

Six Reasons Why China and Russia Are Catching Up with the U.S. Military

Why the Gap In Military Superiority Is Closing

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [Asia](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

China and Russia are still behind the U.S. militarily. But they are both showing surprising breakthroughs that – sometime down the road in the future – could threaten U.S. hegemony.

The Washington Times [reported](#) last month:

Defense Secretary Ashton Carter on Wednesday warned Russia and China are **quickly closing the military technology gap** with the U.S. as inconsistent military budgets and slower innovation threaten America's lead in the military world.

"It's evident that nations like Russia and China have been pursuing military modernization programs to close the technology gap with the United States," he continued. "They're developing platforms designed to thwart our traditional advantages of power projection and freedom of movement. They're developing and fielding new and advanced aircraft and ballistic, cruise, anti-ship and anti-air missiles that are longer-range and more accurate."

The SecDef issued this warning *before* Russia stunned the U.S. with its [long-range missile](#) and [electronic communications-jamming](#) capacities.

How could this be happening, when U.S. military spending [dwarfs](#) that from the rest of the world?

There are six reasons ...

1. Corruption and Pork. America spends a [large percentage of its defense spending](#) on unnecessary military programs that:

- The generals say aren't helpful and don't even *want*
- Redundant personnel, programs and systems which don't increase our war-fighting capacity
- Equipment which is built and then immediately mothballed before it is ever used
- Money is being thrown away on ridiculous things like a Homeland Security

seminar called “Did Jesus Die for Klingons Too?” and [mansions and personal chefs for generals](#)

Indeed – as many lottery winners and star athletes will tell you – it’s easy to piss away even huge sums of money over a couple of years’ time without discipline.

And plain old corruption is [wasting huge sums and dramatically weakening our national security](#).

How much are we talking about?

Well, here’s some indication: [\\$8.5 trillion dollars](#) in taxpayer money doled out by Congress to the Pentagon since 1996 ... has never been accounted for.

2. Fighting the Wrong Wars. A closely-related issue is that the war-fighting assets are being squandered, spread thin and distracted by fighting wars which *decrease* our national security.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were the [most expensive in U.S. history](#), costing between between \$4 trillion and \$6 trillion dollars.

And we spent additional boatloads of money carrying out regime change in Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

But these wars have only [caused ISIS](#) and [the Taliban](#) to [flourish](#).

Indeed, the majority of our defense spending is – literally – making us *less* secure because we’re spending money [to fight the wrong wars](#):

- We’re overthrowing the moderates who help insure stability
- We’re arming and supporting brutal dictators ... which is one of the main reasons that terrorists want to attack the U.S.
- We’ve fought a series of wars for petrochemicals, instead of security
- We expend huge sums of money on mass surveillance ... but top security experts agree that mass surveillance makes us [MORE vulnerable](#) to terrorists (we’re targeting the [wrong guys](#))

3. Never-Ending War Destroys the Economy. We’re in the [longest continuous period of war](#) in U.S. history. The Afghanistan War has been going on for 14 years ... as long as the Civil War ([4 years](#)), WW1 ([4 years](#)) and WW2 ([6 years](#)) COMBINED.

Wars which drag on are [horrible for our economy](#). A weak economy – in turn – makes it more difficult to sustain a leadership role in defense in the long-run.

And Americans are [sick and tired](#) of war. If our national security was *actually* threatened, it might be hard for the government to rouse our commitment and motivation.

4. More Bang for the Buck. China has the [world's largest economy](#) when measured by "purchasing power parity" ... meaning how much Chinese can buy in their their local currency in their local economy. And [see this](#).

Therefore, China can buy locally-produced military parts and services [more cheaply](#) than the U.S. can.

As Bloomberg [noted](#) last year:

The lowest-paid U.S. soldiers earn about \$18,000 a year. In comparison, in 2009, an equivalent Chinese soldier was paid about [a ninth](#) as much. In other words, in 2009, you could hire about nine Chinese soldiers for the cost of one U.S. soldier.

Even that figure doesn't account for health care and veterans' benefits. These are much higher in the U.S. than in [China](#), though precise figures are hard to obtain. This is due to higher U.S. prices for health care, to higher prices in general, and because the U.S. is more generous than China in terms of what it pays its soldiers. Salaries and benefits, combined, account for a significant percentage of military expenditure.

But labor costs aren't the only thing that is cheaper in China. Notice that China's gross domestic product at market exchange rates is only two-thirds of its GDP at purchasing power parity. This means that, as a developing country, China simply pays lower prices for a lot of things. Some military inputs — oil, for example, or copper — will be bought on world markets, and PPP won't matter. For others, like complicated machinery, costs are pretty similar. But other things — food or domestically manufactured products — will be much cheaper for the U.S.'s developing rivals than for the U.S.

Those who follow global security issues have [known](#) about this issue for a long time. But somehow, this fact hasn't penetrated the consciousness of pundits or made its way into pretty, tweet-able graphs.

5. Theft. The [U.S. Naval Institute](#), [Fiscal Times](#) and others document that the Chinese have greatly accelerated their weapons development timeline by spying on the West and shamelessly copying our military inventions and designs.

If the NSA and other spying agencies had used their resources to stop foreign governments from stealing our crown jewels – instead of using them to gain [petty advantages](#) for a handful of knuckleheads – we'd be a lot better off today.

6. Geography. Russia is almost [twice the size](#) of the U.S. Russia and China together are [so massive](#) – forming such a giant swath of land-based territory, so much closer to the Middle East than America is – that it gives their militaries an advantage.

Bloomberg [points out](#):

The U.S., situated in the peaceful, relatively unpopulated Western Hemisphere, is **very far away from the location of any foreseeable conflict**. China isn't going to invade Colorado (sorry, "Red Dawn" fans!), but it might invade Taiwan or India. **Simply getting our forces to the other side of the world would require enormous up-front expenditures.**

The National Interest notes:

“Defeating China in these scenarios [Taiwan and South China Sea] could nonetheless be difficult and costly for the United States’ primarily as a result of the geographic advantages that China enjoys, as well as specific systems capabilities.”

A recent RAND report, “[The US China Military Scorecard](#),” ... argues that China is catching up to the U.S., is becoming more assertive and confident, and **has geography on its side**.

And Russia’s proximity to Ukraine, the Baltics and other neighboring countries gives it a [huge advantage](#).

Postscript: Sadly, because we’ve squandered our resources, war games [show](#) that the U.S. is no longer invincible.

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