conveyed his idea of employing “soft power” to cope with mainland China to the U.S.⁸³

The Obama administration’s notification to Congress with regard to arms sales to Taiwan in 2010 and 2011 were somewhat welcomed by the opposition DPP. For instance, as a response to Obama’s notification to Congress in January 2010, then DPP spokesman Tsai Chi-chang (蔡其昌) expressed that due to the KMT’s boycott under the Chen years, the overall deal had become more expensive than it was years before, and that it was “wasting taxpayers’ money.”⁸⁴ However, this statement *per se* was not to oppose the purchase, but rather to discredit the Ma administration. DPP Chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), while receiving Richard Armitage in March 2011, argued that the DPP “is in support of the purchase of weaponry necessary to Taiwan’s national defense.”⁸⁵

The ruling KMT and opposition DPP seemed to reach a common denominator that the procurement of weaponry is a necessity to Taiwan’s national security and the U.S. is the most likely source that can provide the supply despite mainland China’s denouncement.⁸⁶ In other words, the

⁸²Wang yu-chung and Zeng Wei-zheng, “Fu: Taiwan buhui duiji anquan xiushou” (The presidential office: Taiwan will not ignore its own security), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), May 3, 2010, A04. Along with President Ma, other high level officials such as Andrew Yang (楊念祖) in the MND also expressed this view. See Wendell Minnick, “Interview with Andrew Yang, Taiwan’s Deputy Minister of Defense,” *Defense News*, August 8, 2011, <http://mobile.defensenews.com/story.php?i=7326197&c=FEA&s=INT> (accessed May 20, 2012).

⁸³Lin Ting-yao, “Ma chengnuo Mei: weichi GDP 3% jungou yusuan” (Ma promised U.S.: Maintain the budget to GDP 3% for arms procurement), *China Times* (Taipei), May 21, 2008, A10.

⁸⁴Zou Li-yong, “Minjindang: Jungou baojiagui, langfei renmin xuehanqian” (DPP: The deal is expensive and this is wasting taxpayers’ money), *China Review* (Hong Kong), February 1, 2010, <http://www.chinareviewnews.com/doc/1012/1/6/7/101216763.html?coluid=98&kindid=2995&docid=101216763&mdate=0207010001> (accessed May 31, 2012).

⁸⁵Xin-fang Lee and Tian-bin Luo, “Cai: ‘Wo jiushi wo, canxuan zhengming Taiwan duomianxiang’” (Tsai said, “I am who I am; running in the election proves that Taiwan is multi-dimensional”), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), March 29, 2011, <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2011/new/mar/29/today-fo2.htm> (accessed June 12, 2012).

⁸⁶Lü Chao-lung, “Yi cuoguo zuijia shiji” (The best timing has already gone), *China Times* (Taipei), August 14, 2011, A4.

gap between the two largest political parties in Taiwan over “whether” to purchase arms from the U.S. is narrowing. However, the PFP seemed to have strong second thoughts on those deals approved by the U.S. James Soong, Chairman of the PFP, in an interview with *Liberty Times* contended that he had shared the view with former KMT Chairman Lien Chan (連戰) that the pan-Blue objected to “wastrel spending” on arms procurement, to unnecessary items, and to the inappropriate procedure that puts it as Special Budget. However, he went on, “When Ma took the chairmanship [of the KMT], these commitments are gone.”⁸⁷ Dr. Michael Tsai from the DPP also conveyed his hope that “there should be bipartisanship on national security and foreign policy.”⁸⁸ This seems to be a positive development to Taiwan’s future arms procurement in that partisanship is giving way to reasonable discussion.

Resource Allocation

The locus of the current domestic debate between political elites over the arms procurement is highly related to the issues of resource allocation. Given the restrained economic growth rate in Taiwan, the LY is still critical of the government expenditures. Under these circumstances, political elites have begun to be highly interested in the development of Taiwan’s asymmetric capabilities to sustain itself in the face of China’s attack. For instance, both DPP and KMT legislators have been concerned about the capabilities and have persuaded the MND to evaluate and be prepared for asymmetric warfare in the near future.⁸⁹ These legislators have included Hsueh Ling (薛凌, DPP), Lin Yu-fang (KMT), and Chen Cheng-hsiang (陳鎮湘, KMT), among others, who have demonstrated their interests and specialties in communicating with the MND.

⁸⁷Xiao-guang Shi, “Soong tongpi Ma, ‘hui zutou bushige’” (James Soong criticized Ma, “meeting with a bookie is not appropriate”), *Liberty Times* (Taipei), November 19, 2011, <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2011/new/nov/19/today-p4.htm> (accessed June 12, 2012).

⁸⁸Interview with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

⁸⁹Various issues of the Legislative Yuan Reports.

