China taking lead in Indo-Pacific arms race

EXCLUSIVE

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The US and Australia must invest urgently in military technologies and innovation to help combat the threat posed by a rising China, a major report warns.

It states the US and Australia will struggle to contain China’s military might without a radical shake-up of the focus on conventional military spending rather than forging new technologies with artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons.

The US military technological advantage, an aspect of its strategic power since the end of the Cold War, is eroding," says the report on the technical military rivalry in the Indo-Pacific to be released today by the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.

“As China invests heavily in its military and high-end research sector, the superiority of US military forces is less guaranteed. Sustaining the US military and strategic position with current technologies is straining the Pentagon budget, calling into question the ongoing ability of the US to deter and defeat competitors.”

The report, written by USSC’s Brendan Thomas-Noone, says that although the Trump administration appears to understand the importance of investing heavily in military technologies to maintain its advantage, US budget constraints pose a major risk and may prevent any meaningful increase.

“It is possible political discord over the defence budget will prevent congress from authorising spending levels (required),” it says.

The report says the US success or failure in investing more in cutting-edge military technology and innovation will have “profound implications” for Australia and Canberra should take the lead in encouraging more joint projects to explore new military technologies.

“Canberra should seek greater opportunities to co-ordinate and collaborate with Washington on emerging technologies, including by exploring the co-funding of innovative defence procurement organisations,” the report says.

“Whether the US can sustain its military advantage will inform Australia’s national security outlook, the make up of the Australian Defence Force based on the principle of inter-operability with the US, and Australia’s own defence policy,” the report says.

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