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[U.S. Defines Its Afghan Strategy](#)

The Wall Street Journal – March 27

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The Obama administration will unveil a new Afghanistan strategy Friday that calls for devoting significant new resources to counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan and economic development in Pakistan, according to senior U.S. officials.

The administration now plans to send about 4,000 military trainers to Afghanistan -- in addition to the recently announced 17,000 additional troops -- and hundreds of diplomats and other civilian officials. The U.S. financial commitment to Afghanistan and Pakistan will grow by billions of dollars per year under the plan.

Aid will be tied for the first time to performance benchmarks, though administration officials declined to specify what they were or how they'd be measured.

The Pentagon also is considering a new U.S. military command in southern Afghanistan that would assume responsibility for the American troops deploying there. The area is currently commanded by European NATO generals, and a new U.S. command would signal increasing American control over the war effort.

The moves are part of a broad push to prevent the stalemated Afghan war from destabilizing both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since taking office in January, President Barack Obama has announced plans to wind down military operations in Iraq next year and shift more military resources to Afghanistan. The president was to outline his approach in a White House address Friday morning.

Senior U.S. officials have grown increasingly concerned about Afghanistan and Pakistan. The resurgent Taliban exert day-to-day control over many rural parts of Afghanistan and have pushed U.S. and Afghan military casualties to record highs. Militants in Pakistan have battled the Pakistani army to a draw in several regions of the country and carry out regular suicide bombings.

"There's a clear understanding that the status quo is not remotely sustainable in either country," said a U.S. official involved in the new approach. The strategy will effectively focus U.S. efforts in Afghanistan on the narrow goal of defeating al Qaeda and its Taliban allies, a shift away from the Bush administration's broader nation-building efforts there. Officials said the 4,000 American trainers, along with the additional diplomats and civilian officials, will be on the ground in Afghanistan by the fall.

The plan calls for expanded American diplomatic outreach inside and outside Afghanistan. U.S. officials will try to persuade moderate Taliban elements in Afghanistan to abandon violence and join the country's political process. American diplomats will also reach out to Tehran in the hope of winning Iranian assistance in stabilizing the country.

The new strategy is notable for the emphasis it places on Pakistan, which senior officials now see as critical to determining whether Afghanistan stabilizes or continues its downward spiral. The U.S. has

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given Pakistan more than \$10 billion since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on the U.S., mostly in military assistance. As part of its new strategy, the Obama administration plans to instead give Pakistan at least \$1.5 billion in economic development aid in each of the next five years.

The economic aid will be accompanied by additional American strikes on militant targets inside Pakistan. U.S. and Pakistani intelligence officials are drawing up a fresh list of terrorist targets for Predator drone strikes.

The policy changes come less than a week before Mr. Obama travels to France for a North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit devoted heavily to Afghanistan. Administration officials say Mr. Obama has come to accept that NATO nations are unlikely to contribute more combat troops to Afghanistan because of domestic political opposition.

Instead, White House officials say Mr. Obama will ask European nations to provide more military and police trainers to Afghanistan, as well as additional economic assistance to Pakistan.

The U.S.-led NATO mission in Afghanistan has been a source of increasing friction within the military alliance. In response, Pentagon officials are firming up plans to redraw the balance of power between the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan, according to three military officers familiar with the deliberations.

The idea getting the most support calls for a U.S. military command in southern Afghanistan, the officers said. It would be led by a two-star American general.

Most of the American reinforcements are being deployed to the south of the country, a Taliban stronghold that is one of the largest opium-producing regions in the world. U.S. and NATO officials believe that the drug trade provides the Taliban with billions of dollars each year.

The Obama administration hopes to undercut the Taliban by launching a new counter-narcotics offensive in the Helmand River Valley and other parts of southern Afghanistan. The mission will be the primary focus of the U.S. reinforcements.

Under one facet of the plan, U.S. or Afghan troops will first offer Afghan farmers free wheat seed to replace their crops that produce opium. If the farmers refuse, U.S. or Afghan personnel will burn their fields, and then again offer them free replacement seeds. A senior U.S. military official described the approach as a "carrot, stick, carrot" effort.

