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[Gates: Limit Expectations in Afghanistan](#)

*Defense News* – January 22

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Jan. 27 that the United States needed "realistic and limited" objectives in Afghanistan or it would face failure.

"My own personal view is that our primary goal is to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a base for terrorists and extremists to attack the United States and our allies. And whatever else we need to do flows from that objective," he told lawmakers.

Noting that Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, he said "if we set ourselves the objective of creating some sort of a Central Asian Valhalla over there we will lose," he said.

"Because nobody in the world has that much time, patience or money, to be honest," he added in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"It seems to me we ought to keep our objectives realistic and limited in Afghanistan. Otherwise we will set ourselves up for failure," he said.

Valhalla is commonly used as a synonym for heaven, but in the old Norse mythology it was a great hall where heroes slain in battle are received.

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## [U.S. missiles "don't help" Pakistan war effort](#)

Reuters – January 25

U.S. missile attacks on Islamist militants in Pakistan do not help its efforts in the U.S.-led campaign against militancy, a spokesman for President Asif Ali Zardari said on Sunday.

U.S. drones fired missiles into Pakistan late on Friday killing 17 people, intelligence officials and residents said, in the first such strike since Barack Obama became U.S. president.

Pakistan objects to the strikes on its territory, saying they not only a violation of its sovereignty but are counter-productive to its efforts to tackle the militants in its lawless ethnic Pashtun lands on the Afghan border.

Zardari discussed the attacks with U.S. ambassador Anne Patterson at a lunch on Saturday, said the president's spokesman, Farhatullah Babar.

"The president said that these attacks do not help the war on terror," Babar said.

The Daily Times newspaper quoted Zardari telling Patterson: "These attacks can affect Pakistan's cooperation in the war on terror." Babar said he could not comment on the specifics of what was discussed.

The United States, frustrated by an intensifying Afghan insurgency and what it sees as Pakistan's failure to stem the flow of al Qaeda and Taliban fighters from northwest Pakistan into Afghanistan, stepped up the missile attacks last year.

It has carried out about 30 missile attacks, according to a Reuters tally, more than half of them in the last four months of the year.

The attacks killed more than 220 people, including foreign militants, according to reports from Pakistani intelligence agents, district government officials and residents.

There was no sign Friday's strikes hit any of al Qaeda's top leadership.

"COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE"

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said it hoped the new U.S. administration would review the policy, although during his election campaign Obama had spoken of strikes into Pakistan if the Pakistani military was unwilling or unable to tackle militant targets.

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"With the advent of the new U.S. administration it is Pakistan's sincere hope that the United States will review its policy and adopt a more holistic and integrated approach," the ministry said in a statement.

"We maintain that these attacks are counter-productive and should be discontinued," it said.

Pakistani authorities said the drone attacks, which sometimes kill villagers, enrage Pashtun tribesmen and drive them into the arms of the militants when authorities were trying to isolate the militants by winning the tribes to the government side.

The attacks came a day after Obama appointed foreign policy veteran Richard Holbrooke as a special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Obama has ordered a review of the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and is expected to bolster troop levels, perhaps nearly doubling the number of U.S. troops to 60,000 from 32,000.

Pakistani analysts said Holbrooke's appointment showed the new U.S. administration would push a multi-track policy in its efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan, not relying on a surge of troops to do the job.

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## [Sri Lanka army in ghost 'Tiger' town](#)

BBC News – 28 January

Heavy monsoon rains were falling as we approached the outskirts of Mullaitivu in a Sri Lankan armoured personnel carrier.

"We had to fight here for one week or so," said Colonel Arun Aryasinghe, as he showed us a huge earthen defence line constructed by the Tamil Tigers. "It was a very hard battle."

Mullaitivu used to be one of the Tigers' most important bases. Now the Sri Lankan flag flies overhead, and government troops are in complete control.

But they have inherited a ghost town, full of broken buildings. Apart from men in uniform, a stray dog wandering through a burnt-out shop was one of the only signs of life.

When the Tamil Tigers were forced out, they took Mullaitivu's civilian population with them into the surrounding jungles.

### **Guerrilla tactics**

For almost a year, as Sri Lankan troops have advanced from the south, the story has been the same. They have taken territory, boosted by better weapons and weight of numbers.

But the local population has melted away in front of them.

Why has the army suddenly had such striking military success?

It is partly because they have taken on the Tigers at their own game - guerrilla warfare.

They have deployed small teams of fighters deep in the jungle, and sent out highly manoeuvrable boats to take on the Tigers' fledgling navy.

Now the rebels have their backs to the wall, holding a shrinking but still significant piece of land. Estimates of their remaining strength vary, but they are unlikely to go down without a fight.

Some of the fighting is pretty close to Mullaitivu. The sound of shell fire echoes through the empty streets.

Just to the north is the final stretch of Sri Lankan coastline under rebel control. If - and they will say when - government forces reclaim it, the Tigers will be surrounded and cut off from the sea.

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## 'Exaggerated' numbers

International aid agencies say a quarter-of-a-million civilians are already trapped in the war zone, and hundreds of people have been killed and injured. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has spoken of a major humanitarian crisis.

But the man running this war, Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, told me that the numbers were exaggerated.

"It's wrong information," he said, "it is all propaganda. I'm not saying the Red Cross is lying but they are exaggerating."

People who have been into rebel-held territory paint a very different picture, of traumatised civilians moving from place to place with little shelter and no security.

A United Nations spokesman told me that UN staff had seen dozens of people killed by shell fire.

But with his troops patrolling the streets of Mullaitivu, and other towns which had previously been under rebel control, Gotabaya Rajapaksa is scenting victory.

The defence secretary categorically ruled out the prospect of any kind of ceasefire for humanitarian reasons.

"No ceasefire," he said. "Why should we?"

"Every time there is a ceasefire, the LTTE [Tamil Tigers] use that to their own advantage. That's why this war has been dragging on for 30 years."

And his aim now?

"The mission is... eradicating terrorism and destroying the LTTE completely."

But once again - away from the eyes of the world - it is the civilians of northern Sri Lanka who are suffering.

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## [Violence threatens Gaza truce as Obama envoy visits](#)

Reuters – January 29

Palestinian rocket attacks and Israeli air strikes threatened on Thursday to undermine efforts by U.S. President Barack Obama's Middle East envoy to reinforce a fragile Gaza ceasefire.

Palestinian militants in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip launched one rocket into Israel late on Wednesday -- the first since the January 18 ceasefire -- and another on Thursday. No one was hurt.

Israeli aircraft then struck in the southern Gaza Strip, attacking a metal workshop that the military called a weapons factory, causing no casualties, and a motorcycle, wounding two militants and 10 youths passing by, medical workers said.

The surge of violence over the past two days threatened to reignite a war that Israel launched on December 27 with the declared aim of ending cross-border rocket fire.

Former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, Obama's envoy, planned to meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the occupied West Bank following talks on Wednesday in Egypt, which has been trying to broker a long-term truce, and Israel.

Mitchell, repeating Obama's call for a return to peace talks, said it was "of critical importance that the Gaza ceasefire be extended and consolidated."

But with an election approaching on February 10, Israeli leaders have been talking tough on security, a main voter concern.

They have pledged a forceful response to an explosion that killed an Israeli soldier on the Gaza border on Tuesday and to the rockets. Palestinian militants said the rockets were payback for Israel's killing of three Palestinians since the truce began.

"HAMAS MUST LEARN"

" Hamas has to know that these rockets are their responsibility and they will learn that shooting rockets into Israel is simply not in their interest," said Mark Regev, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Some 1,300 Palestinians, including at least 700 civilians, were killed during Israel's 22-day offensive in the Gaza Strip, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in the territory.

