

China Navy vs US Navy 2023

US Navy Modernization Effort.

When U.S. Navy leaders unveiled their fourth long-term shipbuilding plan in as many years last April, lawmakers were a bit surprised to see it take the form of 3 alternatives. Alternative 3 was ultimately approved which budgeted, among smaller ships, 2 Virginia class attack submarines and 2 Arleigh Burke class Destroyers. No new carriers are planned until 2028.

With \$1.9 billion requested in FY 2024, the Department proposes to finance the seventh increment of funding for the third Ford-class carrier, USS Enterprise (CVN 80), and the sixth increment of funding for the fourth Ford-class carrier, USS Doris Miller (CVN 81).

Note that the Senate Appropriations Committee's past defense spending proposal would have added \$4 billion to the Navy budget — money the Navy did not seek and much of which the Armed Services and House Appropriations panels did not approve — for warships built largely by the constituents of senior appropriators.

In the meantime, the Navy is trying to stay nimble enough to take advantage of developments in the field of drones and autonomous weapons. The service has long wrestled with how to count unmanned vessels in its long-term fleet plans, and has struggled to convince Congress that it has a solid vision for harnessing them. But a year after the Bahrain-based Task Force 59 began vigorous real-world experiments with drones above, on, and under the surface of Mideast waters, the Navy appears to be learning quickly and is determined to apply the lessons that emerge.

Another problem is our supply chain. Much of our Military procurement materials are provided by foreign entities. For example, the United States is completely dependent on a single Chinese company for the chemical needed to produce the solid rocket fuel used to propel HELLFIRE missiles. As current U.S. on-hand supplies diminish, our military will be reliant on the Chinese supplier to provide this critical chemical—butanetriol—in the quantities needed to maintain this missile system. HELLFIRE missiles are a widely used, reliable, and effective weapon launched from ships, attack helicopters, and unmanned drones. They are a critical component in America's arsenal.

The US Navy currently counts 243 total units in its active naval inventory. This total includes frontline commissioned vessels but excludes smaller patrol vessels, auxiliary / survey ships, replenishment, and historical ceremonial types.

China's Navy Modernization Effort

This is the top focus of U.S. defense planning and budgeting.

China's naval modernization effort has been underway for more than 25 years, since the early to mid-1990s, and has transformed China's navy into a much more modern and capable force. China's navy is a formidable military force within China's near seas region, and it is conducting a growing number of operations in the broader waters of the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and waters around Europe.

China's navy is, by far, the largest of any country in East Asia, and sometime between 2015 and 2020 it surpassed the U.S. Navy in numbers of battle force ships (meaning the types of ships that count toward the quoted size of the U.S. Navy). DOD states that China's navy "is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 340 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, aircraft carriers, and fleet auxiliaries. This figure does not include approximately 85 patrol combatants and craft that carry anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM). The overall battle force [of China's navy] is expected to grow to 400 ships by 2025 and 440 ships by 2030."

The U.S. Navy, by comparison, included 243 battle force ships at the end of FY2022, and the Navy's FY2023 budget projects that the Navy will include 290 or 291 battle force ships by the end of FY2030. U.S. military officials and other observers are expressing concern or alarm regarding the pace of China's naval shipbuilding effort and resulting trend lines regarding the relative sizes and capabilities of China's navy and the U.S. Navy. China's naval modernization effort encompasses a wide array of ship, aircraft, weapon, and C4ISR (command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) acquisition programs, as well as improvements in logistics, doctrine, personnel quality, education and training, and exercises.

China's navy currently has certain limitations and weaknesses, which it is working to overcome. China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, is assessed as being aimed at developing capabilities for, among other things, addressing the situation with Taiwan militarily, if need be; achieving a greater degree of control or domination over China's near-seas region, particularly the South China Sea; defending China's commercial sea lines of communication (SLOCs), particularly those linking China to the Persian Gulf; displacing U.S. influence in the Western Pacific; and asserting China's status as the leading regional power and a major world power. Observers believe China wants its navy to be capable of acting as part of an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) force—a force that can deter U.S. intervention in a conflict in China's near-seas region over Taiwan or some other issue, or failing that, delay the arrival or reduce the effectiveness of intervening U.S. forces.

The U.S. Navy has taken a number of actions to counter China's naval modernization effort. Among other things, the U.S. Navy has shifted a greater percentage of its fleet to the Pacific; assigned its most-capable new ships and aircraft to the Pacific; maintained or increased general presence operations, training and developmental exercises, and engagement and cooperation with allied and other navies in the Indo-Pacific; increased the planned future size of the Navy; initiated, increased, or accelerated numerous programs for developing new military technologies and acquiring new ships, aircraft, unmanned vehicles, and weapons; developed new operational concepts for countering Chinese maritime A2/AD forces; and signaled that the Navy in coming years will shift to a more-distributed fleet architecture that will feature a substantially greater use of unmanned vehicles by 2030.

US Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in February at the National Press Club in Washington that China's navy "has significant advantages over its US rival, including a bigger fleet and greater shipbuilding capacity,"

The US must upgrade its fleet in response, he said, as the PLA Navy has about 340 ships and the number is increasing, while the US has less than 300, according to the CNN report.

Del Toro claimed that US naval shipyards cannot match the output of Chinese ones, as China has more shipyards while the US lacks skilled labor. Much of which was caused by outsourcing labor to foreign entities.

The US Navy fleet still leads the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy by far in terms of actual capabilities, which are reflected more by total displacement rather than number of ships, they said.

In recent years, the PLA Navy has indeed made huge strides and built dozens of modern warships, including those of the Type 052D and Type 055 destroyers, the Type 075 amphibious assault ship, plus the *Fujian*, an electromagnetic catapult-equipped aircraft carrier. However, they serve the needs of China's normal and rightful national defense modernization amid the country's growing comprehensive national strength and complicated national security situation. Even so, the US Navy is presently still far ahead of the PLA Navy overall, experts said. The US Navy operates 11 nuclear-powered super carriers and uses the most cutting-edge nuclear-powered submarines.

The Chinese Type 055 Destroyer

Launch started in 2017, these 13,000-ton stealth guided-missile destroyers are considered by many to be the most powerful surface combatants in the world.

The Type 055, big enough to be considered a cruiser by NATO standards, is equipped with 112 vertical launch tubes that can be used to fire everything from anti-ship missiles to long-range land-attack missiles.

“This ship in particular has a sophisticated design, stealth features, radars, and a large missile inventory. It is larger and more powerful than most US, Japanese, and South Korean destroyers,” RAND Corp. senior analyst Timothy Heath told CNN in 2018, when Beijing launched two of the warships in a single day – a testament to China’s impressive shipbuilding capabilities.

A US Congressional Research Service report in March said at least 10 Type 055s are thought to have been launched or are under construction.

China's new destroyers: 'Power, prestige and majesty'



The deployment of the Type 055s, to the Sea of Japan for drills amid growing tensions over Taiwan, was championed by China’s state-run Global Times tabloid.

The potency of the Type 055 was underlined in footage that emerged on social media in April 2022. It showed one launching a hypersonic YJ-21 anti-ship ballistic missile – a weapon often referred to as a “carrier killer.”

“If the US does not make military provocations against China, including over the Taiwan question, it does not need to worry about the missiles,” China’s state run news agency said.

The Navy didn't take the China challenge seriously for a long time. Now we're scrambling to fix problems that could have been solved long ago.