[Pakistani and Afghan Taliban Unify in Face of U.S. Influx](#)

New York Times – March 27

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After agreeing to bury their differences and unite forces, Taliban leaders based in Pakistan have closed ranks with their Afghan comrades to ready a new offensive in Afghanistan as the United States prepares to send 17,000 more troops there this year. In interviews, several Taliban fighters based in the border region said preparations for the anticipated influx of American troops were already being made. A number of new, younger commanders have been preparing to step up a campaign of roadside bombings and suicide attacks to greet the Americans, the fighters said.

The reformed alliance was forged after the reclusive Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, sent emissaries to persuade Pakistani Taliban leaders to join forces and turn their attention to Afghanistan, Pakistani officials and Taliban members said.

The overture by Mullah Omar is an indication that with the prospect of an American buildup, the Taliban feel the need to strengthen their own forces in Afghanistan and to redirect their Pakistani allies toward blunting the new American push.

The Pakistani Taliban, an offspring of the Afghan Taliban, are led by veterans of the fighting in Afghanistan who come from the border regions. They have always supported the fight against foreign forces in Afghanistan by supplying fighters, training and logistical aid.

But in recent years the Pakistani Taliban have concentrated on battling the Pakistani government, extending a domain that has not only threatened Pakistan but has also provided an essential rear base for the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

At the same time, American officials told The New York Times this week that Pakistan's military intelligence agency continued to offer money, supplies and guidance to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan as a proxy to help shape a friendly government there once American forces leave.

The new Taliban alliance has raised concern in Afghanistan, where NATO generals warn that the conflict will worsen this year. It has also generated anxiety in Pakistan, where officials fear that a united Taliban will be more dangerous, even if focused on Afghanistan, and draw more attacks inside Pakistan from United States drone aircraft.

"This may bring some respite for us from militants' attacks, but what it may entail in terms of national security could be far more serious," said one senior Pakistani official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not permitted to talk to news organizations. "This would mean more attacks inside our tribal areas, something we have been arguing against with the Americans."

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The Pakistani Taliban is dominated by three powerful commanders — Baitullah Mehsud, Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulavi Nazir — based in North and South Waziristan, the hub of insurgent activity in Pakistan's tribal border regions, who have often clashed among themselves.

Mullah Omar dispatched a six-member team to Waziristan in late December and early January, several Taliban fighters said in interviews in Dera Ismail Khan, a town in North-West Frontier Province that is not far from South Waziristan. The Afghan Taliban delegation urged the Pakistani Taliban leaders to settle their internal differences, scale down their activities in Pakistan and help counter the planned increase of American forces in Afghanistan, the fighters said.

The three Pakistani Taliban leaders agreed. In February, they formed a united council, or shura, called the Council of United Mujahedeen. In a printed statement the leaders vowed to put aside their disputes and focus on fighting American-led forces in Afghanistan.

A spokesman for the Afghan Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid, denied that the meetings ever took place or that any emissaries were sent by Mullah Omar. The Afghan Taliban routinely disavow any presence in Pakistan or connection to the Pakistani Taliban to emphasize that their movement is indigenous to Afghanistan. "We don't like to be involved with them, as we have rejected all affiliation with Pakistani Taliban fighters," Mr. Mujahid said. "We have sympathy for them as Muslims, but beside that, there is nothing else between us."

Several Pakistani officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not permitted to talk to news organizations, confirmed the meetings. But they said that the overture might have been inspired by Sirajuddin Haqqani, an Afghan Taliban leader who swears allegiance to Mullah Omar but is largely independent in his operations.

Mr. Haqqani, and his father Jalaluddin Haqqani, the most powerful figures in Waziristan, are closely linked to Al Qaeda and to Pakistani intelligence, American officials say. From their base in North Waziristan, they have directed groups of fighters into eastern Afghanistan and increasingly in complex attacks on the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The Taliban fighters said the Afghan Taliban delegation was led by Mullah Abdullah Zakir, a commander from Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan, whose real name is reported to be Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul. A front-line commander during the Taliban government, Mullah Zakir was captured in 2001 in northern Afghanistan and was detained at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, until his release in 2007, Afghan Taliban members contacted by telephone said.

