

## US Senate must not miss this chance

By Raymond Burghardt and Shelley Rigger



US President Joe Biden's decision to send a high-level unofficial delegation comprised of former US senator Chris Dodd and former US deputy secretaries of state Richard Armitage and James Steinberg to Taipei last week sends an unmistakable signal of White House interest in reassuring Taiwan, while emphasizing US commitments to the nation and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

In Taipei for only three days, the delegation met with the senior Taiwanese leadership, including President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳釗燮), Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) and legislators.

Closed-door meetings at the Presidential Office Building evidentially focused on security, energy and economic matters, with the two sides agreeing to strengthen the partnership overall.

All indications are that the visit was successful. As such, it should go far to put to rest concerns in Taiwan — and hopes in Beijing — that the Biden administration would be less supportive of Taiwan than its predecessor.

If anything, the delegation visit was aimed at raising Taiwan's profile in its region and as a valued US partner.

Beijing responded unhelpfully, although unsurprisingly, with what it described as “combat drills” — that is, nearly two dozen Chinese military aircraft, including fighters and bombers, entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone, the largest such incursion known to date, Reuters reported.

As Dodd, Armitage and Steinberg return to the US, the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations begins formal deliberations this week on the Strategic Competition Act of 2021. This ambitious bipartisan bill presents an opportunity for the still-new Biden administration to truly deliver on the administration of former US president Barack Obama's “Pivot to Asia.”

Introduced earlier this month, the 280-page bill extensively treats US-Taiwan exchanges.

Speaking of “enhancing the United States-Taiwan partnership,” the bill calls “to recognize Taiwan as a vital part of the United States Indo-Pacific strategy.”

Highlighting a theme stressed by the Biden administration, the act calls on the US to promote “meaningful cooperation” among Taiwan, the US and “like-minded democracies.”

Washington has the chance to deliver on those aspirations. The Taiwan Fellowship Act — introduced last month by US senators Edward Markey and Marco Rubio — would create a government-to-government civil servant training and cooperation initiative between Taiwan and the US.

Promoted by the nonprofit Western Pacific Fellowship Project and endorsed by Biden in a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga in the White House Rose Garden on Friday last week, such a fellowship between Taiwan and the US would be a living endorsement of Taiwan's democratic achievement and the vitality of the unofficial yet deep bilateral relationship.

As 10 US federal civil servants would study Mandarin in Taiwan each year and work inside the Taiwanese government alongside their Taiwanese counterparts, it would facilitate long-term non-military cooperation between the two governments.

The Taiwan Fellowship Act is an opportunity to create a lasting program of cooperation between the Taiwan and the US while helping to prepare the next generation of US civil servants — the same career public servants who are to do much to respond to the China challenge that will define global affairs in the coming decades.

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We commend Biden for reiterating US support for Taiwan via three senior statesmen and friends. Nevertheless, renewing US leadership in East Asia requires more than statements and reassurances. The history of Taiwan-US relations going back at least to 1979 shows the crucial role of congressional creativity and leadership expressed through prescient and responsible legislation — legislation that protects the US' long-term interests and the interests of partners such as Taiwan.

The Strategic Competition Act of 2021 and the Taiwan Fellowship Act have the potential to renew that long-term US commitment starting this year.

We urge that the Taiwan Fellowship Act be incorporated into the Strategic Competition Act, and that such a complete bill move forward without delay, passes the US Senate and US House of Representatives this month and is quickly signed into law.

*Raymond Burghardt is a former chairman and director of the American Institute in Taiwan; Shelley Rigger is the Brown Professor of East Asian Politics at Davidson College. Burghardt is a founding board member of the Western Pacific Fellowship Project. Rigger is an adviser to the organization.*

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**Tom Mountcastle**

How can you use "unofficial" and "high level" in the same sentence? Do words mean anything? There was nothing high level about a visit from a group of former 'whatevers' to the ROC. I am reminded of your satisfaction to be "observers" at international conferences and being "allowed" to compete in the olympics as "ChungHwa Taipei".

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