EVALUATING CHINA’S PATTERNS OF RESPONSE TO U.S. ARMS SALES IN EAST ASIA

by
Carson Von Doyle

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Abstract

This research study looks at Chinese responses to U.S. foreign military sales in East Asia over the time period of 2010-2019. Over the past decade, China has demonstrated an increased willingness to respond and counter U.S. arms sales to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. This research study leverages a methodology of coding case studies of significant U.S. arms sales over the past decade to identify patterns and trends within China’s repertoire of responses to arms sales it deems as detrimental to its security objectives. Moving beyond simple diplomatic protests and formal complaints, this research demonstrates that China is now using an increasingly broad range of diplomatic, military, and economic tools to express their discontent with the U.S. and neighboring states who purchase major American weapons platforms. This research study offers a framework for evaluating the Chinese government’s response playbook to better understand emerging trends and new patterns of behavior relating to Chinese reactions to foreign military sales in East Asia.

This research study was faculty peer reviewed by:

Jennifer Staats, PhD
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Introduction

This research project will examine the evolving nature of Chinese responses to United States arms sales in East Asia. In recent years, the U.S. has increasingly viewed the East Asian theatre as a top geostrategic priority. From the Obama Administration’s “Pivot to Asia”¹, to China being listed as the first Strategic Priority in the Trump Administration’s 2018 National Defense Strategy², it is clear that there is bipartisan consensus in American politics that Asia must play an expanded role in the nation’s foreign policy strategy. As the world’s preeminent military power and largest exporter of military equipment³, foreign military sales are a key tool in U.S. foreign policy. As China continues to rise in terms of global political, economic, and military power, the nation is increasingly at odds with U.S. support for key allies and partners in the East Asian region. Specifically, U.S. military support for Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan has prompted strong reactions from a Chinese mainland that does not wish to see America build up the military capabilities of the Communist Nation’s neighbors.

On 21 March 2019, the Trump Administration confirmed that it had given Taiwan tentative approval to purchase 66 F-16 fighter jets from U.S. manufacturer Lockheed Martin.⁴ This was a significant shift in U.S. military policy relating to arms sales to Taiwan

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as the U.S. had not approved the sale of fighter jets to the island republic since 1992. This announcement from the Trump administration would set forth a series of escalating reactions from the Chinese government who view Taiwan as a breakaway province, not an independent republic. On 28 March 2019, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Ministry of Defense spokesperson Wu Qian stated in a press conference that “that China ‘resolutely opposes’ the United States' recent moves on the Taiwan issue concerning arms sales to and military relations with the island” and that “any word or act violating the one-China principle will shake the foundation of China-U.S. relations, is against the fundamental interests of both countries and ‘extremely dangerous’”.5 That same day, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Geng Shuang issued a similar statement saying:

“I will reiterate our consistent, unequivocal and firm opposition to US arms sales to Taiwan. China has lodged stern representations to the US on this issue. We urge the US to fully realize the high degree of sensitivity and severe impact of this issue, honor its commitment to the one-China principle, and... stop arms sales to and military ties with Taiwan.”6

On 31 March 2019, two Chinese J2 fighter jets crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait that divides China and Taiwan.7 This was the first time this incursion on Taiwanese airspace had occurred since 2011 and prompted Taiwan to scramble F-16 fighter jets in response. This series of events highlights the sensitivity with which China views the sale of U.S. military equipment to its East Asian neighbors.

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7 "Taiwan Condemns China...", March 31, 2019.
On 8 July 2017, the South Korean Ministry of National Defense and U.S. Department of Defense issued a joint statement announcing the allies’ decision to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense (THAAD) antimissile battery in South Korea to counter the perceived increasing North Korea missile threat.\(^8\) While the stated intent of the system deployment was directed at North Korea, Beijing has perceived the system as primarily targeting China and has categorized it a severe national security concern. Within thirty minutes of the joint announcement, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei stated in a press conference that China expressed, “strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition” to the deployment of the system.\(^9\) In the months following this announcement, China proceeded to mobilize a coordinated response to South Korea’s defense acquisition which included issuing 27 formal objections by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense, publishing 265 articles in China’s state-run People’s Daily, organizing an informal boycott of South Korean goods and services, and restricting Chinese tourism to South Korea.\(^10\)

These two recent examples illustrate the evolving set of tools China uses to respond to foreign military sales that it perceives are contrary to its national security interests. It is important to note that these are hardly the first times China has issued coordinated and stern responses to the potential or realized execution of U.S. foreign

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\(^10\) Meick, China’s Response.
military sales in East Asia. Furthermore, given the scale, complexity, and variety of issues influencing the relationships between China, the U.S., and other East Asian nations, it is difficult to definitively attribute Chinese actions as direct retaliation for foreign military sales. However, a systematic review of the history of U.S. foreign military sales to East Asia coupled with an analysis of Chinese responses to these acquisitions will shed light on the methods, pace, and scale with which the Chinese government chooses to react to these developments.

This research project will begin with a review of the existing literature on the topics of foreign arms sales as a diplomatic tool, understanding the power balance in East Asia, and an evaluation of China’s use of power and influence. Following the review, this research project will utilize inductive coding of U.S. arms sales to East Asia to quantify and categorize the history of Chinese responses to these sales. Leveraging information from databases that track foreign military sales, this study will seek to identify key defense equipment acquisitions that elicited a coordinated response from the Chinese government. Furthermore, this study will attempt to categorize the methods and channels with which China has responded to U.S. foreign military sales in East Asia. Finally, this study will strive to analyze the long-term trends within the perceived Chinese government’s response playbook to better understand emerging trends and new patterns of behavior relating to Chinese reactions to foreign military sales. This research will hopefully enable policymakers and defense contractors to better understand why China responds to foreign military sales in certain ways and can
offer a framework for evaluating and anticipating potential Chinese responses to future foreign military sales in East Asia.
Literature Review

To better understand the context of this research study, this paper will review the existing academic literature on three key topics: Utilizing Arms Sales as a Tool of Diplomacy, Understanding the Power Balance in East Asia, and Defining Repertoires of Chinese Influence and Power. Since this paper focuses on Chinese responses to U.S. arms sales in East Asia, it is important to understand the significance of arms sales and the role they play in the diplomatic environment. The literature on this topic covers the relatively recent use of foreign military sales to achieve foreign policy objectives. The second topic, Understanding the Power Balance in East Asia, breaks down a variety of scholarly positions on how the United States, China, and other states in East Asia view the power dynamic between two of the world’s preeminent powers. This section discusses the Thucydides Trap and how Graham Allison’s framing of that historical concept around the modern case of the U.S. and a rising China could potentially be influence by U.S. arms sales to China’s regional neighbors. Finally, this literature review concludes with a review of scholarly work outlining how and why China chooses to exert its power. China’s government is notoriously secretive about its intentions and methods, however, this section of the paper provides a foundation for later categorization and analysis of China’s repertoires of response to U.S. arms sales.

