

Crouching Tiger: **Peter Navarro Prepares for War**

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In his latest book, *Crouching Tiger* (2015), Peter Navarro asks, “Will the U.S. and China go to war?” Although the question is never answered directly, Navarro believes that the world’s two most powerful countries are “very likely” destined for conflict unless drastic changes occur.

Navarro lays out two convincing and troubling arguments. First is his claim that the source of Chinese military strength lies in their asymmetric capabilities that can deter U.S. forces in the region. Although it still does not possess an air force or navy capable of beating the U.S. head on, China is capable of mass producing cheap, less sophisticated weapons such as sea mines and cruise missiles that could neutralize U.S. capabilities in the event of a conflict. He claims that the U.S.’ ability to protect Taiwan or a disputed Japanese island would be limited if China mines the surrounding seas or can overwhelm an aircraft carrier strike group with hundreds of missile strikes. He stresses the idea of “quantity having a quality of its own.” In other words, what Chinese weapons lack in sophistication, they make up by their sheer numbers.

Navarro’s second main argument is that China has strategically engaged in patient, incremental provocations that have allowed them to slowly but steadily increase their military posture in the region without having to fire a single shot. Rather than pursue blatant territorial domination, Chinese leaders have succeeded in pacing their military expansion just slowly enough to prevent military intervention by the U.S. or other nations. Not only do they take great effort to appear as a non-aggressor, they employ “non-kinetic” warfare to divert attention and create conflicting opinions that weaken opposition. “Non-kinetic” warfare refers to the psychological, economic, and legal means the Chinese use to subvert their enemies and alter public opinion.

Economic threats, such as banning all movies of a Hollywood studio from the Chinese market if just one movie portrays China negatively, are highly effective at encouraging self censorship far beyond the direct reach of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As far back as 1997, both Disney and Sony Entertainment were briefly banned in China for releasing the films *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*, respectively. More recently, Hollywood studios have learned not to provoke the CCP. Several movies, including *World War Z*, *Red Dawn*, *Pixels*, and *Mission Impossible 3* were all reedited to remove any negative portrayals of China. These revised cuts weren't just for release overseas—the domestic U.S. versions were censored too.¹

To counteract this growing Chinese threat, Navarro first lays out what the U.S. shouldn't do. The US should not withdraw from the region, impose economic sanctions on China, hold “talks for the sake of talks” with the Chinese government, or pursue a “Grand Bargain” in which the U.S. gives up one interest (e.g. Taiwan) for the sake of Chinese cooperation on another issue (e.g. North Korea). Navarro believes each of these policies would weaken the U.S.’ bargaining position vis-à-vis China and constrain the projection of U.S. military power in the region.

Rejecting these “pathways to peace that (probably) won't work,” Navarro outlines his plan for preserving “peace through strength” in Asia. Some of his policy prescriptions include: ending the technology sharing of U.S. companies operating in China with the Chinese government; enacting education reform in the U.S. to create better industries; fortifying and diversifying U.S. military bases in Asia; boosting space capabilities and cutting edge aircraft production; and buttressing regional alliances. While Trump questioned the sustainability of these alliances on the campaign trail, Navarro believes that Trump, as a businessman, will be more concerned about getting a better deal for the

¹O'Connor, Sean and Armstrong, Nicholas. Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China: How China's Censorship and Influence Affect Films Worldwide. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. October 28,

2015. <http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Directed%20by%20Hollywood%20Edited%20by%20China.pdf>. Accessed December 23, 2016.

American taxpayer, rather than intentionally ceding American military influence in Asia to China.

Navarro argues that ultimately the problem must be solved within the U.S. Harking back to his argument in *Death by China*, one of Navarro's key policy prescriptions is to recast U.S.-China trade relations on more favorable terms for the U.S. By reducing the trade deficit with China and buying fewer Chinese made goods, America can reduce the amount of money being spent on their military development. He writes: "such a step to 'rebalance' the China trade relationship would slow China's economy and thereby its rapid military buildup."² Domestically, U.S.-China relations face conflicting interests, as both big businesses and farmers profit from bilateral trade. Lobbyists in Washington influence politicians on behalf of their Chinese clients. Chinese "non-kinetic" warfare influences US public opinion by whitewashing CCP human rights abuses and censoring negative portrayals of the country in movies. Unless the U.S. changes this behavior, Navarro believes America could end up losing the long term geopolitical struggle.

In *Crouching Tiger*, Navarro takes a broad view of China's military capabilities and intentions, as well as U.S. measures to counteract this growing threat. Yet as convincing as his analysis is, Navarro's methodology and trade policy are his Achilles heel. *Crouching Tiger* would have benefited from more diverse sources, including interviews with Chinese scholars or government officials. Navarro assumes the worst about China's intentions without any attempt to amalgamate nuanced opinions. The book also could have been longer. Navarro attempts to cover too much in less than 300 pages. The section on potential flashpoints in the region is a succinct summary of international relations in Asia, but it barely scratches the surface of the issues. While the book is intended more for the lay reader than the Asia foreign policy expert, Navarro spends only a few pages on topics that require years of experience to fully understand. Overall, it is a prescient, if cursory, account of the security issues the US faces in Asia today.

² Navarro, Peter. *Crouching Tiger: What China's Militarism Means for the World*. Prometheus Books. 2015. p. 256