

The Chinese Plan to Make the US Military Obsolete

By Frank , 1 August 2026

The Chinese Plan to Make the US Military Obsolete

A New Era of Security: How Innovation and Adaptability Shape the Future of Global Stability



By Frank Dumon

In the dynamic geopolitical landscape of the 21st century, the concept of global security is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Where the previous century was dominated by a race in size, numbers, and the brute force of military equipment, a growing consensus of strategists and diplomats points to a new reality. The question is no longer which country possesses the largest or most expensive weapons systems, but which country can innovate the smartest, the fastest, and most resiliently. Recently, an interesting analysis has emerged – highlighted in a widely discussed video essay – which argues that China is employing a strategy not to match, but to bypass the traditional military advantages of the United States.

This article aims not to frame this shift as a doomsday scenario or a cause for polarization. On the contrary, it offers a hopeful, connective, and solution-oriented perspective. It challenges us to think about how we can redefine global security: from a focus on outdated, capital-intensive platforms to a future focused on sustainable innovation, technological progress, and diplomatic resilience. By combining lessons

from the past with a constructive look at the future, we can sketch a blueprint for a more stable world.

The Paradox of Modern Defense Spending: Lessons from History



To understand the current dynamics, it is valuable to listen to the insights of experienced diplomats and strategists. Singaporean diplomat and academic Professor [Kishore Mahbubani](#) has repeatedly pointed to a remarkable paradox in the current geopolitical competition between the United States and China. In his analyses, he argues that, ironically, it is not China that is repeating the mistakes of the former Soviet Union, but that the United States risks falling into a similar trap: the inability to rationally adjust its defense budget to actual strategic needs.

The Challenge of the Status Quo

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union threw itself into a war of attrition, allocating a disproportionately large share of its gross domestic product (GDP) to military expenditures. This came at the expense of civilian innovation, consumer goods, and economic resilience. Mahbubani rightly points out that the United States today has a much stronger and more resilient economy than the Soviet Union ever did, and that the political systems are fundamentally different. The warning, therefore, is not that a collapse is inevitable, but that any great power can make strategic mistakes when it becomes too focused on maintaining yesterday's advantages.

The U.S. defense budget is structurally embedded in a complex network of interests. The production of a single advanced weapons system, such as a fighter jet or a naval ship, involves thousands of suppliers spread across dozens of states. Defense spending is therefore inextricably linked to employment and local economies. This creates political inertia: even when military leaders recognize that resources must be shifted to new technologies, there is strong pressure to maintain existing, traditional programs. The result is a budget that, while enormous, is not always optimally deployed for tomorrow's challenges.

Innovation over Scale: A New Blueprint



China has closely observed this dynamic. Instead of trying to defeat the United States by copying their military model, Beijing has chosen a different path. The Chinese defense budget grows at a steady, predictable percentage of GDP, rather than rising exponentially. Strategically, China is even "happy" with the U.S. fleet of 13 aircraft carriers. Why? Because each of these gigantic assets costs millions of dollars daily in operational and maintenance expenses, while they have become more vulnerable than ever before. This offers an opportunity for reflection: instead of competing in capital-devouring projects, the focus can shift to research and development (R&D), where the real contest of the future will be decided.

Asymmetric Warfare: The Power of Smart, Affordable Technology

The future of warfare is increasingly less about building the biggest weapons, and more about developing the most cost-effective means to neutralize expensive systems. This concept is known as asymmetric warfare, and it is fundamentally changing the economic equation of conflict.

The Drone Revolution and the Cost Factor



One of the most striking examples of this shift is the rise of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). Modern attack drones can be surprisingly cheap. By way of illustration, certain drones deployed in recent conflicts are estimated to cost a few tens of thousands of dollars. Defending against such a drone, however, often requires advanced air defense systems, such as the Patriot missile, a single interceptor of which can cost several million dollars.

This creates a huge economic imbalance. Suppose an attacker deploys a weapon costing \$30,000, and the defender must use a \$4 million weapon to intercept it. The defender may stop the attack, but if this scenario is repeated hundreds or thousands of times, the cost burden becomes unsustainable. The question shifts from "Can you stop the attack?" to "Can you afford to keep stopping the attack?". This reality is forcing Western defense industries to innovate, such as the development of directed-energy weapons (lasers) or electronic warfare, which have a much lower cost per interception and can thus restore the economic balance.

Hypersonic Weapons and the Vulnerability of Aircraft Carriers



A similar dynamic is visible at sea. An aircraft carrier of the Gerald R.

Ford class costs over \$13 billion to build, excluding the aircraft, personnel, and lifetime operational costs. It is a marvel of engineering, but also a large and relatively slow target. Military analysts, including professors from institutions like Harvard, have pointed out that a hypersonic missile, which represents a fraction of that cost (for example, a few hundred thousand dollars), is in theory capable of disabling or seriously damaging such a billion-dollar investment.

