China warns Trump over Taiwan phone call

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The Chinese government has issued a warning over US President-elect Donald Trump's phone call last Friday with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, which breached longstanding diplomatic protocols. The leaders of the US and Taiwan have not spoken since 1979 when Washington cut diplomatic ties with Taipei and implemented a "One China" policy, recognising Beijing as the sole legitimate government of China.

Having initially downplayed the phone call, the Chinese foreign ministry told the media on Monday that Beijing had made "solemn representations with the relevant party on the US side." Spokesman Lu Kang suggested that Trump had not made a mistake, saying the president-elect's team was "fully aware of China's solemn attitude on the issue [of Taiwan]."

The *People's Daily*, the state-run organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), published a front-page commentary on Monday condemning the phone call as "despicable" for violating the One China policy and breaking the tradition of avoiding direct contact between US and Taiwanese leaders. It stated that Trump's action had thus "penetrated to the heart of China-US ties" as the One China policy was the foundation of bilateral relations.

The commentary declared: "Trump's unscrupulous actions have set off alarms for the development of bilateral ties. China will surely be on guard." It warned: "Trump and his transition team ought to recognise that creating trouble for China-US relations is just creating trouble for the US itself… Considering the size and increasing mutual reliance of both countries, creating troubles for China won't make the US 'great'."

The article reiterated that Taiwan remained a "core interest" for China of "great importance to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity." Beijing regards Taiwan, where the defeated Kuomintang (KMT) fled after the 1949 Chinese revolution, as a renegade province and has stated that it would seize the island by military means if a Taiwanese government ever declared formal independence.

Trump's phone call with Tsai was not a blunder. It was a conscious provocation designed to put China on notice that his administration intends to overhaul US relations with China. His incoming chief of staff, Reince Priebus, who has close ties with Taiwan, told the media that Trump "knew exactly what was happening" when he spoke to Tsai. In subsequent tweets, Trump dismissed concerns about the conversation, again branding China as a currency manipulator and denouncing its "massive military complex" in the South China Sea.

During the US presidential election campaign, Trump repeatedly said he intended to declare China to be a currency manipulator and impose tariffs of 45 percent on Chinese imports—moves that could trigger a trade war.

Trump's reference to the South China Sea is another indication that his administration intends to ramp up Obama's confrontation with Beijing over the South China Sea, where the US Navy has already conducted three "freedom of navigation" intrusions into waters claimed by China. While China has over the past two years engaged in significant land reclamation and building on islets under its control, claims that it has constructed a massive military complex are simply false.

Trump's call with Taiwan has been broadly supported by those layers within the Republican Party, the media and the military-intelligence apparatus who have been critical of the Obama administration for not prosecuting Obama's "pivot to Asia" against China aggressively enough.

Stephen Moore, a Trump economic adviser, expressed the view most crudely, declaring on Monday: "We gotta stand by Taiwan. We see what's happening in China with the way they're sabre-rattling out there

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in the East, and it's about time we do what Reagan did: We stand up to bullies and say we're not gonna let you do this."

"If China doesn't like it, screw 'em," he added.

Such language only raises the stakes in an already tense situation in East Asia, brought on, not by Chinese "bullying," but rather a relentless US diplomatic offensive and military build-up under the Obama administration throughout Asia aimed at subordinating China to American interests, even at the risk of precipitating a war.

The Chinese regime, which represents the interests of the ultra-rich oligarchies that have benefitted from capitalist restoration, is organically incapable of making any appeal to the working class in China or internationally. Its military expansion has only played into Washington's hands and heightened the danger of war.

Far from any retreat into isolationism, Trump is indicating that he has every intention of intensifying the US confrontation with China. He has already announced plans to expand the American military, particularly the US Navy, which is central to the Pentagon's AirSea Battle strategy for war with China.

Moreover, Trump's bluster, recklessness and disdain for established diplomatic norms adds a new uncertainty and instability into world politics that can only greatly exacerbate geo-political tensions. Even among those who are supportive of a more aggressive policy toward China, there is a recognition of the immense dangers involved.

Former CIA analyst Christopher Johnson told the *Wall Street Journal* that Obama might have brought "too much predictability" to US-China relations over the past eight years. "A little unpredictability is a good thing, but too much is scary. There is a fine line there between good predictability and scary, and that's the balance that has to be found," he said.

Trump's extreme right-wing nationalism and "Make America Great Again" rhetoric threatens to trigger a trade war between the world's two largest economies that could plunge the global economy into deep recession. Trade war leads to war. Unable to secure its dominance through economic means, US imperialism will inevitably resort to military might—as it has done time and again over past 25 years.

The determination of Trump and his militarist advisers to use any and all means to confront and undermine China to achieve American hegemony in Asia and around the world greatly heightens the danger of an open clash and conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

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