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Brian Berletic

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Chinese Military Might vs Washington's Asymmetrical Tools of Empire

China continues to strengthen its military capabilities, combining rapid growth in conventional power with readiness to counter U.S. asymmetrical strategies.



Over the past few months China has achieved several breakthroughs in terms of military power in both quantity and quality including the introduction of new aircraft, increased production rates of existing aircraft, and the launching of a new amphibious assault ship proposed as recently as 2020, demonstrating a rapid progression from drawing board to dockside all within China's already vast shipbuilding capacity.

The implications of these recent developments impact ongoing US encroachment in the Asia-Pacific and the looming prospect of an Ukraine-style war the US appears eager to launch against China. However, just as the US has demonstrated elsewhere, what it lacks in military

and industrial power, it makes up for in political influence and its asymmetrical capacity to destabilize and destroy entire regions of the planet.

The NED* is heavily active in Southeast Asia in an attempt to poison the population against China

China's Expanding Air Force

At the Zhuhai Airshow in November 2024, China unveiled its twin-engine Shenyang J-35 fifth-generation fighter. Defense News would note that the J-35's introduction together with the mass-produced Chengdu J-20 makes China only the second nation in the world to field two types of fifth-generation warplanes besides the US with its F-22 and F-35 fighters.

While many attempts have been made to dismiss China's fifth-generation warplanes as cheap copies of American warplanes, both the J-35 and J-20 represent entirely different designs fulfilling entirely different requirements, and mass-produced with flexible and rapidly updated manufacturing techniques quickly closing the fifth-generation fighter gap with the US.

Not only does this mean China will possess at least as many fighter planes as the US, it also means China will be able to rapidly replace lost aircraft in the event of any peer or near-peer conflict, including with the United States.

In 2022, South China Morning Post reported that China was speeding up production of its J-20 warplane, often seen as China's answer to the US F-22. At the time, it was estimated China had produced up to 200 J-20s, a comparable number to the current number of F-22s the US operates.

By 2024, Air & Space Forces Magazine would report that China may be building up to 100 J-20 airframes per year – all of which are for use by China's armed forces. While the US produces 135 F-35s a year (with 1,000 produced in total), most of these aircraft are for export to US allies. Because Chinese production of the J-20 has increased since its introduction, it cannot be ruled out that China will continue producing these aircraft at an accelerated rate.

With the introduction of the J-35 last November, a similar production rate may follow.

US airpower has been the central factor in upholding US and Western military supremacy since the end of the Cold War. More recently, the impact of Western military aviation has been blunted by the proliferation of advanced air defense systems, a field the US and Europe neglected throughout the Cold War and has fallen even further far behind since.

China possesses one of the largest and most advanced integrated air defense networks in the world, including proven Russian air defense systems as well as indigenous systems based on proven Russian designs.

Together with China's expanding fleet of warplanes, China is gradually establishing a two-fold advantage within and along China's borders and shores. While the US still has a larger air force than China, it should be noted that US warplanes are dispersed across the planet among the hundreds of military bases the US maintains stretching from the US itself, across Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and of course, the Asia-Pacific. It is unrealistic for the US to concentrate all of its warplanes in any potential conflict with China without conceding military domination elsewhere around the globe. Likewise, deeply investing in conflicts against Russia or Iran directly means expending limited warplanes and munitions the US wants to preserve for potential conflict with China.

China's Expanding Navy

The US government and arms industry-funded Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) published a June 2024 [article](#) titled, "*Unpacking China's Naval Buildup.*" In it, CSIS admits China's large and growing advantage in terms of shipbuilding while also acknowledging a growing crisis across what remains of American shipbuilding capacity.

It admits that, "*the decline of U.S. naval dominance will be difficult to reverse,*" admitting that it constitutes a process that has "*spanned decades*" and "*rests on slow-moving economic and industrial trends.*"

It paradoxically concludes that:

...the United States can still maintain superiority by investing in smaller surface combatants like corvettes, frigates, and unmanned naval systems paired with alternative platforms like aircraft or ground-based missile launchers; deepening its partnerships with Pacific nations like Japan and South Korea; and investing more in its domestic shipbuilding industry—particularly the highly specialized submarine industrial base.

