

The background of the slide is a dark, semi-transparent overlay of the United States flag and the Chinese flag. The American flag's stars and stripes are visible on the right side, while the Chinese flag's red field with yellow stars is on the left. The text is white and stands out against this dark background.

The Great Military Rivalry: Could America Lose a War with China?

Graham Allison

As China rises, war is more likely than not

History's warning: In the last 500 years, 12/16 cases in which a rising great power threatened to displace a ruling power ended in a hot war.

	Period		Ruling Power	Rising Power		Result
1	First half of 16th century		France	Hapsburgs		War
2	16th–17th centuries		Hapsburgs	Ottoman Empire		War
3	17th century		Hapsburgs	Sweden		War
4	17th century		Dutch Republic	England		War
5	Late 17th–early 18th centuries		France	Great Britain		War
6	Late 18th–early 19th centuries		United Kingdom	France		War
7	Mid-19th century		United Kingdom, France	Russia		War
8	19th century		France	Germany		War
9	Late 19th–early 20th centuries		Russia, China	Japan		War
10	Early 20th century		United Kingdom	United States		No war
11	Early 20th century		Russia, U.K., France	Germany		War
12	Mid-20th century		Soviet Union, U.K., France	Germany		War
13	Mid-20th century		United States	Japan		War
14	1970s–1980s		Soviet Union	Japan		No war
15	1940s–1980s		United States	Soviet Union		No war
16	1990s–present		United Kingdom, France	Germany		No war



Hottest flash point:
TAIWAN

Xi Jinping's commitment: “We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!”

Alarms flashing: Former Commander of Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Philip Davidson warned: the risk of conflict over Taiwan is “manifest during this decade.”

America might lose a war over Taiwan

U.S. could lose: As the National Defense Strategy Commission concluded, America “might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China.”

U.S. and Chinese forward-deployed air and naval forces in Asia

U.S. military			Chinese military	
Current	→ 2025		Current	→ 2025
250	250	Fighter jets	1,250	1,950
		Bombers	175	225
10	10	Patrol aircraft	15	30
1	1	Aircraft carriers	2	3
4	4	Amphibious assault ships	8	12
12	12	Warships	60	108
10	10	Submarines	56	64



Source: U.S. military and Department of Defense
 Notes: Current figures are estimates and 2025 figures are projections.

Source: *Nikkei*



In every realistic war game, America loses

A perfect record: As former Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work has stated publicly, in the most realistic war games the Pentagon has been able to design simulating war over Taiwan, the score is 18 to 0. And the 18 is not Team USA.

Put less diplomatically: Per former defense planner David Ochmanek, America “gets its ass handed to it.”

Bottom Line: 7 decades of primacy are over

Read Mattis's lips: Former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis's 2018 National Defense Strategy was candid that America no longer enjoys military dominance.

NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

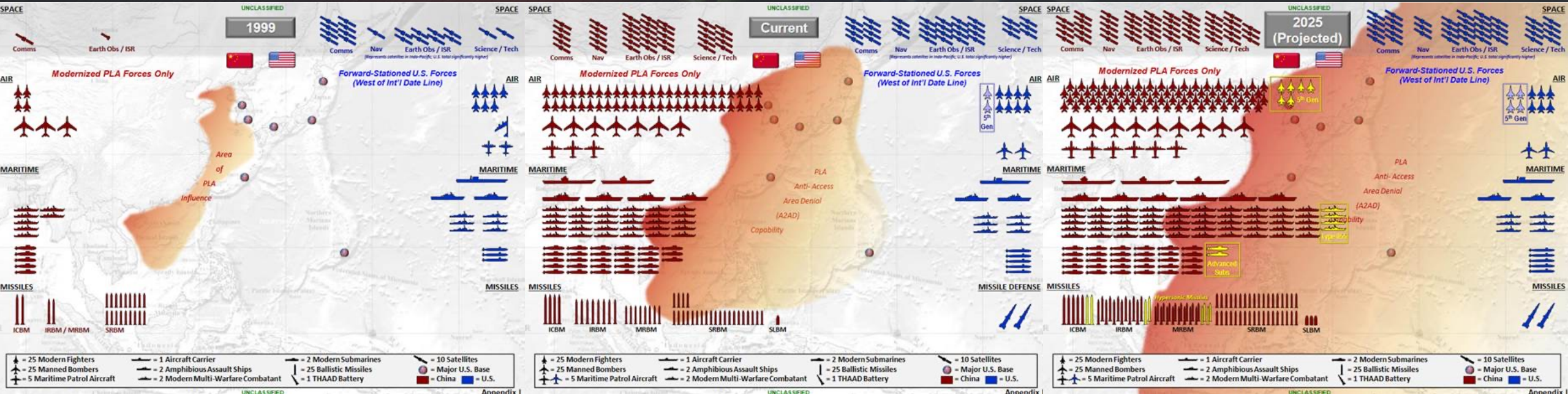
Challenges to the U.S. military advantage represent another shift in the global security environment. For decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain. We could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted. Today, every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.



