

War clouds thicken over Taiwan, what should the left-wing standpoint be?

Monday 24 April 2023, by [LIU Xiang](#) (Date first published: 23 April 2023).

The article by [Liu Xiang](#) argues that the left in the Chinese-speaking world should take a principled stand on the Taiwan issue, based on the principles that Taiwan should never be ruled by the CCP, war should be avoided whenever possible, and Taiwan has the right to defend itself militarily.

Contents

- [Principle 1: Taiwan should](#)
- [Principle 2: War should \(...\)](#)
- [Principle 3: Taiwan has \(...\)](#)

Note: On 8-10 April, in response to the Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with Kevin Maccathy, speaker of the US House of Representatives, Beijing launched a war drill against the island. This is on top of the last August war drill when Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. This article was written to promote debate among the international in relation to the question as posed in the title.

Over the last year, the 'left-wing' voices on the war in Ukraine have often been criticized and hotly debated. Although 'left-wing' is a broad concept and there is no unified position among the various trends, some of these voices still cause resentment towards the entire label, especially among those who do not pay much attention to the detailed classification of left-wing ideology.

One reason for this dilemma is that the Western left-wingers have a tradition of prioritizing criticism of the imperialist camp to which their own countries belong. To adhere to this principle on all anti-war issues would certainly be dogmatic and erroneous. But the leftists in the Chinese-speaking world follow this tradition in an even more problematic way - they insist on 'prioritizing criticism of the U.S.-led Western imperialist camp' while neglect 'to which their own countries belong'. The Western left-wingers stick to this position not only because the U.S. is the strongest and most belligerent, but also because fighting the 'enemy at home' is more effective.

The most likely location for the next major war is undoubtedly Taiwan - as I am writing this article, the CCP has conducted a new round of military exercises and announced it 'continues to maintain the island siege and further pressing posture'. The leftists in the Chinese-speaking world certainly need to speak out about Taiwan. But how can we avoid taking a bad position? Perhaps we our standpoint should base on some principles that anyone with a conscience would understand.

Principle 1: Taiwan should never be ruled by the CCP

It is often said that the Taiwan issue is complicated, but one thing is very simple and clear: the CCP is a very bad ruler. This can be argued in many ways - human rights, social equality, financial capability, religious freedom, women's rights, self-determination of ethnic minorities, political

freedom, corruption, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, academic freedom, workers' rights, judicial justice, economic vitality, environmental protection, animal rights, social trust, business environment, LGBT rights, child protection ... Even if the CCP is not the worst government and Taiwan's current government is not the best in the world, the former replacing the latter would undoubtedly be a disaster. And it will never be the choice of 23 million Taiwanese, no matter how polls or votes are taken.

“The CCP is a very bad ruler...the former replacing the latter would undoubtedly be a disaster.”

If someone wants to start a debate on this principle, the left is certainly worth responding to, because such a debate can be turned into advocacy and education for left-wing ideas.

However, if someone disagrees with this principle but wants to skip the debate about it to talk about other aspects of the Taiwan issue, it is a waste of time to argue with them, whether the other side calls itself left-wing, right-wing, chicken-wing or any other wings.

Only if both sides agree that Taiwan and other small islands under the rule of the Republic of China (ROC, the official name of Taiwan) should not be ruled by the CCP, it is constructive to discuss other related issues - such as what is 'China'; the 1992 Consensus; which empires Taiwan historically belonged to; anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism positions ...

So is there any possibility of unification under the premise that this principle is satisfied?

Article 1 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) states: 'The socialist system is the fundamental system of the People's Republic of China. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics.' Constitutional recognition of the 'fundamental system' and 'the most essential feature' means that the CCP will never give up or share the ruling position of the PRC on its own initiative. The example of Hong Kong clearly demonstrates that Taiwan will necessarily be ruled by the CCP if it becomes part of the PRC (the so-called 'reunification'). What if both sides of the Taiwan Strait give up their existing state names, form a new state and democratically elect a new government together? Because of the huge demographic differences between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and the deep roots of the CCP in the mainland, it is very unlikely that the results of such an immediate election would satisfy the Taiwanese. Therefore, I do not see a workable unification plan right now.

As for future unification or not, I do not think it is a matter of principle for the current left-wing position.

Principle 2: War should be avoided whenever possible

There is no good war in this world. No matter how glorious and just the causes are claimed, the process of war inevitably involves brutal killings, civilian casualties, destruction of nature, etc. War is a barbaric solution that should be eliminated with the development of civilization. Even if the nature of imperialism and other drawbacks of human society dictate that 'no war' is still a utopian ideal, there are still many tools to prevent war between nations - such as government hotlines, disarmament conferences, arms control treaties, etc. So there is always a chance of avoiding a particular war.

“War is a barbaric solution that should be eliminated with the development of civilization.”