Israel put its losses at 10 soldiers and three civilians.

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In Jerusalem on Wednesday, Mitchell said any durable truce must end smuggling into the Gaza Strip and reopen border crossings to relieve Israel's economic blockade of the enclave, where half the 1.5 million population depend on food aid.

Olmert told Mitchell that Israel would not reopen any Gaza crossings, except for aid shipments, until an Israeli soldier captured in 2006 was freed, an Israeli official said.

Israeli opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who tops opinion polls ahead of the election, saw more violence ahead.

"It's clear Hamas is rearming. Of course it's attacking us. Of course it's trying us," Netanyahu told Israel Radio. "The next government will have no choice but to finish the work and remove the Iranian terror base for good."

Israel has secured U.S. and European pledges to help to prevent Hamas, which it says receives weapons from Iran, from rearming through tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border and by sea.

It has lobbied its Western allies to put pressure on Cairo to better seal its border with the Gaza Strip.

Israel tightened its blockade of the Gaza Strip after Hamas seized the territory in internal fighting in 2007, and the tunnels have been the only way for Gazans to get access to the commercial goods that Israel keeps out.

Providing emergency aid, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency gave each of the 200,000 students in the schools it runs in the Gaza Strip a 100 shekel (\$25) stipend on Thursday.

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## [Afghan elections in August as violence rises](#)

Reuters – January 29

Afghanistan on Thursday announced presidential elections for August 20, hoping a U.S. troop surge will improve security at a time when violence is at the highest levels since the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban.

President Hamid Karzai has strongly hinted he will run for re-election saying he still has "a job to complete," but his popularity has waned both among Afghans and his Western backers due to rampant corruption and weak government outside Kabul.

President Barack Obama has ordered a comprehensive review of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, which a White House official said would have a "significant non-military component," a reference to a likely increase in development aid.

Obama is also considering almost doubling U.S. forces in Afghanistan from 36,000 to more than 60,000 to secure the polls. A similar troop surge in Iraq improved security there greatly.

Western nations see successful Afghan elections as a key marker of progress in the face of a Taliban insurgency that has grown stronger in the ethnic Pashtun heartlands of the south and east and is now encroaching into areas just outside the capital.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates on Tuesday described Afghanistan as America's greatest military challenge.

The Pentagon's ability to boost its forces in Afghanistan depends partly on how quickly it can withdraw them from Iraq, where 140,000 U.S. troops are deployed.

### ELECTION DATE

Independent Election Commission chief Azizullah Ludin said August 20 was chosen for the Presidential poll after consulting with Afghan and international security forces.

"They told us there will be new security forces here ... and they will guarantee security," Ludin told a news conference.

NATO said the date would give the alliance enough time to deploy sufficient reinforcements to help protect the vote..

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The United States has about half the nearly 70,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan and if Obama gives the go-ahead for more deployments, its share will dwarf other nation's contributions. Britain has the second biggest force with 8,000 troops.

But while European nations have been slow to come up with extra forces, Washington is expanding the Afghan army from 80,000 soldiers now to 134,000 by 2012 and Afghan troops, together with police, will provide much of the security on election day.

Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun from the south, has led Afghanistan since U.S.-led and Afghan forces toppled the Taliban in the wake of the September 11 attacks, first as head of an interim administration and then after winning elections in 2004.

But since then, the Taliban have regrouped and launched an insurgency to overthrow the government and drive out foreign troops, with guerrilla attacks and hundreds of suicide bomb attacks that have killed scores of troops and civilians alike.

Once the darling of the West with his ethnic robe and hat, Karzai has since fallen out of favor with his Western backers.

Before his election, Obama said in July that "Karzai has not gotten out of the bunker and helped to organize Afghanistan, and the government, the judiciary, police forces, in ways that would give people confidence."

For his part, Karzai has hit back, strongly criticizing U.S. and NATO forces for killing dozens of civilians in air strikes -- incidents that provoke extreme anger among Afghans and seething resentment against the presence of foreign troops.

While no candidates have officially announced they will run, diplomats say there are few, if any, alternatives to Karzai who would gain support from majority Pashtuns, the traditional rulers of Afghanistan, and be able to govern effectively.

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## [Fata insurgency challenge of highest order: Obama](#)

*Dawn* – January 23

An international challenge of the highest order and an urgent threat to global security is how the new US President Barack Obama described the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan in his maiden speech to his diplomatic corps.

Mr Obama was equally forceful while talking about another pivotal issue that has occupied US policy makers for half a century: the Middle East.

‘Let me be clear: America is committed to Israel's security. And we will always support Israel's right to defend itself against legitimate threats,’ he said.

‘Now, just as the terror of rocket fire aimed at innocent Israelis is intolerable, so too is a future without hope for the Palestinians,’ he added.

Reacting to his statement, the pro-Israeli neo-con media welcomed Mr Obama's commitment to Israel but rejected his suggestion for creating a better future for the Palestinians.

‘We need to wipe them out,’ said a neo-con blogger. Some Arab commentators were also disappointed.

‘Mr Obama dispelled any notions of a change in the US Middle East policy,’ As'ad Abu Khalil, a professor of political science at California State University, told a US media outlet. ‘It's like sprinkling sulphuric acid on the wounds of the children in Gaza.’

But both groups noticed that Mr Obama acted fast, unlike his predecessor George W. Bush who ignored the Arab-Israeli conflict for too long and was not sincere to his own peace plan.

Just two days after talking oath, Mr Obama made telephone calls to Washington's long-standing allies in the Middle East - Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and King Abdullah of Jordan.

But his Thursday afternoon statement at the State Department makes it clear that he is equally, if not more, focused on South Asia.

‘Another urgent threat to global security is the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan,’ he said.

‘This is the central front in our enduring struggle against terrorism and extremism.’

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Drawing a parallel between the two issues, Mr Obama observed: 'There, as in the Middle East, we must understand that we cannot deal with our problem in isolation. There is no answer in Afghanistan that does not confront the al Qaeda and Taliban bases along the border.'

He also acknowledged that the military option alone cannot end this crisis. 'And there will be no lasting peace unless we expand spheres of opportunity for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan,' he said.

'This is truly an international challenge of the highest order.'

The American people and the international community must understand that the situation in the two countries 'is perilous and progress will take time,' he warned.

Mr Obama conceded that violence in Afghanistan was 'up dramatically.'

In describing the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, Mr Obama did not focus only on the existence of the so-called terrorist safe-havens in Pakistan, indicating that his administration is open also to pointing out the drawbacks of its Afghan allies.

'A deadly insurgency has taken deep root. The opium trade is far and away the largest in the world. The Afghan government has been unable to deliver basic services,' he said.

Mr Obama then turned to the issue that he also highlighted during his election campaign: militancy in the tribal areas.

'Al Qaeda and the Taliban strike from bases embedded in rugged tribal terrain along the Pakistani border,' he said, adding that this does not only threaten Afghanistan but also is a threat to the United States.

'While we have yet to see another attack on our soil since 9/11, al Qaeda terrorists remain at large and remain plotting,' he warned.

Toning down his election rhetoric, which focused on using the US military might to subdue the militants, in this policy statement Mr Obama spoke instead of setting 'achievable goals.'

'Going forward, we must set clear priorities in pursuit of achievable goals that contribute to our collective security,' he said.

Mr Obama said that his administration was committed to refocusing attention and resources on Afghanistan and Pakistan and to spending those resources wisely.

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'We will seek stronger partnerships with the governments of the region, sustained cooperation with our Nato allies, deeper engagement with the Afghan and Pakistani people and a comprehensive strategy to combat terror and extremism,' he declared.

