

# **Appeal to the European Union to Maintain Its Arms Embargo on China**

Position Paper

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## **I. Background**

After the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, the European Union condemned China for using force to suppress pro-democracy advocates, and instituted an embargo on arms sales to China for such a serious violation of human rights. Since 2003, however, due to China's lobbying and pressure, some EU member states have pushed strongly for an end to the ban, although the reasons for the imposition of the embargo have yet to be resolved. In a joint statement issued upon the conclusion of the 7th EU-China Summit, which took place in The Hague, the Netherlands, on December 8, 2004, the European Union "confirmed its political will to continue to work towards lifting the embargo." This was reaffirmed in its Presidency Conclusions of the European Council released on the 16th and 17th of the same month.

The United States and Japan, on the other hand, have opposed the removal of the EU arms embargo on China under the current circumstances. During a visit in late February 2005, US President George W. Bush voiced his concerns to the European Union. The US Senate and House of Representatives have also passed a number of resolutions

expressing their opposition to the lifting of the ban.

On March 14, 2005, China passed an “anti-separation law” (the so-called anti-secession law) in an attempt to provide a “legal” premise for resolving the cross-strait issue by non-peaceful means. This move caused grave misgivings among European countries, including Luxembourg, the then holder of the EU presidency, which issued a statement on behalf of the European Union regarding this matter. In the statement, the European Union reiterated that cross-strait relations should be based on constructive dialogue and the pursuit of real progress to peacefully settle disputes. In the end, the European Union did not remove its ban on arms sales to China in 2005.

## **II. Argument for Maintaining the EU arms embargo on China**

In light of the latest developments and the fact that certain EU countries have been continuously proposing to lift the embargo on arms sales to China, Taiwan hereby reiterates its opposition and urges the European Union to maintain the embargo. Our reasons are as follows:

### **A. Core problems within China**

The European Union should neither show indifference to the Chinese dictatorship’s denial of human rights nor ignore the problems latent in China’s economic development.

#### **1. Lack of improvement in problem areas**

The reasons for imposing the arms embargo against China still hold true

today. China is a dictatorial regime devoid of human rights. It is precisely for this reason that the European Union decided to impose an arms embargo on China after the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989.

Furthermore, although China signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1998, its National People's Congress has given no indication of ever ratifying it. In the meantime, China continues to put democracy activists behind bars and charge political dissidents with sedition. All of those arrested have been treated without regard to proper legal procedures.

In February 2006, both *Time* and *Business Week* published stories that the search engine Google was pressed by the Chinese government into designing a search engine especially for Internet users in China. These tools were designed to eliminate or replace criticisms of China or other information that the Chinese government deems inappropriate. Such censorship of Internet news would be unimaginable in a country that upholds democracy and respects the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

These actions amply demonstrate that China's human rights record has not improved, meaning that the reasons for the EU arms embargo against China still exist. Lifting the embargo now would equate to nothing less than an endorsement of China's continued misconduct. This would clearly fly in the face of the European Union's original intent in implementing the embargo, and send the wrong signal to Beijing. By this token, China's leaders could end up believing that China's economic allure means that they can make the European Union cooperate without

making any effort to resolve issues related to the Tiananmen Square Incident and other human rights issues. This, in turn, would deal a severe blow to the confidence of China's democracy activists, and adversely affect students who shed blood or died in the Tiananmen Square Incident, imprisoned democracy activists, and Falun Gong practitioners who have been persecuted in China.

Concessions by the European Union would cause China to backtrack or even neglect human rights reform. In the end, such concessions would deal another severe blow to Chinese and others who have devoted themselves to, or are concerned about, the democratic reform movement and the state of human rights in China.

## **2. China's relentless suppression of dissidents and reform advocates**

In addition to its unrelenting military suppression of dissidents in Tibet and Xinjiang, Beijing has also employed brutal means to crack down on domestic social movements throughout China. The conditions under which the European Union imposed an arms embargo on China following the Tiananmen Square Incident have not improved.

Despite amending its constitution in 2004 to include the protection of human rights, China continues to be criticized worldwide for its human rights conditions. For example, the US State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2004* indicated that Beijing continues to suppress, arrest, and detain human rights activists. These include individuals voicing their opinions via the Internet, intellectuals expressing

differing political views, and workers demanding their rights. A 2005 report issued by the UN Commission on Human Rights also condemned China's judiciary for willfully detaining its citizens and violating their freedoms of thought, expression, religion, association, and assembly.