However, China is likely just as capable of outproducing the US in terms of smaller vessels, unmanned systems, aircraft, and missiles as it is in terms of larger warships.

Beyond just quality and quantity, China's ability to rapidly design, build, and launch warships at rates many times faster than the US lends an additional advantage to China.

Its most recent Type 076 amphibious assault ship was proposed sometime in mid-2020 and launched late last year. In less than 4 years China proposed, designed, and launched a modern amphibious assault ship. It takes the US 6 years just to produce an America class amphibious assault ship – the initial development process having taken up to 7 years.

The same CSIS report admits:

The United States probably faces insurmountable obstacles to meaningful increases in shipbuilding in the coming decade, but it might be able to reduce China's advantage through

its relationships with Japan and South Korea. These U.S. partners accounted for 26 and 14 percent of global ship deliveries in 2023, respectively. The U.S. Navy plans to repair ships at international shipyards in 2025 on a trial basis, which could reduce the maintenance backlog, but actually constructing U.S. ships using foreign shipbuilders is unlikely due to U.S. legal restrictions. The only long-term answer is probably an industrial strategy that supports the broader U.S. shipbuilding sector for decades.

Thus, the US is unable to rectify this growing gap. Its strategy depends on “*partners*” like South Korea and Japan, both hosting US military bases but counting China as their largest and most important trade partner.

Conventional Military Power vs. Asymmetrical Military Power

As the ongoing US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine has demonstrated, the US together with its “*partners*” are unable to match even Russia’s military industrial production, let alone China’s.

The prospect of the collective West significantly expanding production is hindered by private enterprise and its prioritization of profits over any actual purpose on the battlefield. Without nationalizing military industrial production, additional funds made available to the collective West’s arms industry will simply be transformed into additional profits, not shells, airframes, or ship hulls.

Another significant obstacle to expanding military industrial production (including aircraft and ship production) is access to a skilled workforce. China’s vast industrial base and equally vast workforce enables China’s increasingly superior quantities and quality. Efforts to close the gap across the collective West would require significant educational reforms that would span the better part of a generation – if such reforms were even pursued in the first place – which they are not.

Thus, in order for the US to maintain the primacy of its “*international rules-based order*,” it must apply asymmetrical military power against targets of its aggression, including Russia, Iran, and China. This includes politically capturing and turning nations against US adversaries as the US has done with Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia, the use of Türkiye, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia against both Syria and Iran, and nations like South Korea, Japan, and more recently the Philippines against China.

The US maintains a vast global network, investing in political sedition toward the political capture and pivoting of additional nations against its adversaries. Through the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED*), the US is attempting to infiltrate the media, education,

legal, and political systems of targeted nations around the globe and poison them against nations labeled US adversaries – even at the expense of each nation’s own best interests.

The NED* is heavily active in Southeast Asia in an attempt to poison the population against China – the region’s largest, most important trade partner, investor, source of tourism, and infrastructure partner. While China objectively represents greater peace, stability, and prosperity for Southeast Asia than subordination to the US as a proxy pivoted against China, the nature of US political capture and propagandization makes it possible to exploit and manipulate populations emotionally, short-circuiting reason and logic. .

The US has demonstrated the ability to turn entire populations against their own objective best interests, as it has done in Ukraine. There, the US convinced the Ukrainian population that not only is it an entirely separate entity from Russia despite centuries of shared language, history, culture, and religion, but that Russia posed an existential threat Ukrainians were required to militarize and array themselves against.

The resulting proxy war is now in the process of destroying Ukraine economically, politically, and literally.

A similar process has taken place across Asia including within Chinese territory itself. This includes Hong Kong and the island province of Taiwan.

The population of Taiwan has been convinced – despite being ethnically, linguistically, historically, and recognized under international law as Chinese – they are “*not*” Chinese and that China represents an existential threat the island province must militarize and array itself against in what will be a predictably Ukraine-style conflict that will result in predictable Ukraine-style self-destruction.

