



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 15, 2023

If We Want Peace in Taiwan, We Must Be Willing to Accept War

Theodore Roosevelt's advice to "speak softly and carry a big stick" is what's needed in the case of Taiwan — except the U.S. would do well to speak *loudly* and still carry a big stick.

The United States and other Western nations certainly have reason to ensure Taiwan stays out of the hands of China, which is already moving heavily to control America's economy and political system. If China takes Taiwan, it will control [global production of semiconductors](#) — which are essential for computers, smartphones, and automobiles. Thus, there is a vested interest for the U.S. to keep Taiwan free.



Luis Miguel

Though it may seem contradictory, a hawkish stance when it comes to defending the Republic of China from invasion by Beijing is what will most likely maintain peace. On the other hand, being a dove will lead to invasion, war, bloodshed, and oppression.

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu famously wrote, "The Supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

This principle has been true in every age, but is especially relevant today given the realities of contemporary economies and war capabilities. Modern technology has made war more destructive than it ever has been, and the interconnectedness of global trade has made war more disruptive than it ever has been.

As a result, war is not a luxury that any great power can indulge in freely anymore. The days in which world powers could afford to wage war against each other once every decade are over — and the catastrophic aftermath of the World Wars is largely responsible for showing us just how devastating modern warfare is. How much more would it be today considering how weaponry has advanced since the end of World War II.

Today, the great nations of the world can really only afford to wage war against smaller powers without making the whole world blow up. The United States can afford to go to war with Afghanistan or Iraq; Russia can afford to go to war with Ukraine (in each of these cases, the invaded country has a population within the 40 million range). Such conflicts do not significantly disrupt global trade, nor do they put the invader at any risk to national security — they can lose money, troops, and reputation, but they most likely won't face an existential crisis if they are defeated.

But the major powers — such as the United States, Russia, China, and the European Union bloc collectively — cannot afford to wage direct war against each other without risking a huge blowback that could be catastrophic, even fatal, to both sides of any potential conflict.



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No one would really win such a war. Take, for example, a hypothetical direct war between the U.S. and China. Even if it didn't end in nuclear holocaust, the fact that the two nations are so economically dependent on each other means that whoever wins is really just destroying their own livelihood. They would both sink into bitter economic ruin, depression, and inevitable political upheaval.

For this reason, in this modern world, the great powers must wage war against each other indirectly — as Sun Tzu wrote, “without fighting.” It's no surprise that China, being the birthplace of Sun Tzu and the nation from whose history the military philosopher drew the lessons underpinning *The Art of War*, is much better at this form of warfare than the U.S. Their military thinkers call it [“unrestricted warfare.”](#) All China's actions — from buying up American land to funding Confucius Institutes on college campuses to getting American youth addicted to Chinese social media apps — are part of this unrestricted warfare.

Meanwhile, the only realistic way for small states to dissuade larger ones from invading them is by possessing nuclear weapons and the willingness to use them. This is why North Korea will [never give up its nukes](#).

In line with the above, China can afford to go to war with Taiwan — a small republic of 23.5 million inhabitants. At least, it could if it weren't for the support that the Republic of China ostensibly has among the Western world.

Unlike North Korea, Taiwan does not have nuclear weapons with which to ward off an attack by Beijing (it would do well to acquire them in order to break free of dependence on foreign protection). Its military simply can't compete with the People's Liberation Army. Without international support, Taiwan will fall. It's not even up for debate.

And China has made perfectly clear time and again that it has every intention of taking Taiwan. It's simply a matter of when. The answer to “when?” is simple: China will invade Taiwan when it feels confident that it has successfully isolated it from its allies, when it firmly believes that neither the United States nor other great powers will come to Taiwan's defense.

Or, stated conversely, China *will not* invade Taiwan so long as it sincerely believes that the United States will actually come to Taipei's rescue.

What it all comes down to, then, is a fascinating instance of psychological warfare that, again, appears contradictory on the surface: If America truly commits itself to defending Taiwan, even though doing so would mean war with China, then there will be peace — as China will not risk war with the U.S.

But if the United States remains tepid in its assurances of protecting Taiwan, then China will inevitably call Washington's bluff — and there will be war in Taiwan.

In other, more concise, words — it's a question of peace through strength.



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