Specifically with regard to Taiwan, as long as Taiwan is not going to be taken over by the CCP, it is acceptable to not take actions that would overly irritate the latter in order to avoid war. Such actions include: declaration of a new state of Taiwan, development or deployment of nuclear weapons in Taiwan, large-scale third-party military presence in Taiwan, developing a plan for an active attack on the mainland, etc. If there is an anti-war movement in the Chinese-speaking world, it should also call for commitments to ‘no first shot’ from all parties and arms control negotiations.

This principle also means that if the Taiwan War breaks out, the party that ‘fires the first shot’ should be condemned in the strongest possible terms – whether it is the CCP launching a forced unification for any reason, or the United States or Taiwan launching a ‘pre-emptive strike’ to prevent a possible forced unification. Of course, once the war starts, the complexity of anti-war position becomes greater. Under what conditions should there be a cease-fire? Should the attacked side extend the war to the other side’s territory? Should we support the military intervention of third-party? I am afraid that the debate on these issues will make it difficult to stick to some simple principles.

Although they are both Chinese-speaking, the tasks of left-wingers in the mainland and Taiwan are not the same. While Taiwan side has effectively given up on forcefully retaking the mainland territory claimed by the ROC, the PRC keeps emphasizing that it will not give up on forced unification, and that the latter’s capacity for war is far greater than the former’s. In other words, the left-wingers in the mainland have a greater responsibility to oppose a war initiated by their own rulers. However, because of legal restrictions such as the *Anti-Secession Law*, it is unrealistic to expect everyone in the mainland to have the courage to speak out publicly against forced unification. We can discuss taking what anti-war actions is low-risk for mainlanders. However, there should be a minimum standard for the left-wingers in the mainland to not sing the praises of forced unification and to not take side with the CCP in the imperialist struggle for hegemony.

“The left-wingers in the mainland have a greater responsibility to oppose a war initiated by their own rulers.”

Principle 3: Taiwan has the right to defend itself militarily

Although I oppose an arms race, I have to admit that Taiwan’s ability to deter is one of the key reasons why the war in the Taiwan Strait has not broken out. If the ROC disbands its military forces, forced unification would certainly occur, even though the CCP no longer has the need to wage war.

“Taiwan’s ability to deter is one of the key reasons why the war in the Taiwan Strait has not broken out.”

In fact, there is a conflict between Principle 1 and 2 above: should Taiwan accept the CCP's rule in order to avoid war? Taiwan's long-standing strategy in this regard has been to strengthen its defensive capabilities so that the other side cannot achieve its goals easily through war. This strategy has certainly created a harmful regional arms race, but it has in turn prevented war and the CCP's takeover.

However, Taiwan's economy is not large enough to sustain such an arms race permanently, and even now it is no longer able to accomplish deterrence with its own military alone. The war in Ukraine has proved that the Western style weapons equipped by the ROC army are capable of defeating the Soviet style weapons equipped by the CCP army, but it also has showed that a small country need a constant flow of foreign aid to survive in a war with bigger opponent.

The Taiwanese left is faced with a dilemma on this issue: on the one hand, it needs to oppose its own government's excessive militarism, lack of investment in social welfare, and becoming a cash cow for Western military industries; and on the other hand, it has to face its country's need to fight against aggression as a vulnerable party. How to find a balance between the two requires careful consideration.

Constructing a position on this issue is relatively simple for the left-wingers in the mainland -their priority should be recognizing the right of self-defence of the ROC. If they keep talking about the problems of Taiwan's social welfare system, it is like the Russian left tells that the Ukrainian government should stop buying Western weapons in order to avoid excessive debt.

But does Taiwan's right to self-defence include third-party involvement? U.S. involvement is certainly motivated by its own interests and a major confrontation between the U.S. and the PRC would be harmful to humanity in general, but from Taiwan's perspective, America's commitment of military protection is indeed essential to prevented war and the CCP's takeover. In the case of an invasion by the CCP, if Taiwanese public opinion does not oppose third-party involvement - such as the provision of weapons, supplies, intelligence, etc. - in my opinion the left should not oppose it in principle. Of course, it is also important to avoid a direct war between the two nuclear-armed powers - China and the United States, because the devastation of such a scenario would be incalculable. But such a scenario is no longer just a Taiwan issue, and how to construct a position on it would need to be discussed separately.

“In the case of an invasion by the CCP, if Taiwanese public opinion does not oppose third-party involvement...the left should not oppose it in principle.”

To conclude, regardless of where one is on the left, the above three principles should be the basis for discussion of the Taiwan issue. The latter two involve the extreme circumstances of war and may be criticized as 'too idealistic', but it is always useful to discuss them before war begins. The left forces of the mainland and Taiwan, who are next to the crater, are both very weak. Their positions on the Taiwan issue run the risk of leaving a lasting bad reputation if they are not careful; this is also why we should have more discussions before the situation is irreversible.

“The left forces of the mainland and Taiwan...are both very weak. Their positions on the Taiwan issue run the risk of leaving a lasting bad reputation if they are not careful.”

Liu Xiang

P.S.

• Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 23 Apr 2023 :
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/war-clouds-thicken-over-taiwan-what-should-the-left-wing-standpoint-be/>

Liu Xiang is a Mainland Chinese socialist.