The Pakistani fighters described Mullah Zakir as an impressive speaker and a trainer, and one said he was particularly energetic in working to unite the different Taliban groups. Beyond bolstering Taliban

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forces in Afghanistan, both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban leaders had other reasons to unite, Pakistani officials said.

One motivation may have been to shift the focus of hostilities to Afghanistan in hopes of improving their own security in Waziristan, where more than 30 drone strikes in recent months have been directed at both Mr. Mehsud and Mr. Nazir. Two senior commanders of the Haqqani network have been killed.

The Pakistani Taliban leaders also rely on Mr. Haqqani and their affiliation with the Afghan mujahedeen for legitimacy, as well as the money and influence it brings. In their written statement, decorated with crossed swords, the three Pakistani Taliban leaders reaffirmed their allegiance to Mullah Omar, as well as the leader of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden.

The mujahedeen should unite as the “enemies” have united behind the leadership of President Obama, it said. “The mujahedeen should put aside their own differences for the sake of God, God’s happiness, for the strength of religion, and to bring dishonor on the infidels.” The Taliban fighters interviewed said that the top commanders removed a number of older commanders and appointed younger commanders who were good fighters to prepare for operations in Afghanistan in the coming weeks.

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[Heavy fighting rages in northern battlefronts of Sri Lanka, LTTE offensive repelled](#)

Colombo Page – March 25

Sri Lankan troops repelled an LTTE offensive to breach the Army forward defence lines North of Iranapalai, at the Mullaitivu battlefront today amid heavy fighting. The military reported that scores of terrorists were killed and many were injured when troops of the 58 Division engaged intense small arms fire and pushed back a wave of LTTE Tigers moving towards the FDL.

Defence sources said over a dozen LTTE bodies were seen left in the battlefield following heavy fighting that ensued since 5:30 a.m. today. Sporadic fighting is still continuing, the sources added. Citing intercepted LTTE communication military officials said 4 senior Tigers identified as Kadal, Vardhan Anna, Sooriyan and Eelavan were killed during the confrontations.

Several soldiers also sustained injuries in the fighting and were admitted to the hospital. The choppers evacuating the wounded soldiers came under surface-to-air- missile attacks from LTTE firing the SAMs from the government demarcated No-Fire Zone where thousands of Tamil civilians are trapped.

Meanwhile troops conducting search operations in Ramanadapuram, Visuamadu, Ampakamam and Puthukkudyiruppu areas uncovered massive loads of weapons including mortar bombs, Rocket Propeller Grenades (RPGs), anti personnel mines, and a large stock of LTTE arms and explosives.

Troops also came across another LTTE mortar bomb producing factory in the general area of Puthukkudyiruppu. Defence sources say the latest LTTE ploy is to arm forcibly recruited elderly civilians with grenades and send them to the front in waves to confuse the soldiers. Sri Lankan military says the rebel-controlled area is getting depleted day by day and the LTTE have now been confined to an area of just 20 sq km in Puthukkudyiruppu.

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[India, Iran, Russia mull strategy to fight Taliban](#)

Times of India – March 28

It's still part of bilateral conversations, but old partners, India, Iran and Russia, are dusting out an old mechanism to take on the Taliban in Afghanistan. All three countries are still at an exploratory stage, but some articulated realities and possibilities are spurring on these discussions. First, the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan is giving the Taliban and other Pakistan-sponsored jihadists a growing space.

Second, a fear that the US and Nato, in their eagerness to craft out an exit strategy in Afghanistan might fall for a Pakistan-assisted scheme to put some Taliban elements dressed up as "moderate" in charge of governing Afghanistan.

The first time this will be discussed more fully will be during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's ministerial meeting in Moscow on March 27. Both Iran and India will attend, though as a preparatory move, senior Iranian official Saeed Jalili will be in Delhi this week. Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki was in Mazar-e-Sharif last weekend to meet officials from Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

India has been much more quiet. But Russia, in its capacity as SCO chairman, is taking a more hands-on position, and recent reports say Afghan president Hamid Karzai has been asking for Russian assistance for a whole host of things. Afghan foreign minister Rangin Dagdar Spanta will be in Moscow as well.

