

“THE HAVES,” US AND CHINESE SSNs IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

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The United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are the two principal strategic competitors in the Asia-Pacific region. Within this broader strategic competition, the underwater-nuclear domain has become a central arena. Both countries are making substantial investments in nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) and nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). However, these two capabilities serve distinct purposes. SSBNs primarily provide nuclear deterrence by ensuring a credible second-strike capability, whereas SSNs are primarily designed to conduct hunter-killer missions, including tracking and, if necessary, engaging adversary SSBNs, as well as escorting carrier strike groups (CSGs) for sea control missions. Consequently, SSNs are amongst the most important capabilities for countering SSBNs. One of the primary reasons both the United States and the PRC are acquiring SSNs is to counter their adversaries’ SSBNs. Understanding SSNs is therefore essential to analysing the dynamics of nuclear deterrence in the Asia-Pacific. This paper examines this issue by analysing and comparing the most recent SSN programmes of the United States and the PRC.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a brief overview of submarine operations before examining the development of US SSN capabilities. Then the next section considers the principal operational areas of US SSNs in the Asia-Pacific and then analyses the latest capabilities of the *Virginia*-class and the future SSN(X), focusing on their displacement, armament, and the integration of hypersonic weapons. The paper then turns to the Chinese SSN fleet. Following the same analytical framework, it first examines the principal operational areas of Chinese SSNs before assessing the capabilities of the Type 093 (also known as *Shang*-class) and the Type 095 (also known as the *Sui*-class), with particular attention to their displacement, armament, and overall operational capabilities. Finally, the paper presents a comparative analysis of the US and Chinese SSN programmes, examining how each country’s SSNs are designed to serve both SSBN countering and CSG escorting missions.

SSN operations in the Asia-Pacific

As briefly discussed above, SSN operations in the Asia-Pacific can be broadly classified into two primary missions: (1) countering SSBN capabilities and (2) escorting CSGs. The former is closely associated with nuclear deterrence, whereas the latter reflects the traditional sea power function of controlling and protecting key sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Both missions are particularly important in the Asia-Pacific because of the region’s geopolitical characteristics. First of all, the Asia-Pacific is fundamentally a maritime region. Consequently, its principal flashpoints, including the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait, are all maritime domains. As

a result, strategic competition between the United States and the PRC is also primarily taking place at sea. In this context, maintaining credible naval capabilities is essential to advancing both deterrence and broader strategic objectives in the region.

Secondly, owing to its maritime geography, the Asia-Pacific maritime domain encompasses some of the world's most critical chokepoints for global maritime trade. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, around one-third of global shipping traverses the South China Sea.¹ Moreover, the significance of the maritime trade passing through this region extends beyond its economic value. For countries such as Japan, the PRC, and the Republic of Korea (ROK), sea lanes such as the South China Sea serve as vital maritime gateways through which they import key energy resources. For instance, as of 2023, approximately 43 per cent of global seaborne oil shipments passed through the South China Sea. Of these shipments, around 50 per cent were destined for the PRC, 14 per cent for the ROK, and 12 per cent for Japan.² More importantly, these sea lanes are closely associated with regional strategic competition. Consequently, the naval capability to secure them is directly linked to national security in the region.

Thirdly, CSGs continue to play a major role in controlling and protecting these critical SLOCs in the Asia-Pacific. Consequently, the role of SSNs in escorting CSGs is equally crucial. By providing lethal undersea capabilities that can silently target threats across multiple domains, including surface and subsurface targets, SSNs can effectively eliminate threats to aircraft carriers. This is particularly important for the United States, given the vast distance between the US mainland and the maritime flashpoints of the Asia-Pacific. This means that, compared with the PRC, the United States faces greater challenges in projecting its air power into the region. To address this challenge, the United States permanently deploys an aircraft carrier to the Seventh Fleet, based in Yokosuka, Japan, and it is common for more than one CSG to be present in the Asia-Pacific region at any given time.³ Likewise, the PRC is rapidly developing its own CSG capability to counterbalance that of the United States. Consequently, SSNs play a critical role both in escorting friendly CSGs and in countering those of potential adversaries, reflecting the strategic maritime geography of the Asia-Pacific.

