

# WILL AMERICA LOSE ITS NEXT WAR?

KITE & KEY  
MEDIA

## [SCRIPT]

Taiwan's navy has been destroyed. So has its air force. But the consequences of the Chinese military's invasion don't stop there.

American military bases in the region have been attacked. Dozens of our ships and those of our Japanese allies lie at the bottom of the Pacific. So do hundreds of aircraft.

Our communications networks have been severed, leaving much of our military operating in the dark. And America will run out of supplies of several key munitions within the first few days of the war.

According to one senior American military commander, the Chinese military "ran rings around us ... they knew everything we were going to do before we did it."<sup>i</sup>

This isn't pulled from a novel.

This isn't the Chinese military's fantasy of how an invasion of Taiwan would play out.

These were the results of a war game conducted by America's own Department of Defense.

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"Speak softly and carry a big stick."<sup>ii</sup> That was Teddy Roosevelt's famous advice about how America should conduct itself in foreign affairs.

Translation: Don't go looking for a fight ... but be ready if one comes looking for you.

Americans tend to take it for granted that we are, in fact, ready. After all, we're by far the global leaders in military spending.<sup>iii</sup>

And the historical record shows that, even when we start out on shaky footing, America can be ready to defend ourselves and our allies in no time.

As the country ramped up for World War II, we increased spending on the Army by more than 5,000 percent in just two years.<sup>iv</sup> The result of our incredible mobilization: a system so efficient that we were producing a new B-24 – a long-range bomber with over a million and a half parts – every 63 minutes.<sup>v</sup>



BOEING FACTORY

1942

How sweeping was America's military mobilization? By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 – before America had even officially entered the war – the U.S. Congress had already spent more on Army procurement than it spent on the Army and the Navy combined over the entirety of World War I.

The result of *that*? Victory over the Nazis and Imperial Japan.

It's a legacy that Americans are rightly proud of. But also ... it was 80 years ago.

How confident can we be that America could defeat the aggression of a major power today?

Well, if you ask the experts ... not very.

It's not just the experts, however. In 2013, Gallup reported the only 60% of Americans said they had a "great deal" of confidence in the American military, the lowest number in over 25 years.





Analysis from leading defense scholars has warned that there's a serious prospect that we could lose our next war.<sup>vi</sup> And that analysis came even before recent attacks on American allies put even more pressure on our military resources.

Another group that's sounding the alarm about our readiness? Our men and women in uniform.

In a 2020 survey of the Army, only about 40 percent of generals said they were confident that troops under their command would be ready to deploy, fight, and win anywhere in the world immediately.<sup>vii</sup> Amongst some of the most combat-hardened troops that number was under 20 percent.<sup>viii</sup>



Now, those kinds of sentiments would be cause for concern at any time. But they're especially worrying now.

The CIA has reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping expects his military to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027.<sup>ix</sup> And as that war game we told you about earlier indicates, there are major concerns about whether the United States would be able to fulfill its pledge to defend the island.



The good news: Not all the analysis coming out of the Pentagon looks so dire.

The bad news: Their more *optimistic* scenario is one where we fight to a draw. With heavy casualties on both sides. And even that assumes weapons and resources that we won't have available until years from now.<sup>x</sup>



Now, regardless of what you think about the wisdom of a potential conflict with China, the reason this is so unsettling is because it's not actually a question about what the military *should* do. It's a question about what the military can do.

Why is it unclear whether the world's most powerful fighting force could actually win a war with a major adversary?

Actually, there are a lot of different answers to that question.

First, **there's the matter of hardware**. It's not just that we're waiting on new technology to give us a military advantage. We're also doing a lot of waiting for ... well, for pretty much everything. Whether it's producing new weapons or maintaining existing ones, we're badly behind.



Why is hardware so hard to come by? One of the reasons is consolidation within the defense industry, which has led to fewer suppliers. In the 1990s, as the Cold War was coming to an end, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Bill Perry hosted an infamous meeting that came to be known in military circles as "The Last Supper," in which he told defense contractors that future budget cuts would require mergers within the industry. As a result, the Pentagon reports that the number of major aerospace and defense contractors has shrunk from 51 to 5 in the intervening decades.

The Navy is so backlogged on maintaining its fleet that it's the equivalent of 15 ships being out of service each year.<sup>xi</sup>

A decade-long analysis of 49 different types of aircraft used by the military found that only four of them consistently met their readiness goals. Twenty-six of them never met readiness standards in any of those 10 years.<sup>xii</sup> !

Recent war games estimate that the U.S. would need between 800 and 1,200 long-range anti-ship missiles for a conflict with China. We currently have 200. At the current rate of production, we could get to 1,000 ... by 2032.<sup>xiii</sup>



And there are vulnerabilities related to where we get our supplies too. The Air Force's new F-35 fighter jets, for instance, have a magnet component with an alloy almost exclusively manufactured ... in China.<sup>xiv</sup>

This is far from the only problem besetting the F-35, which is often pointed to as an object lesson in military bureaucracy. Because of a mismanaged supply chain, a 2019 government report found that, in one recent Marine Corps deployment, 44% of parts supplied for the F-35 were actually incompatible with the planes. Making matters more complicated: There's no agreement on whether the ownership of spare parts for F-35s actually resides with the Pentagon or Lockheed Martin.



There's another problem here though. Even if the military gets all the resources it needs ... who's going to use them?



While getting enough able-bodied men and women into uniform is a big problem ... so is paying them. While the public often thinks that expensive hardware drives defense spending, the reality is that military pay and benefits are actually the single largest category of defense expenditures – and that they've risen more than 50% in inflation-adjusted terms since 9/11.

In 2022, the Army fell 15,000 troops short of its recruiting goal.<sup>xv</sup> In 2023, it's projected to happen again – and to happen to the Navy and the Air Force as well. The Pentagon estimates that only 23 percent of youths age 17-24 can meet the military's standards.<sup>xvi</sup> More importantly, fewer than 10 percent are even interested in joining.<sup>xvii</sup>

While this may seem like widespread public indifference to military service, the reality is a bit more complicated. In recent decades, many analysts have noted the rise of an American "warrior caste"; that is, people who join the military frequently come from families that already have a history of service. In 2019, for instance, nearly 80% of Army recruits also had a family member who served. But even amongst this loyal contingent, there are signs of decline. A 2021 survey found that the share of people who had served in the military and would recommend that others do the same had dropped from nearly 75% to under 63% in just two years.





Where does that leave us? Vulnerable.

A 2020 Defense Department report admitted that China's military has pulled even – or even surpassed – America's on several fronts.<sup>xviii</sup> The number of ships in the Chinese navy is set to dramatically outpace those in America's.<sup>xix</sup> And China's defense spending has been increasing<sup>xx</sup> while America's has remained flat – and has actually shrunk as a percentage of the overall economy.<sup>xxi</sup>

Americans hold a wide range of views on our proper role in the world. Some of us want the country to be a military powerhouse capable of taking on even the most formidable adversaries. Some of us want a quieter, more modest role on the global stage.

But if we split the difference? If we talk like a superpower without taking the necessary steps to back it up?

Well, that would be speaking loudly ... and carrying a small stick.

[END SCRIPT]

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## SOURCES:

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