

31 December 1981

Aircraft for Taiwan

The F-5E--of which there are about 170 in Taiwan--is, and will probably remain, the backbone of Taiwan's air force. The following comparison uses the F5-E as the base line. (U)

F-16

The F-16 is a first line US fighter which entered service in 1980. On air defense missions, the F-16 is capable of reaching an intercept area faster than the F-5E. The F-16's radar can search twice as far as the radar on the F-5E, and the F-16 can engage a target from any direction with AIM-9L air-to-air missiles (AAMs). The F-5E, which is armed with older AAMs, must maneuver for a tail shot. If an enemy aircraft is too close for AAMs, the F-16 can use its high velocity, six-barrel 20mm Vulcan cannon. The F-5E has two 20mm cannons. (U)

On ground attack missions, the F-16 can carry about twice as much ordnance, about a third farther than the F-5E. The F-16 can deliver its ordnance more accurately than the F-5E. (U)

F-5G

The F-5G, which will not be available until 1983, represents a significant improvement over the F-5E--primarily in terms of propulsion. In terms of capability, the aircraft ranks between the F-5E and the F-16. The F-5G will be powered by a modern turbofan engine which will give about 60 percent more thrust, about 50 percent better acceleration and about 40 percent better maneuverability, while burning about 10 percent less fuel. (U)

The only difference between the F-5G and the F5G-2 is the avionics package. The F-5G-2 can search for enemy aircraft about twice as far as either the F-5E or the F-5G. Moreover, the radar on the F-5G-2 will have a "look down, shoot down" capability which permits detection and attack of enemy aircraft attempting to slip under ground based radar coverage. (U)

F-104

There are 47 F-104s in Taiwan. Twenty-six are older A/B models. The rest are F-104Gs, the only model which is available from foreign suppliers. Taiwan has been attempting to acquire F-104s to replace the A/B models, which are nearing the end of their service life. (U)

The F-104G, which entered service in 1963, was designed as a point interceptor. It has better climb capability and range than the F-5E for air defense missions, but has less capability for ground attack because it lacks maneuverability at low altitudes. The F-104 can track and engage targets at only about half the range of the F-5E and is, therefore, more dependent on ground control for the air defense mission. (U)

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Although technically comparable, in some respects, to the newer aircraft, the age of the F-104 design is a deficiency. The F-104 is more expensive to operate and maintain than the F-5E and costs will increase with time. Also, the limited life of the F-104 does not offer the long term potential for maintaining Taiwan's desired force levels. (U)

A Note on the Chinese Side

Few PRC aircraft can climb as fast as the F-16 or F-5E. Only about five percent of PRC aircraft have radars, and those that do can only search about half as far as can the F-5E. Only a small number of PRC fighters are equipped with AAMs, of mid-1950s technology. The guns on PRC aircraft are comparable to those on the F-5E. [redacted]

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For comparison the chart shows the characteristics of three Chinese fighters. (U)

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