



Hot War with China on the Bad News Buffet

Description

Great news, guys! We've got some brand new dishes in the Bad News Buffet, everyone's favorite 24-hour operation.

Today's menu takes some twists on classic fan favorites. As an appetizer, the US may well be experiencing a full-blown financial crisis in the style of 2008 or worse. I [wrote before](#) that this was guaranteed to happen, and that we just didn't know when. It's juicy and there's plenty more to come.

Now, I could rattle off a bunch of the other menu items, but you're here for the main course. A hot war between the world's two most powerful countries certainly wins out in my attention triage system. It's gone from possibility to probability and, in many minds, inevitability. Previously, I said that a debt crisis was the biggest threat to the world because, as I thought, at least a global conflagration wasn't guaranteed. But hey, welcome to the buffet! Why not both?

The evidence that a US-China war is more likely than ever is the rapid change in both the tone and content of rhetoric from each country. And again, not a cold war, but an actual, hot war. Kinetic. Bullets, missiles, planes, ships, explosions, the works. Publications, politicians, and more are treating it as if it were a foregone conclusion. Saber rattling has turned from thinly veiled threats into open hostilities. The sentiment has been building for a long time. The Foreign Policy piece screenshotted below and linked above was published just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

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ARGUMENT: **Washington Must Prepare for War With Both Russia and China**

ARGUMENT *An expert's point of view on a current event.*

Washington Must Prepare for War With Both Russia and China

Pivoting to Asia and forgetting about Europe isn't an option.



By **Matthew Kroenig**, deputy director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security.

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In a War Over Taiwan, First Step Needs to Be Sinking Chinese Ships, Air Force General Says

So, what official moves have we seen recently? For one, Chinese leader Xi Jinping is set to visit Moscow possibly within the week. Such a symbolic move is clearly closing the ranks against the US. Similarly, China has appointed a new defense minister in Li Xingfu, a general the US has specifically sanctioned for buying Russian weapons and cooperating militarily with Russia. This move is a middle finger to the US and the message isn't lost on anyone paying attention.

Xi has also spoken directly against the US in the most candid terms yet. That's not something he's done before, and thus marks a significant departure from past statements. As he put it,

“Western countries—led by the U.S.—have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression against us, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country's development.”

I cannot emphasize enough how much of a change in rhetoric this is. It's equal in magnitude to President Biden saying unequivocally that the [US will militarily defend Taiwan](#). Neither China nor the US have been so openly hostile to each other until now, and no one appears to be backing down.

Lawmakers in the US have become increasingly strident as well. At a recent House Homeland Security hearing, Representative Tony Gonzales (R-TX) said,

“I fought in two wars. I know what war looks like, I know what war smells like, and I know what war feels like. We are at war. We are at war with China.”

This was in the context of the fentanyl crisis the US is currently grappling with, which many argue China is causing by sending precursor drugs to Mexican cartels. If you were to call this situation the Third [Opium War](#), you might be on to something.

He's not wrong about the fentanyl crisis in the US, but those are most certainly fighting words.

We can't expect a change of the political guard in either country anytime soon, so expect more of this — but louder and more frequent. The upcoming US election is still more than a year and a half away. Additionally, Xi recently won [re-election for a third term](#) in a Stalinesque unanimous vote of 2,952-0. This victory is hardly surprising, but it gives him a full mandate from his government and cements him without reservation as the most powerful man in China since Mao Zedong.

Additionally, China's new foreign minister, Qin Gang, has also recently contributed to the rhetorical escalations.

Further, China has recently brokered an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia that represents a seismic shift in the Middle East. The US is no longer the lead power player in the region, and Saudi Arabia is pondering selling oil in Yuan rather than only dollars. Such a move threatens the stability of the US Dollar, which has traditionally made the US super mad to the point where it invades countries that even consider doing so.

Side note: In 2009, Foreign Policy magazine called this idea a conspiracy theory. Two years later, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi was killed and his country ruined after he proposed a gold-backed African

Dinar for trading oil. I'll let readers decide what they think.

Back to the topic: The teams have been drawn up, and they're getting ready for the big show. In one corner is the US-led NATO, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan (willingly or not), and possibly India. In the other corner is Russia, China, Iran, and possibly others. Many countries are in the "unknown" category and we'll have to wait and see.