This does not mean that aircraft carriers are immediately useless, but it does require a reconsideration of their deployability. It forces the development of more advanced defense layers, better detection networks, and a wider dispersal of military capabilities, which in itself is a catalyst for technological progress.

China's Strategy of 'Denial' (Anti-Access/Area Denial)

China's military strategy is described by many analysts as a strategy of "denial," formally known as Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD). The goal is not necessarily to defeat the U.S. military in a direct, symmetrical confrontation. The goal is to make the existing advantages of the United States much more difficult and expensive to use, particularly in the region around the Chinese coastline.

Not Competing, but Playing Smart



Instead of trying to match the U.S. Navy ship for ship, China has

heavily invested in systems that challenge those ships. This includes long-range missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles, advanced satellite networks for target acquisition, and drone swarms. The logic is simple and rational: why spend tens of billions building your own version of a U.S. aircraft carrier, when you can develop cheaper weapons that make that carrier too risky to operate near you?

From a constructive perspective, this A2/AD strategy can also be seen as a form of stabilizing deterrence. By making the threshold for military intervention extremely high, the likelihood of impulsive conflicts is reduced. It forces all parties to resolve conflicts through diplomatic channels, because the military option has become too unpredictable and too costly.

The Focus on Scalability and Speed

What distinguishes China here is the emphasis on scalability and production speed. The Chinese industrial base is enormous and flexible. While traditional Western defense contracts often take decades from concept to delivery, the Chinese technology sector can develop, test, and scale prototypes in record time. This agility is a strength in itself. For the West, this is not a reason for panic, but a clear incentive to streamline its own acquisition processes, reduce bureaucracy, and forge public-private partnerships to accelerate innovation.

A Call for Strategic Renewal: Opportunities for the Future

The message that traditional military power is being challenged does not have to be negative. It is a powerful catalyst for a necessary "strategic reboot." History teaches us that great powers rarely decline because they suddenly become weak; they lose their position when they fail to adapt to a changing world. The British Empire did not lose its influence because it became poor overnight, but because the world changed faster than the system could adapt.

From Military Complex to Innovation Ecosystem



The solution lies in reorienting resources. Instead of clinging to outdated platforms, countries can invest in a broad innovation ecosystem. This means more investment in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space technology, and sustainable energy. The beauty of these "dual-use" technologies is that they not only strengthen national security, but also have direct, positive applications in civil society. A breakthrough in battery technology or AI for logistics, developed with defense resources, can ultimately lead to greener cities, better healthcare, and more efficient supply chains. Competition can thus become an engine for human progress.

Diplomacy and Cooperation as Force Multipliers

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that military power is only one pillar of national influence. The United States still possesses enormous assets: the world's largest economy, the most experienced armed forces, a global network of bases, powerful allies, and leading technology companies and universities. Meanwhile, China faces its own challenges, such as an aging population, regional tensions, and dependence on imported energy and advanced semiconductors.

This is not a story where one wins and the other loses. The real competition is about which country can adapt the fastest. And in a world facing existential, cross-border challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and the regulation of artificial intelligence, cooperation is not a luxury, but a necessity. A strategic reboot must therefore also involve making room for diplomacy. Reducing tensions through transparent communication and engaging in cooperation on areas of mutual interest is the most effective way to guarantee the safety of all citizens.

Conclusion: A Hopeful Perspective on Global Stability



The analysis that China is trying to bypass America's traditional military superiority with smart, affordable, and scalable technology is no reason for fatalism. It is a clear, objective observation that invites mature reflection. It challenges policymakers to take a critical look at where every tax dollar is best spent: not in cherishing the past, but in shaping the future.

By focusing on innovation, streamlining defense procurement, embracing dual-use technologies, and strengthening diplomatic ties, nations can adapt to the new reality. The nation that will successfully navigate the 21st century is not necessarily the nation with the largest weapons arsenal, but the nation that can innovate smartest, produce fastest, and create the most value with every dollar invested, while simultaneously building bridges instead of walls. In that spirit of adaptation, innovation, and mutual respect lies the key to a more peaceful and predictable world.

Sources and Further Reading

For those who wish to delve deeper into this subject, the following sources are invaluable. They offer well-founded, academic, and strategic insights that further elaborate on the themes discussed in this article:

Mahbubani, K. (2020). Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy. PublicAffairs. (Provides in-depth insight into the geopolitical dynamics and the warning about defense budgets and strategic adjustment)

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Various reports on Asymmetric Warfare and Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategies in the Indo-Pacific region. (Provides objective analyses of the shift in military investments and technological trends).

RAND Corporation. Reports on the Cost-Exchange Ratio in Modern Warfare, specifically focused on the economic imbalance between cheap drones and expensive air defense systems.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Annual databases and reports on global military expenditures, placing the trends in defense budgets of the US, China, and other major powers in a broader, factual perspective.

Work, R. O., & Brimley, G. (2014).: Preparing for War in the Robotic Age. Center for a New American Security (CNAS). (A forward-looking view on how warfare is changing through automation and the necessity of strategic adjustment).