Utilizing Arms Sales as a Tool of Diplomacy

In 1981, Andrew Pierre published an article in Foreign Affairs titled, “Arms Sales: The New Diplomacy”. Pierre, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, argued in this piece that arms sales to foreign nations were becoming key foreign policy tools
within statecraft. Pierre states, “Arms sales have become, more than ever before, a crucial dimension of world politics. They are now major strands in the warp and woof of international affairs. Arms sales are far more than an economic occurrence, a military relationship, or an arms control challenge – arms sales are foreign policy writ large.”

Pierre goes on to outline a variety of factors that contributed to the rise in prominence of arms sales as foreign policy. Among these topics are the increase in quantity of weapons being supplied, the qualitative upgrading of the types of arms being sold, and a shift in arms being increasingly supplied to developing countries rather than only developed nations. Pierre notes the increasing diffusion of power from developed to developing states and implies that in the midst of expanding Cold War proxy conflicts, “major powers are less likely to intervene with their own armed forces, they are more prone to shore up friendly states through the provision of arms or to play out their own competition through the arming of their proxies.” Pierre cites the Reagan Administration’s difficult choice of whether to sell the FX fighter jet to Taiwan. At the time, China issued a notice to the U.S. stating they would view this sale as a “litmus test’ of future Sino-American relations” while Taiwan would similarly view the rejection of the sale as abandonment by the U.S. This example appears particularly ironic, given the current tensions over the proposed sale of F-16 jets to Taiwan. It appears that some issues remain consistent despite the passing of nearly 40 years. Pierre’s article does an

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12 Pierre, Arms Sales, 267-268.
13 Pierre, Arms Sales, 269.
14 Pierre, Arms Sales, 266.
excellent job chronicling the advent of the modern foreign military sale era and establishes a clear foundation that arms sales are a key component of foreign policy.

Building from Pierre’s work, authors Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster discuss key developments in the evolution of defense diplomacy at the turn of the 21st Century. In their 2004 piece titled, “Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance”, Cottey and Forster evaluate how militaries and defense ministries around the world have been tasked increasingly with conducting foreign diplomatic endeavors that fall beyond the arc of what is traditionally expected out of a state’s military.15 Their work discusses how arms transfers serve as a key foreign policy tool that enables states to “counterbalance or deter enemies, maintain spheres of influence, support friendly regimes in suppressing domestic opponents or promote commercial interests.”16 Cottey and Forster contend that arms sales, among other defense diplomacy actions, are being increasingly leveraged to conduct “strategic engagement”, which they define as helping to “build cooperative relationships with former or potential enemies … promote democratic civilian control … [and] support partner states in developing the capacity to contribute to peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations.”17 Cottey and Forster highlight the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program as the primary method of supplying weapons and facilitating arms transfers for the U.S. Department of Defense.18 Data provided by the FMS program will serve as one

17 Ibid, pg. 7-8.
18 Ibid, 10.
of the key sources for tracking U.S. arms sales in East Asia during the time period discussed in this study.

Richard A.I. Johnson’s 2017 article published in Defence and Peace Economics builds on the existing academic literature surrounding the role of arms sales in diplomacy and provides a contemporary analysis and useful framework for analyzing the role different weapons platforms play in foreign military sales.¹⁹ Johnson piece titled, “The Role and Capabilities of Major Weapon Systems Transferred between 1950 and 2010: Empirical Examinations of an Arms Transfer Data Set”, analyzes differences in the use of various weapons platforms based on their potential strategic use or implications for the recipient country.²⁰ This research goes beyond simply tracking arms transfers based on monetary value or count of total weapons sold to more fully account for other important factors such as technological innovation, tactical, or strategic advantages achieved by acquiring specific weapons platforms. Johnson’s article provides a beneficial framework for categorizing and sorting the types of weapons being sold based on their potential use and impact. The breakdown of weapons systems is as follows:

“Land weapons [are separated] into gun and missile air defense systems, towed and self-propelled artillery, offensive armored vehicles, and tanks. Aircraft are separated by planes and helicopters as support, transport, and combat in addition to unmanned aerial vehicle (UAVs) on their own. The separations occur under a simplified Lancaster framework based on the roles of the weapons and the capabilities they provide to the importer.”²¹

²¹ Ibid.
Johnson’s framework and research on the impact of different weapons systems in weapons transfers will serve as a foundational component of this study’s division and classification of weapons platforms and a basis for establishing the threshold and criteria for inclusion of foreign weapons sales.

**Understanding the Power Balance in East Asia**

To understand the root causes of China’s reactions to U.S. arms sales in East Asia, it is imperative to understand the underlying dynamics of the shifting balance of power between the U.S. and China, and between China and other powers in East Asia. One of the most influential scholars and authors on the subject of the Chinese-U.S. power dynamic is Graham Allison. In 2015, Allison and his research team at the Harvard Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs published a signature research study analyzing the history of conflict when a rising power challenged the preeminent existing great world power.\(^\text{22}\) Allison’s team found that in 16 historical cases of a rising power challenging an existing great power, 12 of the cases resulted in war.\(^\text{23}\) The study reviews the cases through the lens of the Thucydides Trap. Thucydides, the famous Greek Historian, when reflecting on the Peloponnesian War wrote that, “It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable.”\(^\text{24}\) The

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\(^{23}\) “Overview Thucydides Trap.”

Thucydides Trap implies that the fear of losing great power status to a rising power may spark conflict between the two states.

In a September 2015 piece published in The Atlantic titled “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?”, Allison reviews the findings of his team’s research project and applies the findings to the modern case study of the United States and China. Though Allison cautions that war has been the predominant outcome of historical cases similar to that of rising power China and preeminent power United States, he does offer optimism at the potential prospect for peace. Allison states, “When the parties avoided war, it required huge, painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged.”

Allison contends that for the U.S. and China to avoid war, it would require a great deal of concentrated effort on the part of both nation’s governments to actively manage the power balance and openly communicate their actions and intentions. Based on Allison’s research, if the two nations were to fall victim to the Thucydides Trap, it would likely involve an escalating series of tensions and disputes as China seeks to assert itself more aggressively in the international world order and project its power outward. Allison writes, “In Beijing’s view, China is now being restored to its rightful place, where its power commands recognition of and respect for China’s core interests.” This behavior can undoubtedly be witnessed in China’s response to perceived increases in the relative military strength of their neighbors. U.S. arm sales to China’s neighbors in East Asia are often

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
characterized as threatening to China’s security objectives, and China’s response to such actions can serve as a key indicator of how close the U.S. and China may be to falling into the Thucydides Trap. Allison’s framework of the dynamics between a rising and preeminent power will serve as a strong foundation on which to evaluate the evolving trends of how China is choosing to respond to U.S. arms sales in East Asia.