'The world needs to understand that America will be unyielding in its defence of its security and relentless in its pursuit of those who would carry out terrorism or threaten the United States,' the new US president warned.

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## [Suicide bombing rises in Pakistan: report](#)

*Dawn* – January 27

A significant shift in the incidence of suicide bombing has taken place away from Iraq and towards Pakistan and Afghanistan over the last three years, according to a newly published report by the Combating Terrorism Centre (CTC), an independent research institute at the West Point military academy in the US.

Assaf Moghadan, an associate professor at CTC, found that Pakistan suffered the sharpest rise in suicide attacks – 12.9 per cent of all attacks between July 2007 and June 2008, up from 3.14 per cent in the previous 12-month period.

Moghadan examined the 1,944 suicide attacks that took place between 1981 and June 2008 and found that between July 2007 and June 2008 – the last one-year period for which data on suicide attacks is available – 58.2 per cent of attacks took place in Iraq and 36.6 per cent in Afghanistan and Pakistan, compared with 69.3 per cent in Iraq and 25.1 per cent in Afghanistan and Pakistan the year before.

Grim as they are, the statistics yield one significant positive finding – the prediction that 2008 should see a fall in the number of suicide attacks in the first time for a decade.

The report said for the first time in a decade the last 12 months saw a considerable decrease in the incidents of suicide attacks in most other parts of the world.

During the first half of last year, 198 suicide attacks took place, suggesting a total of less than 400 for 2008, Moghadan writes in the January issue of CTC Sentinel. This compares to 535 for 2007, the deadliest toll in the last nine years.

However, he warns: ‘It is far too early for the United States and its allies to become complacent about the potential trend. While it is true that the occurrence of suicide attacks – especially in Iraq – has decreased, the United States and its friends should be wary of a further increase of this tactic where Salafi-jihadis are establishing a new foothold or are maintaining a viable presence.’

Most suicide attacks are carried out by Salafi-jihadi groups, which emerged from the war fought by Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the early 1980s.

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[Insurgents roam free on Pak-Afghan border: study](#)

Dawn – January 27

A poorly controlled border and frosty relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have allowed Al Qaeda and insurgent groups to increase their activity in the region, a top think tank said on Tuesday.

A lack of a cohesive strategy by Nato forces and insufficient troop numbers in Afghanistan have also let insurgent groups move into previously quiet areas of the country, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said.

Elsewhere the think tank noted a “surge” in terrorist attacks in India, including the November bloodbath in Mumbai, and a growing radicalisation of a minority of Indian Muslims.

According to the IISS “Military Balance 2009” annual overview of world security, the weak Afghan-Pakistan border regime was part of a broader theme, whereby links between criminal, insurgent and terrorist groups were widened.

“Weak border regimes and an increasing volume of trade moving in unchecked containers aid the activities of these groups, as do poor inter-state relationships,” it said.

In particular, it noted that Al Qaeda elements along the disputed Afghanistan-Pakistan border “increased their activity in Pakistan whilst continuing to support the insurgency in Afghanistan.”

The think tank said that in Pakistan’s NWFP, “security forces in general remain unable or unwilling to effectively counter the resurgent Afghan and TTP (Tehrik-i-Pakistan Taliban) militants”.

“With TTP beginning to control large swathes of the tribal areas and their influence spreading in the adjoining areas of the NWFP, an increase in cross-border attacks against coalition forces and civilians in Afghanistan has taken place.”

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, “tensions within Nato over mission objectives have undermined the mission’s effectiveness” while new counter-insurgency efforts to adapt to revised Taliban tactics “seemed to make little overall headway”.

On India, IISS senior fellow for South Asia Rahul Roy Chaudhury noted that “for some time, we have been noticing an increase in radicalisation in small sections of the Indian Muslim community.”

His colleague Nigel Inkster, the think tank’s director of trans-national threats and political risk, added that India was “clearly now very vulnerable to attacks” from Al Qaeda or its affiliated groups.

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India has said that militants who killed 165 people in Mumbai in November must have support from “official agencies” in Pakistan, a charge Islamabad has denied, with tensions between the two nuclear-armed powers steadily rising.

IISS chief executive John Chipman voiced worries that Pakistan’s army could use concerns over potential conflict with New Delhi to move troops away from counter-terrorism efforts to its border with India.

“In general, these trends are discouraging because of the growing appreciation that the conflict in Afghanistan is intimately linked to the situation in Pakistan,” Chipman said.

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[China says Somali mission signals no change in military policy](#)

Google News – January 15

The Chinese navy's historic mission to fend off pirates in Africa signals no change to the nation's defensive military posture, according to a senior defence official.

A convoy began patrolling in the Gulf of Aden on January 6, part of a United Nations effort to protect commercial vessels from pirates working from Somalia, marking China's first potential combat mission beyond its waters in centuries.

"The Somali mission shows China's efforts to undertake its international obligations as a permanent member of the UN Security Council," Huang Xueping, deputy chief of the defence ministry's information office, told the China Daily newspaper.

"Of course, it also demonstrates our confidence in the PLA's (People's Liberation Army's) handling of various security threats and accomplishing of diversified military missions.

"But it never signalled that we were deviating from the defensive policy. We also tell the world candidly that the Chinese defence policy is always defensive in nature."

The United States, Japan and other nations have repeatedly expressed concern in recent years about China's growing military might, and have accused the Chinese government of not being transparent over its spending.

China has in turn insisted that the world has nothing to fear over its fast-rising military budget, sentiments repeated by Huang in the China Daily interview.

"The rise is... in line with the demands of developing our military in a modern way for the sake of national defence," Huang said.

China previously said it set aside 417.8 billion yuan (61 billion dollars) for military spending in 2008, a rise of 17.6 percent from the previous year.

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## [Russian military spending to reach \\$125 bln by 2011](#)

*RIA Novosti* – January 15

The state will earmark 4 trillion rubles (\$125 billion) for arms procurements by 2011, including 1 trillion rubles (\$31 billion) in 2009, the Russian prime minister said on Thursday.

Vladimir Putin said the modernization of defense related enterprises would continue despite the global financial crisis.

"The modernization of defense industry enterprises as well as the development of modern weapons should continue," he said.

He added that federal defense programs need to be reviewed and "streamlined," in particular with regard to production volumes.

Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said earlier on Thursday the state had earmarked \$10 billion for 'core enterprises' and defense-related sectors of industry.

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## [China fears containment as defense spending rises](#)

Reuters – January 20

China fears containment abroad and separatist groups at home, a defense policy paper said on Tuesday, justifying a drive to increase military spending and push the People's Liberation Army into the high-tech era.

China's security has been improving as its economy grows and the PLA embraces modernization, the defense "white paper" said, but pro-independence forces in Taiwan, Tibet and the energy-rich western region of Xinjiang still "pose threats to China's unity and security."

"On this issue, there can be no compromise and no concessions," Defense Ministry chief spokesman Hu Changming said at a news conference to launch the document.

China has pointed to its recent deployment of navy ships to police pirate-troubled seas off Africa as a sign of benign military intentions. Analysts say the mission shows a rising but cautious power's desire to project its growing global influence without alarming neighbors.

But China's increased spending on arms has been criticized as opaque by other countries, including the United States and Japan.

Beijing says its defense budget is purely for defensive purposes and is quite open, and it notes its budget is much smaller than the Pentagon's. Experts estimate China's true defense spending could be as much as triple the stated figure.

"China is faced with the superiority of developed countries economically, scientifically and technologically, as well as militarily," the 95-page white paper said.

"It also faces strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside."

China has long feared being surrounded by hostile forces on its extensive borders, whether by Russia in the north and west, India to the southwest or allies of the United States in the east, including South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

The U.S. Defense Department budget for fiscal 2009 is \$515 billion, a 7.5 percent rise on the previous year. That number does not include separate multi-billion dollar outlays for Iraq and Afghanistan and some spending on nuclear weapons.