Russia has indicated that Iran might be more comfortable working with it and India under the SCO rubric than the US-led effort. The US and Nato are organizing a "big tent" meeting in The Hague on March 31, also on Afghanistan.

Iran has a lot of clout inside Afghanistan due to its ethnic and religious connections with the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. India has also steadily built up a lot of equity with its relentless commitment in the developmental field.

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[Suicide blast kills 50 at mosque in Khyber](#)

Dawn – March 27

A suicide bomber killed at least 50 people when he blew himself up in a crowded mosque near Pakistan's Jamrud town, about 30 km from the Afghan border, on Friday, government officials said. The bomber set off his explosives as an imam, or prayer leader, began the service. Eyewitnesses believe the casualty figures are being under-reported and that at least 70 people have been killed, first by the explosion, and secondly by the collapsing of the mosque's ceiling.

'The moment the imam said Allahu Akbar (God is Greatest), the blast went off,' said Tauseer Khan, 70, from a hospital bed in nearby Peshawar. 'It was huge. I still can't hear properly,' said Khan, who had wounds to his hands and face. His son and grandson were also wounded. Rahat Gul, a spokesman for the Khyber administration, said 50 people were killed and 75 wounded.

Between 250 and 300 people were in the mosque, said Tariq Hayat Khan, the region's top administrator. 'It was a suicide attack. The bomber was standing in the mosque. It's a two-storey building and it has collapsed,' Khan said. Worshipers searched through piles of bricks, pulling out bodies and carrying them to ambulances in sheets and on rope beds, television pictures showed. Police caps, prayer caps, prayer beads and mobiles telephones were later lined up on a wall outside the mosque.

Dawn's Khyber Agency correspondent Ibrahim Shinwari explained that the Friday prayer congregation at this mosque is quite large as it is frequented by Frontier Corps personnel and members of the Khasadar force who are stationed at the adjacent check post. Moreover, those who travel to and from Torkham for work stop at this mosque to offer prayers. There are also many tribal households within a two-kilometre area from where people come to offer prayers.

TTP militants had warned of a blast of this nature, Shinwari said, adding that a shoot-out between militants and security forces at the nearby checkpost one month ago left one militant dead and two injured, and they were thus seeking revenge. Following that encounter, a TTP spokesman in Khyber Agency had said that there would be consequences if Nato supplies are not suspended and if FC personnel are not disbanded.

'ENEMIES OF ISLAM'

Police initially said a bomb blew up at a police post next to the mosque, which is by the main road leading to the Khyber Pass and the Afghan border beyond. 'It's surprising, those who claim that they are doing jihad (holy war) and then carry out suicide attacks inside mosques during Friday prayers,' Khan told a private television channel. 'They are infidels. They are enemies of Pakistan. They are enemies of Islam,' he said.

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[1,800 rebel soldiers are still on the run: BDR chief Dhaka](#)

PTI – March 22

About 1,800 BDR soldiers were still absconding nearly a month after the bloody mutiny at the paramilitary force's headquarters in Dhaka in which more than 73 Army personnel were killed, officials said today. A manhunt was still underway to trace the fugitives. "Some 1,800 soldiers are still in hiding according to our list," newly appointed BDR chief Brigadier General Mainul Islam told PTI. About 9,000 soldiers fled their barracks during or after the February 25-26 mutiny but nearly 7,000 of them reported to work as ordered under a 24-hour ultimatum following the mutiny that saw deaths of 73 Army officers serving the paramilitary force. Army troops under a special operation codenamed "Operation Rebel Hunt" and police and other security agencies including elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) so far arrested nearly 250 fugitive soldiers under a massive countrywide manhunt. Officials earlier said the fugitives fled the BDR's Pilkhana headquarters along with "huge" weapons, ammunitions and explosives.

