

Would a China War Scenario Break the Insiders' Hold?

Mathew Burrows

Elizabeth Saunders has written a chilling book, *The Insiders' Game*, showing that the “facts on the ground” or the nation’s longer-term interests have often taken a back seat to partisan political exigencies when it comes to foreign policy. After a string of disastrous wars in recent decades, the public’s trust in policymakers’ capacity to make the right decision has taken a beating. Unless China attacks first, a decision to intervene against it over Taiwan is unlikely to be left up to the foreign policy elite. Not only would any military action threaten a potentially ruinous escalation, but a war between the two largest economic powers would ensure the downfall of the global economy no matter who won militarily. Recent presidents Biden and Trump have sensed that the public has grown increasingly opposed to taking any major military risks.

US elites have led foreign policy for decades, with disastrous results. As Elizabeth Saunders writes in her recent book, *The Insiders' Game*, partisan divides and identities have played an important role. Partisanship’s grasp on policy is not inevitable, however, and the future challenge of China might offer opportunities to break the insiders’ hold.

Saunders has written a chilling and provocative book documenting how foreign policy is the province of elites on both sides of the political aisle, with the publics whom they serve playing an ancillary part, brought into the decision-making process when convenient but mostly pushed aside. The sad fact is that for most close-in witnesses—including my own experience of twenty-eight years as a CIA analyst—all of this comes as no surprise. In addition to the undemocratic character of foreign policymaking, there is the awful US record over the past seventy-five years of turning military interventions into forever wars, most notably in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

After reading *The Insiders' Game*, one wonders why the United States cannot find a way of better grounding its decision-making on the “facts on the

ground” and on the country’s longer-term interests, instead of letting inertia take over and hoping for the best. The same story keeps repeating itself, like the one so deftly described by Les Gelb and Richard Betts in their famous analysis¹ of Vietnam War decision-making: planning for failure. Many of the decisions to continue to fight were made to satisfy other objectives, such as President Lyndon Johnson’s efforts to save his domestic aspirations in Congress, rather than facing reality and trying to end the conflict and restore peace. Even more objectionable was President George W. Bush’s adventurism, spawned by his yearnings for revenge after the 9/11 attacks and the timidity of much of the opposition.

Hawks and Doves: Partisan Identities Shape Elite Actions

Despite what appears on the surface as the perverted nature of US foreign policymaking, Saunders shows there is a rationale behind it—a sort of “method” to the elite’s “madness.” Democratic presidents usually prioritize a domestic agenda and fear risking that agenda if they follow their more

1 Les H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (The Brookings Institution Press, May 31, 2016).

dovish inclinations on foreign policy. Republicans are in a stronger position, being naturally more hawkish, which sometimes gives them the ability to be “dovish”—like President Richard Nixon working to open up Communist China, which he otherwise loathed and lambasted. Nevertheless, even if the Democratic Party leaned heavily toward getting out of Vietnam, particularly after their 1968 electoral defeat, Nixon faced pressures from the Republican right wing not to admit defeat. Nixon and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger also feared losing US credibility on the world stage if the United States simply gave up, prompting them to expand the conflict with an invasion of Cambodia before aggressively pursuing a peace deal that they thought would guarantee an honorable retreat. As it was, two years later, the game was up for all to see in the humiliating fall of Saigon. Nixon was no longer president, having had his own ignominious fall, but Kissinger remained secretary of state under Gerald Ford. When writing about that day, Kissinger did not admit any responsibility for the failure, seeming to blame Watergate instead: “For the sake of our long-term peace of mind, we must someday undertake an assessment of why good men on all sides found no way to avoid this disaster and why our domestic drama first paralyzed and then overwhelmed us. But, on the day the last helicopter left the roof on the embassy, only a feeling of emptiness remained.”²

More recently, President Barack Obama only partly avoided the endless-war trap. Having campaigned against the war before he was elected to the Senate in 2005, Obama could not completely free himself from the “dove curse,”³ labeling the Afghan conflict as the “good” war during his presidential campaign. As Saunders describes it, Obama—like most of his predecessors—succumbed to pressure for a bigger military surge in Afghanistan than he favored. Politically, Obama felt that it was important to show that he and his Democratic Party were not “wimps” because they condemned the “bad” war in Iraq. Obama was against any large surge and closer to Vice President Joe Biden’s idea for a targeted counterterrorism approach, but he was fearful of military opposition, which forced him to compromise with the Department of Defense (DoD) on a surge of thirty thousand soldiers. In doing so, he missed an opportunity to wind down the war and save American lives.

