*Just for show? Beyond the smokescreen*
*Current Affairs Debate*

Teacher Del, OSL Sant Vicent

**Guess the missing words in the headlines. Watch the videos and check**

**News 1. _____ Show. China's Spectacular Tech Display**

**News 2. The Sky as a Digital Screen: China's _____ Revolution**

LIVEWORKSHEETS

**Debate**

## The Future of Automation and Control

### 1. Soft Power vs. Military Power

The news anchors state that China uses these shows as a "soft demonstration" instead of a traditional military parade.

- **Question:** Is a 3D drone show or a Kung Fu robot display more "intimidating" to other countries than a display of tanks and missiles? Why or why not?
- **The Debate:** Does "controlling complexity" (AI) represent more power in 2026 than "physical force" (weapons)?

### 2. The "Normalization" of Surveillance

The drone show is meant to "normalize" the presence of thousands of machines in the sky so people aren't afraid of them.

- **Question:** Is it a good thing that we are becoming "comfortable" with thousands of autonomous machines flying over our heads?
- **The Debate:** At what point does a "beautiful light show" turn into a "scary surveillance system"? Where should we draw the line?

### 3. Humans vs. Algorithms

The first video mentions robots replacing an **aging workforce**, and the second one mentions AI managing **urban infrastructure**.

- **Question:** If AI can manage our power grids, transport, and factory labor more efficiently than humans, should we let it?
- **The Debate:** What happens to the "human element" in a city that is managed entirely by algorithms? Are we losing control or gaining freedom?

## "Show" vs. Reality

### 4. Choreography vs. Autonomy

The first video highlights that the Kung Fu was **pre-programmed**, while the drone video video notes that drones are **autonomous nodes** that adjust to wind and interference in real-time.

- **Question:** Which is more impressive: a robot that can perform a perfect, pre-set dance, or a drone that can navigate a windy sky on its own?
- **The Debate:** If a machine is just "following a script," can we really call it "Intelligent"?

### 5. The "Stress Test" Strategy

The drone show is described as a "public stress test" under extreme loads.

- **Question:** Should critical infrastructure technology (like the systems that will run our power grids) be tested in public "festive" events, or should it be kept in private laboratories until it is 100% safe?

## The Ethical Dilemma

### 6. The Global "Arms Race"

Both videos mention a race between China, the U.S., and other nations for AI dominance.

- **Question:** Does this "AI Arms Race" make the world safer because technology is advancing faster, or more dangerous because countries are rushing to show off systems that might still have "bugs"?

### 7. Economic Priority

China is spending tens of billions on these technologies to offset (=counteract) its shrinking workforce.

- **Question:** If a country has an aging population, should it spend its money on **policies to fight low birth rates** or on **developing robots** to do the work the humans can no longer do?

## On a more lighthearted note...

*"If you could have a 'Swarm' of 1,000 tiny drones or one 'Humanoid' robot to help you in your daily life, which would you choose, and what specific problem would you ask it to solve?"*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

*For 1B2 students, summaries can be provided:*

**News 1. The Future of Humanoid Robots: China's Spectacular Tech Display**

During the recent Lunar New Year, China captured global attention by showcasing its massive advancements in robotics. At the center of the celebrations was the CMG Spring Festival Gala, a televised event with over a billion viewers—an audience size comparable to the American Super Bowl. The show served as a major touchstone for the country, demonstrating how Beijing intends to dominate the future of industrial manufacturing.

The highlight of the event was a groundbreaking performance called "Wubot." This performance featured a spectacular fusion of traditional Chinese culture and cutting-edge technology. Humanoid robots, developed by the robotics company Unitree, shared the stage with young martial artists. Together, they executed incredibly complex moves, including staff fighting, nunchaku sequences, and "drunken boxing."

What amazed the audience was the perfect synchronization between the machines and their human counterparts. The CEO of Unitree explained that this was achieved through extreme precision: every movement was timed to the hundredth of a second to match the rhythm of the music. Furthermore, the technology has progressed at an astonishing rate; these robots are now reportedly 5 to 10 times faster than the models seen just one year ago.

However, while the show looked like a scene from a dystopian sci-fi movie like ***I, Robot***, experts point out that there is a difference between a choreographed show and true intelligence. These robots were pre-programmed to follow a script. Truly autonomous robots—those that think for themselves—still face many "bugs." For example, viral videos often show autonomous robots failing at simple tasks, such as accidentally walking into mirrors or falling over during soccer matches.

Despite these current limitations, the investment in this sector is serious. China is spending tens of billions of dollars on humanoid robots to counteract the economic pressures caused by an aging workforce. By using automation, they hope to maintain productivity as the number of human workers decreases.

Finally, this technology has significant military implications. There is a growing AI arms race between global powers. The U.S. Department of Defense is also investing billions into autonomous systems, such as drones and ground vehicles. This suggests that the future of both the economy and the battlefield will increasingly be driven by complex algorithms.

**Source:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUmlv814aJo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPEGve_U1cY
**Humanoid Robots Perform in China's 2026 Lunar New Year Gala**

**News 2. The Sky as a Digital Screen: China's Drone Revolution**

On New Year's Eve 2026, the skylines of China's major cities were transformed into massive 3D displays. Thousands of drones rose simultaneously, creating dynamic light shows that looked like science fiction come to life. While the general public enjoyed the beautiful spectacle, engineers and military analysts saw something much more significant: a public demonstration of swarm intelligence and advanced autonomous control systems.

**The Technology of the Swarm.** Controlling a few drones is simple, but managing thousands in the same airspace is an incredible engineering feat. Each drone acts as an "autonomous node," meaning it has its own sensors, computing power, and navigation. While they receive a general mission from a central system, the drones must make real-time adjustments to avoid collisions, compensate for wind, and handle signal interference. If one drone fails, the AI system instantly adjusts the formation so the audience never notices a missing "pixel" in the sky.

**Strategic Meaning and Soft Power.** Behind the entertainment lies a strategic message. China is using these light shows as a "soft demonstration" of its technological strength. Instead of showing off weapons in a traditional military parade, the country is showcasing its ability to control highly complex autonomous systems. This sends a signal to the world that their technology is scalable and ready for "real-world" exploitation in areas like logistics, search and rescue, and infrastructure management.

**A Training Ground for AI.** Every festive show serves as a massive data collection event. Thousands of drones generate a constant stream of information regarding battery status, route deviations, and response to interference. This data is used to train and improve the AI algorithms that control the swarms. In essence, these public celebrations are actually "stress tests" for the smart control systems that will eventually manage the cities of the future.

**Preparing Society for a New Reality.** Finally, these shows serve a social purpose. By filling the sky with beautiful lights, the government is "normalizing" the presence of thousands of drones above cities. This reduces the public's fear of autonomous machines. As people become accustomed to seeing drones overhead, the transition to using them for daily tasks—such as package delivery, traffic monitoring, and building inspections—will be much smoother. What began as a celebration is actually the birth of a new "aerial digital infrastructure," where thousands of machines act together as a single organism.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odbplGPzcx8
**China's Largest Combat Drone Show Breaks World Record at Lunar New Year Gala**

LIVEWORKSHEETS