

# America Being Overtaken? We've Heard That Before

By Victor Davis Hanson

The recent [Chinese-American summit](#), as I've spoken elsewhere, has raised anxieties that there is a tension between an establishment United States and a rising power, China. And a lot of people who I would call declinists say, "Well, China's gonna replace us."



A lot of people on Wall Street are afraid of that, a lot of people in the military, a lot of people on the left, a few people on the right, but we're not looking at it empirically.

So there are two things to be cognizant of. Number one, there's about [eight or nine ingredients](#) that allow a society to flourish, to advance, to expand, that are critical to this argument.

And they cross time and space. They're ancient. One is fuel.

The United States is the largest producer of gas and oil in the world right now. Another one is food. The value of our agricultural products is at an all-time high. We're completely self-sufficient in food, and we're, in terms of the value of the exports, the biggest exporter of food.

So, food and fuel. How about education? The Times Educational Supplement that studied the top 50 universities in the world—if you look at the United States, 90% of them are here in the United States, especially in the so-called STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Caltech and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are at the top in the world.

So in higher education, we're there.

Fertility—we're not at 2.0 anymore, but we're much better than Europe at 1.3 and much, much better than China at 1.0, which is a shrinking and aging society. We're not at 1.7. It's about as [good as you can get](#) in the Western Hemisphere.

In terms of the military, we're going to spend the largest amount of money we ever have in real dollars and the largest in many years as a percentage of our budget. We invented the aircraft carrier. We've got 11 carrier groups. We have the most sophisticated weapons in the world.

As far as space goes, we have a NASA program and then we have SpaceX, and SpaceX on its own is superior to most space programs elsewhere in the world.

So, by any fundamental evaluation, the United States is not in decline. So, why do people say that? Usually, they say it because they're unhappy with the other party.

So, most of this is now coming from the Left. If you'd watched MSNBC, which I'm forced to do sometimes to get a different view, and CNN, they're all saying that the summit was a disaster.

[Chinese Leader Xi Jinping] had all the cards. [President Donald] Trump was played. That's not true. I just explained why it isn't. But Western declinism is kind of intrinsic in general to Western societies that are paranoid about decline, and particularly in the United States.

And let me just finish by giving you a few examples.

During the Great Depression, which started in 1929 with the stock market collapse and continued all the way to 1940, unemployment was 25% at some point across the United States.

People said look at Europe. There is a new paradigm. Fascist Italy, fascist Germany. They have wonderful infrastructure programs. Hitler is building autobahns. Mussolini is building rail tracks. They didn't suffer the Depression like we did.

They have a new formula. They're rearming. By 1939 and '40, Charles Lindbergh said we couldn't win a war against Germany. The Luftwaffe is invincible compared to our decrepit forces. In fact, at the outset of 1939, when the war broke out in Europe, our army was smaller than Portugal's, 19th in the world.

So, everybody said, our system doesn't work. We had a Depression. Now we're unprepared. And [four years later](#), we destroyed all of our enemies, and the U.S. economy was larger than all of the economies of the belligerents in the war put together.

And the U.S. Navy was the largest navy in history, and it was larger than the Russian navy, what was left of the German, Japanese, Italian navies, and the British navy all together—the U.S. Navy, one Navy.

So that was just a passing paranoia, but it was typical.

The next thing happened after World War II. Our ally, the Soviet Union, suddenly switched sides. It became an enemy even

after we supplied 25% to 30% of its Lend-Lease effort to win the war.

And yet, they started the Cold War, and then people got very scared because they said this totalitarian command economy is very, very efficient. It's better than ours. Look what's happened. They're ahead of us in the space race. They ignited a hundred-megaton bomb, the biggest in history. There was something called the missile gap.

They have twice the missiles that we do pointed at us. That's what John Kennedy got elected on. It really didn't exist, but that's what he was about to convince people about. So, the Soviet Union, in the words of Nikita Khrushchev, "We will bury you."

And what happened? It imploded two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and then we found out that it was completely overrated. It was a rotten system. The CIA estimates of its military power and its economic vitality were all wrong. It was a pathological society, and it broke apart.

That didn't stop the declinists. Then they said by the 1980s and the 1990s, right after the Soviet collapse, well, we have a new problem. Our capitalist free-market democratic society is not as efficient as what's going on in Japan.

They called it Japan Inc. Look what Japan has done. They've got more money than we do. Their cars—the Honda, Toyota, Lexus—are all better than our cars. GM is through. Ford is through. American Motors is through.

And then what happened? An aging, shrinking Japanese population backed by unwise government and corporate policies went into a period of about 15 years of destructive deflation.

And today it's a strong economic power. We're friends with it, but no one in their right mind thinks Japan Inc. is going to replace the United States.

And then at the millennium, we were told the European Union was the new paradigm. Four hundred and fifty million people, one continental nation-state. But it wasn't a nation.

And today, the EU with 450 million people has an economy about 65% the size of ours, and no one thinks the EU is going to take over. In fact, we're worried that Europe is in rapid decline.

I say all this because what we are saying now about China is not new. It's an old phenomenon of pessimism and declinism in Western civilization, particularly in the United States

China is not the new rival that's going to replace us. It is the new version of Germany and Italy and Japan and the Soviet Union and Japan Inc. and the EU—the pseudo threats that we've all seen before.

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