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# Hey China: U.S. is Prepping New Ship-Killing Missiles, Too

By [Spencer Ackerman](#) [Email](#) [Author](#)

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Yeah, yeah, so the Chinese are working hard on a potentially deadly ballistic missile, designed to kill ships. That missile has [long prompted](#) a lot of [debate](#) about whether surface ships are ultimately a losing proposition for the U.S. Navy. If so, no one's told the seafarers, who are moving forward with their own anti-ship missile upgrade.

Yesterday, Darpa and the Navy awarded Lockheed Martin \$218 million to develop and test an experimental Long Range Anti-Ship Missile, a program to knock out enemy ships using guided missiles even when an adversary (read: China China China) is jamming the Navy's GPS. The LRASM — “el-razzem” — will come in an air-launched version and a ship-launched one. It'll use sensors made by BAE Systems to help it select targets autonomously. Lockheed vice president Rick Edwards boasted in a [statement](#) that the missiles will provide extraordinary range, willful penetration of ship self defense systems and precise lethality in denied combat environments.”

Exactly how extraordinary that range is remains unclear, making the program rather oddly named. A Lockheed spokesman said the company was hesitant to give out that information without the Navy's say-so; and the Navy and Darpa are currently conferring to see if the range can be made public. I'll update when and if I can, but at the very least, the missile will have to travel further than the 150 miles that aging anti-ship missiles like the [AGM-84 Harpoon](#) can reach. At least Darpa and the Navy are pinky-swearing that the missile will travel far and wide.

In any event, longer-range anti-ship missiles send a certain message: *don't bother developing a navy that can rival ours*. Shipbuilding is expensive, which is one of the reasons the Chinese covet their [DF-21D “carrier killer”](#): it's a good tool to back a ship way out of your waters. But the People's Liberation Army Navy is [building its own aircraft carrier](#) and expanding its own surface fleet. The U.S. Navy anticipates having the LRASM by 2013 — which essentially adds years onto the timetable for when China's navy can outperform the U.S.' No wonder Adm. Gary Roughead, the U.S.' top naval officer, isn't [out of joint over Chinese seapower](#).

And then there's what comes next for shipboard defense: [lasers and electromagnetic railguns](#). The lasers burn through incoming anti-ship missiles; while the railgun sends a bullet at supersonic speeds to punch through a hull. Neither capability will be ready in the next decade, so consider the LRASM the interim step for distancing the U.S. Navy from its would-be rivals.

It's not that the Chinese anti-ship missile isn't a big deal. Nor is a debate about the future of surface warfare resolved or even put off by the U.S.' countermeasure in building a longer-range missile. It just demonstrates that the U.S. is willing to make other modernizing navies consider the cost of challenging it at sea. And combined with its impending anti-missile lasers, which blunt the alternative to shipbuilding, the U.S. Navy is taking concrete steps over the near future to remain the undisputed master of the high seas. Now to see if it can keep [agile, small missile-equipped boats](#) away...

*Photo: U.S. Southern Command*

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Danger Room senior reporter Spencer Ackerman recently won the 2012 National Magazine Award for Reporting in Digital Media.

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para58

Sorry, but the tone of the complete post sounds like rather fanboyish cheerleading in the face of depressing reality. The mention of lasers and railguns just topped it off.

Those "would-be rivals" have had capabilities that the "undisputed master" is lacking (matter for thought, if the master is undisputed, why so skittish about AShBMs etc?) since their inception. The PLAN alone operates three flavors of supersonic AShMs.

Shipbuilding might be expensive, but look at Chinese shipyard capabilities and those of the US and then the crying may start (we are not even talking about cost-effectiveness here, something the US have not been able to do in years with any new system).

As far as LRASM is concerned...IOC 2013 is wishful thinking. Lockmart needs more than two years alone to create something, that does not exist solely within a PP presentation. On a side-note, Lockmart was the only bidder, with two proposals. Can you spell "cost-overflow" and "delay"?

Its the USN, who is under pressure here, namely to demonstrate, they have the ability to procure something, that is being used by others for some time (please no mention of "extraordinary new capabilities" - thats the part, where every new US system has gone horribly wrong to date).

1 year ago 1 Like

Like



reew

para58,

Well this article is childish and rubbish but you do realize that this is type of journalism we get from reading a tech blogger. Much like garbage crap from Engadget, these places never have anyone with cred to talk any real subject matter

1 year ago in reply to para58

Like



Ian Watson

You say about the shipbuilding, go look up SunBurn missile and wonder why this might be a bit of a pig in a poke story...



1 year ago in reply to para58

Like

**Tamooj**

No, warships are \*not\* sitting ducks to supersonic missiles. If that were true, warships would be sunk all the time by missiles, instead of it being a rarity. Sure, a lone warship can be bushwhacked by (any) missile and sunk, but the combination of layered anti-air defenses, electronic countermeasures and targeting problems are all used to lower this risk. It's a chess game, and it's very complicated - blithely making a simplistic statement like "sitting ducks" this demonstrates a lack of understanding about the dynamics of anti-ship missile engagements.