While Allison’s piece has been highly influential in defining the contemporary conversation surrounding the U.S.-China power dynamic, his theories are not universally accepted. Indeed, Allison’s perspective on the Thucydides Trap has been challenged by scholars who believe there are a wider range of factors that will influence the future of Sino-U.S. relations. In a 2017 publication in West Point’s Modern War Institute, Dr. Albert Wolf writes that Allison’s theory largely amounts to a summary of the infamous ‘Security Dilemma’, which contends that efforts to bolster a nation’s security, even defensive moves, may weaken the security of a neighboring state.28 Wolf outlines a critique of the Security Dilemma, claiming that states have “ambitions beyond security, such as status and hegemony”.29 The author also states that there is little evidence to suggest that countries account for offensively or defensively-dispositioned weapons in terms of their accepting or rejecting security signs.30 While Wolf’s critique offers useful assertions surrounding the need to keep other ambitions in mind beyond security, his overall tone is an oversimplification of Allison’s argument, and, as such, does offer as

30 Ibid.
useful of a context for analyzing the power balances between China and the U.S., and China and its East Asian neighbors.

A more useful framework for understanding the theoretical perspectives surrounding the U.S.-China power dynamic can be found in Aaron Friedberg’s 2005 piece titled, ”The Future of U.S.-China Relations Is Conflict Inevitable?” Though the piece was written a full decade prior to Allison’s work on the Thucydides Trap, Friedberg does an excellent job summarizing the differences in scholarly opinions on the future of U.S.-China relations, and his piece still holds contemporary value despite the significant geopolitical changes that have taken place since its publication. Friedberg describes scholarly views on the topic through two vectors: international relations philosophy, and optimism or pessimism. The resulting breakdown can be summarized in the below chart:

Table 1: Categorization of Optimistic and Pessimistic Schools of Thought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorists</th>
<th>Optimists</th>
<th>Pessimists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>PRC regime:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Authoritarian/insecure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratization</td>
<td>The perils of transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realists</td>
<td>PRC power: limited</td>
<td>U.S. regime:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRC aims: constrained</td>
<td>A crusading democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security dilemma: muted</td>
<td>Interactive effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivists</td>
<td>Identities, strategic cultures, norms: flexible</td>
<td>Rigid and “hardening” via</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and “softening” via institutional contact</td>
<td>shocks and crises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32 Friedberg, 2005, pg. 39.
Friedberg analyzes each of the traditional schools of international relations theory (liberalism, realism, and constructivism) through the lens of an optimistic or pessimistic view on the future of Sino-U.S. relations. The analysis of each theoretical camp focuses on the primary causal mechanisms that shape that theory’s outlook. For Liberalism, the focus is on interdependence, institutions, and democratization. For realism, the focus is on state power, state aims, and the status of the security dilemma. For Constructivism, the focus is on identities, strategic cultures, and norms. Friedberg’s division of theoretical frameworks between optimism and pessimism largely revolves around the perceived interpretation of the current or future state of each causal mechanism as it relates to U.S.-China power dynamics. Friedberg does a solid job of finding examples where scholars in the same theoretical camp have disagreed as to whether a causal mechanism has an optimistic or pessimistic outlook (i.e. realists viewing the U.S.-China security dilemma as either ‘muted’ or ‘intense’).³³ Friedberg does not weigh in on where he views the future of U.S.-China relations, but instead offers the analytical framework as a useful guide in interpreting developments between the U.S. and China.

Moving beyond theoretical frameworks, an analysis of the East Asia power balance should review China’s perceptions of the security situation. Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell’s article titled, “How China Sees America”, presents a unique look into the motivations and perceptions of Chinese policymakers toward America. Nathan and Scobell argue that the growing competition between the U.S. and China has led both powers to question the motivations behind actions perceived as threatening to each

³³ Ibid.
country’s national interests. Though America has increasingly viewed China the sole state that could challenge U.S. global hegemony, Nathan and Scobell point out that Chinese leaders also spend a great deal of time worrying whether the U.S. will use its global supremacy to support or hinder China’s interests. The authors describe China’s security situation through the lens of four concentric rings. The first ring contains all the land China administers or claims (including Taiwan), the second ring is the fourteen countries that China borders, the third consists of the six distinct geographical regions surrounding China, and the fourth is the rest of the world beyond China’s immediate surroundings. Nathan & Scobell argue that the U.S. confronts China in each one of these circles via many of its foreign policy actions including the U.S. security guarantee with Taiwan, extensive military basing throughout Japan and Korea, and persistent challenges to Chinese claims in the East and South China Sea. The authors state that China views the U.S. as fundamentally aggressive, ideologically motivated, and revisionist in its use of power internationally. Through this lens, China’s perception of U.S. actions in the East Asian region are viewed with intense skepticism. Regarding the United States’ continued support and assistance provided to Taiwan, the authors write, “Most Chinese see strategic motives at the root of Washington’s behavior. They believe that keeping the Taiwan problem going helps the United States tie China down.” This piece provides a useful insight into Chinese perceptions of U.S. actions in the region and

35 Nathan, Andrew, How China, 33-34.
36 Ibid, 34-35.
38 Ibid, 42.
can enhance a framework for understanding the why behind China’s reactions to U.S. foreign military sales.

Bonnie Glaser’s March 2014 testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on China’s Grand Strategy in Asia offers a succinct summary of the Xi Jinping administration’s strategic approach to East Asia. Glaser states that, “Beijing’s periphery policy is also aimed at countering the U.S. rebalance to Asia, preventing the formation of anti-China coalition on its periphery, and weakening U.S. alliances.” Glaser outlines China’s goals as “exerting control over its Near Seas”, “defending and advancing Chinese sovereignty claims”, and “regional economic integration”. Glaser highlights that the Xi administration has been increasingly assertive in increasing their defense capabilities to counter the U.S.’s military presence in the region and support for regional partners. Speaking specifically about Korea and Japan, the author writes, “China has dubbed U.S. efforts to strengthen its military alliances with Japan and South Korea as a destabilizing factor in the region and criticized the alliances themselves as ‘Cold War relics’.”

