

Bill to restructure US' Taiwan policy

Written by Taipei Times

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U.S. Senator Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, speaks during a hearing in Washington, April 26, 2022.

Photo: Reuters

A bill described by its sponsors as “the most comprehensive restructuring of US policy toward Taiwan since the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979,” was expected to receive bipartisan support at a committee hearing yesterday, one of its initiators said on Tuesday.

“I think we will have a strong bipartisan vote tomorrow that we’re working on,” US Senator Bob Menendez said a day before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which Menendez chairs, was to mark up the draft Taiwan policy act (TPA).

The legislation includes clauses calling for an “enhanced defense partnership” between Taiwan and the US, under which Washington would provide Taipei with US\$4.5 billion in foreign military financing.

It also comes with symbolic gestures, including the renaming of Taiwan’s de facto embassy in Washington from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office to the “Taiwan Representative Office.”

Another provision would designate Taiwan as a “major non-NATO ally” for the purposes of expediting arms sales. The status is currently afforded to Australia, Israel, Japan, South Korea and others.

The bill has raised concerns in the White House.



Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., left, and Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen, right, pose for a photo during a meeting at the Presidential Office in Taipei, Taiwan, Friday, April 15, 2022.

Photo: Taiwan Presidential Office via AP

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told Bloomberg last week that he would meet with congressional leaders to discuss the TPA, initiated by Menendez and US Senator Lindsey Graham.

"There are elements of that legislation, with respect to how we can strengthen our security assistance for Taiwan, that are quite effective and robust; that will improve Taiwan's security," Sullivan told Bloomberg's David Rubenstein on Wednesday last week. "There are other elements that give us some concern."

Bloomberg reported that Sullivan declined to go into detail, but it said that the US government was trying to strike a balance between supporting Taiwan while tamping down growing bipartisan hawkishness on Capitol Hill against China.



US Senator Lindsey Graham gestures as he arrives at a gala at the National Building Museum in Washington on Tuesday.

Photo: AFP

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China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian (朱鳳蓮) yesterday said that China resolutely opposes the TPA, which "seriously violates" basic principles of international relations, the "one China" principle, and the Three Joint Communiques between the US and China.

Asked about yesterday's committee session, Menendez told reporters in Washington on Tuesday that he and other senators did have "various conversations with the administration" over the proposed bill.

"We think we are landing in a good spot that can meet some of their concerns and at the same time have a very strong bill, and expresses the Senate's intent of strengthening our relationship with Taiwan, of assisting Taiwan in its abilities to preserve its territorial integrity," he said.

He said that the bill would not change the US' policy toward Taiwan, but it would give "greater clarity about our willingness to help Taiwan."

Asked if there were to be changes to the wording of the bill in the committee session, the senator said there would be "some edits to it, there will be some changes" as there normally are in any legislative process.

The support for Taiwan is important, Menendez said, citing the example of Lithuania, which has faced Chinese economic sanctions for months after allowing Taiwan to open a representative office in Vilnius last year.

"This is a test for the West. If we cannot help a country like Lithuania meet the challenge of China for deciding its own sovereign decisions, then we will lose this battle," he said.

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