Political elites in Taiwan are also concerned about the possible linkage or the crowding-out effect between several policy choices. For instance, the retrofit of F-16A/B and the purchase of F-16C/D advanced fighter jets has been granted a great deal of attention. Legislator Chen Cheng-hsiang (KMT) strongly maintained that if the government aims to get F-16C/D fighter jets, it will be better for the government “not to agree to the upgrade of the F-16A/B,” due to the very limited financial resources.⁹⁰ In another line of reasoning but also with the concerns of the financial resources, former deputy Air Force Commander-in-chief Lee Kuei-fa (李貴發), based upon the air force’s strategy and profession, opined that all those fighter jets, even with their advanced technologies, may be rendered useless given Taiwan’s plan to cave those jets in the commencement stage of war to preserve their capability for a second-strike, because those caves may not have a runway long enough for the jets to take off. Instead, Lee suggested that Taiwan needs missiles and asymmetric abilities to defend itself.⁹¹ At the same time, the plan for domestic submarine-building seems to have regained a certain amount of attention, and the Ma administration does not rule out the possibility.⁹² Experienced interviewees for this research also pointed out that the establishment of a voluntary military service system would further complicate the situation due to its costs.⁹³

Since 2008, Taiwan’s domestic debate over armament procurement from the U.S. has been mitigated in relation to that between 2000 and 2008. Among the three factors decisive to our understanding of the

⁹⁰Lü Chao-lung, “Chen Cheng-hsiang: ruyao maixinji, bietongyi tisheng’an” (Chen Cheng-hsiang: ‘if the government aims for F-16C/Ds, then do not agree to the upgrade of F-16A/B’), *China Times* (Taipei), April 29, 2012, A4.

⁹¹Lee Kuei-fa, “Taiwan ying jiangou ‘youxiao de’ guofang wuli” (Taiwan should build up “effective” national defense forces), *Taipei luntan* (Taipei Forum), May 15, 2012, http://140.119.184.171/taipeiforum/print/P_03.php (accessed June 20, 2012).

⁹²Mei Fu-hsing, “Qianjian guozao kaoyan Ma de lingdaoli” (Domestic sub-building plan is a test for Ma), *Apple Daily* (Taipei), March 23, 2012, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20120323/34108694> (accessed June 3, 2012).

⁹³Interviews with Shuai Hua-min, Taipei, April 12, 2013, and with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

domestic concerns over arms procurement, partisanship, which used to be a salient factor during 2000 and 2008, seems to be giving way to pragmatism. While the public perceive that China's hostility toward the ROC government has decreased over time, it is worth noting that political elites seem to share the consensus that arms procurement from the U.S. is salient to Taiwan's survival. As Dr. Chong-Pin Lin notes, mainland China's growing capabilities and grand strategy may gradually root in and shape Taiwan's strategic thinking, and as Dr. Michael Tsai cautions, Taiwan needs to demonstrate more political will on national defense to deter China and to prepare for possible negotiations in the future.⁹⁴

Concluding Thoughts

Neoclassical realism is of significance to our understanding of a state's foreign policy, and the distribution of capabilities among states in the international system is to be analyzed by political elites. It is political elites' perceptions and debates that help to shape a state's foreign policy, indicated as *World 2* in table 1. As shown in this research, bargains between the FPE and other political elites have helped to explain Taiwan's policy choices over arms procurement from the U.S. as neoclassical realism has proposed.

The debates between Taiwan's political elites over the armament procurement from the U.S. help us better understand the Taiwanese leadership's policy choices. Lacking a timely response, U.S.-Taiwan relations experienced a downward spiral despite the growing military strength and influence of mainland China. More important, this inaction more or less contributed to U.S. mistrust in Taiwan during 2000 to 2008. Political elites' divergent views on the threat of China, Chen's legitimacy and the way he handled the issue, as well as limited financial resources are responsible for the outcome.

⁹⁴Interviews with Dr. Chong-Pin Lin, Taipei, April 1, 2013, and with Dr. Michael Ming-Hsien Tsai, Taipei, April 16, 2013.

Since 2008, Taiwan's domestic debate over armament procurement from the U.S. has been mitigated in relation to that from 2000 to 2008. Among the three factors, partisanship seems to be giving way to pragmatism. While the public perceive that China's hostility toward the ROC government has decreased over time, it is worth noting that political elites seem to share a consensus that arms procurement from the U.S. is salient to Taiwan's survival. This new development and seemingly emerging consensus might be attributed to Ma's call for institutionalization of the cross-strait relations and the "peace through strength" argument in recent years, and/or to the changing context of U.S.-China relations. For the Taiwan government, it is the time to strengthen the domestic consensus over this prominent issue. For the United States, it is important to acknowledge the importance to continue to provide defensive weaponry to Taiwan, because this policy choice would help to boost Taiwan's self-confidence vis-à-vis mainland China in the future.

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