As a final note to this portion of the literature review, this study will quickly view the East Asian response to the U.S. and China. Researcher Jae Ho Chung’s piece, “East Asia Responds to the Rise of China: Patterns and Variations”, conducts a study that categorizes 15 East Asian nations in terms of how they have chosen to respond to the

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41 Ibid, pg. 1.
42 Ibid, pg. 5.
perceived hegemonic tensions between the U.S. and China in the region. Chung deftly summarizes the dilemma facing many states in East Asia caught between the two dominant powers:

“Based on the premise that China’s principal chessboard is as yet located in East Asia, where America’s hub-and-spoke system of alliances is in active operation ... the region as a whole is facing an intricate dilemma of having to balance economic benefits from cooperating with China against security gains from allying with the United States.”

Chung analyzes political, military, and economic responses to the rise of China taken by 15 states in East Asia. The author categorizes the states on a spectrum that ranges from fully appeasing China’s rise (Bandwagon with China) to balancing against China’s ambitions in the region.

Table 2: Spectrum of East Asia’s Responses to the Rise of China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>Mongolia</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N. Korea</td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chung’s study further analyzes 5 key factors to understand the relative degree of influence they have on determining a country’s place along the spectrum outlined above. The five factors studied were: trade dependence, the size of overseas Chinese population, regime similarity, territorial disputes, and alliances with the United States.

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44 Chung, 2009.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
Ultimately, Chung’s study found that alliance status with the U.S. and regime similarity had the strongest correlative evidence with a country’s place along the spectrum of responses to China. These two findings have key implications on the validity of this research study. By highlighting the significance of U.S. alliances, this study underscores a key point that allies or strong partners with the U.S. are far more likely to take an active role in balancing China’s power in East Asia. This can often take the form of military partnerships and/or weapons procurements from the United States. According to this study, then, these acquisitions may be fundamentally viewed as efforts to balance China’s power in East Asia.

**Defining Repertoires of Chinese Influence & Power**

To understand why China responds to U.S. arms sales in East Asia in the manner it has demonstrated over the past decade, it is important to review how China chooses to assert its influence and power within the global community. To that end, David Lampton’s 2007 piece titled, “The Faces of Chinese Power”, outlines how China views its projection of military, economic, and ideological power on the international stage.\(^{47}\) Lampton writes that foreign policy experts have often misinterpreted China’s power and its will to exercise it. Lampton claims that China is seeking to leverage the profound economic success it has achieved over the past decades to “boost its military, economic, and intellectual might.”\(^{48}\) In the military sphere, Lampton asserts that China is

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\(^{48}\) Lampton, 2007.
attempting to walk a fine line of modernizing and expanding its military capabilities while trying not to alarm the U.S. or neighboring states. As China’s military capabilities have grown, the nation is choosing to engage more in military exchanges, joint exercises, and international humanitarian aid missions in an attempt to reassure neighbors in the region who are increasingly wary of how China will use its newfound military strength.\(^{49}\) China’s economic success has long been the primary engine that has supported the country’s rise. Lampton writes that,

“As China's "going global" strategy gains steam, its role as an investor abroad is also growing. Beijing's ability to coordinate corporate investment, tariff and other trade policies, development assistance, and military aid is a potential asset when competing with more pluralized systems.”\(^{50}\)

China’s ability to direct and control its vast economic power is a remarkable tool, and one that is often employed to force cooperation with China’s desired objectives. On the ideological front, Lampton writes that China’s political system is largely undergirded by the nation’s economic success, and when stressed or threatened, the state has a tendency to overplay nationalist sentiment as a response.\(^{51}\) Each of these three avenues of power projection are leveraged in how China has responded to U.S. arms sales in East Asia.

As underscored by Lampton, interpreting China’s strategies and how it is choosing to project its power is notoriously difficult. In an attempt to quantify Chinese signaling of strategy and power projection, researcher Joel Wuthnow conducts an

\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
analysis of official Chinese statements and communications in his piece, “U.S. ‘Minilateralism’ in Asia and China’s Responses: A New Security Dilemma?” Wuthnow’s methodology identifies the following indicators that could serve as a measure of Chinese concern over potential U.S. actions: government delivered demarches, the content of China’s biennial defense white paper, remarks by Chinese foreign and defense spokespersons at press conferences, PRC journal articles on related topics, and qualitative analysis of Chinese analyst perspectives. Wuthnow’s framework for measuring Chinese signaling might serve as a useful collection of quantifiable measurements that may be used to objectively determine Chinese reactions to U.S. military actions.

Along the lines of attempting measure and quantify official Chinese responses to U.S. actions, Sarah Norgrove, Chris Louie, and Mary Willett published a 2013 policy analysis for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) titled, “China’s Response to the U.S. in Contemporary Asia”. Their policy analysis chooses to focus on a breakdown of official Chinese commentary and media coverage on U.S. activity over the course of fifteen months. While these measurements are narrower than the Wuthnow framework, the extensive qualitative study does reveal major trends related to the differences in tone between official government and media statements, key issues that elicit a strong nationalistic response, and reactions to Secretary of State Clinton’s 2011

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‘America’s Pacific Century’ essay. The ASPI article identifies a variety of key findings and factors influencing the U.S.-Sino relationship including the dangers of ambiguous statements being misinterpreted, the inconsistency with which China reacts via statements to U.S. arms sales in the region, and the then-recent change in leadership to the Xi Jinping administration. These factors will be important to bear in mind during this current research project, particularly the potential influence of various Chinese administrations on how the country responds to U.S. actions.

In 2012, the U.S. Taiwan Business Council (USTBC) and Project 2049 published a joint report on “Chinese Reactions to Taiwan Arms Sales”. This report summarizes the Chinese reactions and public responses to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan from 1979 (when the U.S. switched formal diplomatic recognition to the People’s Republic of China) to 2012. The report provides a sound outline of the U.S. policy framework for arms sales to Taiwan based on the Taiwan Relations Act and 1982 Joint Communique. The primary content within the report is an extensive historical analysis of all U.S. arms sales to Taiwan between 1979 – 2012 and subsequent Chinese responses to those actions. The report ultimately concludes that:

“While Beijing’s responses should indeed be considered and appropriate contingency plans developed, the U.S. should not be deterred by PRC reactions from approving legitimate requests for arms by Taiwan. While limited and largely symbolic retaliations for future arms sales cannot be ruled out, the PRC is

54 Norgrove Louie Willet, China’s Response, 2.
unlikely to actually challenge fundamental U.S. interests over arms sales to Taiwan.“

**Summary**

The existing body of scholarly work has outlined clear schools of thought on the use of arms sales as tools of diplomacy, the balance of power in East Asia, and the repertoires of Chinese influence and power. While the authors discussed above have contributed to a sound understanding of each of these respective fields, there is still room for exploration and study in the overlap between these three topics. These three pillars of scholarly work will serve as key foundations in framing and interpreting the findings of this study.