**How did so much
change so quickly?**

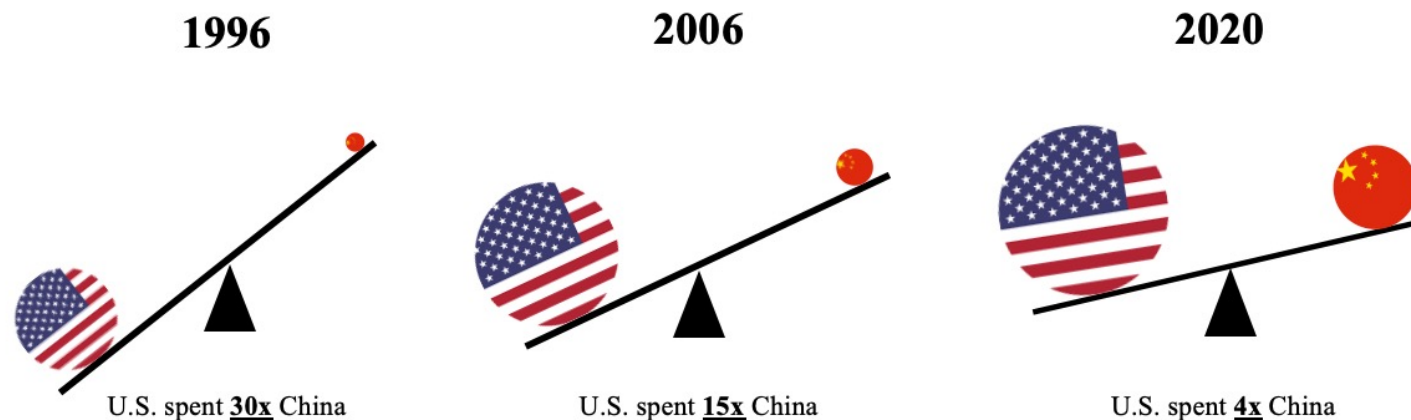
China's A2/AD advantage

Expanding A2/AD envelope: In 2000, A2/AD (anti-access/area denial systems designed to disrupt America's command and control networks, degrade its combat power, and thereby thwart its power projection) was just a PLA acronym on a briefing chart. Today, China's A2/AD operational reach encompasses the First Island Chain, including Taiwan. By 2025, it could extend to the U.S. territory of Guam.



Beijing's defense spending surge

Catching up: In 1996, China's reported defense budget was 1/30 America's. By 2020, measured by the yardstick that CIA and the IMF judge the best single metric for comparing national economies, China's defense spending was over 1/2 America's and on a path to parity.