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China's defense budget for 2009 has not been released. In 2008, the government said it would spend 418 billion yuan (\$61 billion) on defense, up 17.6 percent on 2007.

A PLA officer said more development was needed.

"Our military's general levels of armaments have made big strides," Fan Jianjun of the PLA armaments department told the news conference.

"But there's still quite a large gap with the levels of the world's developed countries, and we still cannot fully adjust to the needs of protecting national security and unity and better fulfilling our international duties."

While it said relations with Taiwan had "taken a significantly positive turn," the paper denounced U.S. arms sales to the island as "causing serious harm to Sino-U.S. relations as well as peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

Hu said China and Taiwan had "entered a period of peaceful development" and called for improved military ties with the United States under Barack Obama. But he deflected a question on whether China had reduced the number of missiles aimed at Taiwan.

"Our country's military deployments are based on national security interests, the imperatives of our fundamental interests as a nation and our core national interests," Hu said.

China and Taiwan have faced off since 1949, when Nationalist forces fled to the island after losing the Chinese civil war to the Communists, although ties have improved considerably since Ma Ying-jeou became Taiwan president last year.

"So many missiles are unnecessary," said Chang Jung-kung, China affairs director with Taiwan's ruling Nationalist Party. "I think they're serious (about missile removal). I believe they are doing this."

Media on the island said on Monday the military was considering cutting its troop strength by as much as a third as ties improve. Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said on Tuesday the "case is still being studied."

China said its military modernization would focus on upgrading technology to maintain a "lean and effective deterrent force," a programme it saw being more or less finished by the middle of the century.

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## [South Korea, Indonesia to bolster ties on global issues](#)

*Yonhap* – January 21

South Korea and Indonesia agreed Wednesday to strengthen their "strategic partnership" on global issues and expand bilateral economic cooperation, the South Korean foreign ministry said after talks between their foreign ministers.

In his meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan in Jakarta, Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda promised full support for the South Korea-ASEAN summit to be held on the South Korean resort island of Jeju in June, the ministry added.

"The ministers discussed ways to cooperate in the G-20 summit to deal with the financial crisis and exchanged opinions on major international issues, including climate change," it said in a press release. "The two nations agreed to step up cooperation on the international stage."

Yu arrived Tuesday in Indonesia on the first leg of his regional tour that will also take him to Australia and New Zealand. The ministry said Yu stressed the need for promoting trade and investment between the two sides, whose annual trade volume is US\$18.5 billion. He also paid a courtesy call on Vice President Jusuf Kalla, it added.

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## [Singapore Boosts Defense Spending 6 Percent](#)

*Defense News* – January 22

Singapore, battling what likely is its worst-ever recession, plans to increase defense spending by 6.0 percent from a year ago, estimates released Jan. 22 showed.

The government intends to spend 11.45 billion Singapore dollars (7.66 billion US) on defense during the 2009 fiscal year, the estimates showed.

In the budget, the government took the unprecedented move of tapping into its vast financial reserves as part of measures to fight the recession, Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said during a speech in parliament.

The tiny city-state, which has one of Asia's most advanced armed forces, spent 10.8 billion dollars for defense in 2008, figures contained in the 2009 budget said.

The money will be used to purchase and maintain military equipment and facilities, and to pay the salaries of national servicemen.

The mission of the armed forces is to enhance peace and security through deterrence and diplomacy, but should these fail, the military will aim to "secure a swift and decisive victory over the aggressor," a statement on the Ministry of Defence Web site said.

Singapore has a population of more than 4.8 million people, 3.64 million of them citizens and permanent residents who provide the manpower for its conscription-based armed forces.

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[Pakistan offers China blank cheque to negotiate deal with India](#)

*Asia Bulletin* – January 22

Keen to bring its relations with India back on the peace track, Pakistan has offered key ally China a blank cheque for negotiating any deal with New Delhi to satisfy it on the issue of Mumbai terrorist attack.

According to the Dawn, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi the Special Envoy of the Chinese Government, He Yafei, at Chinese Embassy reception: "You can go to Delhi and you have blank cheque from us."

Emphasizing on the trust Pakistan reposed in Chinese leadership for ending the tensions, Qureshi told Yafei that Pakistan would endorse whatever China would say to India.

The Chinese envoy had visited Pakistan on December 29 for defusing tensions between Pakistan and India.

In his meetings with country's top leadership, the envoy had indicated that China would remain engaged to promote peace and stability in the region.

Immediately after Yafei's visit, Pakistan made two proposals for defusing tensions arising from the Mumbai attack asking India to 'de-activate the forward airbases' and 'relocate the troops back to peace time positions'.

Referring to China's peacemaker role, Qureshi had in his statement on PTV that 'certain developments during the past 48 hours' augured well for the region.

The Chinese envoy then traveled to New Delhi on January 5 to push India to de-escalate the tensions and resume dialogue with Pakistan.

Although, Chinese initiative was initially cold-shouldered by the Indians, there was a change in attitude and New Delhi discussed their concerns with the envoy.

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## [Mullen: Involve Iran in Afghanistan](#)

*Defense News* – January 27

The U.S. military chief said Jan. 27 he favors a regional approach to Afghanistan that would include neighboring Iran, despite problems posed by Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Adm. Michael Mullen's remarks echo similar statements this month by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and General David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East.

"With respect to Afghanistan, a regional approach is critical," said Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Iran, as a bordering state, plays a role as well and to the degree that we are able to dialogue with them and find some mutual interests, there is a potential there for moving ahead together but I really leave that to the diplomats," he said.

"Iran is unhelpful in many, many ways, so I wouldn't be overly optimistic at this point but there are mutual interests that I think might offer some possibilities," he said.

The United States, which has had no diplomatic relations with Tehran for three decades, accuses Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, President Barack Obama on Jan. 26 reaffirmed his intention to open discussions with Iran and extend a hand to the Islamic Republic if its leaders "unclenched their fist."

Mullen said the Obama administration has still not taken the military option against Iran off the table, but said "I believe it's got to be last resort."

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## [Cambodia and Thailand agree to begin border demarcation](#)

*Radio Australia News – January 27*

Cambodia's foreign minister, Hor Namhong, and his Thai counterpart, Kasit Piromya, have agreed to begin demarcating the disputed border near the ancient Preah Vihear temple.

At a meeting in Phnom Penh they agreed to prioritise ending the stand-off over the land that sparked military clashes last October and left four soldiers dead.

Hor Namhong spoke to reporters afterwards and said that the joint border commission will start to demarcate territory from February 2-4.

Thailand's defence minister will then visit Cambodia on February 6th to discuss withdrawing troops from the disputed territory.

The Cambodia-Thailand border has never been fully demarcated, partly because it is littered with landmines left over from decades of war in Cambodia.

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[Russia's naval exports boom, especially in Asia](#)

UPI – January 15

The world may be in recession, but the Russian naval shipbuilding industry is still booming.

RIA Novosti reported Tuesday that naval shipbuilding last year accounted for \$7 billion of Russia's record \$8.5 billion in arms sales around the world funneled through the state-owned Rosoboronexport arms export corporation.

"This sum relates to the Rosoboronexport portfolio of orders. This is the maritime share of the portfolio of orders," Rostekhnologii First Deputy General Director Alexei Alyoshin told the news agency.

RIA Novosti said Russian arms exports soared in 2008 to \$8.5 billion -- double the figure of nine years ago. That allowed Russia to shoot ahead of Britain to become the world's second-largest arms exporter after the United States. Rosoboronexport currently has on its books arms exports worth \$33 billion, the report said.

