

Dangerous Crossroads: Goaded China to Go to War

By [Dr. Chandra Muzaffar](#)

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A number of defence analysts are convinced that the United States of America, supported by Britain and Australia, is goading China to go to war over Taiwan. They point to constant statements by officials from the three countries pledging to come to Taiwan’s defence if it is attacked by China and the actual presence of US warships in the vicinity of the region as evidence of “an aggressive stance”. The game-plan of the US and its allies according to these observers is to create an atmosphere that will compel China to retaliate to these provocations and fire the first shot. The Western media which is already on their side will quickly brand China as the aggressor and mobilise global public opinion on behalf of the “victims of Chinese aggression”.

There are certain underlying motives that may tempt the US to pursue this game-plan. There are hawks in Washington and elsewhere who believe that a short, quick war against China at this stage will benefit the hegemon and its global agenda. One, since the US is militarily stronger than China, a humiliating defeat for the latter will be a huge setback. At a time when the peaceful rise of China has made such an impact upon nations everywhere, a defeat will prove to all and sundry that the US is still the master of the planet. Two, a US victory over China will undoubtedly strengthen the Taiwan independence movement and encourage the separatists to expand their activities and intensify their demand. This will impact adversely upon Chinese sovereignty and undermine its national resilience. Three, a war over Taiwan will force China to divert its resources from much needed economic and social development to an unnecessary war on its doorstep. This diversion of resources will impede its progress. This is what the US and some of its allies would want to see.

China will not allow this to happen. The Chinese leadership has always been aware of the dire consequences of war and violence for the nation and the people. Yet it is deeply cognisant of the imperative necessity to defend its sovereignty and integrity as a nation and the dignity of its people. It will therefore respond to provocations by resorting to measures — various measures — which do not lead to violence and war. These could be political moves or diplomatic manoeuvres or even trade sanctions. But China will not yield to provocations. It will not succumb to threats or arrogant bullying.

The US leadership does not seem to understand this. For many decades now, US leaders

and indeed, leaders of many other Western countries including Australia, do not seem to appreciate the importance of respect as a value in inter-state relations. Coercing or compelling a state to follow blindly one's dictates is an example of a lack of respect for the other in international relations.

The controversy over Taiwan illustrates the point about respect in international relations. Taiwan is part of China. This is an indisputable historical fact. 180 countries in the world recognise this reality. Since 1979, the US government has acknowledged that there is only one China represented by Beijing. This is contained in documents such as the famous three joint communiques. Beijing has always objected to US officials sometimes treating Taiwan as if it were an independent, sovereign state. This is apparent not just in US-Taiwan military ties but also on occasions in politics and economics.

The time has come for the United States' friends in Asia to remind the US in a firm but courteous tone that living up to the One China policy is fundamental for the rest of the world in its relations to China. It is the deepest red line in our relations with China and will remain so for centuries to come. We must respect this line with a sincere heart. There must not be the slightest hint that the US or Britain or Australia or anyone else is trying to encourage separatist, anti-unification with China movements in Taiwan.

By advocating strict adherence to the 'One China' policy, we are not suggesting that we kow-tow to Beijing in a servile manner. If we have to disagree with Beijing on a matter of principle we should. For instance, many countries within ASEAN, are at odds with Beijing on Beijing's claim that it has suzerainty over almost 85% of the area perceived as the South China Sea. ASEAN governments and indeed, ASEAN civil society groups as a whole should continue to reiterate our sovereign maritime rights over the South China Sea in accordance with our historical claims and international law. We should never cease to persuade the authorities in China to accept our legitimate demands.

In other words, we should ask China to respect our rights vis-à-vis the South China Sea just as we want the US to respect China's position on Taiwan.

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Dr. Chandra Muzaffar is the president of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), Kuala Lumpur.

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

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