

Special Report: Asia-Pacific Spending Spree

China, Rivalries Drive Naval Buys

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Standing Guard: A Japanese Maritime Defense Force's destroyer Kongo launches a missile off Hawaii. Japan has successfully shot down a ballistic missile over the Pacific. (Agence France-Presse)

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TAIPEI — The Asia-Pacific will comprise 26 percent — nearly \$200 billion — of global naval and maritime security builds in the next 20 years as complex relationships and rivalries drive procurements designed for particular regional challenges.

New builds in Asia and Australia include six aircraft carriers, 128 amphibious and 21 auxiliary ships, 12 corvettes, two cruisers, 42 destroyers, 235 fast attack craft, 115 frigates, 34 mine countermeasures, 82 offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), 255 patrol craft and 116 submarines, said Bob Nugent, vice president of advisory services at AMI International, a naval analysis firm based in Bremerton, Wash.

This list includes China with 172 hulls, South Korea at 145 and Japan at 74, he said.

The OPV market in particular is maturing, with a total regional market forecast for 2013-2030 of \$4.6 billion.

Trends indicate OPVs are not displacing frigates in fleet mix, but OPVs do meet growing demand for “other-than-war” ship designs for maritime security and law enforcement, Nugent said. This makes OPVs more likely to be ships first on the scene at potential flashpoints. The relative simplicity and appeal of OPVs allow local shipyards to take a larger role in designing and building them.

Premium OPVs, at 1,500 tons and up, can successfully substitute for corvettes and frigates for most requirements, Nugent said.

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Singapore's formidable corvette design, Malaysia's second-generation patrol vessel/littoral combat ship and Brunei's OPVs are evidence of a move toward smaller platforms.

However, OPVs appear to be favored among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), who are "more at the lower end with corvettes, light frigates and OPVs, while in northeast Asia, it's larger vessels, including Aegis destroyers and large amphibious vessels, the latter vessels in particular seem more in response to bilateral issues" beyond perceptions of China's military modernization, said Sam Bateman, a senior research fellow in the Maritime Security Program at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. "After all, who is going to invade China?"

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