Defense Spending: Reported Amounts
(billions USD at current prices [MER])

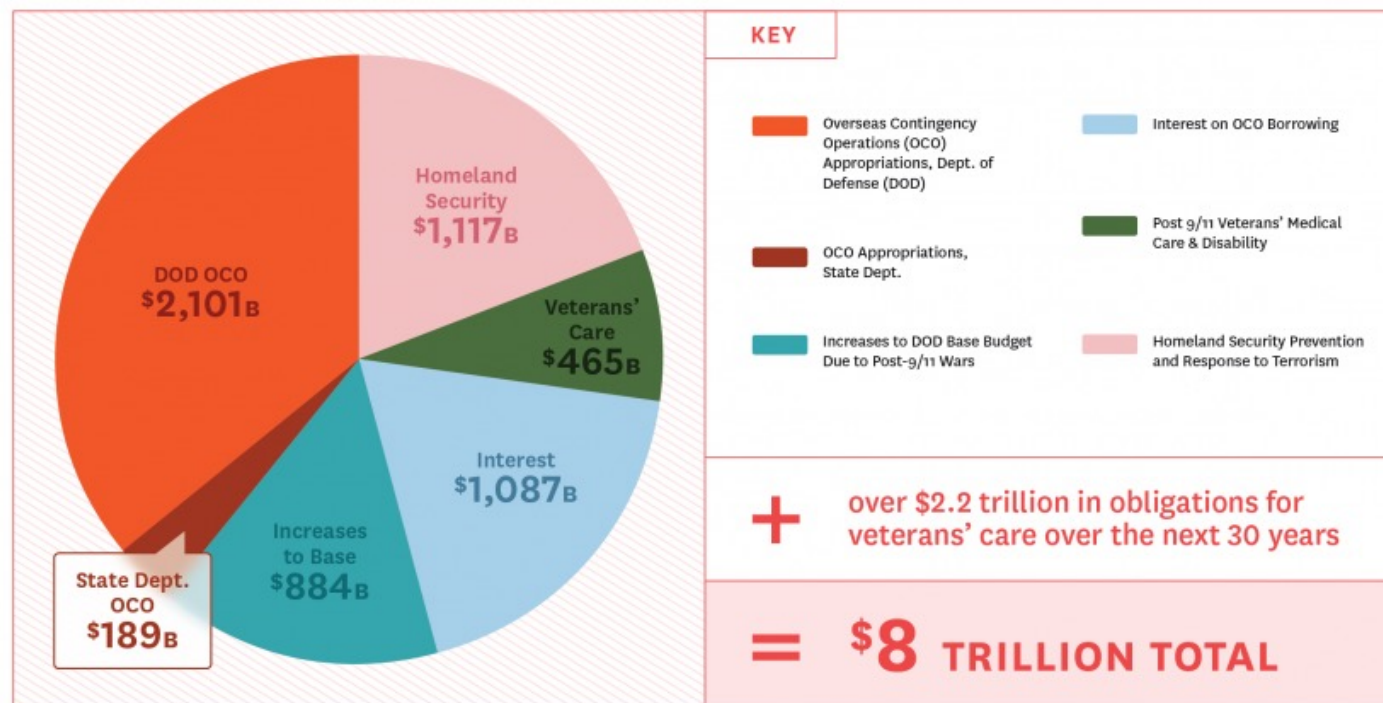
	1996	2006	2020
China (Reported)	9	35	178
U.S. (NDAA)	266	522	738

Sources: Chinese documents (white papers, state media), U.S. government documents (NDAA, OMB tables).

U.S.: distracted and paralyzed

Middle East wars, congressional infighting: As former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford told Congress, “seventeen years of continuous combat and fiscal instability have affected our readiness and eroded our competitive advantage.”

Estimate of **U.S. Post-9/11 War Spending**, in \$ Billions FY2001–FY2022



Source: Brown University



China “went to school”

Not a peasant army:

Meanwhile, in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley’s words, China “went to school” on the U.S. to develop a formidable fighting force: “they have gone from a peasant-based infantry army that was very, very large in 1979 to a very capable military that covers all the domains and has global ambitions.”

America is playing a “losing game”

Legacy vs lethality: While the U.S. prioritizes exquisite, expensive legacy platforms, China has developed cheap weapons to destroy them. In National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’s words, “for every \$10,000 we spend on an aircraft carrier, they spend \$1 on a missile that can destroy that aircraft carrier.”