The study will draw upon many of the frameworks discussed in the existing literature, with a particular emphasis on the USTBC and Project 2049 report on “Chinese Reactions to Taiwan Arms Sales”. Building off of the topic and structure of the 2012 USTBC and Project 2049 report, this current study looks at a broader scope with regard to target countries (South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan) and will provide an updated assessment of developments that have transpired over the past decade. This research study accounts for important developments that have taken place since 2012, including the change of the U.S., Taiwanese, and PRC heads of government. All three of these new heads of state have taken much stronger nationalistic tones, which have no doubt contributed to a more aggressive national security environment in the region. This study

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56 Chinese Reactions, 2.
seeks to fill the existing gap in scholarly literature related to the evolving methods of Chinese response to U.S. arms sales in East Asia.
**Hypothesis & Methodology**

**Overview**

In light of the existing literature on China’s responses to arms sales in East Asia, it is clear that there are certain themes and ideas that have solid bases of research content. There are multiple studies that look at the strategic implications of military power balances in East Asia, other studies that conduct deep dives into the track record of U.S. arms sales to the region, and others still that seek to understand the subtle differences in official messaging from the Chinese government in reaction to certain policy actions. However, based on the content outlined above, there is still room for additional research on a variety of topics related to China’s reactions to U.S. arms sales in East Asia.

Specifically, this paper will conduct an inductive review of key developments in the history of China’s responses to U.S. arms sales in East Asia. Because there is a substantially smaller pool of available academic research on more contemporary U.S. arms sales to East Asia, this study will focus on the Chinese responses to significant U.S. arms sales in East Asia over the past 10 years (2010-2019). The analysis will leverage databases of U.S. foreign military sales and analyze Chinese reactions to significant arms sales to the East Asian region. The types of reactions that will be evaluated will build from Wuthnow’s key indicators including: Chinese government delivered demarches, the content of China’s biennial defense white paper, remarks by Chinese foreign and defense spokespersons at press conferences, PRC journal articles on related topics, and qualitative analysis of Chinese analyst perspectives. Additionally, this paper will include
more action-oriented measures such as economic retaliations, breaking of formal
military communications or exchanges, coordinated declines in foreign tourism, and
other unique actions as identified.

This study hypothesizes that China is increasingly assertive in issuing both formal
and informal responses to significant U.S. arms sales to its neighbors in East Asia. The
null hypothesis for this study would demonstrate that there is no correlation, pattern, or
even presence of Chinese responses to U.S. arms sales in East Asia. This study seeks to
demonstrate that China’s methods of response to U.S. arms sales that it deems
threatening or not in its own interest have grown increasingly complex, impactful, and
centrally coordinated by the Chinese government. Research should prove that China is
moving its repertoires of response beyond simply lobbying traditional diplomatic
complaints, to now marshalling a broad range of Chinese policy tools in an attempt to
show its displeasure with certain U.S. foreign military sales. These modern tools include
coordinated military, economic, and ideological efforts to support China’s perceived
security objectives within the East Asia region. The specific types of responses that will
be tracked are as follows:
Table 3: Categories of Chinese Responses to U.S. Arms Sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diplomatic/Ideological</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Economic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Official Government Statements</td>
<td>• Conducting Military Exercises</td>
<td>• Threatening Sanctions on Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Issuing Formal Diplomatic Complaint</td>
<td>• Suspending Military Dialogues</td>
<td>• Boycotting Foreign Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Issuing state-sponsored critical publications</td>
<td>• Cancelling Military Exchanges</td>
<td>• Suspending/Limiting Tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions and Parameters

East Asian States

For purpose of this study, East Asian States are defined as the following countries: China, Japan, North Korea, Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan. The geographic selection of these countries is based on Nathan & Scobell’s first and second concentric rings framework, which highlights the increased value and importance China places on issues taking place within the inner rings (i.e. rings 1 & 2). China is obviously eliminated from the analysis, as it cannot react to U.S. arms sales to itself. Further, Mongolia and North Korea are also eliminated from the study’s focus as they either represent a hostile state to the U.S. or have received minimal foreign military sales from the U.S. during the specified time period. Though Taiwan is not formally recognized as a state by most international organizations and countries, the island republic will be included in the study based on the unique security cooperation agreement it has with the U.S. and the history of contentious Chinese responses to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.
Based on these criteria, U.S. arms sales to the following states will be analyzed: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

“Significant” Foreign Military Sales

A “significant” foreign military sale is defined as being an FMS deal or collective system with a total estimated sale value of greater than $1 billion USD. This study seeks to evaluate China’s response to the largest and most impactful weapons sales being sold in East Asia. This dollar value threshold distinguishes foreign military sales that represent a substantial increase in capacity and/or upgrade in technological capability for the recipient nation.

Types of Weapons Systems

This study leverages Johnson’s framework for categorizing classes of weapons being sold. The following weapons platforms are included as potential use cases: gun and missile air defense systems, towed and self-propelled artillery, offensive armored vehicles, and tanks, combat planes and helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Transport vehicles/aircraft are excluded from the dataset as these platforms are unlikely to pose a significant threat to Chinese security due to their non-offensive combat utility. Exceptions to this exclusion are made if included as part of a broader weapons package deal.

Based on these definitions, the following sales will be analyzed for potential Chinese responses:

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57 Johnson, 2017.
Caveats and Limitations

It is possible that the specified definitions and parameters of this study may introduce a level of bias based on the restrictive thresholds that allow only the largest weapons deals sold in East Asia to be included in the study. However, this bias is hopefully mitigated and accounted for in the analysis section by focusing the application of findings on other large weapons packages, not attempting to apply the findings of this study on all types and sizes of foreign military sales.

It is also worthwhile to note that China is notoriously secretive in its state decision making and has a complex and nuanced pattern of hiding the true motivations for its actions. As such, it is exceptionally difficult to definitively state why or when an

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58 SIPRI Arms Transfer Database.
action is being taken in response to a U.S. arms sale. As such, this study will attempt in earnest to demonstrate causality between Chinese actions and their connection to U.S. FMS in East Asia, but outside of formal government statements, it is unlikely to ever be able to undeniably link certain actions as directly in taken response to specific FMS packages.
Data

2010 – U.S. Sale of PAC 3 Missiles, Blackhawk Helicopters, and Other Items

On 29 January 2010, the Obama Administration notified Congress regarding the issuance of Letters of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) to Taiwan for the sale of helicopters, missiles, military equipment, and related materials. The total sale, valued at the time at $6.4 billion, was headlined by 60 UH-60M Black Hawk Helicopters, and 114 Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missiles. This arms package was the first major weapons sale to Taiwan during the Obama Administration.