Fourthly, the two principal competitors in the strategic rivalry – the United States and the PRC – are both nuclear-armed states and rely on the maritime domain to ensure the credibility of their second-strike capabilities. This means that undersea dominance in the Asia-Pacific could translate into escalation dominance in the event of a nuclear conflict. Therefore, to achieve such escalation dominance, both the United States and the PRC require sophisticated SSNs capable of countering an adversary's SSBNs. This

¹ China Power Team, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" July 6, 2026, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

² U.S. Energy Information Administration, "South China Sea," March 21, 2024, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/South_China_Sea.

³ USNI News, "Fleet Tracker," 3 August 2026, <https://news.usni.org/category/fleet-tracker>.

demonstrates that SSN operations are directly related to nuclear deterrence in the Asia-Pacific, extending beyond conventional naval strategic concerns.

In summary, SSN operations are associated with both conventional missions to protect and control SLOCs and strategic missions related to nuclear deterrence by countering SSBNs. These roles are particularly critical in the Asia-Pacific because of the region's unique maritime geopolitics. Against this backdrop, the next section examines the development of the US SSN fleet in the Asia-Pacific.

US SSN development in the Asia-Pacific

US SSN operational areas

The United States acquires and deploys its SSNs both to secure critical SLOCs and to achieve escalation dominance vis-à-vis the PRC in the Asia-Pacific. This logic can be understood by examining the major operational areas of US SSNs in the region. Although the operational areas of US SSNs are classified, their likely areas of operation can be inferred by tracking the movements of US CSGs, which are often accompanied by SSNs.⁴ On this basis, the operational footprint of US SSNs extends across much of the Asia-Pacific. As discussed, one US CSG is permanently deployed to the Asia-Pacific as part of the Seventh Fleet, based in Yokosuka, Japan. In addition, it is common for at least one other CSG or Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) to be operating in the region.⁵ For example, according to the US Naval Institute Fleet and Marine Tracker for 3 August 2026, two CSGs were operating in the Asia-Pacific: one near Vietnam and the other near Hawaii.⁶ This suggests that US SSNs routinely operate across the region, from the South China Sea to Hawaii.

Even the operational areas of US SSNs clearly demonstrate that the objectives of US SSN operations include both countering SSBN capabilities and securing sea lanes by escorting CSGs. The South China Sea constitutes a critical SLOC for the United States and its allies, meaning that maintaining naval superiority in the region is directly related to safeguarding this vital maritime route.⁷ As discussed, for the United States, this role is primarily fulfilled through the presence of CSGs. Given the considerable distance between the US

⁴ Dick Corpus and Kevin Eyer, "Independent but Integrated," *Proceedings* 144, (2018): <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018/october/independent-integrated>.

⁵ An Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) is a US Navy formation centred on an amphibious assault ship capable of operating fixed-wing aircraft, accompanied by surface warships and other supporting vessels. SSNs also often escort ESG in a similar manner to CSG. Although its structure resembles that of a CSG, its primary mission is to conduct amphibious operations and support power projection ashore, whereas a CSG primarily focuses on sea control and air superiority. Regarding this, please see Susan G. Hutchins et al., "Expeditionary Strike Group: Command Structure Design Support," Naval Postgraduate School, June 2005, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/2b812b39-c7fc-4dae-8134-96cd8e761dc1/content>.

⁶ U.S. Naval Institute Staff, "USNI News Fleet and Marine Tracker: Aug. 3, 2026," *USNI News*, August 3, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/08/03/usni-news-fleet-and-marine-tracker-aug-3-2026>.

⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "South China Sea."

mainland and the South China Sea, SSNs are required to escort and support these CSGs during their operations.