Like other Democratic presidents, Obama’s priority was domestic reform, but unlike many of them, he was fortunate that his party controlled both houses, including a brief filibuster-proof Senate supermajority of sixty members when he entered the White House in 2009. Obama was not dependent on Republican votes for passing his controversial health-care reform, so it remains a bit of a mystery why he angered some of his fellow Democrats by backing a troop surge in Afghanistan in 2009. Saunders quotes Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi as recalling that “I have to admit that this [sending 21,000 troops at the start of Obama’s term before the later surge] wasn’t what we had in mind.”⁴ In 2010, Congress approved “Obamacare,” even though all Republicans in the House and Senate opposed it, plus thirty-four Democrats in the House—demonstrating the Democrats’ strength at that time and raising a question about whether Obama needed to compromise on the issue of Afghanistan.

Instead of Obama being worried about Congress, Saunders believes that the new president was more intent on keeping his “team of rivals” intact, especially Robert Gates,⁵ who had served in the Bush administration and who Obama appointed as defense secretary. Demonstrating that presidential toughness is more than just a political necessity—as in the Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy cases—Obama showed that it was a deep-seated psychological trait of Democratic doves.

An Important Exception

Saunders, however, mostly ignores one crucial example of a Democratic president demonstrating “toughness” through compromise to avoid war. The Cuban Missile Crisis risked turning into a nuclear Armageddon. The 1962 ten-day crisis could have been one of those occasions when a Democratic president felt he had to be a hawk. Kennedy received advice from no less than the dean of US post–World War II diplomacy, Dean Acheson, as well as from generals, such as Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay, who urged him to bomb the missile sites on Cuban soil. Acheson later admitted that such bombings could very well have elicited a military retaliation from Moscow. Fortunately, Kennedy had read Barbara Tuchman’s book *The Guns of August*, about World War I, published just months before the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁶ In his memoir, *Swords*

2 Henry Kissinger, Letter to the Fall of Saigon Marine Association, <https://fallosaigon.org/orig/kissinger.htm>.

3 Elizabeth N. Saunders, *The Insiders’ Game: How Elites Make War and Peace* (Princeton University Press, 2024), 231–35.

4 Saunders, *The Insiders’ Game*, 232.

5 Saunders, *The Insiders’ Game*, 230.

6 Library of America, “How Barbara Tuchman’s *The Guns of August* Influenced Decision Making During the Cuban Missile Crisis,” March 19, 2012, <https://blog.loa.org/2012/03/how-barbara-tuchmans-guns-of-august.html>.

and *Plowshares*, Gen. Maxwell Taylor recalled how the book came up during his discussions with the president during the crisis:

An avid reader of history, Kennedy has been greatly impressed by Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August, which he often quoted as evidence that the generals are inclined to have a single solution in a crisis and thus tie the hands of the political leaders by leaving them with the choice between doing nothing and accepting an inflexible war plan. As he read Tuchman's book, it was the rigidity of the mobilization plans both of the Triple Alliance and of the Triple Entente which made it impossible for the diplomats to avert a world war in 1914. . . . In the midst of the crisis, he told his brother Bobby: "I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time [and call it] The Missiles of October."⁷

As with other Democratic presidents, Kennedy had ambitious domestic plans that he did not want to give up, but, in this case, Congress had little or no direct influence, not knowing what was under consideration by the Kennedy administration. Arthur Schlesinger wrote in *The Imperial Presidency* that “there was no legislative consultation, there was most effective executive consultation . . . but Congress played no role at all. . . . It was only after he had made his decision that Kennedy called in congressional leaders. The object was not to consult them but to inform them.”⁸ A greater congressional role could have complicated the back-channel deal that he and his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, worked out: The Soviet Union would withdraw its missiles and, in return, the United States would go ahead with the already-planned dismantling of its Jupiter missiles in Turkey that were pointing at the Soviets—something that Kennedy wanted to keep a secret for fear of the potential congressional and public blowback.

