



To the Teeth

July 23, 2026

“A good move in Ukraine *would have been* to arm it to the teeth,” [says](#) historian Frank Dikötter. “A good move *today* with Taiwan would be to arm it to the teeth.”

Dikötter was responding to Peter Robinson, host of Hoover Institution’s [Uncommon Knowledge program](#), who asked if the Trump administration’s [National Security Strategy](#), published last November, was “a good move.” The document states that “Deterring a conflict over Taiwan . . . is a priority,”

Note how quickly “the most widely read living [historian](#) of modern China” bee-lined from the published strategy paper to the question of actual military might.

“Taiwan is essential,” Dikötter [added](#) emphatically. “Absolutely essential.”

But *why*, though? The National Security Strategy explains it is “partly because of Taiwan’s dominance of semiconductor production” — everyone brings that up — “but mostly

because Taiwan provides direct access to the Second Island Chain and splits Northeast and Southeast Asia into two distinct theaters.”

If you are thinking that’s just war talk, think again: “Given that one-third of global shipping passes annually through the South China Sea, this has major implications for the U.S. economy.”

And the world’s, I might add.

Later, Robinson asked if the historian had any [advice](#) to offer President Trump. He touched on containment and reciprocity and then offered a third bit of counsel regarding China . . .

Dikötter: Stand up. Stand Up. Stand up. This is a big bully that huffs and puffs but its aircraft carriers aren’t all that great, its economy isn’t all that great, its political stability isn’t all that stable.

Robinson: So you would recommend a president . . .

Dikötter: Be a little tougher.

Robinson: . . . call them out, like Ronald Reagan called out the Soviets?

Dikötter: Yes, exactly!

It may very well be that the more we Americans call out the CCP — the more we stand up against the bully — the more our leaders will follow.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.