

Take Biden at his word: US official

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US President Joe Biden's remarks that US troops would help defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion "speak for themselves," US National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell said on Monday, adding that US policy on Taiwan remains consistent and unchanged.

In a prerecorded interview with the CBS show 60 Minutes that aired on Sunday, Biden told host Scott Pelley that the US would defend Taiwan "if in fact there was an unprecedented attack."

"So unlike Ukraine, to be clear, sir, US forces — US men and women — would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion?" Pelley asked.



US President Joe Biden is pictured in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington on Friday.

Photo: Reuters

"Yes," Biden said.

After the interview, a White House official said US policy on Taiwan had not changed, according to 60 Minutes.

Campbell said he did not believe it was appropriate to describe the White House statement "as walking back the president's remarks."



A photograph released by the Control Yuan on Monday shows members of its Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee on Friday during a visit to the naval base in Yilan County’s Suao Township to inspect the production of Ta Chiang-class corvettes.

Photo courtesy of the Control Yuan

“The president’s remarks speak for themselves. I do think our policy has been consistent and is unchanged and will continue,” he said during an online conference organized by the Washington-based think tank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The US’ primary goal is to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait to secure and stabilize the “status quo,” make sure there is healthy dialogue between the sides and try to avoid escalation, he said.

Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭碧霞) told reporters in Washington that she believed Biden “speaks his mind.”

Taipei and Washington would continue to work closely to maintain peace and security in the region, and maintain the “status quo,” she added.

Taiwanese academics said that Biden’s remark is meant to reaffirm Washington’s commitment to Taipei and deter Beijing.

Biden is gradually moving away from “strategic ambiguity,” because he has full confidence in President Tsai Ing-wen’s (蔡英文) pledge to maintain the “status quo,” said Shen Ming-shih (申明世),

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director of the National Security Research Division at the government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research.

Taiwan's restraint in response to China's increasingly assertive military coercion has assured Biden that Taipei would not take any aggressive action, Shen said.

Taiwan's actions have been defensive in nature and are meant to bolster its sovereignty instead of declaring independence, he added.

Biden's remarks also express a tougher stance against China following Beijing's drills around Taiwan last month, with an eye on the US midterm elections, said Shen, a retired army infantry battalion commander.

Chieh Chung (齊中), an associate defense research fellow at the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) National Policy Foundation think tank, said he believed the US "would definitely in some way intervene" if China launched a full-scale invasion of Taiwan.

Washington would not sit idly by if Beijing attempted to unilaterally change the "status quo" in the west Pacific by force, because that would undermine the US' Indo-Pacific strategy and lead other US allies to question its leadership, he said.

However, Chieh said he was concerned because Washington does not have a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan and Beijing has nuclear weapons.

Washington could intervene "too late" and deploy "too few" military resources to aid Taiwan, he added.

During the interview Biden also said that "Taiwan makes their own judgements about their independence. We are not encouraging their being independent. That's their decision."

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His critics said that China could perceive the comments as tacit support for an independence declaration.

They added that his comments are more likely to aggravate hostilities than overt defense commitments, as Beijing already likely assumes Washington would defend Taiwan.

“It is incoherent to argue that America’s Taiwan policy has not changed while also claiming that the US has a commitment to fight for Taiwan and that Taiwan makes its own judgements about independence,” said Craig Singleton, a China policy expert at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Beijing will likely worry that Biden is suggesting Taiwan can decide for itself whether it is independent, he added.

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