"The trained rebel soldiers, carrying weapons and explosives, are ready recruits for terrorist or militant outfits in Bangladesh and neighbouring countries," leading security expert retd general ANM Muniruzzaman told PTI. PTI

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[Japan, ASEAN defense officials to meet on Tues. to discuss security](#)

Breitbart – March 12

Japan will host the first security meeting for senior defense officials from Japan and 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations member countries next Tuesday to discuss "nontraditional" security issues, the Defense Ministry said Thursday. The conference, dubbed the "Meeting of Senior Defense Officials on Common Security Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region," will explore nonmilitary security issues confronting the participating countries, such as natural disasters and bird flu. Relations between Japan and ASEAN have long centered on the economy. So we hope to move them up to a higher level and start to build confidence from an area that is less likely to meet resistance," a senior ministry official said in a briefing. The one-day meeting in Tokyo, which will be chaired by Japanese Vice Defense Minister Kohei Masuda, will be followed by bilateral meetings between Masuda and his counterparts from Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore. ASEAN has seven other member states: Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

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[North Korea joins space treaty, convention: Russian ministry source](#)

RIA Novosti – March 12

North Korea has informed Russia that it has signed up to an international treaty and convention on space, a Russian Foreign Ministry source said on Thursday. "The Foreign Ministry of Russia, being a depositary state, received on March 5 notification that North Korea has joined the 1966 space treaty," the source said. The source said Pyongyang also told the Russian ministry that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had been informed of the country's joining the 1974 Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

North Korea's official news agency said earlier that the government has informed the International Maritime Organization and other related global bodies that the country will launch a satellite-carrying rocket between April 4 and 8. A South Korean Foreign Ministry official said that despite Pyongyang's joining the agreements, the launch would be considered a breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1718, which prohibits the country from launching ballistic missiles.

The communist state announced plans last month to launch a satellite using a three-stage rocket from the newly constructed Musudan-ri launch pad on the country's northeast coast. However, Seoul and Washington believe the real purpose of a satellite launch would be to test a long-range Taepodong-2 missile, which is thought to have a range of 6,700 kilometers (4,100 miles) and could possibly reach Alaska.

Pyongyang first tested a long-range missile in 1998, when it launched a Taepodong-1 over northern Japan and claimed that it carried a domestically-developed satellite. In 2002, Pyongyang and Tokyo agreed to a moratorium on missile tests, but the secretive regime has continued research on ballistic missile technology. In 2005 Pyongyang announced that it had nuclear weapons and in July 2006 test-launched a Taepodong-2 long-range missile and later staged an underground test of a nuclear device. On July 15, 2006, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1695, which forbids North Korea from developing ballistic missiles. The Taepodong-2 reportedly has a maximum range of 6,700 kilometers (4,190 miles), which would make it capable of hitting the U.S. states of Alaska and Hawaii, as well as South Korea and Japan.

Some analysts believe the impoverished country is not capable of developing a domestic space program, and that the planned rocket launch was simply an attempt to draw the attention of U.S. President Barack Obama's new administration to the issue of the stalled six-party talks on its controversial nuclear program. The six-nation talks, involving North Korea, South Korea, Russia, Japan, China and the United States, were launched in 2003 after Pyongyang withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

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[China Sends Patrol Ship to South China Seas](#)

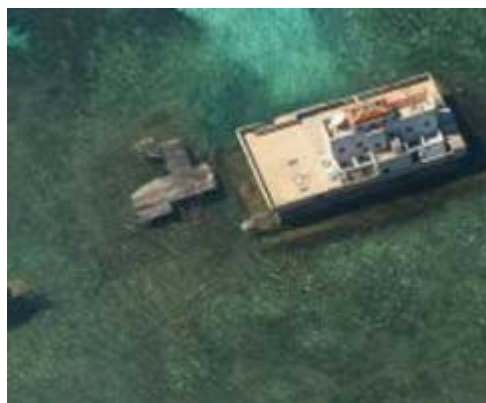
Defense News – March 15

China has dispatched its most modern patrol ship to the South China Seas, state press said March 15, after an incident with a U.S. naval vessel and a fresh claim by the Philippines to disputed territory.

The Beijing News said the vessel would conduct patrols of what it called China's exclusive maritime zone in the disputed waters surrounding the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

It said the converted naval rescue ship would aid Chinese fishing boats and transport vessels.

