

Taiwan

US's Taiwan security bill spurs debate on level of support for Taipei

Lawmakers say more robust stance needed after Ukraine war but some worry about needlessly provoking China



A live-fire drill in Taiwan's Pingtung County this month. The Taiwan Policy Act would seek to boost Taipei's military deterrence capabilities in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine © Daniel Ceng Shou-Yi/ZUMA Press Wire/dpa

Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington AN HOUR AGO

The US Senate foreign relations committee is poised to vote on a bill that would finance weapons exports to Taiwan for the first time and significantly alter relations with Taipei amid rising pressure from China.

The Taiwan Policy Act, which will come up for a vote on Wednesday, would provide Taiwan with \$4.5bn in weapons and security assistance over the next four years. It would also create a \$2bn loan facility to help Taipei buy arms and make Taiwan eligible for a war reserve arms stockpile mechanism.

The bill would also punish China if it took military action against [Taiwan](#) by requiring the White House to impose sanctions on large Chinese financial institutions over “escalating hostile actions in or against Taiwan”.

Coming on the heels of China's large-scale military exercises in response to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taipei last month, the bill has [sparked debate in the US](#) about how to support Taiwan. Backers of the bill say the US must do more to help the country, while some worry that certain provisions will antagonise China while doing very little to secure Taiwan.

“If the bill passes in its current form, we're really in for a major crisis,” said Bonnie Glaser, a China expert at the German Marshall Fund. “China will feel compelled to respond to the bill by taking actions that if it doesn't, Congress will be forced to

respond very strongly because it feels that if it doesn't, Congress will do more and more and the executive branch will do nothing to stop it.”

Supporters such as Republican congressman Michael Gallagher said the TPA was long-overdue and was crucial after Russia's [invasion of Ukraine](#). “The failure of deterrence in Ukraine shows that we cannot wait until the shooting has started to provide critical weapons to Taiwan,” he said.

Robert Menendez, the Democratic head of the Senate foreign relations committee who co-sponsored the bill, has called it the “most comprehensive restructuring” of US policy towards Taipei since the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which requires Washington to [provide Taiwan with weapons](#) to maintain a “sufficient self-defence capability”.

The Chinese embassy in Washington said the TPA would change the longstanding US “One China” policy and was “extremely egregious”. Under the policy, the US recognises Beijing as the government of China and acknowledges — without endorsing — its view that Taiwan is part of China.

“Once passed as law, it will have a subversive impact on China-US relations and send a gravely wrong signal to the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces,” said Liu Pengyu, the embassy spokesperson. “We are firmly opposed to this.”

The bill would also amend the Taiwan Relations Act to say that Washington must provide weapons to Taiwan to help it implement a strategy “to deny and deter acts of aggression” by the People’s Liberation Army.

The TPA includes several symbolic elements, such as formally designating Taiwan as a “major non-Nato ally”. While US law already treats Taiwan as such, Glaser said China viewed a formal designation as akin to resurrecting the US-Taiwan mutual defence treaty that ended in 1979, when the US switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing.

The bill would also let Taiwan rename its de facto embassy in Washington, the “Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office”, as the “Taiwan Representative Office”.

Jessica Drun, non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council, welcomed the parts of the bill that “focus on substantive support for Taiwan through enhanced military co-operation and deepening economic ties”. But she said the symbolic parts “may do more harm than good, especially if they are viewed by the [People’s Republic of China] as a further ‘hollowing out’ of existing US policy towards Taiwan”.

Ahead of a meeting with senators last week to discuss the bill, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said some parts of it would help Taiwan enhance its security, but others were concerning. Three people familiar with the situation said the White House was worried about the more symbolic elements.

“There are a number of provisions in the legislation that would allow us to do more to support Taiwan,” said one US official. “We also need to be focused on supporting Taiwan in practically impactful ways. This includes proactively addressing continued hurdles in providing assistance to Taiwan.”

Oriana Skylar Mastro at Stanford University said she viewed the TPA as mostly counterproductive. “They do very little to deter China and just piss China off. And in some cases, they give China the moral high ground and legitimacy for actions that help them prepare for war.”

But she said Taiwanese officials recently told her that such efforts [helped boost morale in Taiwan](#) and might encourage the Taiwanese people to fight longer, helping to bridge any gap before the US joined a conflict.

Eric Sayers of the American Enterprise Institute said the bill would kick-start a debate about how the US could use sanctions to deter China from attacking Taiwan, or how to respond to a conflict, which most experts believe would be more complicated than the penalties imposed on Russia over Ukraine.

“Waiting until a war starts would be too late. Treasury needs to start doing the work now to have these options available should they be necessary,” said Sayers.

Senators will have a chance to vote on possible changes to the TPA before a final vote, but the more practical security components of the bill have broad support, according to people familiar with the discussions.

Carolyn Bartholomew, a member of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, said there was strong backing for Taiwan in Congress but that there was always a danger of political outcomes that sent a bad signal.

“I don’t think anyone wants to do something that could be seen as a weakening of support,” said Bartholomew. “If someone offers an amendment that is perceived as not being strongly supportive of Taiwan or votes against an amendment that strengthens US support, what message would that send to Beijing?”

The bill would still require a vote in the full Senate and House after passing the Senate foreign relations panel. Lawmakers could also try to insert it into another big

piece of legislation, such as the annual defence spending bill.

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