

While there is no prospect of the US-China relationship returning to what it used to be, it is worth revisiting some of US president-elect Joe Biden’s stated views on the subject.

First, in 1999, Biden was a key figure in the opposition to the US’ Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, a bill that never became law. It would not be considered a controversial bill today — many of its provisions have been included in other laws.

During a hearing of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on Aug. 4, 1999, Biden said: “The bill’s mistaken conclusion [is] that Taiwan’s security is primarily a function of its military capabilities. While it is true that deterrence is a significant component of Taiwan’s security, in my view, the reality is that no amount of weaponry alone can guarantee Taiwan’s security.”

“Taiwan’s security, in my view, flows from its democratic form of government, its growing economic, cultural and political contacts with the mainland, and, ultimately, the United States’ abiding commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan question,” Biden said.

“Far from enhancing Taiwan’s security, I am concerned that passage of this legislation would be the equivalent of waving a red cape in front of Beijing and inviting China to charge,” he added.

Second, in 2001, responding to a reporter’s question whether the US had an obligation to defend Taiwan if it was attacked by China, then-US president George W. Bush said: “Yes, we do, and the Chinese must understand that. Yes, I would.”

The reporter asked a follow-up question: “With the full force of the American military?”

Bush said: “Whatever it took” to help Taiwan defend itself.

## **‘Strategic ambiguity’ might return under Biden**

Written by Chen Shih-min 陳希敏

Monday, 16 November 2020 05:55

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In a May 2, 2001, opinion article in the *Washington Post*, Biden criticized Bush, saying that the US should continue to maintain strategic ambiguity over whether it would come to Taiwan’s assistance.

Biden said: “There is a huge difference between reserving the right to use force and obligating ourselves, *a priori*, to come to the defense of Taiwan.”

The US’ Taiwan Relations Act states that if China seeks to “determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means,” it would be a matter of “grave concern to the United States.”

The central thrust of Biden’s article is that the US has no obligation to defend Taiwan.

Third, Biden said that the way to resolve the “Taiwan issue” centers on deepening the level of cross-strait interdependence.

During former US senator John Kerry’s 2004 presidential election bid, Biden said that Kerry hoped that the 800,000 Taiwanese investing and doing business in China would exert Taiwan’s influence, resulting in increased mutual dependence across the Taiwan Strait.

As time progressed, this would naturally develop into mutual acceptance, Biden said.

This position is very close to the pan-blue camp’s cross-strait policy — no wonder that they support Biden.

However, Biden’s democratic and liberal convictions run much deeper than those of US President Donald Trump, and therefore he would not “sell out” Taiwan to China.

The question is how much a Biden administration would be willing to pay to prevent China from

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annexing Taiwan.

Biden’s statements suggest that the US-Taiwan relationship would become more constrained by the US-China relationship than during the Trump years, and might even return to being guided by a strict interpretation of the Taiwan Relations Act.

This would entail “strategic ambiguity” and sales of defensive weaponry only. It might be some time before Taiwan is again able to purchase offensive weapons systems from the US.

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Translated by Edward Jones

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/11/16](#)