China reacted quite harshly to the announced arms sale. Shortly after the LOA announcement, China’s Foreign Ministry issued formal statements denouncing the sale of weapons and summoned then-U.S. Ambassador Jon Huntsman to deliver a formal protest. China further stated they would be breaking off military dialogues and military exchanges with the United States in response to the planned sale. Furthermore, China stated it would be pursuing economic sanctions on the U.S. firms involved in the sale.

Despite the threat of imposing economic sanctions, no formal efforts were made to follow through on those claims. In the end, the response to the sale largely involved

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63 Ibid.
formal diplomatic protests, the postponing or cancelling of military dialogues and exchanges, and the empty threat of sanctions on U.S. companies involved in the sale.65

2012 – U.S. Sale of F-35A Fighter Jets to Japan

In December 2011, Japan announced it would select the U.S.-manufactured F-35 fighter jet as the replacement for the nation’s ageing F-4s and F-15s.66 Widely regarded as the most advanced stealth fighter jet in the world, the decision to purchase the 42 of the F-35A aircraft was perceived as both a step to modernize Japan’s air defense capabilities, and respond to an increasingly powerful Chinese military.67 Following a three day visit to Beijing in January 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates encouraged Japan to move forward with purchasing the F-35 after being treated to a display of China’s new J-20 jet and a tour of China’s nuclear missile command center.68

The move to purchase the F-35 by Japan might be best characterized as a response to China’s growing military capability in the region. In support of this notion, there was no publicly available response or notable reaction from the Chinese government related to the announcement, purchase, or deployment of the F-35 to

Japan. No evidence was found to suggest any coordinated Chinese response to this weapons sale as defined by this study’s methodology.

**2012 – U.S. Sale/Deployment of Aegis Missile Defense System to Japan**

On 17 September 2012, an announcement was made that the U.S. and Japan had agreed to deploy an additional radar component to Japan’s Aegis missile defense system.\(^69\) Under most circumstances, this announcement would not likely have garnered any strong negative response. After all, the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense (Aegis BMD) system had been deployed to Japan since 2006.\(^70\) However, the announcement coincided with brewing tensions among Chinese citizens related to a key anniversary date related to the 1931 Japanese invasion of China.\(^71\) 18 September marks the anniversary of the Mukden Incident which served as a pretext for the Japanese invasion of China.\(^72\) In September 2012, this period of time was marked by strong anti-Japanese protests throughout China, and the tensions were further inflamed by suspicions stemming from the announced deployment of a second U.S.-made component of Japan’s Aegis system.\(^73\)

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\(^71\) Shanker and Johnson, 2012.


\(^73\) Shanker and Johnson, 2012.
This announcement came as U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta was on his way from Tokyo to Beijing to meet with the leaders of the two Asian nations. Though U.S. and Japanese leaders quickly denied the radar system was targeting China, top Chinese figures insisted that the missile system was undermining China’s nuclear deterrence posture and emboldening Japan to expand its territorial claims over the disputed Diaoyu (or Senkaku) Islands. A New York Times article had the following quote from a Chinese professor:

“The joint missile defense system objectively encourages Japan to keep an aggressive position in the Diaoyu Islands dispute, which sends China a very negative message,” said Shi Yinhong, a professor of international studies at Renmin University in Beijing. ‘Japan would not have been so aggressive without the support and actions of the U.S.’

The protests in China turned violent in some areas, as angry Chinese set vandalized, looted, and set fire to Japanese-affiliate businesses throughout China. These actions were accompanied by critical articles in Chinese state-sponsored publications and calls for boycotts against Japanese businesses and products. While it is impossible to specifically quantify the impact the U.S. radar system announcement had toward increasing anti-Japanese unrest in China, it is safe to say that the

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
announcement of the deployment prompted strong negative reactions and responses among many Chinese citizens.

**2013 – U.S. Sale of AH-64 Apache Attack Helicopters to South Korea**

On 25 September 2012, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) issued a notice to Congress regarding the potential sale of AH-64D Apache Attack Helicopters to the Republic of Korea. The sale included 36 helicopters to be delivered over the span of several years and was estimated at USD $3.6 billion. The DSCA stated that the proposed sale “will not alter the basic military balance in the region” and further outlined that the intended primary use of the helicopters was to “more effectively secure its borders and littoral waters, as well as conduct counter-terrorism/counter-piracy operations.” In support of the DSCA’s assessment of the non-impact to the military balance in the region, no evidence was found to suggest any coordinated Chinese response to this weapons sale as defined by this study’s methodology.

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80 Taylor and Ebner, 2012.
81 Ibid.
2014 – U.S. Sale of PAC-3 Missile Defense System to South Korea

In November 2014, the U.S. government approved the sale of PAC-3 missiles valued at $1.41 billion to South Korea.\textsuperscript{82} This purchase was intended to be an upgrade over South Korea’s existing PAC-2 missile defense system.\textsuperscript{83} China demonstrated no strong response to this weapons system upgrade. Among the potential reasons for the muted response, the most likely explanation is that Chinese military experts were more concerned at the time with the Republic of Korea’s potential decision to undertake deployment of the advanced U.S.-manufactured Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense (THAAD) system.\textsuperscript{84} Further details of this perceived tension are discussed in the THAAD section below.

2014 – U.S. Sale of F-35A Fighter Jets to South Korea

In November 2013, the South Korea Joint Chiefs of Staff announced they would select the American-manufactured F-35 as the winner of the nation’s FX-III fighter acquisition program.\textsuperscript{85} The lengthy bidding process officially resulted in the two nations signing a deal in September 2014 that agreed to the sale of 40 F-35A fighter jets to


South Korea. Defense experts speculated the selection of the fifth generation stealth aircraft was intended to ensure Korea’s ability to contend with neighboring China and Japan’s existing stealth capabilities. Despite the geostrategic implications to China, there was no publicly available response or notable reaction from the Chinese government related to the announcement, purchase, or deployment of the F-35 to South Korea. No evidence was found to suggest any coordinated Chinese response to this weapons sale as defined by this study’s methodology.

2016 – U.S. Sale of THAAD Missile Defense System to South Korea

On 7 July 2016, the U.S. and South Korea announced their joint decision to deploy the THAAD missile defense system to the Korean Peninsula. Discussions surrounding the potential sale of the advanced missile defense system, valued at $1.6 billion, had been ongoing since 2014, but had largely been met with reluctance by Korean leadership. However, Republic of Korea (RoK) leaders in February 2016 decided to formally move forward with discussions surrounding the deployment of THAAD

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following a series of intermediate-range ballistic missile tests by North Korea in 2015 and early 2016.\(^\text{90}\)

The decision to move forward discussions on the project was met with immediate criticism by the Chinese government.\(^\text{91}\) Beijing summoned the Korean Ambassador the day of the announcement to formally protest the decision to pursue talks with the U.S. about the missile defense system.\(^\text{92}\) During an interview on 13 February 2016, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi decried the decision stating, “[China] firmly oppose[s] any country to utilize the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula to jeopardize China’s legitimate rights and interests.”\(^\text{93}\)

China’s stated resistance to the THAAD deployment primarily stems from concerns over the system’s use of X-band radar. Many Chinese military experts have speculated that the X-band radar system would enable South Korea and, by proxy, the U.S. to track and monitor missile launches deep within China’s borders.\(^\text{94}\) According to Professor Li Bin of Tsinghua University, “China has to worry that the THAAD radar in the ROK would undermine China’s nuclear deterrence by collecting important data on
Chinese nuclear warheads that the United States could not acquire from other sources.”  

