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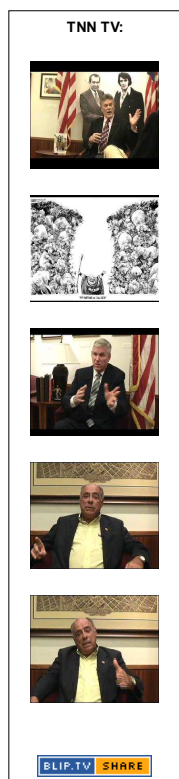
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Obama's China Two-Step

December 28, 2009 by [Jonathan Movroydis](#) | Filed Under [Barack Obama](#), [China](#), [Nixon Center](#), [Richard Nixon](#), [The National Interest](#)

At The Nixon Center's *National Interest* magazine, Ted Galen carpenter [writes](#) that President Obama's decision to send arms to Taipei indicates that he wants to strengthen a beleaguered leader cooperative with Washington, and signal to China that their recent deployment of missiles across the strait is unacceptable:

There appear to be multiple motives for announcing an arms package now, including the mundane desire to give portions of the U.S. defense and aerospace industries a boost during tough economic times. But the primary motives seem to be diplomatic. An arms sale would be a reward to Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou for pursuing policies designed to reduce tensions in the Taiwan Strait and, equally important, for keeping Washington in the loop regarding any initiatives Taipei might take. That behavior comes as a great relief to U.S. officials, since it is in marked contrast to the conduct of Ma's predecessor, Chen Shui-bian, who seemed to delight in provoking Beijing and blind-siding Washington in the process.

But Ma is now under fire at home for being too soft toward China, and his political popularity has sagged badly over the past year for numerous reasons. Responding favorably to Taipei's long-standing request for additional weapon systems would help de-fuse the domestic opposition to Ma and strengthen the political standing of a cooperative leader Washington would like to see remain in power after Taiwan's next presidential election.

Even more important, the arms sale would convey a message to Beijing of Washington's growing annoyance regarding various issues. One grievance is China's failure to halt the deployment of missiles across the strait from Taiwan, despite Ma Ying-jeou's more conciliatory posture. Beijing's conduct could be seen as a deliberate challenge to Washington, since the missile deployments have long been the primary justification for previous U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The Obama administration might well conclude that Chinese leaders would view Washington's continued inaction on Taipei's request as a sign of weakness.

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