So, the questions I want to address here are simple:

I'd originally written a rather lengthy diatribe in this bias disclosure section, but will do readers a favor and shorten it to not bury the lead. You probably want to get to the good stuff, anyway.

To summarize:

- The US has lost its moral authority as the leader of the free world after decades of foreign policy blunders that have squandered American power and caused countless unnecessary deaths, destroyed countries, and displaced millions
- The CCP's China is a nightmarish Orwellian surveillance dystopia that has no regard for human life
- Both governments have fallen prey to a lust for power
- The bad actions of one government do not negate the bad actions of the other
- Taiwan has the unfortunate distinction of being the most likely candidate for hosting a US-China fight, just like Ukraine is host to a NATO-Russia fight

Above all, I want to see peace. A war between these two countries would be an unmitigated disaster for the world. As the saying goes, when elephants fight, the grass gets trampled. If you're reading this, odds are you're the grass.

A common question is, well, why would either country want war? Sadly, both the US and the Chinese government have something to gain from a conflict, or at least so they believe. Both face internal strife and economic instability. Leaders throughout history have taken their countries to war in such circumstances to cement their hold on power and use emergency powers to quash internal dissent. And although ordinary citizens certainly do not want war, that's rarely been a problem. As [Hermann Göring](#), Luftwaffe commander of Nazi Germany explained at the Nuremberg trials,

"Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger."

Are we seeing leaders in each country tell their citizens they're being attacked? Why yes, quite clearly. The spy balloon incident in the US was comedy gold, but the hysterical reaction to it from all levels of the country tells you how effective such messaging can be. I won't speak for the mood of Chinese citizens, but am confident that the CCP regularly informs them what a threat the US is to them.

Additionally and crucially, the semiconductor industry is a large part of the reason for any potential US-

China conflict. US semiconductor sanctions on China are a much bigger deal than most people understand, and are reminiscent of the US oil embargo on Japan leading up to Pearl Harbor. The US is determined not to cede semiconductor leadership to China, as former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien describes here. Decide for yourself what he thinks about Taiwanese sovereignty.

There are deep historical roots here as well, of course. Standard American education tells students that World War 2 dragged the US out of the Great Depression by providing jobs in the war industry. That's partly true, but it ignores the fact that the cost was the blood of countless people — including, notably, millions of Russian and Chinese citizens — and that the underlying banking system that caused the Depression in the first place was never really fixed. American leaders since have really taken the “lesson” to heart, and many view war as an economic panacea — primarily for their political donors, if you'll allow me to be cynical — rather than as an unfortunate necessity.

Meanwhile, China is dependent on its industrial base for economic output and employment. The magic number for the GDP growth necessary to maintain social stability was long considered 7%, and China is well below that now — though it's hard to believe any stats coming out of China.

In a world where sanctions and boycotts are far more dangerous to China than Russia, retrofitting that industrial base to make weapons of war instead of baubles and trinkets would ensure jobs, economic growth with Chinese characteristics, and some semblance of stability. You can be certain China has looked at the latent industrial power of the US going into the Second World War and its subsequent transformation — and has taken detailed notes.

If there's one thing to be certain about in war, it's that things certainly don't go according to plan. This has long been axiomatic: As the Prussian general Helmuth von Moltke explained, no plan survives first contact with the enemy. Many other military minds, both great and mediocre, have said the same thing in different ways.

This doesn't mean that models, predictions, and speculation don't have their place. They're a crucial part of any preparation, and militaries spend a lot of time on them. As the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) noted,

“The Department of Defense (DOD) has done much internal wargaming on a US-China conflict, but the results are classified, with only a few details leaking out. These details hint at heavy casualties and unfavorable outcomes.”

Consequently, we have to look to unclassified wargames for models. The most comprehensive unclassified China-US-Taiwan war game to date was conducted by the very same CSIS mentioned above, and you can feel free to read the whole thing from the link. It focused on a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan in 2026 and covered quite a few specifics, including iterations of weapon systems, varying degrees of involvement, and more.

They ran 24 games to reveal different scenarios. Of course, it was imperfect and could not take all possibilities into perspective, but it was pretty well done. Credit where credit is due. For reference, the CSIS is relatively neutral as far as American think tanks go. Also, for reference, I don't usually trust much of what comes from think tanks. This particular wargame, however, is an outlier in that the transparency, awareness, and disclosure of limitations make it pretty solid. I'm using it to demonstrate

that, even in Beltway DC circles, some people are aware of how dangerous this potential conflict could be.