These areas are also important in terms of escalation dominance. Yulin Naval Base, located on the southern coast of Hainan Island, is a strategic hub for the PRC's nuclear submarine fleet and serves as a major base for its SSBN fleet.⁸ The presence of US SSNs in the South China Sea could therefore counterbalance the PRC's escalation dominance capabilities by threatening its SSBNs. Accordingly, the deployment of US SSNs to the region also reflects their hunter-killer role in tracking and, if necessary, targeting Chinese SSBNs.

Furthermore, the forward deployment of US SSNs to the South China Sea implies that their operational areas also extend to the Taiwan Strait and the East China Sea, two other major flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific region. This demonstrates that US SSNs are prepared to conduct operations in these contested areas, potentially involving both CSG escort and SSBN-targeting missions.

Assessing the newest capabilities: *Virginia*-class SSNs and the future SSN(X)

The *Virginia*-class SSN began to be procured by the USN in fiscal year (FY) 1998, with the first submarine entering service in October 2004. The *Virginia*-class remains the newest class of SSN in operational service with the USN and constitutes a significant portion of the US submarine fleet. The initial design of the *Virginia*-class SSN had a submerged displacement of approximately 7,800 tonnes. These *Virginia*-class SSNs can carry approximately 25 torpedoes as well as 12 Tomahawk cruise missiles, demonstrating that they are designed to perform multiple roles, including hunter-killer and CSG escort missions, with the capability to engage surface, subsurface, and land targets.⁹

In the meantime, the USN recently reclassified the payload module-equipped *Virginia*-class submarines as nuclear-powered cruise-missile submarines (SSGNs), reflecting their enhanced combat capabilities and ability to carry additional Tomahawk cruise missiles.¹⁰ These reclassified SSGNs have a submerged displacement of approximately 10,200 tonnes and can carry an additional 28 Tomahawk cruise missiles.¹¹ More importantly, these new models are expected to be equipped with hypersonic weapons, further

⁸ Matthew P. Funaiole et al., "A Glimpse of Chinese Ballistic Missile Submarines," Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 4, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/glimpse-chinese-ballistic-missile-submarines>.

⁹ Ronald O'Rourke, *Navy Virginia (SSN-774) Class Attack Submarine Procurement: Background and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, 2023), 5-6.

¹⁰ US Navy, "Navy to Reclassify Virginia Payload Module-equipped SSNs to SSGNs, Unleashing Next-Generation Strike Power," August 3, 2026, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4562527/navy-to-reclassify-virginia-payload-module-equipped-ssns-to-ssgns-unleashing-ne/>.

¹¹ Rourke, *Navy Virginia (SSN-774) Class Attack Submarine Procurement*, 6.

enhancing their lethality against surface, subsurface, and land targets.¹² These developments demonstrate that the new *Virginia*-class SSGNs possess significantly greater strike capabilities and lethality than the previous model across multiple mission areas.

The USN's next-generation attack submarine (SSN(X)) programme is still in the early stages of development, with the USN aiming to acquire the first SSN(X) between FY2035 and FY2040. The SSN(X) is expected to have a submerged displacement of approximately 10,100 tonnes, which is larger than that of the initial *Virginia*-class SSN and approximately the same as that of the reclassified *Virginia*-class SSGNs.¹³ This larger displacement suggests that the SSN(X) is being designed to provide greater endurance than the original *Virginia*-class SSNs while accommodating more sophisticated weapons systems. In the meantime, the detailed armament configuration of the SSN(X) remains unclear. However, the USN has stated:

SSN(X) will be designed to increase to counter the growing threat posed by adversaries in strategic competition for undersea supremacy. It will provide greater speed, increased horizontal [i.e., torpedo room] payload capacity, improved signatures, flexibility to adapt to future threats, and higher operational availability.¹⁴

This means that the SSN(X) will likely be equipped with advanced weapon systems, including hypersonic weapons capable of effectively engaging surface and subsurface targets, while also carrying Tomahawk missiles in a manner similar to the reclassified *Virginia*-class SSGNs for strikes against land targets. In the meantime, its increased torpedo payload capacity suggests that the SSN(X) will be further optimised for hunter-killer missions targeting adversaries' SSBNs.