We now know how close we came to nuclear disaster. In pursuit of a Soviet submarine to enforce the naval quarantine of Cuba, the US Navy used training depth charges to force it to surface with-

out knowing that the Soviet submarines carried nuclear-tipped torpedoes. The crew of the targeted B-59 submarine had lost contact with Moscow and, hearing the depth charges, thought war had broken out. The Soviet captain wanted to retaliate, but he needed the concurrence of two other senior officers. One of them, Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov, refused.⁹ It was a fraught moment and one in which Congress was thankfully cut out. Kennedy could pursue his dovish sentiments and end the threat of a nuclear war.

Overmilitarizing US Foreign Policy

Saunders makes much of the interplay of elite politics, but she doesn't mention the wider causes underlying the breakdown of effective policymaking. Diplomacy has been the poor stepchild in the panoply of foreign policy tools, which has helped to boost hard-power options. Even defense secretaries, such as Gates, have argued against the “overmilitarization” of US foreign policy, advocating more funding of the State Department.¹⁰ Even in the case of Iraq—in which the State Department, the US Agency for International Development, and others were patently more skilled—the Department of Defense was left in charge of nation-building.¹¹ I remember one exchange with a senior-level diplomat who captured the disparity: When State screws up, it is punished and Congress takes away funding, but it's different for the CIA, which Congress sees and favors (along with the DoD) as one of the hard-power components of US national security. Unlike the State Department, every “intelligence failure” earns the CIA more funding—as happened after 9/11—to correct the problem. In numbers of personnel and resources, US foreign policy is overmilitarized. Hence, if you only have a hammer, every national security problem is a nail. Moreover, from my own personal knowledge, many DoD officers dislike having responsibility for tasks—such as nation-building—that they are not trained for, and yet US foreign policy leaders tend to assign such tasks to the military.

What's behind this penchant for hawkishness? It's not clear. After the Vietnam War, there was certainly

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- 7 Rachel Lipson, David Deming, Jerren Chang, Jacob Greenspon, Stephanie Nussbaum, and Mariano Parro, “The Search for Stability: A Review of Worker Transitions,” American Enterprise Institute, February 17, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-search-for-stability-a-review-of-worker-transitions/>; Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares: A Memoir* (Da Capo Press, 1972).
- 8 Quoted in Patrick Hulme, “Congress, the Cuba Resolution and Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Lawfare*, April 4, 2021, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/congress-cuba-resolution-and-cuban-missile-crisis>.
- 9 Bryan Walsh, “60 Years Ago Today, This Man Stopped the Cuban Missile Crisis from Going Nuclear,” *Vox*, October 27, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2022/10/27/23426482/cuban-missile-crisis-basilica-arkhipov-nuclear-war>.
- 10 Robert M. Gates, “The Overmilitarization of American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-02/robert-gates-overmilitarization-american-foreign-policy>.
- 11 Kenneth M. Pollack, “The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction,” Brookings Institution, December 1, 2006, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-seven-deadly-sins-of-failure-in-iraq-a-retrospective-analysis-of-the-reconstruction/>.

an element of guilt for all the suffering endured by servicemen during the war and afterwards when they were not all welcomed home. At the time, much of the public and many politicians saw the military leadership as digging an ever-deeper hole for the United States—calling for more conscripts to be sent to fight a war that some government leaders believed was futile. From burning flags in the 1960s and early 1970s, the public mood has shifted to trying to honor those who give service, and soldiers returning from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq came home to a more supportive reception.

The overmilitarization of US foreign policy is even more ironic when you consider that, of all the great powers, the United States benefits from two natural barriers on either side—the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans—and friendly neighbors to the north and south. Even after the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact collapsed beginning in 1989, the US military continued to grow after a short pause, with current spending totaling more than 40 percent of all military expenditure worldwide and troops being stationed in 150 countries.¹² The United States has undertaken more military interventions—nine, from the ouster of Manuel Noriega in Panama to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—than the six significant military operations from 1945 to 1988 when the Soviet Union could be said to have presented an existential risk.¹³ After 9/11, Bush declared a War on Terror, ignoring the advice of many terrorism experts who saw “war” as the wrong frame for fighting terrorism.¹⁴

Shifts in Partisanship

But Republicans—more than other Americans—may be changing, in that the small or forever wars don’t now seem in favor, according to opinion polls.¹⁵ While the Republican Party has been out front calling for pouring money into the DoD and praising military valor, beginning with his 2016 term, Pres-

ident Donald Trump—whose victory was helped by military veterans voting for him by a 2-to-1 margin¹⁶—brought about a sea change, as he criticized Republican and Democratic predecessors alike for their inability to shut down the forever wars.