Beyond Washington’s ability to asymmetrically disfigure geopolitical relations along China’s periphery and even within its borders, the US plans on deploying its own military force in an asymmetrical manner.

Rather than fighting China head-on, the US has reconfigured its military forces, including the entire US Marine Corps for interdicting Chinese maritime travel. While this is advertised as targeting Chinese military vessels, long-standing US policy seeks to target and strangle Chinese maritime trade as well.

Washington’s obsession with “*freedom of navigation*” in the South China Sea, where the same CSIS mentioned above admits is primarily trade coming from and going to China – isn’t to protect it – but to undermine and utterly strangle it.

While the US may not be able to concentrate its global-spanning military forces to confront China along its own shores in a head-on battle – because China likewise is unable to project

military power globally – the US would be able to impose a maritime blockade on China by simply stopping its ships beyond the reach of China’s military forces in Asia-Pacific.

This means interdicting or shutting down the flow of hydrocarbons from the Middle East to China and Chinese trade through the Panama and Suez Canals.

An example of such US policies laid out in detail is the 2013 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace piece titled, “*Stranglehold: The Context, Conduct and Consequences of an American Naval Blockade of China.*” It lays out a policy of not only blockading Chinese maritime shipping by convincing or coercing its neighbors to isolate it, it discusses using military force to strike at what is now referred to as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure.

At one point, it claims:

...the United States would mix political-military coercion with economic incentives to bully and cajole China’s neighbors into imposing embargoes on China. In some cases, the United States might be able to do so with relative ease. Countries like India and Vietnam have a checkered military history with China, and they both fear China’s rise as a regional hegemon. In other cases, the United States might be willing to use military force to interdict lines of supply into China. For instance, if Burma refused to cooperate, the United States might strike the Sino-Burmese oil and natural gas pipeline or even extend the blockade to Burmese ports.

Since then, the US has already begun attacking the Sino-Burmese pipeline through armed proxies it has built up over decades through extensive NED*, USAID*, and other forms of financial, military, and political support. The US NED*-funded “Irrawaddy” reported as recently as August 2024 that US-backed armed groups seized guard posts protecting the pipeline. Armed attacks on the pipeline itself have also been reported.

Likewise, US-backed militants regularly attack Chinese BRI infrastructure across Pakistan, including as recently as October last year, the BBC reported.

In other words – the US blockade and isolation of China is not a proposed policy for some far-off future conflict – it is already a work-in-progress with Washington constantly summoning what resources it has to enhance efforts to strangle China’s economy covertly, as successive US sanctions attempt to do overtly.

Despite China building up sufficient military power to deter or even defeat a head-on conflict with encroaching US forces in the Asia-Pacific and having secured its own information and political space at home, its periphery is still vulnerable and in the process of being transformed into a united front against it. The crisis the US faces militarily and industrially is

offset by its expert and proven method of politically capturing and using nations to advance US foreign policy through non-military or “near-military” means.

China’s close relationship with Russia and Russia’s ability to offset the impact of US attempts to strangle it economically – at least in terms of importing resources – helps explain the urgency with which the US is attempting to overextend, collapse, and remove the current political order in Moscow.

The 2013 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace article even stated:

Russia is remarkably well-positioned to alleviate the blockade’s effects on China. Russian trade would be immune to American interdiction, since Russia’s nuclear arsenal and significant conventional assets preclude any serious American attempts at military coercion. If the United States were unwise enough to try, the Kremlin would be incensed and might enter the fray on the Chinese side. But on the other hand, China’s northern neighbor could also sound the death knell for China’s ability to resist a blockade.

So far, attempts by the US to compel Russia to “*sound the death knell for China’s ability to resist a blockade,*” have failed, but continued efforts by the US toward this end should not be underestimated.

Until China (along with Russia and Iran) can protect its partners from America’s ability to “*bully and cajole*” them, Washington’s asymmetrical tools of empire will remain an existential threat to China, no matter how significant its conventional military power may be.

**-banned in Russia*

Brian Berletic, January 11, 2025

Brian Berletic is a Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer.