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Opinion

If Pelosi really wants peace to prevail in Taiwan, she'll stay away



- The best thing for Taipei's security would be for Washington to do everything it can to repair ties with Beijing, instead of constantly provoking it
- If that is too much to hope for, the next best thing would be for US politicians to simply do nothing

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Today's US-China relations are more akin to a rugby match than an elegant balletic pas de deux. Nothing illustrates this better than the Nancy [Pelosi Taiwan caper](#).

Sure, when it comes to the moralism of the average American politician, sensitivity to other political cultures is a pretty alien concept. But there was an easy way out before this affair got dicey.

If only the government of the People's Republic, albeit with an insincere grin, had put on a happy face over the proposed visit to Taipei next month by Pelosi, the speaker of US House of Representatives – like it was sort of nothing. Maybe even invite her to Beijing afterwards?

True, such a clever manoeuvre would have taken self-confidence and cosmopolitan savvy, but it would have frustrated anti-China hawks. Alas, such slick moves are not the hallmark of the elite currently holding sway in Beijing.

It would have been even better for peace in East Asia if the strong-minded politician (think Margaret Thatcher, tilting slightly left) had thought better of proposing the visit in the first place, given the terrible timing.

The mainland Chinese political establishment regards Taiwan as an existential challenge to its governing credibility. It's difficult to think of an equivalent American analogue. The Communist Party leadership is [not joking around](#): Americans seen to play games with its core principles disrespect China and reveal a narrow narcissism and alarming short-sightedness.

Current American policy, to the extent that it can be understood, seems to want to [dilute](#) past US concessions on "one China" (for starters, note the 1979 Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations).

The West does tend to overestimate Beijing's alleged blood lust for a [military "solution"](#). However, Taiwan is not Vietnam; seen from Beijing, it is an extension of the heart of China itself, and its reintegration is the desired final movement in a Chinese symphony of togetherness – "all under heaven".

Even so, a big fat PLA military slap across the face of Taiwan, if it came to that, would risk triggering searing corollary damage on the internal psyche and exterior self-image of China.

I suspect China's leaders understand that. For all their shortcomings, they know this to be an unspoken truth about Taiwan. Still, Beijing's consistent position is that even military heavy-handedness would not logically be an invasion (like [Russia/Ukraine](#)) but mere sovereign enforcement.

While this is not Beijing's preferred move at all, leaders may be getting uneasy, egged on by blowhards in the US Congress who assume the right to counsel China on how to handle its political business.

Rather than enhancing [Taiwan's security](#), the braying of these know-nothings is more likely to trigger in Chinese minds a flashback to US intervention in the Chinese civil war (1945-1949), when America overtly locked horns against the Communists.

For her part, Pelosi – the first and only woman to lead Congress' House of Representatives in its 233-year history – well reflects the politics of her San Francisco home. She has held down the powerful speaker's position for years and has represented parts of California continuously since 1987.

Many of her Chinese-American constituents are anti-Communist and anti-reunification. From her perspective in representing that constituency, her anti-Beijing views are the epitome of political correctness. Years ago, I spent almost a full morning listening by long-distance call to her keen views on Taiwan. I can confidently tell you that, on this matter, as was said of Thatcher, this lady is not for turning.

There is only one comfortable way for a high-profile American politician to enjoy a pleasant politico-business trip to Taipei without causing dangerous political turbulence.

It would be to go with the aim of making the bilateral relationship work in any way possible to avoid the worst of Beijing, and Washington, in the hope that such an ongoing dynamic would nudge the relationship out of [bilateral bedlam](#) and onto a sustainable platform for peace.

But the provocative hubris of the US stymies that relationship by seeming to resent the presence of a strong China. Should that psychology remain dominant, Washington's relations with Beijing – and others – will roil endlessly.

You reap what you sow. All the racial insults and bigotry inside the US [seep into its foreign policy](#) like acid rain. Good Americans who try to build bridges and widen the lanes of cooperation with China face suspicion they might be closet panda-huggers, or worse.

The Confucian Institutes that Beijing offers US campuses are often written off as little more than spy nests. Disarmament conferences are for the foolish and naive; don't even bother to verify because there's no possibility of even minimum mutual trust.

Pelosi is anything but unsophisticated, but with cockeyed optimism I do wish she would first visit Beijing if she must go. That's not going to happen, of course. Maybe the Taipei trip won't happen, either. Given the roller-derby relationship between the US and China, perhaps the best we can hope for is that nothing happens.

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