China’s intensity and methods of response to the THAAD deployment became more virulent as the project moved forward and was officially deployed on the Korean Peninsula. China responded with a mix an unprecedented mix of diplomatic, military, and economic measures. In addition to formal government statements and diplomatic protests, such as the ones outlined above, China suspended military dialogues and military exchanges with the U.S. and Korea. On 9 January 2019, a formation of Chinese military aircraft reportedly entered the air defense self-identification zone near the Korean border in violation of established protocol.

While the diplomatic and military responses were significant, perhaps the most impactful response methods from China were those in the economic realm. Following the announcement that Korea would move forward with the THAAD system, China cancelled several Korean Pop (K-Pop) music star appearances and shut down airing of Korean TV shows and other media within China. China also banned the sale of some South Korea consumer products and encouraged boycotts of popular Korean brands.

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By July 2017, Hyundai Motors’ sales had reportedly dropped 60% as a result of a targeted boycott of cars in the company’s largest foreign market. Following Korean conglomerate Lotte Group’s decision to participate in a land swap with the government to enable the deployment of a THAAD location, Chinese media coordinated a strong boycott effort targeting Lotte products, stores, and casinos. Perhaps the most unique form of economic retaliation was China’s decision to limit their tourism to Korea. China reportedly ordered travel agencies to cease the sale of Korean travel tours and restricted the number of flight routes traveling to Korea. The measures contributed to a significant drop in Chinese tourists traveling to Korea with 3 million visiting in 2017, down from 7 million in 2016.

2018 – U.S. Sale of F-35 Fighter Jets and Carrier Upgrade

In December 2018, Japan announced its intent to purchase 105 F-35 Fighter Jets from the United States. The fifth-generation stealth aircraft represent a substantial upgrade in Japan’s military capabilities. Along with the announced schedule of F-35

103 Meick and Salidjanova, 2017.
purchases, Japan has initiated a program to upgrade their two Izumo-class helicopter carriers to enable them to carry short take-off fighter jets. The perceived plan is to station the F-35B vertical take-off variation of the aircraft onboard the retrofitted ships. Though the F-35 acquisition alone was a recognized improvement in Japanese military capability, stationing the new aircraft on a mobile sea-based platform would greatly expand Japan’s force projection capabilities and pose a greater threat to Chinese interests in the region.

In response to that potential threat, China has responded with skepticism and critical comments related to Japan’s more aggressive military posture. Chinese officials have criticized the potential move by Japan, citing concerns that the move would violate Japan’s pacifist constitution. Additionally, Chinese state-backed news outlets have published articles criticizing Japan’s military reform efforts as they relate to operationalization of its F-35 jets.

2019 – U.S. Proposed Sale of M1 Abrams Tanks & Stinger Missiles

On 8 July 2019, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency announced its formal notification to Congress regarding the intention to sell $2.2 billion worth of military equipment to Taiwan. The proposed sale included 108 M1 Abrams Tanks, 50

Stinger Missiles, and 409 Javelin anti-tank missiles, each representing significant upgrades over Taiwan’s aging tank and anti-air and anti-tank capabilities. In response to the announcement, China’s foreign ministry issued statements calling for the U.S. to immediately cancel the deal and lodged formal diplomatic complaints with the U.S. China also threatened economic responses to the proposed sale. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Geng Shuang said in a statement, “In order to safeguard national interests, China will impose sanctions on US enterprises participating in this sale of weapons to Taiwan.” Despite the statement, there have been no reports that sanctions have actually been implemented in response to the threat. China’s military also responded with a series of provocative maneuvers. In late July, the People’s Liberation Army began conducting two military drills near the Taiwan Strait. According to reports, this was the first time China had conducted two simultaneous large-scale exercises near the Taiwan Strait since the mid-90s during the Taiwan Strait Crisis. Additionally, on 25 July, the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced it would be banning all solo travel

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112 “China to Impose...”, 2019.
to Taiwan. Estimates suggest the move might cost roughly $900 million in lost tourism revenue for Taiwan.

2019 – U.S. Proposed Sale of F-16 Jets to Taiwan

On 20 August 2019, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency issued formal notice to Congress regarding the approved sale of 66 F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan. The sale of the aircraft is highly significant as it marks the first time the U.S. has moved forward with selling new aircraft to Taiwan since the mid-90s. In response, the Chinese government issued a series of strong statements and diplomatic countermeasures. Shortly after the announcement, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Geng Shuang stated, “[the sale] is a serious interference in our internal affairs and undermines our sovereignty and security interests.” China reportedly lodged formal diplomatic protests with the U.S. and threatened to impose sanctions on any American company involved in the sale of the planes. As of this publication, no sanctions have been implemented in response to that claim. In a surprisingly provocative military move

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days after the announcement, China deployed two J-2 planes across the median line between China and Taiwan for the first time since 2011.\textsuperscript{120} This bold military gesture provoked Taiwan to scramble F-16 jets to respond to the incursion.\textsuperscript{121}

**Analysis**

By coding each of the above case studies in a consistent framework, the results can be aggregated into a table that summarizes the repertoires of response to each weapons sale. The table below details which types of responses were observed from China during each weapons sale. The repertoires of response are categorized into three groups: Political/Ideological, Military, and Economic.


\textsuperscript{121} Marcus, 2019.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Recipient Nation</th>
<th>Weapons Platform</th>
<th>Political/Ideological</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Economic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>PAC3 / Helicopters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>F-35 Fighter Jets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Aegis Missile Defense System</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>AH-64 Apache Helicopters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>PAC3 Missile Defense System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>F-35 Fighter Jets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>THAAD Missile Defense System</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>F-35 Fighter Jets / Carrier Upgrade</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>M1 Abrams Tanks / Stinger Missiles</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>F-16 Fighter Jets</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 10 U.S. foreign military sales that met the criteria for inclusion in this study, 6 involved evidence of a negative response or reaction from China. Of those 6, each case had more than one type of response observed. Below are key observations and trends:

1. **More Frequent Responses in Latter Half of Past Decade**

   When considering the timing of each observed case, it is noteworthy that observable responses from China have become more consistent over the span of 2016-2019 when compared to that of 2010-2014 (No FMS met the threshold of observation in 2015). All 4 cases from 2016-2019 had some form of observed response, whereas only 2 of 5 cases from 2010-2014 had observable responses.