I'll summarize some of the most important points here and then extrapolate.

"The invasion always starts the same way: an opening bombardment destroys most of Taiwan's navy and air force in the first hours of hostilities. Augmented by a powerful rocket force, the Chinese navy encircles Taiwan and interdicts any attempts to get ships and aircraft to the besieged island. Tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers cross the strait in a mix of military amphibious craft and civilian roll-on, roll-off ships, while air assault and airborne troops land behind the beachheads.

However, in the most likely base scenario (in which Japan does not directly get involved), the Chinese invasion quickly founders. Despite massive Chinese bombardment, Taiwanese ground forces stream to the beachhead, where the invaders struggle to build up supplies and move inland. Meanwhile, US submarines, bombers, and fighter/attack aircraft, often reinforced by Japan Self-Defense Forces, rapidly cripple the Chinese amphibious fleet. China's strikes on Japanese bases and US surface ships cannot change the result: Taiwan remains autonomous.

There is one major assumption here: Taiwan must resist and not capitulate. If Taiwan surrenders before US forces can be brought to bear, the rest is futile."

Crucially for the US, the CSIS wrote:

"In all iterations of the base scenario, US Navy losses included two US aircraft carriers as well as between 7 and 20 other major surface warships (e.g. destroyers and cruisers)."

Their estimates for US casualties range from 7,000-10,000 in such a conflict. Additionally, in every case Japan and the US lose significantly more aircraft and ships than China does. Taiwan's infrastructure is wrecked, but the country remains autonomous.

So, there's the satellite-level, fast-forward view of what would be the largest amphibious invasion Since D-Day in 1944, if not ever.

There are many details to explore here, which I could draw out into a far-too-long article. In the CSIS base-case scenario, for example, Japan does not get involved yet American air bases suffer heavy damage from Chinese attacks. I ask you: How on Earth does that not make Japan get involved? Indeed, it may not be up to Japan, as it is already host to US air bases. China refrained from attacking Japan in only 5 of the 24 scenarios. So, in all likelihood, a US-China war draws Japan in, too.

Wait a minute, though. The US also has military bases in South Korea, which would also get involved. Does this mean a nuclear North Korea gets involved, too? It's entirely possible, and such speculation would be its own article. To be honest, however, I don't see how such a war doesn't quickly spill over into a broader East Asian war. How about the Philippines, and Thailand, and Singapore, which all host US bases? Or, hell, Australia?

as published in January, 2023, and a lot has changed since then. Chinese-Russian relations are rapidly warming, as are Chinese relations with its oil suppliers in the Persian Gulf. The US has also

sent troops to Taiwan as an unequivocal escalation.

For the record, there's no guarantee that Taiwan itself is the flashpoint of a US-China conflict. There's no guarantee that China invades Taiwan rather than encircles, or that there's conflict elsewhere. It's simply that an invasion is currently the most studied scenario, so that's what we're going with for now.

The US has not seen casualties in a hot war like the one being discussed here in generations. I believe our society is too emotionally fragile to handle such casualties and would react wildly and unpredictably. Whether that reaction comes in the form of calls for escalation to nuclear war or radical peace movements I can't say. But I am fairly certain Americans don't have the stomach for such casualties anymore, especially after decades of pointless, frustrating, and demoralizing wars. I'm curious if readers agree or disagree.

Back in the practical world, though, we have to look at, well...practicality. Logistics win wars. The boring stuff — fuel, food, ammunition, shipping, and so on — is what separates winners from losers.

The CSIS war game only looks at a month's worth of conflict. As the Russia-Ukraine war — and every other conflict besides — has proven, that's pie-in-the-sky optimism. As an example, in 2002, before the US invaded Iraq, Donald Rumsfeld said the war would be short. I'm well aware the CSIS weren't able to realistically model out further and don't blame them for that. However, we have to be prepared for the possibility such a fight would turn into a long, grinding, brutal conflict.

Is the US prepared for such a confrontation? What would two sunk aircraft carriers carrying thousands of American souls mean to the US population?