Russia currently sells weapons to no less than 80 nations around the world, RIA Novosti said. While sales are slowly growing in Africa and the Middle East, the main success stories are with the major nations of Asia: India, China, Vietnam and Indonesia all are buying large quantities of Russian-built warships and submarines.

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## [French Arms Exports Rose to \\$8.1B in 2008](#)

*Defense News* – January 22

France exported 6.3 billion euros (\$8.1 billion) of arms in 2008, up from 5.5 billion euros in the previous year, Defense Minister Hervé Morin said.

"In 2008, the target was 6 billion [euros] in exports," he said Jan. 19 in presenting his New Year's greetings to the defense establishment at the Air and Space Museum at Le Bourget. "We did it, and did even better, with 6.3 billion in 2008 against 5.5 in 2007, which is the best year since 2000."

France aims to beat that in 2009 and reach the same level as Britain, he said. French military export hopes center on sales of the Rafale combat aircraft, which is under negotiation with Libya. The United Arab Emirates have said it wants Rafales to modernize their fleet, and the fighter is a contender in Brazil, India and Switzerland.

Morin said he had told industry that he would not hesitate to go around the world promoting French products where they had made it to a final selection.

"Because a country's purchasing decision depends on the quality of the product of course, the product's price, but also it's a political act. There has to be both: industrial and political. If one is missing, our position is weakened," he said.

That was why the government has undertaken a reform of export procedures, with the result that export license applications now can be processed in less than 40 days, compared with 80 days previously, and only 7 percent of requests were delayed compared with 30, he said.

A procedure for global authorizations has been launched and half of the applications from industry were made online compared with 3 percent two years ago, he said.

Britain jumped to second-largest arms exporter last year after the U.S. on the back of a sale of 72 Eurofighter Typhoons to Saudi Arabia.

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## [China expanding African arms sales](#)

*UPI Asia* – January 26

Increasing quantities of China-made military equipment have been finding their way to Africa, traded for oil, mineral resources and even fishing rights. Zambia has used its copper resources to pay China in a number of military deals, for instance, and Kenya has been negotiating with China to trade fishing rights for arms.

Among the most popular Chinese military exports to Africa are the J-7, K-8 and Y-12 aircraft, which are relatively inexpensive and easy to operate. China sees those countries already armed with the K-8 and J-7 aircraft as potential customers for its new FC-1 fighters.

Sources from the Russian and South African military industries say they are now keeping an eye on China's FC-1 fighter sales. The Russian military believes the FC-1 is inferior to its MiG-29 SMT and Su-30 MKA. But the Russians cannot match China's deal-making ability, as the Chinese are accepting oil and minerals in lieu of cash to pay for their equipment.

A delegation from the Nigerian air force told the author at the Cape Town Air Show in South Africa last September that their country was negotiating with China to purchase K-8 trainer aircraft. The country imported Chinese J-7 fighters in 2006, and has expressed an interest in the FC-1.

Zimbabwe's air force delegation told the author that they were negotiating the purchase of one squadron of FC-1 fighters from China. Zimbabwe is already equipped with K-8 trainers and J-7 fighters. In August last year one Zimbabwean K-8 trainer crashed due to pilot error, the air force representative admitted.

The current problem lies in how Zimbabwe will be able to pay for the purchase of FC-1 fighters. A source from the South African military industry says that China is interested in Zimbabwe's zinc and aluminum mines.

In recent years, a large number of Chinese companies have been involved in the development of mines in Angola as well. Military observers in South Africa told the author that there are many Chinese workers in Angola, and China has already become the largest importer of the country's crude oil.

A source from the Angolan military said the country was very interested in Chinese arms. He said the Angolan air force needed entry-level trainer aircraft, and therefore was discussing a deal to import Chinese aircraft. The Angolan air force also intends to acquire new-generation advanced fighters.

A source from the South African military industry said Angola has at least eight Su-27 fighters. Since Russia denies having exported these planes to Angola, they are believed to be secondhand Su-27 fighters from Ukraine or Belarus, both of which have good military ties with Angola.

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Since Angola has rich oil resources – and if combat capability is not a top priority in its choice of fighter aircraft – there is a good chance the country may trade its oil for China-made fighters.

The author has learned that the Angolan army is also in contact with China's defense manufacturer Norinco for the purchase of artillery guns, armored vehicles and ammunitions. China has been supplying an extensive range of light weapons and ammunitions to Zimbabwe and Angola.

African military sources told the author that Norinco has recently exported a certain quantity of 155-mm howitzers to North African countries, including Algeria, Sudan and Egypt. One source claimed that Algeria purchased enough 155-mm auto-propulsion howitzers to equip a battalion. This country has not traditionally been a purchaser of Chinese ground-force equipment, but seems to have taken its lead from Sudan, which first bought the howitzers.

One company of Chinese auto-propulsion 155-mm howitzers consists of six artillery vehicles, one 704-1 positioning radar and one 720-D meteorological radar. One battalion is composed of 18 155-mm howitzers, one command vehicle and one surveillance vehicle.

This type of auto-propulsion 155-mm howitzer originated from the 45-caliber PLL01 towed howitzer, which uses extended range full bore, base bleed or rocket-assisted (ERFB-BB/RA) ammunition with a maximum range of 50 kilometers. Other ammunitions used for the howitzer are the 30-kilometer ERFB/HE (high explosive), and 39-kilometer ERFB-BB/HE. The weight of the artillery gun is 13 tons.

Analysts from the African military industry believe that China has fitted Russian Krasnopol semi-active laser-guided gun launch projectiles on its 155-mm howitzers. The United Arab Emirates uses the Chinese-version Krasnopol, which are almost one-third cheaper than the Russian originals.

A military source also told the author that Norinco has delivered WMZ-551 6x6 wheeled armored vehicles to both Zambia and Kenya in the past three years. Kenya is not a traditional market of Chinese ground-force equipment, but as China has been competing fiercely with Russia and South Africa in selling arms in Africa, it appears to be opening up new markets.

The Royal Guards of Oman have imported 50 of these vehicles, and the Sudanese army also has them.

The WMZ-551 uses a new turret and is equipped with the 2A72 30-mm gun produced under license from Russia. The armored vehicle can be fitted with a 12.7-mm machine gun, 105-mm smoothbore gun, 120-mm mortar and four HJ-8 anti-tank missiles.

It has been reported recently that the Chinese army's light mechanized brigades have received batches of WMZ-551 wheeled armored vehicles fitted with 120-mm mortar guns, 105-mm smoothbore guns and

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2A72 30-mm cannon guns. A source from the Chinese military industry claimed that the turrets of the WMZ-551 can be transferred to 8x8 wheeled vehicles once those have been developed.

Aside from the weapon systems fitted on board, the WMZ-551 has a combat weight of 13.5 to 19 tons. It is powered by one 235-kilowatt diesel engine, has a maximum speed of 85 kilometers per hour, a maximum duration of 600 kilometers, a length of 6.69 meters, width of 2.86 meters, and its speed in water is eight kilometers per hour.

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## [Iran says 'self-sufficient' in missile production](#)

*RIA Novosti* – January 27

Iran has achieved self-sufficiency in manufacturing combat missiles of various modifications, the country's defense minister said on Tuesday.

Mostafa Mohammad Najjar said Iranian military specialists "are creating types of weapons that have no equal in the world."

He added that Iran would continue to build up its defense capability to ensure regional stability and security.

"Our greater defense power is no threat to other countries," he said. "Iran only needs a system to deter and repulse possible external aggression against it."

Iran said on Monday it had successfully test-fired a heat-seeking air-to-air missile. The Defense Ministry said the new missile, which has a range of 100 kilometers (62 miles), will go into production after the tests are completed in March.

