



# Everything Decays

## Fight Loss of U.S. Dominance With War Bonds

Order in nature tends to break down; the same is true of civilizations. As an analyst, I find this immutable law both frightening and palpable. Decay will proceed — the only question is at what pace and whether it can be denied.

Fortunately, it can be slowed and even prevented when a country has the will to do so.

America's dominance is waning. We have to get over the shock that our technologies are no longer absolutely superior, our arsenal without peer, our ability to influence world affairs without question. Some will argue with this view. Let's examine the facts.

The Chinese Navy has 283 ships, roughly the same as the U.S. More worrying is the quality of the ships. The latest generation, the Type 052D, is an Aegis-class air-defense destroyer that carries equivalent capabilities to our own — phased-array radar, anti-air, anti-ship and land attack capabilities. Its adaptable and modular vertical launch system is the largest and some say most sophisticated in the world. On our end, we seem to be struggling to perfect the mission modules for our latest design, the littoral combat ship.

The Chinese have flown the J-20, a fifth-generation fighter jet with a configuration that suggests a superior range, maneuverability and weapons payload to both the F-22 and F-35. The Russians are not far behind with the T-50.

Other examples can be found in cybersecurity, anti-access, missile technology, counter-stealth technology, even industrial policy.

The world is unstable and getting worse. The Middle East is in flames, at least metaphorically. China is causing tremendous angst in the South and East China seas. Almost daily incursions into Japanese territorial space and other provocations with Taiwan and other neighbors are changing the way we think about China's "rise."

Japan has elected a new prime minister who argues the nation should abandon its post-World War II pacifist constitution and its purely defensive posture. U.S. foes North Korea and Iran are still there, but

with longer-range ballistic missiles and either existing or imminent nuclear weapons.

Of equal concern is our willingness to fund our way of life. The average American has become woefully insensitive to the nature of the world we live in. Our lives revolve around iPhones, flat-screen TVs and Super Slurpees. We take the short view, and our allies seem to be following us. What happened to American self-determination?

In the waning days of World War II, the U.S. spent 37 percent of GDP on defense; during the Korean conflict, the equivalent was 15 percent. During Vietnam and the Cold War, it hovered around 10 percent. During the post-9/11 wars, it never got much above 5 percent.

Today, excluding costs associated with overseas operations, we sit at 3.6 percent. After sequestration, it will be 2.9 percent — less than Algeria, Angola, Armenia and Azerbaijan (those are just the countries starting with the letter A).

Just because we are bringing our troops home doesn't mean the problem has gone away. The 9/11 attack may seem a distant event, but many state and nonstate actors actively plan our demise.

An effective cyberattack could shut down the U.S. financial system or electric grid for weeks. Some estimates put casualties in the thousands if the grid collapses for a prolonged period during the winter. Spending 10 percent of GDP on defense is no longer politically palatable, but 4 percent seems more reasonable than 2.9 percent, given the threats we face.

I understand that money does not grow on trees. With almost \$17 trillion in debt, we can't keep playing by the same rules. I'm not advocating cutting entitlement programs so we can buy more arms; that's a poor choice. So here's a different idea.

The U.S. Army and the other services have Facebook pages with hundreds of thousands of followers. If nothing else, Americans are patriotic. While much of the world does not relish U.S. leadership, as soon as we pull back from places like Palestine, there are loud protestations over our absence. We need to invest in our world view; that means maintaining a

quantitative and qualitative edge over those who would do us or our friends harm. But we must do so without increasing our debt or gutting social programs.

After 9/11, the Treasury issued Patriot Bonds. Average citizens buying these bonds enjoyed a reasonable yield while contributing to the nation's recovery, but the money flowed into the Treasury's general fund, so there was no guarantee of how the dollars were spent.

I propose establishing a "Freedom Recapitalization Bond," with the proceeds going directly to the Pentagon. They would still increase overall government debt, but it would be held by Americans, and perhaps some patriots might even agree to zero-interest bonds or charitable contributions if they knew where the money was going.

Christmas is a time of giving. Perhaps we should re-evaluate what's important and how we can slow the inexorable decay of capabilities in the absence of investment. War bonds once played a role in helping us overcome huge challenges. Their time may have come again. Without constant vigilance, military capabilities fall into disrepair or obsolescence. Ignorance and indifference have the same effect — erosion and decay. ■



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