More recently, we have seen Republicans split on support for Ukraine despite Russia’s brutal aggression against it. Some older Republicans like Sen. Mitch McConnell see parallels between Adolf Hitler and Vladimir Putin, but other Republicans, following Trump’s lead, argue that funding for Ukraine would be better spent at home. There are conflicting reports about Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson’s change of mind and decision in April 2024 to bring the Ukraine aid bill to the floor, but it seems that the intelligence¹⁷ that the Biden administration showed him played an important role—along with the subtle threat that, without the bill, the Republicans would be responsible for Ukraine “los[ing] on the battlefield by the end of 2024,”¹⁸ and Johnson did not want that on his conscience. This scenario is far different from what Saunders has described for past critical national security decisions. In this case, the Democratic president was the hawk and the conservative Republicans were doves, more concerned about funding for domestic ends.

Moreover, what also has changed, which Saunders hints at,¹⁹ is the increasing polarization. In a fascinating 2021 study of Senate votes, Lee Drutman summarized the problems with bipartisanship:

The political environment most senators inhabit makes public bipartisanship anywhere from difficult to politically suicidal. This is for a variety of reasons. . . . Party leaders keep most potential “bipartisan” bills from reaching the floor and, perhaps most importantly, . . . the national parties are now geographically isolated, meaning there’s minimal overlap in the interests and values the parties represent.²⁰

12 Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby, eds., *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory* (Routledge, 2013), 121–22.

13 Stavrianakis and Selby, *Militarism and International Relations*, 121–22.

14 Brian Michael Jenkins, Bruce Hoffman, and Martha Crenshaw, “How Much Really Changed About Terrorism on 9/11?,” *The Atlantic*, September 11, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/09/jenkins-hoffman-crenshaw-september-11-al-qaeda/499334/>.

15 Dina Smeltz and Craig Kafura, “Americans Grow Less Enthusiastic About Active US Engagement Abroad,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, October 12, 2023, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-grow-less-enthusiastic-about-active-us-engagement-abroad>.

16 Dan Lamothe, “How Swing-State Military Veterans Played a Key Role in Donald Trump Winning the White House,” *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/11/10/how-swing-state-veterans-played-a-key-role-in-donald-trump-winning-the-white-house/>.

17 Adam Cancryn and Jennifer Haberkorn, “How Johnson and Biden Locked Arms on Ukraine,” *Politico*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/04/18/biden-johnson-ukraine-aid-00153237>.

18 Cancryn and Haberkorn, “How Johnson and Biden Locked Arms on Ukraine.”

19 Saunders, *The Insiders’ Game*, 243.

20 Lee Drutman, “Why Bipartisanship in the Senate Is Dying,” *FiveThirtyEight*, September 27, 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-bipartisanship-in-the-senate-is-dying/>.

This deep-seated partisanship has made it impossible for either party to work with the other. Cooperation is seen as a political sin. Partisanship is not new, but there's agreement among observers and congressional members that it never has reached this level in their lifetimes. Critical national security issues such as immigration and control of the borders have been politicized: "The last comprehensive immigration reform was enacted almost four decades ago, during Ronald Reagan's presidency."²¹

China: An Exception to Growing Partisanship

The old dynamic described by Saunders also doesn't apply to the all-party alarm over China. Biden promised to defend Taiwan against any Chinese invasion, ending "strategic ambiguity," and for the first time, in late 2023, signed off on an admittedly small grant,²² not a loan, setting a precedent for the United States to arm Taiwan. In 2024, he also provided \$345 million of military aid to Taiwan using a drawdown authority passed by Congress in December 2022, fostering "a closer military relationship."²³ There was no quid pro quo that Biden was after with the Republicans, as even if he sought to appeal to them for help on his domestic agenda, they would not have given it to him. The Inflation Reduction Act and COVID-19 relief passed on party line votes; only on the infrastructure bill did thirteen Republicans join in the House to ensure its passage.

