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It is not the US's job to protect Taiwan from China

John Mac Ghlionn

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On Tuesday, July 27, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned the Chinese Communist Party to cease its aggressive operations in the Pacific. Speaking at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore, Mr Austin declared that the United States "will not flinch when our interests are threatened". One of these "interests", according to Mr Austin, involves the protection of Taiwan.

Strong words. But, as I will argue in this short piece, it is not America's job to protect Taiwan. It is the job of elected officials to, first and foremost, protect the American people.

To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Happy will that house be in which the relations are formed from character; after the highest, and not after the lowest order; the house in which character marries, and not confusion and a miscellany of unavowable motives." In other words, happy is the house that gets itself in order. Right now, America's house needs some Marie Kondo magic of tidying up.

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In 2018, Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at The Cato Institute, stated, rather bluntly, that America can no longer police the world. "Even if America once felt wealthy enough to squander its financial resources in such pursuits, those days," he opined "have ended." According to Mr Bandow, a man who worked as special assistant to former president Ronald Reagan, "Washington is effectively bankrupt, with massive unfunded liabilities." As for its fiscal future? This "will only worsen as Baby Boomers continue to retire".

Three years later, the country's population is ageing, and rapidly so. There are now more than 46 million older adults aged 65 and older (1 in 7 people) in America; in less than 30 years, expect that number to double. An ageing population affects the American economy in myriad ways. As Ronald Lee and Andrew Mason, two professors of economics, write: "The growth of GDP slows, working-age people pay more to support the elderly, and public budgets strain under the burden of the higher total cost of health and retirement programs for old people." With national debt expected to reach US\$89 trillion by 2029, America is facing an existential reckoning. Forget saving Taiwan, and focus on saving America.

Of course, some might argue that the two are not mutually exclusive. One can walk and talk at the same time; the Biden administration can focus on saving Taiwan and strengthening America simultaneously. But war is an expensive business. America has spent trillions on largely fruitless

endeavours in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, according to "Cost of War Project" research by researchers at Brown University released last year, for the Iraq war alone, taxpayers paid an average of \$8,000 (about 267,448 baht) each.

Most Americans cannot afford to pay exorbitant sums to fight endless wars overseas. In reality, most Americans can't afford much of anything. According to a recent survey unveiled in recent January conducted by Bankrate.com, just 39% of Americans can afford a \$1000 emergency expense. With little in the way of savings, financing expensive drones that are being deployed in cities like Baghdad and Aleppo is not really in the best interest of the American people.

Moreover, to defend Taiwan from Chinese aggression would surely cost lives. Over the past 15 years, almost 18,571 people have died while serving in the US, according to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) released in May this year. Meanwhile, many returning armed forces believe that the wars are not worth fighting. Regardless of their beliefs, these veterans face difficulty in readjusting to civilian life, financially, emotionally and professionally. The country doesn't need to engage in more overseas conflict; it needs to take better care of its citizens, including the brave men and women who have fought in largely unnecessary wars.

Lastly, even if America does attempt to defend Taiwan, there's reason to believe that China would likely emerge victorious, according to David Ochmanek, a former senior Defense Department official who helps run war games for the Pentagon at the Rand Corp think tank.

In simulated war games, "Taiwan's air force is wiped out within minutes, US air bases across the Pacific come under attack, and American warships and aircraft are held at bay by the long reach of China's vast missile arsenal."

In March of this year, Admiral Philip Davidson, the former commander of US Pacific Command, told senators, rather soberingly, that China's militaristic powers would soon prove too strong for America. By 2027, he warned, the Chinese Communist Party could have full control of Taiwan.

Whether or not Admiral Davidson's predictions prove to be true remains to be seen. However, even if the decorated veteran does prove to be correct, it is not America's job to defend Taiwan. American leaders have no obligation to protect other countries from invasion.

Instead, they are expected to protect the American people from harm. It's time to get things right domestically. Then, and only then, is it appropriate to discuss Taiwan.

This is a controversial point to make, but it's also a fair one.