Furthermore, over recent years Beijing has continued to shed blood in its frequent military suppression of social movements and pro-independence activities in Xinjiang. In its reaction to the Uigher people's appeal for independence, Beijing has long turned a deaf ear to the calls for peaceful co-existence by the moderates in Xinjiang. More importantly, Beijing claims this independence movement is linked with terrorism and, therefore, has adopted coercive measures to indiscriminately mistreat criminals and carry out executions.

The above examples do not necessarily indicate that China will use the highly sophisticated weapons it intends to purchase from the European Union to repress its own people. Given its very nature as a nation that despises human rights and democracy, however, China may use these weapons to invade its democratic neighbors, causing great loss of human life. Were EU nations to unwittingly assist an authoritarian regime to invade democratic countries, it would be the most regrettable chapter in the history of democracy. For this reason, we urge great caution.

### **3. China's continued persecution of religious and minority groups**

As for religious persecution, although China's constitution stipulates freedom of religious beliefs, the Chinese authorities typically view

religious activities as a threat to the communist regime or its ideology. They therefore utilize all manner of excuses to limit religious freedom. In democracies, freedom of religion is considered a universal value and a comprehensive idea that comprises thoughts, value systems, and proselytizing. The Chinese authorities, however, separate freedom of religion from freedom of belief. In other words, people may believe in a religion, but they may not freely proselytize their faith, especially not outside of places already dedicated to the practice of religion. Moreover, they may proselytize in houses of worship, but not at times pre-designated for religious activities. Such restrictions mean that law-abiding religious followers may only conduct religious activities at pre-determined times and places. In theory, both sharing one's faith at home and proselytizing or speaking of religious doctrine at work are "illegal" religious activities. Underground Protestant groups, Catholic churches, Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and disciples of cults deemed "evil" by the government remain under close surveillance by Chinese authorities. Practitioners of Falun Gong in particular continue to be subject to detainment, arrest, and imprisonment.

Regarding the persecution of ethnic minority groups, the Chinese government's oppression of and discrimination against ethnic minority groups remain unchanged. China strictly limits not only their rights in such areas as politics, education, and religion, but also their fundamental human rights. Moreover, in the name of preventing secession and terrorism, China arbitrarily carries out the religious suppression of the Uigher in Xinjiang through related laws, regulations, and policies in

hopes of extinguishing their nationalist tendencies.

Lastly, in order to maintain its rule, the Chinese government in recent years has allocated great sums of money to develop ethnic minority areas and to improve living standards. From 1998 to 2004, a total of US\$2.5 billion was poured into these regions. The benefits, however, are mostly enjoyed by Han immigrants to these regions. The living standards of ethnic minority groups linger well below the national average, as they are denied fair treatment.

#### **4. Latent problems in China's Economy**

The European Union's great importance on its relations with China primarily stems from bilateral trade interests. In recent years, China's economy has indeed grown increasingly important and influential in international trade. However, China's economic growth is founded on imbalanced internal development and the ever-present threat of social upheaval. Its economy is unlikely to sustain a high rate of growth over the long term as it is encumbered with innumerable uncertainties. These range from the government's recent acquisitions of farmland, unpaid rural migrant workers' wages and the demolition of privately owned houses in urban areas, to the disparity between rich and poor, urban unemployment, corruption, and the low caliber of government officials.

Such variables have resulted in the imbalanced distribution of resources, the erosion of moral values, high unemployment, and social disorder.

This year, *The Economist* noted that China's economy shows signs of an

investment bubble. Should current elevated rates of investment growth persist and major sectors continue to experience a surplus in production, bad debt could amass as a result, ultimately causing an economic recession. Moreover, should China's macroeconomic controls become overly effective, it could add momentum to economic stagnancy.

These phenomena show that instability and uncertainty underlie China's economic development, and that China's economy paints a picture not as rosy as the outside world sees. Once China's internal problems emerge, external issues will most likely be blamed. When this occurs, EU-China relations, in particular their close bilateral trade relations, will be severely affected.

Bilateral trade interests form the primary consideration for the European Union in its relations with China. China represents the European Union's second-largest trading partner, with the European Union being China's largest trading partner. China supplies cheap products and provides a market for European products. The economies of the two complement each other. The European Union should remember, however, that commercial interests should not supersede the universal values of human rights and peace. Furthermore, the European Union should not turn a blind eye to China's willful actions. While EU nations hope to enjoy cheap products, they should neither overlook past conflicts over textiles and footwear, nor should they forget that dumping by China causes plant closures and manufacturing job losses in Europe.