Both Trump and Biden have said they don't want war, but with numerous bipartisan delegations traveling to Taipei to offer their support, there is no hiding the growing consensus on Capitol Hill that Taiwan (which China labels as an errant province) is a US strategic asset that must not fall into Beijing's hands. Some see the situation as the new Berlin Wall, in which there cannot be any compromise between the United States and China. The most vocal advocates for US protection for Taiwan against China come from the Republican right. A series of bills in 2020 and 2021,²⁴ including "a preemptive authorization for the use of military force to defend Tai-

wan, the reestablishment of the US Navy's Taiwan Patrol Force, and an end to the policy of strategic ambiguity," were introduced by a group of hawkish Republican senators and members of Congress but received Democratic support. At the same time, when the Biden administration was trying to tamp down tensions with Beijing, Pelosi made a visit to Taipei despite White House and DoD opposition.²⁵

More often than not, pressure to appear strong against China is bipartisan, and the competition is not between hawks and doves but over who can be harsher on China.

Soon after Pelosi's trip to Taiwan, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations debated the Taiwan Policy Act—legislation that had the dual sponsorship from then chair Democratic Sen. Robert Menendez and his Republican counterpart, Sen. James Risch. The legislation would have upgraded US ties with Taiwan, making Taiwan a major non-NATO ally and giving \$6 billion in defense funds, as well as preauthorizing sanctions against China in the event of its aggression. The bill was watered down but became part of the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act, with bipartisan support.²⁶

As Christopher S. Chivvis and Hannah Miller write: "Those pushing for a more aggressive response have mostly had the upper hand and those who might prefer a more moderate approach have found themselves on the back foot, concerned that attempts to moderate could be portrayed as weakness or as un-American to voters."²⁷ More often than not, pressure to appear strong against China is bipartisan, and the competition is not between hawks and doves but over who can be harsher on China. In case of a Chinese invasion,

21 William A. Galston, "The Collapse of Bipartisan Immigration Reform: A Guide for the Perplexed," Brookings Institution, February 8, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-collapse-of-bipartisan-immigration-reform-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/>.

22 Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, "The US Is Quietly Arming Taiwan to the Teeth," *BBC*, November 5, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67282107>.

23 Mark F. Cancian and Bonny Lin, "A New Mechanism for an Old Policy: The United States Uses Drawdown Authority to Support Taiwan," Center for Strategic and International Security, August 2, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/new-mechanism-old-policy-united-states-uses-drawdown-authority-support-taiwan>.

24 Christopher S. Chivvis and Hannah Miller, "The Role of Congress in US-China Relations," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 15, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/11/the-role-of-congress-in-us-china-relations?lang=en>.

25 Christine Wilkie, "Pelosi's Taiwan Trip Is a New Headache for Biden, Increases Tension with China," *CNBC*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/02/white-house-struggles-to-insulate-bidens-china-policy-from-pelosis-taiwan-trip.html>.

26 Chivvis and Miller, "The Role of Congress in US-China Relations."

27 Chivvis and Miller, "The Role of Congress in US-China Relations."

the US president—no matter which party—would face strong bipartisan congressional pressure to defend Taiwan. Gone is the Republican hawk and Democratic dove dynamic that Saunders analyzed in cases running through Obama’s presidency. On China, the congressional moderates in either party are increasingly in the minority.

But Will the American Public Go Along?

In Saunders’s examples, public opinion doesn’t play a big role—that’s why she brands foreign policy as an elite plaything. Certainly, Americans’ views of China are negative. In a 2024 Pew Research Center survey,²⁸ for the fifth year in a row “about eight-in-ten Americans report an unfavorable view of China, including 43% who hold a very unfavorable opinion.” But in a review of polls testing whether Americans would support defending Taiwan against China, only between a third and half of respondents between 2018 and 2023 said they would approve sending troops.²⁹ In the 2024 Pew poll, younger voters were less likely to see China as an enemy. And the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found in a March 2023 survey that “pluralities of these younger generations think military approaches are overused in US foreign policy.”³⁰

A military intervention to stop a Chinese invasion would likely turn into a major war, making it a harder sell for many Americans leery of war. A 2022 Center for Strategic and International Studies wargame scenario of a Taiwan invasion by China

saw the United States succeeding in stopping China from conquering the island, but the “cost of war for all sides was high with estimates of 10,000+ total casualties. The US lost 10–20 warships, two aircraft carriers, 200–400 warplanes, and around 3,000+ troops were killed in three weeks of fighting.”³¹ Other wargames tell the same story. In such circumstances, going to war against a nuclear China would be a domestic as well as international gamble for a US president. The war would not be fought with limited consequences at home, as happened with the forever wars. According to the economic analyst examining the 2022 wargame: “China is . . . the world’s top manufacturing hub, [and] Taiwan is the leading producer of advanced semiconductors.”³² In addition, global shipping would be severely disrupted. Chinese ports accounted for roughly 40 percent of shipping volume among the world’s one hundred largest ports³³ in 2020. In 2022, nearly half of the global container fleet and 88 percent of the largest ships transited³⁴ through the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan is also a critical node³⁵ connecting submarine cables³⁶ from China with the rest of the world.”³⁷

