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Arms sales indicate tacit acceptance of Tsai: report

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The US\$1.83 billion arms package for Taiwan suggests Washington's "acceptance, if not endorsement" of Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), a former White House official said.

Despite Chinese protests, "the sale should help preserve peace in the region" Cato Institute senior fellow Doug Bandow said.

Writing in National Interest magazine, Bandow — a former special assistant to US president Ronald Reagan — said that while some analysts advocate ending the sales, China's recent aggressiveness in the East and South China seas "reinforces the case for continuing arms transfers."

While the US favored the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) in the past, now that Tsai is "almost certain" to win next month's presidential election, "Washington has indicated its willingness to arm a Tsai government," he said.

"By any standard of justice, the Taiwanese are entitled to independence," Bandow said. "China's long-ago sovereignty does not trump the desire of the 23 million people who have dramatically transformed their society."

However, while the US was willing to tip the cross-strait balance during the Cold War, that world "disappeared long ago," he said.

Taiwan does not matter enough to US security to risk a war with China, Bandow said.

"The cultural and economic ties between the US and Taiwan are important, but limited — America is ever less likely to intervene on Taiwan's behalf," he said.

Taiwan matters much more to China than to the US, he said.

"Enabling Taiwan to defend itself is the best way out of this conundrum," he said.

"No arms sales would enable Taipei to defeat a determined China in war," Bandow added. "The former's objective should be deterrence, not victory."

The higher the price any Beijing government would have to pay for attempting to coerce Taipei, the less likely it would be to try to do so, he said.

“Continued patience would remain good sense,” Bandow said. “That doesn’t mean there won’t be costs to the US-China relationship as a result, but they are worth bearing.”

“Taipei will face a continuing difficult challenge in maintaining its independent international existence. Washington should establish a more routine weapons transfer process,” he said.

Bandow said that routine sales would offer a form of strategic certainty short of war and would better protect Taiwanese security and advance US interests.