## **5. Need to defend universal values and ideals**

Taiwan's process of democratization and its record of respecting human rights over the last 20 years have won wide admiration in Europe and North America. In addition, many Europeans think that China can draw lessons from Taiwan's achievements in democratic development.

Experience shows that respect for human rights marks an essential precondition for democratization. China, which remains under totalitarian rule and shows little respect for human rights, still lacks the preconditions needed to break away from autocracy and turn toward democracy. Taiwan would be happy to see its experiences repeated in China and hopes that countries of the European Union and elsewhere will encourage the development of democratic movements in China.

European countries have long upheld democracy and freedom, and protected human rights, while strongly opposing the use of military force in resolving international conflicts. If the European Union were to lift its arms embargo against China before improvements can be seen in China's human rights record, it in essence would be affirming the many villainous acts China has committed in oppressing human rights. It would also represent support for China in its attempt to use force to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty, security, and dignity. This would run counter to the European Union's and European people's ideals of protecting human rights, democracy, and freedom.

## **B. Threat to regional peace**

### **1. China's expansion of armaments**

China expends great effort in expanding its armaments, which aggravates the danger of conflict in the Taiwan Strait and has negative impact on regional security. Beijing has deployed nearly eight hundred short-range missiles targeting Taiwan, and has increased their number by about 100 per year. This greatly threatens security in the Taiwan Strait. China's leaders have repeatedly emphasized that they will not renounce using military force to resolve the Taiwan Strait issue. In March 2005, China enacted its anti-separation law in an attempt to establish a "legal basis" for the use of force against Taiwan. This once again highlighted the purposes behind China's military procurements: to increase its military power, accelerate the modernization of its military, and prepare for potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Ultimately, this will severely impact security of the Taiwan Strait and even that of the Asia Pacific region, thereby jeopardizing global peace and stability.

As China has yet to democratize, its rise will turn it into a military power that threatens the security of the world. Although no country threatens China militarily, China's defense budget has risen continually over recent years. Beijing vigorously carries out the research, development, and deployment of strategic weapons, some of which possess target ranges that cover India, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and the whole of the United States. In addition, China actively cooperates with other countries to raise its military technology and power. Examples include nanosatellite technology for anti-satellite weapon systems, early warning radar for military planes, conventional submarine engine equipment, and attack helicopter technology.

The United States has expressed serious concern over the possible impact of exports by some countries to China. Of particular alarm are missiles, invisibility systems, satellites, command and control expertise, offshore platforms, and military planes, as well as all related subsystems, equipment, and technology. Both the *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China* published by the US Department of Defense in 2005 and the *Defense of Japan 2005 White Paper* published by the Japan Defense Agency pointed out that China marches down the path to becoming a regional power. Both reports also raised questions and expressed concern about China's massive arms expansion.

## **2. Regional security concerns**

Many misgivings and concerns about the deterioration of regional security abound. China's military expansion enables it to flex its muscles within the tectonics of the regional power structure, thereby leading to a gradual deterioration of regional security. China often uses domestic nationalist sentiments to apply pressure to other parties in international disputes. One such example rests in its handling of the 2001 incident when a US reconnaissance plane collided with a PRC fighter jet over the South China Sea. Likewise, China saw a re-escalation of anti-Japanese sentiments over the 12 months following Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, a controversial new edition of a Japanese history textbook, and Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The Beijing authorities incited and manipulated nationalist sentiment to achieve their desired diplomatic

goals, causing great worry to other nations. The United States has gradually redeployed troops to the Asia-Pacific region in response to China's rapid military expansion of recent years. This demonstrates the misgivings and concerns that Chinese military expansion has generated internationally regarding the deteriorating regional security.

### **3. Involvement of and risk to the world**

Should China wage war on Taiwan, the whole world, including EU nations, could easily be involved and endangered. China eagerly hopes the European Union will lift its arms embargo so it can acquire precision weaponry, more effective munitions, and other military equipment to serve its goal of using force against Taiwan. In the event of war across the Taiwan Strait, countries such as the United States, Japan, and South Korea would immediately and unavoidably become embroiled in the dispute. It would also spark strained relations with surrounding nations, including those of ASEAN, South Asia, and Russia. The European Union's trade value with Asia represents almost one quarter of its total. From the perspective of the close economic and trade ties between Europe and Asia, the European Union would find it difficult to avoid deep involvement should any major changes in the Asia-Pacific occur.

