



## America needs more leaders like Kennedy

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As the current global geopolitics evolves into a darker and tensed moment, we are trying to seek the spirit of hope, the hope for peace, especially from the leadership of the US, the most powerful state on Earth.

We think of the late President John F. Kennedy. We think of his spirit of peace.

We remember his peace speech delivered on 10 June 1963 after the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 which was a direct and dangerous confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and was the moment when the two superpowers came closest to nuclear conflict.

But the nuclear war was evaded. Kennedy knew so well the power of nuclear, total destruction “in the first 24 hours”.

Peace for all men and women, peace for all time, was what Kennedy called for. A peace that addresses security concern not only of the Americans but also other people in the world.

“What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave.

“I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children—not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women—not merely peace in our time but peace for all time.”

We need this kind of spirit from American politicians to help put a brake on wars and tensions that the US has been playing a part for reasons that it considers as national security concerns, protection of human rights and democracy, and protection of its status as the strongest superpower in the world.

When the US condemns Russia for invading Ukraine, and China for its assertiveness, we can understand the role the US intends to play: that is to put a check on abuse of power by powerful states.

## **But then who is in the position to put a check on the conduct of the US?**

Many believe that the war in Ukraine is becoming a de facto proxy war between the US and Russia. Many analysts, including the CATO Institute in Washington DC, believe that the US was also part of the blame in igniting the war through repeating abuses against Russia's security concerns.

The CATO institute wrote, "Yet U.S. and European officials blew through one red light after another. George W. Bush began to treat Georgia and Ukraine as valued U.S. political and military allies, and in 2008, he pressed NATO to admit Ukraine and Georgia as members."

In the Eastern part of the world, growing tension between the US and China is worrisome for regional leaders. They fear the possible eruption of armed conflicts that may have impact across the region, not just between a limited number of countries who would fall in direct confrontation.

From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, from the South China Sea to the East China Sea, to Taiwan, we see a lot of reasons to be concerned about regional and global security and peace in this part of the world.

Nonetheless, the visit of the then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, the building of exclusive alliances AUKUS, Quad, Quad Plus, and even NATO Plus are not giving hope for peace and stability.

Some countries like Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia, have expressed concerns about the potential of nuclear proliferation and arm races in the Asia-Pacific through the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia from America and the UK.

A senior Indonesian official said that the country's sea lanes should not be used by Australian nuclear-propelled submarines because "AUKUS was created for fighting".

All the above activities of the US are conducted for the same reasons: to stop Russia, and to stop China.

## **But who will stop the US?**

Instead of putting a check on the growing tensions, we only see more encouragement for wars, conflicts, and confrontations. More and more military exercises are being held in the region including Indonesia's proposal to hold the first ASEAN's military exercise in the South China Sea.

Indonesia's proposal is a matter of concern. Every country should take a step back and give peace a bit of space.

We also see more incitements coming from opportunist American allies who wish to beat the drum of war, and ring the bell louder to fight against Russia and China.

But this is like a novel title of American writer Ernest Hemingway, "For Whom the Bell Tolls".

We have heard only the sounds of the bell from churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, but they were the sounds of the funerals, with the sound of crying and mourning from families of the dead.

We don't see the US playing a role anymore in the Middle East peace process like what we used to see in the 1990s when the US President Bill Clinton brokered the Israeli-Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) peace accord at the White House on 13 September 1993.

That was the nostalgia towards the US' peace leadership in the past.

Unfortunately, as the current situation stands, the US politicians are not pursuing a peace agenda but instead they are increasing the heat of wars, stoking suspicion and division among adversary states, and creating further tension and complexities in many regional flashpoints.

We see only toxic speeches that promote hatred, indoctrination, xenophobia, and division.

All to contain Russia and China.

Moving away from that confrontational approach, let's us recall some wisdoms of peace from the late president Kennedy.

"Peace need not be impracticable, and war need not be inevitable". Kennedy believed that wars are manmade, and therefore they can be solved by man.

Kennedy acknowledged differences between states but that differences need to be settled peacefully. "World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor—it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement."

He urged countries to devote funding to social causes instead of war investment and arm races. "For we are both devoting massive sums of money to weapons that could be better devoted to combating ignorance, poverty, and disease. We are both caught up in a vicious and dangerous cycle in which suspicion on one side breeds suspicion on the other, and new weapons beget counter weapons."

And finally, he encouraged that everyone should labor on strategy of peace instead of strategy of annihilation.

This is the peace spirit that American politicians and world leaders alike need to revisit.

Lastly, let us pay homage the one of the world's greatest statemen, John F. Kennedy.