Tehran announced last November it had successfully test-fired a new surface-to-surface solid-fuel missile, called Sajjil, with a range of about 2,000 km (1,200 miles).

It earlier test-launched an upgraded Shahab-3 ballistic missile as part of the Great Prophet III military exercise in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, drawing a new wave of international criticism.

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## [Malaysia Takes Delivery Of Its First Submarine](#)

*Bernama* – January 28

Malaysia has taken delivery of its first submarine -- a Scorpene built by French military shipyard DCNS in partnership with Spanish shipyard Navantia. A Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) statement today said Nazri Siron, secretary of the Defence Ministry's Procurement Division, headed a team which took delivery of the submarine, named KD Tunku Abdul Rahman after Malaysia's first prime minister, at the French naval base in Toulon, France, last Saturday.

The team also comprised First Admiral Khairudin Khalid, director-general of the Engineering Division, and members of the RMN submarine project team. At the ceremony, DCNS was represented by its Scorpene project director Didier Husson and Navantia by its managing director Manuel Filgureira. Chief of Navy Datuk Seri Abdul Aziz Jaafar witnessed the hand-over. Abdul Aziz congratulated the crew of the submarine on their having surpassed all obstacles and challenges in qualifying to become the crew of the nation's first submarine.

The Scorpene, a conventional submarine built in Cherbourg, France, can monitor the country's waters to a depth of between 100 and 200 metres, the statement said. It also said that the submarine was equipped with six torpedo tubes, which can fire simultaneously, anti-ship surface missiles and anti-submarine torpedoes. The vessel has the capacity to carry 10 torpedoes and 30 mines, it added.

Malaysia has ordered another similar submarine, named KD Tun Razak after the country's second prime minister.

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## [Japan to deploy ships off Somalia](#)

*BBC News – January 28*

Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada has ordered the dispatch of ships to fight pirates off Somalia. He did not say how many ships would be sent or when, but told the military to assess what sort of force was needed. Japan's parliament and Prime Minister Taro Aso would need to pass a formal order before the ships could set off, a process expected to take a month. Japan would be joining a multi-national effort against piracy which includes ships from the United States and China. "The pirates' activities off the Somali coast are a major threat not only to Japan but also to international society and it is a problem that we must deal with urgently," Mr Hamada said.

No Japanese ship has been taken by pirates yet, the government said, but pirates have fired at three Japanese vessels. No-one was injured. Japan's decision to go ahead with a deployment took months of debate. The activities of Japan's military are highly restricted by Japan's post-World War II constitution, which limits Japan to conducting only defensive military operations. Ruling party members have argued that battling pirates should be seen as fighting crime on the high seas, not strictly as a military operation.

## **International effort**

China announced in late December that it would be sending two navy destroyers and a supply vessel to the Gulf of Aden. Their main mission was described as protecting Chinese vessels and ships delivering humanitarian aid. China's deployment was a first for a country that usually eschews involvement in the affairs of other countries.

Also from Asia are ships from South Korea, joining more than a dozen ships from Britain, Iran, the US, France and Germany. The United Nations Security Council decided in early December to extend for another year its authorisation for countries to enter Somalia's territorial waters, with advance notice, and use "all necessary means" to stop acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea. Piracy has taken an increasing toll on international shipping, especially in the Gulf of Aden, one of the world's busiest sea lanes.

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## [UN to back attack on Congo rebels](#)

*BBC News – January 28*

The UN mission to DR Congo (Monuc) says it will provide support to the joint DR Congo-Rwanda operation against Hutu rebels in the east of the country. The UN force said it would provide transport for troops and medical assistance, but would not participate directly in the operation. Rwandan troops entered DR Congo last week and arrested Congolese Tutsi rebel leader Laurent Nkunda.

The joint operation is now advancing to flush out the Hutu rebels of the FDLR.

The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) presence in eastern DR Congo has been a key factor in more than a decade of instability in the region.

It is a largely ethnic Hutu militia, some of whose leaders are accused of involvement in Rwanda's 1994 genocide.

Rwanda twice invaded DR Congo in the 1990s, saying it was pursuing the Hutu force, estimated to be more than 6,000-strong.

Gen Nkunda always said his own rebellion was necessary to protect his Congolese Tutsi community from the FDLR.

Members of Gen Nkunda's group, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), are joining the Congolese army following a split.

Monuc said it would help integrate the former CNDP rebels into the Congolese army, so they can help with the offensive against the FDLR.

A ceremony is set to be held later on Wednesday at a military camp near Rutshuru in North Kivu province to begin the week-long integration process.

"Our priority is to protect civilians and Monuc cannot stay on the sidelines of this operation. We must be present," Monuc spokesman Lt Col Jean-Paul Dietrich said.

The BBC's Thomas Fessy in Rutshuru says more than 6,000 former CNDP members are joining the Congolese forces.

Both DR Congo and Rwanda have been accused in the past of fighting a proxy war through militias in the region - with Rwanda backing Gen Nkunda and DR Congo supporting the FDLR.

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But in mid-November Rwanda shifted its position, saying it would work with the Congolese to destroy the Hutu rebels.

Correspondents say it seems intense diplomacy has led to a deal under which DR Congo lets Rwanda act against its FDLR enemies, in return for taking out Gen Nkunda.

If both groups are neutralised, peace in the region would become a realistic prospect, say analysts.

On-and-off fighting involving the CNDP, FDLR, the army and pro-government militias has forced more than one million people in North Kivu to flee their homes since late 2006.

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## [F-22 Raptors now deployed to Kadena Air Base](#)

*Japan Update* – January 15

A dozen of the U.S. Air Force's most sophisticated stealth fighter aircraft are now on Okinawa, beginning a three-month deployment "to underscore the U.S. commitment to Japan as a vital regional partner.

The F-22 Raptors arrived at Kadena Air Base this past week from Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. The twelve aircraft and about 250 support personnel will spend the deployment in training exercises with American and Japanese Air Self Defense Forces. An Air Force media advisory noted the deployment "signals U.S. resolve to ensure stability and security throughout the Pacific Region. The F-22 Raptor, the most modern plane in the Air Force inventory, is to replace the F-15. F-22's are highly maneuverable and capable of supersonic speeds, and pack sophisticated electronics gear that allow it to evade detection by enemy radars.

While many welcome the F-22, which Japan hopes to buy for its own Air Self Defense Forces, it's not universal. Local residents and mayors of towns and villages surrounding Kadena Air Base are complaining the aircraft will bring more noise and disrupt local life. Kadena Town's mayor was not happy "the F-22's came flying in without listening to resident opinions," but then said he "hoped the training will be done in a minimal way, without making any accidents." Chatan and Okinawa City officials have also voiced displeasure at the F-22 deployment.

Masaaki Gabe, a Ryukyu University professor, says the deployment signals "America's purpose in overseas development is to demonstrate progress in abilities that make it stronger." He notes the U.S. is always aware of potential threats from China and North Korea, and says "if needed, this new stealth fighter can be quickly sent to the west Pacific area."

The professor said the joint training with JASDF crews was "a good opportunity to see how strong these F-22's are, and for this kind of training, it is only possible here, and not in Virginia." Gabe says the F-15's now being flown are "getting old and has to be redeemed."

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## [US General Petraeus announces Central Asian supply lines](#)

*Dawn* – January 20

Gen David Petraeus, the US commander for southwest Asia, announced in Islamabad on Tuesday that the United States had negotiated new supply lines for allied troops in Afghanistan through Central Asia, AP reported.

Pakistan is the sole route through which Nato and American supplies pass at present. This has caused resentment in sections of Pakistani society and supply trucks passing through the northwest have been attacked and raided on several occasions.