Personally, I have a sneaking suspicion that surface fleets are all but obsolete in Great Powers' wars given the power of precision-guided munitions. The CSIS report suggests that China would quickly run out of such munitions, but the same thing was said about Russia towards the beginning of the Ukraine conflict. I have my doubts.

And certainly, there are better countermeasures than ever before, but the Russian Black Sea flagship *Moskva* was sunk with two relatively cheap missiles fired under the radar. You can be sure navies everywhere took note.

For more practical considerations, let's look at fuel for just a moment. I highly recommend reading this excellent thread below for a clear view on what US Naval refueling capabilities currently look like. In short:

- It's a very long way from the US to China
- US Military bases rely on fuel being transported there
- The US currently has 7 oil refueling ships in the Pacific
- Those ships would be needed to refuel all non-nuclear ships. Aircraft need fuel, too
- The oil refueling ships are completely defenseless and would require escort
- Those ships represent fat, juicy targets for any peer nation like, say, China

Additionally, China, Japan, South Korea, and US Pacific bases rely largely on oil transported through the Strait of Malacca. I'd previously considered a blockade of the Strait to mostly impact China, but am now reconsidering. Panama is a strategic chokepoint that wouldn't allow the majority of US oil to pass

through quickly. Check the excellent video at the bottom of this article when you're done reading to understand the role of India and the Strait in a potential conflict.

Then there's ammunition. Currently, Ukraine is using more ammunition — especially artillery shells — than NATO countries can provide. NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said so himself. If the US and its allies are already struggling to provide enough ammunition for one hot war, what about two? Aren't we already drawing down our arsenal dangerously low?

Of course, we have to consider the possible intensity and duration of any coming conflict. Current estimates state that tens of thousands of artillery shells are being fired per day in Ukraine. While, yes, that is a lot, it's far from a historical high score. That high score would go to the German Army on [March 21, 1918](#), when they fired 3.5 million shells in 5 hours as part of their Spring Offensive. Their entire society had to be mobilized for years to produce that level of firepower. Ancient church bells were melted for scrap, civilian munitions workers worked round the clock, and citizens starved by the thousands.

Again — is the modern US prepared for such a conflict? How about China? Wouldn't it be simpler to just push the big red button?

When the US entered the Second World War, workers flooded peacetime factories to create the weapons of war needed to make the country the Arsenal of Democracy. Do we have those workers now? Do we have those factories? Do we have the faith in our country necessary to inspire citizens to suffer and sacrifice for a prolonged, intense conflict? Do Chinese citizens have such faith in their own country?

Furthermore, now that Chinese-Russian relations are strengthening, could the US and its allies compete in manufacturing? Are the raw resources and manpower there? Could China survive the transition from its ship-borne oil imports from the Middle East — around 2/3 of their total oil imports — to a currently insufficient pipeline system from Siberia?

These are real and not rhetorical questions. I have opinions, but not answers yet. I'm happy to hear readers' thoughts, as always.

Because there are so many variables at play, I can't come to any hard conclusion except one:

This war must not happen. We have to stop the greedy war pigs, and we have to stop them now.

The war pigs bang their war drums and blow their war horns loud, and take silence from the population as consent. Do not consent to a war if you do not believe in it. Do not believe anyone who supports war but is unwilling to fight it themselves. Speak loudly and speak often against war rhetoric if you believe, as I do, that the path humanity is on is the wrong one entirely.

We are already closer to nuclear war than we ever have been. Our current generation of leaders has never experienced a true Great Powers' war and, I think, fails to understand just what it would mean for the world. Certainly, no one is acting with the responsibility that helped Cold Warriors keep the world from being set ablaze.

Does the concept of nuclear war shock you? It should. Is it out of the question? Absolutely not. The

more our countries tend towards a Great Power conflict, the more likely someone is going to say screw it and bash the big red button. That could be any country that's pushed into a corner, and those potential numbers are growing.

We must never allow this. This war and any Great Powers war must be opposed with everything we've got. By "we" I mean all of us, because no one will come out of any such fight in good shape, if at all.

By the by — keep an eye on the upcoming bill ordering the declassification of Covid origins that unanimously passed the US House of Representatives and is headed to the President's desk. My hunch? It'll blame China. If so, expect more anti-China propaganda.

by Sam McCommon

Category

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