Overall, the *Virginia*-class SSNs and SSGNs, as well as the SSN(X), are designed to support US operations aimed at securing key SLOCs in the Asia-Pacific while maintaining sufficient capabilities to achieve escalation dominance in the region. These submarines are designed to fulfil these mission requirements while operating at considerable distances from the US mainland, and their operational areas also align with these mission objectives.

¹² Rojoef Manuel, "US Navy Categorizes Next-Gen Virginia Submarines as Guided Missile Vessels," *The Defense Post*, August 5, 2026, <https://thedefensepost.com/2026/08/05/us-virginia-guided-missile-submarines/>.

¹³ Ronald O'Rourke, "Navy Next-Generation Attack Submarine (SSN[X]) Program: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, December 4, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11826>.

¹⁴ O'Rourke, "Navy Next-Generation Attack Submarine (SSN[X]) Program: Background and Issues for Congress."

Chinese SSN development in the Asia-Pacific

Chinese SSN development is also aimed at both securing critical SLOCs and countering US SSBN operations in the Asia-Pacific region. The PRC's most recent SSN, the Type 093, and its future design, the Type 095, have both been developed to fulfil these mission requirements.

Chinese SSN operational areas

Indeed, compared with US SSN operations, Chinese SSN operations remain largely confined to waters closer to the PRC. However, this does not mean that the Chinese submarine fleet is not designed to perform functions similar to those of US SSNs. In particular, given the presence of US SSBNs in the Asia-Pacific region and the importance of subregions such as the South China Sea as critical SLOCs for the PRC, Beijing has strong incentives to maintain a robust SSN presence in the region for both maritime and nuclear security purposes. This is also related to the so-called “Malacca Dilemma,” which refers to the PRC's geopolitical vulnerability arising from its substantial reliance on the Strait of Malacca for energy imports. Most of the PRC's energy imports originating from the Middle East transit through the Strait of Malacca before passing through the South China Sea.¹⁵ This means that, to safeguard its energy security, the PRC needs to maintain access to and influence over the Strait of Malacca. To achieve this, it requires sufficient naval capabilities to maintain control over the South China Sea.

Chinese SSN operational areas also align with these strategic concerns. Currently, the main operational area of the Chinese SSN fleet is within the First Island Chain, which stretches from the main islands of Japan through Okinawa, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the northern Philippines to Borneo.¹⁶ This operational focus corresponds closely with areas of strategic concern to Beijing, where both maritime and nuclear security considerations are particularly salient. Nonetheless, the operational reach of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is expanding, as demonstrated by its recent surface warship activities. For instance, the PLAN deployed a flotilla of warships around Australia in 2025.¹⁷ Although this deployment did not include SSNs, it demonstrated the PLAN's expanding operational reach. Furthermore, the PLAN has begun to increase its

¹⁵ Paweł Paszak, “China and the “Malacca Dilemma,”” Warsaw Institute, February 28, 2021, <https://warsawinstitute.org/china-malacca-dilemma/>.

¹⁶ Bea Castañeda, “The First Island Chain: A Guide to Asia-Pacific's Most Contested Geographic Boundary,” *The Defense Post*, June 29, 2026, <https://thedefensepost.com/2026/06/29/first-island-chain-guide/>. See also, Edward Black and Sidharth Kaushal, “Chinese Submarine Warfare – A Natural Evolution or Game Changing Revolution?” Royal United Services Institute, October 16, 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/chinese-submarine-warfare-natural-evolution-or-game-changing-revolution>.

¹⁷ Jennifer Parker, “The Chinese Warships Australian Never Got to Debate,” *The Interpreter*, February 19, 2026, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-warships-australians-never-got-debate>.

CSG operations beyond the First Island Chain.¹⁸ Given that SSNs often escort CSGs during deployments, increased PLAN CSG operations beyond the First Island Chain also raise the possibility of Chinese SSN operations expanding beyond waters close to the PRC. Overall, the expanding operational reach of Chinese SSNs implies that the PRC may increasingly possess the capability to conduct both SLOC control operations and missions aimed at countering adversaries' second-strike capabilities beyond its immediate vicinity.