Also on Tuesday, government officials expressed concern to Gen Petraeus over unilateral missile strikes by US drones targeting militants on Pakistani soil, AFP reported.

President Asif Ali Zardari and army chief General Ashfaq Kayani outlined Pakistan's position during talks with the visiting US military official, a Pakistani spokesman said.

Pakistan sought to relay its concerns to the US about a domestic backlash against the civilian government caused by the strikes.

'Pakistan expressed concern over the drone attacks and hoped that the new administration will take into consideration the negative impact domestically of such attacks for the democratic government,' said a government official.

'Of course Pakistan reiterated its firm commitment in fighting terrorism and the US side reaffirmed Washington's support for Pakistan's effort in counter-terrorism,' the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Petraeus, who is a key advocate of a major troop surge in Afghanistan, went subsequently into talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, said local officials.

US embassy spokesman Lou Finton confirmed only that Petraeus was in Islamabad for 'scheduled meetings with senior Pakistani civilian and military government officials on issues of joint concern'.

A Pakistani security official had said that the talks with Gen Petraeus would focus on tensions with India, an expected surge of US troops in Afghanistan this year and the situation in the tribal border areas.

The US military announced in December that reinforcements of 20,000 to 30,000 troops will be sent to Afghanistan, where about 70,000 international troops are fighting alongside Afghan security forces.

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## [Five Russian warships to participate in Indra-2009 naval exercises](#)

Zee News – January 26

Five warships belonging to Russia's Northern and Pacific fleets will take part in the Indra-2009 naval exercises in the Arabian Sea. "The manoeuvres will begin in the eastern part of the Arabian Sea on Monday. Five warships of the Russian Northern and Pacific Fleets will join them.

The Russian and Indian warships will learn how to protect marine traffic, struggle against sea piracy and terrorism, carry out joint manoeuvres, artillery and rocket shooting and solve communications tasks.

"They include the heavy nuclear cruiser Pyotr Velikiy, the large anti-submarine ship Admiral Vinogradov which escorts commercial ships in the African Horn, the rescue tugboat Fotiy Krylov, the tankers Pechenega and Boris Butoma," the chief of the Russian Navy headquarters said.

But, he didn't confirm media reports that two huge airborne ships "The Azov" and "The Yamal" of the Black Sea Fleet will participate in the active phase of the bilateral naval exercises. Both the ships have left the port of Sevastopol on January 16, 2009. "All Russian warships have reinforced marine units onboard," the chief of the Russian Navy was quoted as saying by Itar-Tass news agency.

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## [Russia 'halts missile deployment'](#)

*BBC News – January 28*

Russia's military has announced it will halt its plans to deploy short-range missiles in its Baltic enclave Kaliningrad, Interfax news agency says. A Russian military official said a change in US attitude had prompted the latest decision, Interfax reports. The US envoy to Nato, Kurt Volker, said that if true, the suspension would be a "very positive step", the Reuters news agency reported.

Russia had said the US missile shield plan in Europe was a direct threat. In November last year, President Dmitry Medvedev responded by announcing the Russian plan, saying it was to counteract moves by the US. The US has insisted that its plan to base radars and interceptor missiles in Poland and the Czech Republic is designed solely to guard against attack by "rogue states", such as Iran.

While the Russian defence ministry has not confirmed the latest Interfax report, the BBC's James Rodgers in Moscow says the agency is often used by the Kremlin to float proposals. Interfax quoted an unnamed military official as saying that "the implementation of these plans has been halted in connection with the fact that the new US administration is not rushing through plans to deploy" parts of its missile defence shield in eastern Europe.

If the official's statement is borne out it may signal a wider hope in the Kremlin that the US under President Barack Obama will roll back the plans for the missile defence shield in Europe, our correspondent says. If Russia does shelve its Iskander deployment, it would be a substantial conciliatory measure to the new US administration, our correspondent adds.

President Obama spoke to President Medvedev by telephone on Monday. The two men pledged to stop the "drift" in their countries' relations, the White House said.

### **'Moscow infuriated'**

The US has agreements in place with Poland and the Czech Republic to plug what the US has said is a gap in its global system of missile defence. The proposed system has Nato-wide backing.

The US has said Iran is working on long-range missile technology and that the US missile shield would counter this. The US plan infuriated Moscow and soured relations with the US.

Mr Medvedev said in November that short-range Iskander missiles would be deployed in the western enclave of Kaliningrad, bordering Poland, to neutralise any perceived US threat.

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## [Fresh Clues of Iranian Nuclear Intrigue](#)

*The Wall Street Journal* – January 16

U.S. security and law-enforcement officials say they have fresh evidence of recent efforts by Iran to evade sanctions and acquire metals from China used in high-tech weaponry, including long-range nuclear missiles.

Iran's efforts are detailed in a series of recent emails and letters between Iranian companies and foreign suppliers seen by *The Wall Street Journal*. Business records show one Iranian company, ABAN Commercial & Industrial Ltd., has contracted through an intermediary for more than 30,000 kilograms (about 66,000 pounds) of tungsten copper -- which can be used in missile guidance systems -- from Advanced Technology & Materials Co. Ltd. of Beijing. One March 2008 email between the firms mentions shipping 215 ingots, with more planned.

The United Arab Emirates has informed the U.S. that in September it intercepted a Chinese shipment headed to Iran of specialized aluminum sheets that can be used to make ballistic missiles. A month earlier, UAE officials also intercepted an Iran-bound shipment of titanium sheets that can be used in long-range missiles, according to a recent letter to the U.S. Commerce Department from the UAE's Washington ambassador.

Evidence of Iran's efforts to acquire sensitive materials also is emerging from investigations by state and federal prosecutors in New York into whether a number of major Western banks illegally handled funds for Iran and deliberately hid Iranian transactions routed through the U.S. One focus of the inquiries is the role of Italy, including the Rome branch of Iran's Bank Sepah and Italy's Banca Intesa Sanpaolo Spa. Banca Intesa said it is cooperating in the inquiries.

The developments could present President-elect Barack Obama with an early test in responding to what many Washington security officials now say is a rapidly growing threat to the region, including U.S. allies Israel and Saudi Arabia.

All of the high-performance metals Iran has been acquiring also have industrial uses such as commercial aviation and manufacturing, making it difficult for intelligence agencies to be absolutely certain how the materials are being used. "We can't say we know it would, or would not, be used for military purposes," said proliferation expert Gary Milholland of the nonprofit Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, noting that broad economic sanctions on Tehran led by the U.S. mean Iran has to go to unusual lengths to find high-grade materials for industrial use as well as weapons.

Still, he added, "There doesn't seem to be any real doubt or debate whether Iran is going for the bomb or whether Iran is using front companies to import things. Everyone agrees on that around the world."

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Iran developed the ground-to-ground Sajil missile, which it test fired late last year despite international sanctions designed to slow the nation's weapons programs.

Officials at the International Atomic Energy Agency said they believe Iran could have enough fissile material for an atomic weapon sometime this year, though it would need to be further processed into weapons-grade uranium. That assessment was echoed Thursday by Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael V. Hayden. U.S. and European governments have grown increasingly alarmed in recent months at the speed they believe Iran is developing ballistic-missile and nuclear capabilities. Last year the United Nations Security Council, which includes China, formally imposed sanctions on Iran's military and most of its banks for nuclear proliferation activities.

A spokesman for Iran at its U.N. mission in New York declined to comment. China "has been strictly implementing" U.N. proliferation sanctions on Iran, said a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry in Beijing. The export of restricted items such as high-grade metals, which include specialized aluminum and titanium, is prohibited, he added.