### **4. China vs. international accords on sensitive technology and arms**

Concerns remain over China's ability and willingness to abide by international regulations preventing the spread of sensitive technology and weaponry. To ensure international military security and avoid regional clashes, key members of the international community have

reached consensus on preventing the spread of sensitive technology and weaponry. Although China has repeatedly promised to abide by regulations on the proliferation of weapons and technologies, it has often made excuses to justify providing them to other countries. For instance, although China and the United States has held six periodic conferences on non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament, China continues to violate such regulations by exporting these technologies with frequency. In January 2006, for example, the United States imposed new sanctions on China, as certain large PRC companies were assisting Iran to upgrade its guided missile technology. Such instances reveal that international regulations, such as the Missile Technology Control Regime, cannot effectively restrain China's behavior. Consequently, when deciding on whether to lift its arms embargo against China, the European Union could formulate strict regulations (i.e. a code of conduct for arms exports) for China to follow. None the less, it would still be nearly impossible to ensure that China would refrain from providing related technologies and weapons to other countries and, in the process, endangering global security.

### **C. EU resolutions on maintaining the embargo**

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned factors of human rights as well as regional peace and stability, on December 18, 2003, the European Parliament overwhelmingly adopted a resolution supporting the continuation of the arms embargo on China with 373 votes in favor, 32 votes against, and 29 abstentions. The resolution emphasized that “the PRC needs to prove it has made significant progress on human rights

before the EU can consider lifting the ban.” This demonstrates the firm position the European Parliament has taken on urging China, through peaceful means, to embrace the universal values of democracy and human rights. On nine other occasions (February 10 and November 17, 2004, and January 13, February 24, April 13, April 14, April 28, July 7, and November 16, 2005), the European Parliament passed other resolutions calling for the European Union to maintain the embargo. All the while, it called on China to implement concrete measures to improve its domestic human rights conditions. These resolutions clearly reveal the European Parliament’s stance of maintaining the arms embargo until Beijing ratifies the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and fully respects the rights of ethnic and other minority groups.

#### **D. EU role in cross-strait and regional peace process**

The European Union plays a positive role in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, which would benefit regional security as well. It should not consider lifting its arms embargo on China until a framework for democratic, peaceful, and stable interaction has been established between Taiwan and China.

##### **1. Taiwan Strait peace**

By demonstrating a firm adherence to human rights, democracy, and freedom through an arms embargo, the European Union can send a message to Beijing that, besides military force, other solutions to the Taiwan issue do exist. Furthermore, it can draw on its influence and experience in integrating Europe to urge China to engage in dialogue with

Taiwan without preconditions. This could lead to the establishment of a platform for cross-strait dialogue on democracy, peace, and stability. Injudicious lifting of the sanctions before the establishment of such a mechanism would reduce Beijing's willingness to resume dialogue with Taiwan, thus making cross-strait peace even less likely.

## **2. Regional security**

A peace and democracy framework across the Taiwan Strait would serve as the foundation for stability in the western Pacific region. The arms embargo can make China realize that peace- and freedom-loving countries that uphold democracy and human rights do not welcome its strong-handedness and military buildup at all. China's domineering behavior only strengthens other countries' misgivings and creates a stumbling block to its "peaceful rise."

Should the European Union continue to staunchly uphold its principles, it would form a positive force for ensuring order in the post-Cold War era. Otherwise, it will become a negative force that encourages political hegemony, increases the potential for US-China confrontation, and exacerbates tensions in East Asia. In other words, if the European Union wishes to become an active power that supports Asia-Pacific security and stability, then it must be careful in handling its arms embargo on China.

## **III. Conclusion**

The international community has begun to see "China's rise" as part of an overall "China threat." While a large part of China's rise has stemmed

from the country's economic strength and growth, China's rapidly increasing economic might has been accompanied by an expanded influence in international politics, military affairs, and regional security. The international community no longer perceives China's rise just in terms of economic assessments and expectations. It now includes anxiety over the potential negative force China could present to regional security and global order. Although the US government has stated time and again that China's rise does not represent a threat, it has repeatedly expressed concern over China's military expansion. This reflects growing international concern over China's military expansion, energy policies, and economic dominance.

As a democracy, Taiwan upholds the universal values of freedom, peace, and human rights, and strives to fulfill its international responsibilities. Taiwan solemnly calls on the European Union and individual European nations to continue to express concern over China's human rights conditions and political democratization. Their input can safeguard these universal values, and peace and security of the world. Taiwan asks the European Union to urge China to remove its missiles targeting Taiwan, renounce the use of force against Taiwan, which would safeguard security in the Taiwan Strait as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Continuation of the European Union's sanctions against China would directly lead to world peace and the development of democracy. As the embargo's importance far exceeds business interests, Taiwan must reiterate its call for maintaining the arms embargo on China.