   One possible reason for this difference might be the change in U.S. administrations. The transition from the Democratic Barack Obama Administration to the Republican Donald Trump Administration correlates exactly with this split in the dataset. It is possible that President Trump’s more aggressive, antagonistic approach to China across multiple policy fronts may be one of the sources driving a more robust response from China to U.S. FMS in East Asia, however, more research is needed to determine the validity of that idea.

2. **Broadening of Response Methods**

   In addition to seeing more frequent responses from China in recent years, the dataset also shows a broadening of the types of response methods being carried out by China. Building from observation #1, when comparing the total count of observed responses for each category broken out between 2010-2014 and 2015-
2019, it becomes clear there has been a marked increase in the total number and diversity of response types being demonstrated by China over the past 5 years.

**Table 6: Total Observed Chinese Response Types by Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Observed Chinese Response Types by Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political/Ideological</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph showing increased response types" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph showing increased response types" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph showing increased response types" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greatest increases can be seen in the Political/Ideological and Economic categories. This trend suggests that China is more comfortable asserting its political, ideological, and economic strength in an attempt to further its security objectives in East Asia. This observed broadening of the types of responses being conducted by China indicates the country is choosing a wider, more cross-spectrum approach to countering U.S. FMS in the region. Of particular interest in the latter half of the dataset is the use of threatening sanctions against foreign companies and suspending/limiting tourism to countries purchasing major U.S. arms exports. These response options, particularly the tourism bans, are evidence of China taking full advantage of its most powerful resource (its massive economy) to threaten or inflict...
economic harm on those attempting to undermine its perceived security objectives. It should be noted, though China has threatened to impose sanctions on numerous U.S. companies involved in arms exports, there has been no observed evidence to suggest they have formally carried out imposing sanctions on any U.S. company in retaliation for an arms sale in East Asia.

3. Differences in Responses Per Nation

Each of the three studied nations had at least one observed incidence of China responding negatively to an acquisition of U.S. weapons. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Taiwan received the most consistent reactions from China with all three of their purchases seeing a diverse array of negative responses. This is certainly tied to China’s strong and unwavering “One China” policy which considers Taiwan a breakaway province of China that will eventually be reunified with the mainland. Nearly every proposed or executed weapons sale to Taiwan has been protested by China as a violation of its territorial sovereignty.

Japan was the second most targeted state, with 2 of its 3 purchases receiving some form of negative response from China. South Korea had only one U.S. weapons acquisition that received a response from China. However, the Chinese response to the THAAD deployment was, by far, the most significant and diverse reaction to a U.S. arms sale in East Asia during the observed time period. The

Chinese response to THAAD was evident in each of the 9 categories of response types.

4. **Differences in Weapons Platform Type**

When looking at the correlation between weapons platform type and Chinese responses observed, there are some potential trends in the data, but few definitive findings. The fact that China strongly responds to any arms sale to Taiwan slightly clouds an analysis of the entire list of U.S. sales from 2010-2019. If the Taiwan cases are excluded from consideration, some interesting patterns arise. First, missile defense systems appear to be one of the most sensitive types of weapons platforms that elicit a response from China. 2 of the 3 observed missile defense system sales to Korea and Japan had strong responses from China. The reasoning behind this trend may be related to China’s expressed concerns over those systems’ potential ability to use their radar to view into the Chinese mainland. If true, this could potentially undermine China’s missile deterrence capabilities.

Second, it is interesting to note that China did not react strongly to most fighter jet sales. The only exception to this was the 2018 responses to Japan’s F-35 purchases and carrier upgrades. That instance was largely related to Japan’s ability to leverage the carrier upgrades to deploy their new F-35 jets further into maritime territory, and unlikely related to the actual purchase of the fighter jets themselves.

Finally, helicopter sales were not likely to elicit a strong response from China. Taiwan experienced a response to the 2010 purchase of UH-60 Blackhawks, however, as noted above any significant purchase of military equipment by Taiwan
is likely to draw a Chinese response. The lack of response to helicopter platforms is perhaps best summed up by the U.S. DSCA’s comments in their notification of the Korean Apache FMS to Congress: “the proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region.”

Conclusions

This research offers a framework to better understand the evolving nature of Chinese responses to U.S. arms sales in East Asia. As demonstrated above, China has increasingly shown a willingness to leverage a broad range of tools and methods of responding to U.S. arms sales in East Asia. As China continues to strengthen as a regional power, it is likely to continue marshalling a wide range of political, ideological, military, and economic tools to respond to U.S. military sales it perceives to be detrimental to their security objectives.

Though China has demonstrated a trend of negatively reacting to U.S. arms sales, it is important to reflect on the efficacy of their efforts to undermine U.S. FMS in East Asia. Though weakening of diplomatic relations or breaking off dialogue between states have consequences, China’s responses to U.S. sales in East Asia have largely had little impact. The economic consequences imposed by some of China’s retaliation efforts might be the most observable impact of their coordinated efforts, however, beyond the marginal economic impact dealt to neighboring states, China has little to show for its efforts. No major U.S. arms sales were cancelled as a result of Chinese reactions. At

best, China has secured to delay of proposed sales to Taiwan as a result of its strong history of responses. Though policymakers should be aware of the growing trend of China’s use of a wide array of tools to counter U.S. arms sales in East Asia, they should also reflect on the efficacy and total impact of China’s actions in light of the broader security concerns impacting the Pacific region.

The balance of power within the East Asian region is certain to shift in the coming years. As China continues to grow and exert increased power, it will seek to shore up its security situation with its peripheral states. Because of this inherent insecurity, significant U.S. arms sales to China’s neighbors are almost certain to continue to raise protests and reactions from Chinese leadership. Understanding the key variables that compel China to react strongly to certain sales and evaluating the evolution of how China is choosing to respond to countries that accept U.S. foreign military sales will help guide policy maker decisions when considering future arms sales to the region.
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Curriculum Vita

Carson Doyle works as an international security analyst for Lockheed Martin. In this role, Carson specializes in regional security issues in the Asia-Pacific and Latin America regions and leads Lockheed Martin’s corporate open source intelligence program. Prior to joining Lockheed Martin, Carson was hired into JP Morgan Chase & Company’s leadership development program and worked as a data analyst and crisis management coordinator. Carson holds a bachelor’s degree in Business Management from Cedarville University. Carson lives with his wife and two cats in Rockville, Maryland.