

# Taiwan Goes It Alone

An October trip to Washington by Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT) vice presidential candidate, Vincent Siew, was supposed to inform the Bush administration that after four years of obstruction the KMT had reached consensus on military procurement, including the highly contentious PAC-3.



By **Rupert Hammond-Chambers**, president of the U.S.-Taiwan Business Council.

the name Taiwan, as well as Taiwan's ongoing efforts on its HF-2E counterstrike missile program. This was an opportunity missed and an alarmingly inconsistent message about U.S. priorities.

The Bush administration took renewed interest in Taiwan's missile programs in early 2007. Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) testified to the leg-

islative Yuan that more than \$1 billion was needed over the next five years for further research, development and limited deployment of the HF-2E counterstrike missile, as well as monies to further advance the platform.

Taiwan's objective has been to develop counterstrike weapon for tactical, not strategic, application in the event of a conflict with China. Taiwan's operational concepts do not envision attacks against civilian targets or against political leadership assets. There are no Taiwan generals threatening to level Shanghai or Guangzhou.

Furthermore, a few years ago, the Taiwan military discussed counterstrike operations with the United States, at which time it agreed to a number of principles, including only using conventionally armed weapons against military targets in response to a Chinese first strike and to do so only with authorization.

The Bush administration's objections to the HF-2E program, which have been conveyed particularly forcefully over the past six months, surely hinge on their view of Taiwan as an irresponsible play-

er in cross-Strait relations. They likely feel that a counterstrike capability for Taiwan would hurt U.S. interests.

In addition, they view this Taiwan effort as offensive in nature, contrary to the defensive focus of the Taiwan Relations Act.

These objections are unlikely to gain much traction in Taiwan, at least in the absence of any similar efforts to undermine China's massive development and deployment of a missile capability on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

On the modern battlefield, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between a defensive and an offensive system. This fact alone makes the U.S. objections specious, leading to America being viewed as hypocritical at best and as pro-China at worst.

In Taiwan's view, the absence of any cost for China's missile-driven disruption of the "Status Quo" compels it to raise the cost of aggression. To many in Taiwan, a counterstrike missile capability seems a logical, cost-effective response.

The indigenously developed missile program also highlights the in-

creased pressure in Taiwan for greater domestic self-reliance and for improved industrial cooperation with vendors (i.e. with U.S. companies). The island's legislature is increasingly demanding more independence from foreign suppliers, partially as a function of erratic U.S. defense commitments, like the ongoing denial of Taiwan's request for F-16s, and partially as a reflection of the desire to develop cheaper alternatives.

Taiwan recognizes that America's defense commitment is now conditional on Taiwan-China relations and on whether America feels that Taiwan is doing enough to promote good will across the Strait. China's actions as a force disrupter of the "Status Quo" through policy and military coercion seem to have been downgraded as a factor in determining responsibility for bilateral harmony.

A presidential election victory for the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou may assuage many concerns over the future of cross-Strait relations. However, there are no guarantees that China will accept anything other than Taiwan's complete integration into the People's Republic

— an unacceptable outcome for a significant majority of the Taiwanese people.

Taiwan's incoming leadership can promote stronger support for defense modernization from the United States by toning down the identity politics rhetoric that has been adding tension to the triangular relationship between America, Taiwan and China. That said, increased support supposes that the Bush administration will change its attitude after the inauguration of a new Taiwan president in May.

America's desire to work constructively with China will come at the expense of supporting myriad Taiwan initiatives. Active opposition to Taiwan's defense modernization efforts, along with passive opposition or neutrality to similar efforts by China, simply increases the likelihood of Chinese aggression and adds further to Taiwan's isolation.

If the Bush administration desires an end to Taiwan's development of indigenous missiles like the HF-2E, the United States must be consistent in its commitment to Taiwan. Denial of F-16s run at cross purposes to stated U.S. goals in ending the cruise-missile program, and exposes the ad hoc nature of present U.S. policy toward Taiwan. ■