Assessing the newest capabilities: Type 093 and type 095 SSNs

The most recent Chinese SSNs currently in service belong to the Type 093. The initial Type 093 SSN was commissioned in 2006. However, the PLAN has continued to refine the original design, resulting in two additional variants of the Type 093: the Type 093A and Type 093B. Given that the Type 093A and Type 093B constitute the mainstay of China's SSN fleet, this section focuses on these two variants.

Type 093A SSNs have a submerged displacement of approximately 7,000 tonnes and can carry approximately 22 torpedo-sized weapons.¹⁹ However, in a manner similar to the development of the *Virginia*-class SSN, the PRC developed an improved variant of the Type 093 in the early 2020s to accommodate more sophisticated weapon systems.²⁰ This improved variant, known as the Type 093B, is equipped with 24 vertical launch system (VLS) cells.²¹ This suggests that the Type 093B could carry both cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons, in a manner similar to the *Virginia*-class SSGNs. Interestingly, the Type 093B does not appear to be significantly larger than the earlier Type 093 variants, suggesting that its endurance for long-distance operations may remain broadly similar to that of its predecessors.²²

Details of the Type 095 submarines remain limited, given that they are still under development. According to publicly available analyses, the Type 095 is likely to have a

¹⁸ Bonny Lin et al., "China's Carriers Increasingly Venture Beyond the First Island Chain," Center for Strategic & International Studies, February 25, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-carriers-increasingly-venture-beyond-first-island-chain>.

¹⁹ H I Sutton, "The Chinese Navy's Most Powerful Attack Submarine: The Type-093A," *Naval News*, November 15, 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/11/the-chinese-navys-most-powerful-attack-submarine-the-type-093a/>.

²⁰ Naval Technology, "Shang-Class Nuclear-Powered Attack Submarines, China," February 17, 2023, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/shang-class-nuclear-powered-attack-submarines-china/?cf-view>.

²¹ Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, "Chinese Navy Expanding Nuclear Attack Boat Fleet and Missile Strike Capabilities, ONI Commander Says," *USNI News*, March 5, 2026, <https://news.usni.org/2026/03/05/chinese-navy-expanding-nuclear-attack-boat-fleet-and-missile-strike-capabilities-oni-commander-says>.

²² David Axe, "China Has Another New Submarine Type – and It's a Very Dangerous One," *The Telegraph*, October 22, 2024, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/china-another-submarine-type-very-160854054.html>.

submerged displacement of approximately 9,000 to 10,000 tonnes.²³ Moreover, its armament is expected to be broadly similar to that of the Type 093B. It is expected to carry torpedoes, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons, with the latter two potentially deployed through VLS cells.²⁴ Although it remains uncertain how many of these weapons the Type 095 SSNs will be capable of carrying, their sophisticated weapons systems suggest that the Type 095 will likely inherit and potentially expand upon the missions and operational areas of the Type 093 SSNs.

Overall, these two variants of Chinese SSNs also appear to be developed for both achieving sea control by escorting CSGs and countering the adversary's SSBNs. They are equipped with multi-mission capable weapon systems including torpedoes, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons. These demonstrate that Chinese SSNs are also developed in a similar manner to the US SSNs in the Asia-Pacific region.

Comparing the US and Chinese SSN fleet

This section provides a direct comparison of the SSNs of the United States and the PRC. Table 1 provides an overall summary of the SSNs discussed above.