The patchwork of proliferation agreements don't cover certain materials. Sales to Iran of a powdered form of tungsten copper are prohibited by a nonproliferation accord China has agreed to adhere to, but documents about Iran's tungsten copper purchases refer to ingots, which aren't banned in the agreement though they can be used to make missiles. High-grade tungsten copper alloy withstands ultrahigh temperatures and thus can be used in the fins of long-range missiles to greatly enhance their accuracy, according to proliferation experts.

George Perkovich of the pro-disarmament Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said use of the ingots may be an attempt to legally circumvent the restrictions. Chinese merchants, he said, "take a legalistic approach to whether it is prohibited under the treaties," while on the Iranian side, "if there's a problem where somebody's not supposed to sell them stuff, their view is, that's the sellers' problem." "

Because of economic sanctions and the small size of Iranian banks, the banks have long relied on big European multinational banks to finance their international trade and wire transfers. Many of those transfers flowed through New York City.

Documents detailing Iran's metals acquisition efforts are being reviewed by U.S. law-enforcement and intelligence officials, people involved in the matter said. Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said he is conducting a broad inquiry into illegal transactions by Iran. Last week, Lloyds TSB of London agreed to pay \$350 million to settle U.S. sanctions-busting charges with Mr. Morgenthau's office and the Justice Department. The bank admitted it violated U.S. law but said the practice has ceased.

"There are nine other banks that we think were doing this," said Mr. Morgenthau in an interview, including Barclays PLC of the U.K. A Barclays spokesman had no comment beyond a prior disclosure confirming

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the inquiry. Other banks under scrutiny in the probe include Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank, people with knowledge of the inquiries said. Credit Suisse "is cooperating with the New York County District Attorney's Office, the U.S. Department of Justice and other governmental authorities," the bank said in a statement. A Deutsche Bank spokesman declined to comment.

ABAN Commercial & Industrial Ltd. had accounts at the Rome branch of Iran's government-owned Bank Sepah, records show. Bank Sepah has longstanding ties to Banca Intesa, although no evidence has surfaced to date showing that Banca Intesa facilitated illegal acquisitions of sensitive materials by ABAN, people with knowledge of the matter said.

ABAN is run by two top officials of Iran's Aviation Industries Organization, the documents show. That agency is already under U.S. and U.N. sanctions. Efforts to contact the firm by phone and fax for comment were unsuccessful.

An Oct. 14, 2007, invoice says ABAN contracted for 30,900 kilograms of tungsten copper alloy from a firm in China in exchange for €2.1 million (\$2.8 million). Additional orders were made in 2008, according to a March 27, 2008, email to ABAN from Advanced Technology & Materials Co. "I was very happy talking to you on the phone," an AT&M executive told an executive at ABAN in the email. "By now we had sent 215 pieces" of tungsten copper, he added. ABAN didn't respond to requests for comment. Dan Hong, a lawyer for AT&M, said in an email that AT&M received warnings several months ago of allegations "that we have business dealings with Iran." But he said the firm has never heard of ABAN. "AT&M never signed any contracts with and exported to Iran" the specialized metal, he added. "We checked our business records carefully."

Records show AT&M supplied the tungsten copper to an intermediary firm called Liaoning Industry & Trade Co. Ltd. That firm couldn't be reached for comment. Another document reviewed by the Journal is a Jan. 10, 2007, message from an executive at a Chinese metals company to Shahid Sayyadi Shirazi Industries of Iran, regarding the impact of U.S. banking sanctions on payment for a shipment of unknown material. Marked "Top Urgent!" the letter observes that the payment was arranged through Bank Sepah.

The Chinese executives "are worrying the payment may be blocked by USA or UK government through their bank/treasury system," states the letter, from an executive other business records show had shipped tungsten copper to Iran. "You are kindly required to consider the matter and check carefully and seriously with Bank Sepah if the payment can be effected safely under the current situation."

Bank Sepah has denied financing illicit weapons programs. Shahid Sayyad Shirazi Industries is part of Iran's Ammunition Industries Group, according to the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, and has been under U.N. sanctions since March 24, 2007. Efforts to contact the firm for comment were unsuccessful.

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[Clinton vows to quickly renegotiate arms treaty with Russia](#)

*Teheran Times* –January 15

U.S. secretary of state designate Hillary Clinton promised Tuesday during her Senate confirmation hearing to renegotiate quickly the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) that expires December 31.

Clinton said the incoming administration of President Barack Obama ""will have a very strong commitment to START treaty negotiations"" which made little progress under George W. Bush's outgoing team.

""We want to get out of the box early. We want Russia to know that we are serious,"" Clinton told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

State Department negotiators said that there was no breakthrough in talks in Moscow last month for a follow-on agreement to replace START-1, which expires at the end of 2009.

They said a new U.S. proposal on START focuses on limiting nuclear warheads, but Russia wants to open up the negotiations to limits on conventional forces and U.S. plans for a missile shield in eastern Europe.

Clinton also pledged to bolster the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) that the Bush administration has been accused of neglecting.

""The non-proliferation treaty is the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime, and the United States must exercise leadership needed to shore it up,"" Clinton said.

""So we will seek agreements with Russia to secure further reductions in weapons under START, we will work with this committee and the Senate toward ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty,"" she said.

""And we will dedicate efforts to revive negotiations on a verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT),"" she said.

Clinton recalled that Obama was ready to reduce sharply the number of nuclear missiles.

The 61-year-old New York senator said the president-elect is committed to the elimination of nuclear missiles provided Washington has adequate reassurances and it is protected for the future.

While the Bush administration showed little interest in binding and precise documents, the Obama team wants to rebuild a team of disarmament experts at the State Department, she said, calling for the return

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of those who resigned in recent years.

The START-1 treaty signed July 31, 1991 calls for reducing from 10,000 to 8,500 the number of U.S. nuclear warheads and from 10,200 to 6,450 those in the Russian arsenal.

In 2002, Russia and the United States signed in Moscow a disarmament treaty which calls for reducing by two-thirds their strategic arsenals.

Under the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, the United States and Russia may only deploy between 1,700 and 2,000 warheads by 2012.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is an international treaty banning any nuclear tests whether for peaceful or military means.

Though it was ready for signing on September 24 1996, it has still not entered force because some signatory countries have yet to ratify it.

The FMCT is still at the drafting stage.

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## [China states 'no first use' nuke policy](#)

*Market Watch* – January – 20

China has explicitly stated a "no first use of nuclear weapons" policy for the first time, saying its nuclear weapons are not aimed at any country.

The declarations were contained in a white paper on national defense released in Beijing Tuesday, Xinhua, the state-run Chinese news agency, reported. In it, China's Information Office of the State Council stated its intention to implement "a self-defensive nuclear strategy."

"In peacetime, the nuclear missile weapons of the Second Artillery Force are not aimed at any country," the white paper says. "But if China comes under a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile force of the Second Artillery Force will go into a state of alert, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China."

The paper marked the first time Chinese officials have so openly discussed the Second Artillery Force, the country's core force of strategic deterrence. Xinhua said the nuclear forces are under the direct command of the Central Military Commission and is meant to deter nuclear strike from other countries and to carry out nuclear counterattacks

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## [WMD Detection Facility Opens in Singapore](#)

*Global Security Newswire* – January 21

Operations began yesterday at a facility intended to detect biological or chemical warfare materials being smuggled through a border checkpoint in Singapore, the Malaysian National News Agency reported (see [GSN](#), Aug. 8, 2008).

There is no other border facility like the Tuas Protective Analytical Facility, according to the government in Singapore City. The \$4 million site features detection technology covering cargo passages, along with a laboratory and equipment for decontamination of any personnel who are exposed to a biological or chemical agent ([Malaysian National News Agency](#), Jan. 20).

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