I doubt these costs and others could be covered up—unlike what happened in the lead-up to the Iraq invasion in which the Bush administration successfully dodged much discussion, firing Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki³⁸ when he was up-front in a congressional hearing that a much larger number of troops would be needed for the war in Iraq. Bush also let go his economic advisor, Lawrence Lindsey,³⁹ when he predicted the cost would

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- 28 Christine Huang, Laura Silver, and Laura Clancy, “Americans Remain Critical of China,” Pew Research Center, May 1, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/05/01/americans-remain-critical-of-china/>.
 - 29 Russell Hsiao, “Recent Trendlines in American Public Opinion on the Defense of Taiwan,” Global Taiwan Institute, Nov. 1, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/11/recent-trendlines-in-american-public-opinion-on-the-defense-of-taiwan/>.
 - 30 Dina Smeltz and Emily Sullivan, “Young Americans Question US Global Engagement,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, March 22, 2023, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/young-americans-question-us-global-engagement>.
 - 31 For information on the wargaming, see Justin Katz and Valerie Insinna, “‘A Bloody Mess’ with ‘Terrible Loss of Life’: How a China-US Conflict over Taiwan Could Play Out,” *Breaking Defense*, August 11, 2022, <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/08/a-bloody-mess-with-terrible-loss-of-life-how-a-china-us-conflict-over-taiwan-could-play-out/>.
 - 32 “Semiconductor Wafer Capacity by Geographic Region (2020),” <https://anysilicon.com/semiconductor-wafer-capacity-by-geographic-region-2020/>.
 - 33 Lloyd’s List, “One Hundred Ports 2021,” <https://lloydslist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com/-/media/lloyds-list/images/top-100-ports-2021/top-100-ports-2021-digital-edition.pdf>.
 - 34 Kevin Varley, “Taiwan Tensions Raise Risks in One of Busiest Shipping Lanes,” *Bloomberg*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-02/taiwan-tensions-raise-risks-in-one-of-busiest-shipping-lanes?sref=VZPf2pAM&leadSource=uverify%20wall>.
 - 35 Christine McDaniel and Weifeng Zhong, “Submarine Cables and Container Shipments: Two Immediate Risks to the US Economy If China Invades Taiwan,” Mercatus Center, August 29, 2022, <https://www.mercatus.org/research/policy-briefs/submarine-cables-and-container-shipments-two-immediate-risks-us-economy-if>.
 - 36 Matthew P. Goodman and Matthew Wayland, “Securing Asia’s Subsea Network: US Interests and Strategic Options,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 5, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/securing-asias-subsea-network-us-interests-and-strategic-options>.
 - 37 Gerard DiPippo, “What Are the Economic Stakes of a Taiwan Conflict?,” in Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Are Washington and Beijing on a Collision Course over Taiwan?,” October 6, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/are-washington-and-beijing-collision-course-over-taiwan>.
 - 38 Nicolaus Mills, “The General Who Understood Iraq from the Start,” *Dissent*, April 25, 2008, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-general-who-understood-iraq-from-the-start/.
 - 39 James Fallows, “Paying the Cost of Iraq for Decades to Come,” *The Atlantic*, March 29, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/paying-the-costs-of-iraq-for-decades-to-come/274477/>.

be \$200 billion, four times higher than the Bush administration's 2003 projections of a \$50–60 billion war. Today, the total price is estimated to be over \$3 trillion, with veterans' medical and other costs still accumulating.⁴⁰ With public trust in the US government at historic lows,⁴¹ it's unlikely the human and economic costs of a Sino-US war could be swept under the rug. In such a war scenario, US public opinion may break through, widening the narrow elite debates that Saunders describes and finally bringing democracy to bear on foreign policy. At least that's my hope.

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40 Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes, "The True Cost of the Iraq War: \$3 Trillion and Beyond," *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2010, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/true-cost-iraq-war-3-trillion-and-beyond>.

41 Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government: 1958–2024," June 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/06/24/public-trust-in-government-1958-2024/>.