	OPERATIONAL AREAS	DISPLACEMENT	TORPEDOES	VLS CELLS	HYPERSONIC WEAPONS
<i>Virginia-class</i>	Across the Asia-Pacific	7,800 tonnes (initial design) 10,100 tonnes (reclassified SSGNs)	25 torpedoes	12 cells with Tomahawks (initial design) 28 cells with Tomahawks (reclassified SSGNs)	Likely for reclassified SSGNs
Type 093	Nearby waters of the PRC (Broadley Operatable)	7,000 tonnes (for both initial design and Type 093B)	22 torpedo-sized weapons	24 cells with cruise missiles (Type 093B)	Likely for Type 093B
SSN(X)	Across the Asia-Pacific	10,100 tonnes	Yes, but numbers are not available	Yes, but numbers not available	Likely to be installed
Type 095	Likely to be across the Asia-Pacific	About 9,000–10,000 tonnes	Yes, but numbers are not available	Yes, but numbers not available	Likely to be installed

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF THE US AND CHINESE SSNs

²³ Alex Luck, "First Chinese Type 09V Nuclear Powered Attack Submarine Appears at Bohai," *Naval News*, February 12, 2026, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/02/chinese-type-09v-next-generation-ssn-appears-at-bohai/>.

²⁴ H I Sutton, "China's Own Seawolf-class Submarine: The Type 095," *Naval News*, March 25, 2026, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2026/03/chinas-own-seawolf-class-submarine-the-type-095/>.

Based on this comparison, the US *Virginia*-class generally possesses more sophisticated systems. In particular, US SSNs are generally larger, allowing them to carry more weapons while also providing greater endurance than their Chinese counterparts. The *Virginia*-class can carry more torpedoes and is equipped with a greater number of VLS cells, enabling it to accommodate more cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons. Consequently, for both hunter-killer and CSG escort missions, *Virginia*-class SSNs possess more advanced capabilities than the Type 093 variants. In particular, their larger torpedo capacity provides more opportunities to engage SSBNs and surface vessels, while their greater VLS capacity enables them to launch more cruise and hypersonic missiles against land-based targets.

However, the number of weapon systems and the size of a submarine do not necessarily determine its overall combat capability. Another important factor is the number of submarines operated by each country. In this respect, the United States also maintains a quantitative advantage. The International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance 2026* estimates that the PRC has nine SSNs in service, while the United States operates 24 active *Virginia*-class SSNs.²⁵ The PRC is nevertheless rapidly expanding its SSN fleet, suggesting that the current US advantage in the undersea domain may narrow in the future.²⁶ Based on current fleet size and armament, however, the United States maintains a clear advantage in SSN capabilities.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the SSN operations of the United States and the PRC and compared the capabilities of their respective SSNs – the *Virginia*-class, SSN(X), Type 093, and Type 095. Both US and PRC SSNs were developed to serve hunter-killer missions to maintain escalation dominance while escorting CSGs to secure critical SLOCs, with sophisticated anti-surface, anti-submarine, and land-attack capabilities. Their armaments, including torpedoes, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons, demonstrate these mission requirements. Moreover, SSNs are becoming larger, indicating that these vessels will be able to carry more lethal systems while having greater endurance for long-distance operations. This is especially important for the United States, given that the key SLOCs of the Asia-Pacific are far from its mainland. Meanwhile, the operational areas of the PRC's SSN fleet are currently limited to its nearby waters, but its long-distance operational capabilities are also substantially increasing. Given that the PLAN has gradually expanded its operational areas, its SSNs are also expected to operate beyond the First Island Chain.

²⁵ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2026* (Routledge, 2026), Chapter Two and Chapter Five.

²⁶ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress* (Congressional Research Service, 2025), 8.

Currently, the United States has an advantage over the PRC in terms of SSN fleet capacity. Most of the indicators compared in this paper – displacement, torpedo armament, and the number of VLS cells – demonstrate that the US SSN fleet currently has an advantage over its PRC counterpart. However, US and PRC SSNs are being developed in a similar direction. Both are likely to be equipped with hypersonic weapons, which will enhance their lethality. Admittedly, these capabilities do not fully represent the extent to which SSN fleets are capable of fulfilling their assigned missions. Nonetheless, in terms of fleet size, the United States currently maintains an advantage over the PRC. Meanwhile, the PRC is expanding its SSN fleet more rapidly than the United States, so this balance of power may shift in the future. This means that the United States needs to invest in its shipbuilding capabilities to maintain its current undersea dominance.