Similarly, diesel-electric submarines (what I think you really meant to write) can be potent in certain littoral locations, but in order to be even minimally effective they must also be employed properly, and operated by a very well trained crew, and even then they are really only a threat in their home littoral waters. Modern diesel-electric subs, clumsily deployed and operated by ill-trained countries, are not a credible sea-control threat, and only a marginal sea-denial threat. ASW operations against diesel-electric subs is a core competency of many Western navies, and they are damned good at it. Again, know your subject matter please.

1 year ago 1 Like

Like



**Ian Watson**

Oh and last year, wasn't it the Chinese in one of their Russian sourced subs that popped up undetected inside the carrier screen of one of the fleets in the Gulf?

If you really believe that about them not being sitting ducks I would go speak to them at Jane's who might disagree about the Sunburn, the Russians have developed a missile that cannot be evaded, blocked, shot down, jammed or outrun and because of its speed and design, it literally upon impact delivers a crushing blow that shatters the object it strikes, that Chinese Sub who popped up in the screen was loaded with the naval version and that is why the Americans were very cool and reluctant to make the first move.

1 year ago in reply to Tamooj

Like

**reew**

ok





So whose money are US going borrow from to spend for these toys?

1 year ago

Like



**Ian Watson**

Oh well, what can anyone say, the Americans are on top again and always will be according to this rather propagandic article.

But wait a minute, wasn't it a couple of years ago that the Pentagon sheepishly stated to Congress that it was some 15 years behind Russia and China over missile technology and ballistics? Couldn't have been.

And Russia with China being on their third generation of the SunBurn, which is a ship killer, that cannot be shot down, evaded, jammed or defied, America hasn't even got an equivalent to the original SunBurn let alone its descendents.

This article reminds me of Hitler's "super" weapons that were always going to turn the tide of war at the very last moment, when the allies were still out of Europe, people might have believed but the day before he died, he used the "super weapons" line despite everyone in the room knowing the Russian's were a mile from his bunker.

Don't worry, keep calm, America has all these superduper things that will save us from Islam/China/Russia/Al Qaida/Men from Mars/Insert American enemy name here (Delete as applicable)

1 year ago

Like



**SgtBilko**

"Sorry, but the tone of the complete post sounds like rather fanboyish cheerleading in the face of depressing reality."

para58, please note the banner at the top of the web page: it says "Wired," not "Foreign Policy Review."



Complaining about all the fanboys in Wired is like complaining about all the gay guys in a gay bar.

1 year ago

Like

**Tamooj**

Yes, and I think we've seen an awful lot of pictures about the Indian's awesome skills with rockets in recent news. :-)

Oh, declining to purchase Sunburns was the right call since maintaining Russian made military hardware would have been a logistics nightmare; these missiles (the SS-N-22 or 3M80's) have a short range (~150 miles under optimal conditions) and are liquid fueled - a big no-no on board ships. The USN's point defense technology and countermeasures were tested against the attack profile of several supersonic threat missiles and found to be VERY effective. (Go watch YouTube videos of CIWS swatting down incoming artillery rounds).

1 year ago

Like



**Ian Watson**

Oh do behave, the SunBurn and its descendents are still known in the "business" as unstoppable, anyone with the right knowledge could shoot down a shell as it reaches its arc.

The original SunBurn has been carried by the Chinese, the Russians and the Iranians for many years without mishap, yet what is in service now is the grandson of Sunburn, its range extended, faster flying, payload extended to NBC, its terrain following features makes it virtually unspottable on radar, it will now fly round an intervening object, it is the most powerful weapon in its own class and then some, America has been trying to buy them for years.

You ever wonder why the US never went into Iran? Why they stay so far out in the Gulf? It was the Sunburns that did that, go look up the systems and the ones that followed and read about the kinetic focus point of impact that can obliterate a full sized CVN into bite sized chunks just loaded with conventional explosive, just one will do that, you tell me what America has that even close.

1 year ago in reply to Tamooj

Like

**Jackov**





Large, slow surface ships are sitting ducks for diesel subs & supersonic missiles. The Indian-Russian SS-N-26 YAKHONT Mach 2.6 300km cruise missile is on the export market.

1 year ago

Like



**Dust**

"Yesterday, Darpa and the Navy awarded Lockheed Martin \$218 million to develop and test an experimental Long Range Anti-Ship Missile"

Two year old picture, current contract award

1 year ago

Like



**BobbyWong**

Good call, this is 10 year old story reshuffled to stirr the pot during China state visit. Didn't we decline to buy the Sunburn missile from Russia during the Clinton administration?

1 year ago

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