The Philippines passed a law last week which lays claim to disputed islands in the Spratlys chain that are also claimed by China. Beijing has called the law "illegal and invalid."



Chinese built structures on the Mischief Reef in the disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea (Picture courtesy: Channel News Asia)

Tensions in the area rose further when the United States sent destroyers to international waters off southern China to protect a naval surveillance patrol that was involved in a stand off with Chinese vessels.

China says the U.S. patrol vessels were within its 200-kilometer (125-mile) economic exclusive zone, but the United States has insisted they were in international waters. The Spratly and Paracel island chains have been flashpoints for years. The Spratlys are claimed in full or part by China and Vietnam as well as the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, and the Paracels are claimed by China, which now occupies them, as well as by Vietnam and Taiwan.

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[Russia to rearm over NATO expansion](#)

Financial Times – March 16

Russia said it would re-arm its military and boost its nuclear forces in response to the expansion of Nato to its western frontiers and the increased threat of international terrorism. Dmitry Medvedev, Russian president, said on Tuesday: “The main task is to qualitatively improve the combat readiness of our forces, above all our strategic nuclear forces.”

Speaking at a rare meeting with military leaders in Moscow, Mr Medvedev said Nato was continuing to expand closer to Russia’s borders. Russia was also under threat from “local crises and international terrorism.” Mr Medvedev was speaking less than a fortnight after Moscow and Washington pledged to try to improve relations, which sank to the worst low since the Cold War during the administration of former US president George W. Bush.

Russia perceives Nato’s eastern expansion, coupled with US plans to deploy a ballistic missile shields in eastern Europe, as a threat to its national security.

Mr Medvedev said Russia had the financial muscle to improve its armed forces despite the financial crisis engulfing the country. “Never in the history of modern Russia have there been such favourable conditions to create a contemporary highly efficient armed forces,” he said.

The creation of a modern army was crucial to protect Russia against outside aggression and underpin the growing of the economy and wellbeing of citizens, he said. Mr Medvedev admitted that the war with Georgia last summer had exposed shortcomings in the Russian military that should be rapidly redressed.

Although Russia’s military campaign in Georgia was successful, the war exposed the army’s lack of modern equipment and the top-heavy bureaucracy. Russia has since launched plans to transform the army into a lighter more agile force. It has also raised hackles in Nato by establishing military bases in Georgia’s breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and announcing plans to base part of its Black Sea fleet on the Abkhazian coast.

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[China, Australia vow to expand military cooperation](#)

China Daily – March 16

China and Australia agreed Monday to expand military cooperation. "China will spare no effort to support the implementation of any relevant consensus between the Chinese and Australian armed forces and will continue expanding communication, deepen practical cooperation and raise bilateral military ties to a new level," said Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, in a meeting here with Australian Chief of the Army, Ken Gillespie. Chen also said that further development of China-Australia relations was in the interest of both nations and would be favorable for the peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world.

Gillespie agreed, saying that Australia-China relations had developed a lot in the past few years and bilateral military ties had moved forward. He said Australia was willing work with China to strengthen cooperation in fighting terrorism, disaster relief and peace-keeping.

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[China, Vietnam agree to push forward ties](#)

China Daily – March 16

Vietnam is ready to make joint efforts with China to advance the Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership, a senior Vietnamese official said here Monday. Pham Quang Nghi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee (CPVCC), made the remarks during his talks with Liu Qi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Liu said the two parties had increased exchanges on theory and practice of socialist construction since the two top leaders reached an important consensus on the development of Sino-Vietnamese relations last year.

Hu Jintao, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese President, held talks with CPVCC General Secretary Nong Duc Manh on May 30, 2008, when Manh was on a four-day official goodwill visit to China.

The consensus between the leaders of the two parties provided direction to further develop relations, said Nghi, also Hanoi's Party Committee Secretary.

The two countries had also expanded cooperation, which brought concrete benefits to the two peoples, Liu said.

Liu, also secretary of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee, hoped both sides would work together to enrich the bilateral comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership. He also briefed the guests on the Second Session of the 11th National People's Congress (NPC) and the Second Session of the 11th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held earlier this month.

Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, also met with Nghi and his delegation on Saturday.

On Monday afternoon, Jia Qinglin, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), also met with Nghi.

Hailing the completion of Sino-Vietnam land demarcation, Jia said China and Vietnam were facing an opportunity to further comprehensive, strategic and cooperative partnership, and should work together to boost cooperation in all fields and levels.

Nghi believed the Chinese people would overcome the global financial crisis under the leadership of the CPC. He said China was an important force to safeguard world peace and progress, and that Vietnam would learn from China's experience in the reform and development.

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[Taiwan's New Defense Report Could Fray Ties With China](#)

The Wall Street Journal – March 17

Taiwan issued a defense report that calls for the island to press for modern military equipment from the U.S. -- a move that could complicate the warming relations both Taiwan and the U.S. have been cultivating with China.

The quadrennial military review, issued Monday, runs counter to softer, more China-friendly draft versions that circulated in Taiwan over the past few months. Some officials said the harder line is a response to criticism in Taipei and Washington that the current administration in Taiwan had been making too many concessions to China without having received much in return.

"The report is tougher than I expected," said Alexander Huang, a strategic studies professor at Tamkang University in Taipei, who was involved in earlier versions of the paper.

In a file photo, Taiwanese soldiers stand at attention in front of one of Taiwan's many Patriot missile air defense systems near the northern coastal town of Wanli, Taiwan.

Taiwan and China have been ruled separately for more than 60 years, since China's civil war, and have become close trading partners. Under President Ma Ying-jeou, who was elected a year ago, the two sides have moved closer, setting up direct transport flights and shipping links and discussing a possible free-trade deal. On Monday, relations across the Taiwan Strait marked a new milestone when the Ocean Mystery, the first luxury cruise ship to sail directly from China, arrived in Taiwan with more than 1,000 Chinese tourists.

Perhaps the most notable sign of improving ties was a government defense paper endorsed by Mr. Ma that called for democratically governed Taiwan, a hub of the global high-tech industry, to give up its longtime strategy of preventing a Chinese attack by maintaining air and sea superiority. Instead, Taiwan would concentrate its defenses against a ground assault, according to the paper.

Supporters said the proposed strategy would be less costly for Taiwan and the weapons easier to obtain. In deference to China, few countries are willing to sell Taiwan weapons. Opponents said it would be nearly suicidal for the island of 23 million to fight a land war with its giant neighbor.

"Critics from the military and academia forced President Ma to emphasize that the navy and air force are both important," said a senior official from the Ministry of National Defense.

A presidential spokesman said: "President Ma fully respects professionals on this issue."

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Under Monday's plan, Taiwan will try again to buy 66 F-16 C/D fighters from the U.S. These are more advanced versions of the F-16 that Taiwan has and would allow it to more effectively counter China's growing fleet of Russian-built warplanes. Last year, the Bush administration agreed to a US\$6.43 billion arms package but excluded the fighters. China reacted by suspending military-to-military talks with the U.S., though they since have resumed.

Taiwan will formally request the fighters again, officials in Taipei said Monday, and in the long term try to buy "stealth" technology fighters. Taiwan also wants to buy submarines -- another item vetoed by the Bush administration. In an effort to balance this with more China-friendly policies, the paper calls for a "confidence-building mechanism" with China. Some officials have said this could involve officer exchanges.

Although the Obama administration is eager to improve relations with Beijing, some officials in Washington have implied that weapons sales are in the U.S.'s national interest. In testimony to Congress in February, National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair said the U.S. was the only outside power that could help Taiwan: "That means we're going to have to help them some more in order to maintain a balance."

Some U.S.-based analysts say sales would help maintain the balance of power in the region. That would reduce the need for American soldiers to defend Taiwan in case China tries to invade. "If Taiwan is unable to deter attacks from China, it increases the probability of the U.S. having to confront China militarily should China make a mistake," said Rick Fisher, a senior fellow at the International Assessment and Strategy Center in Washington.

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[Pak-Iran-Afghan summit in Tehran to discuss regional issues: Pakistan Foreign Minister](#)

IRNA – March 19

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said on Wednesday that a trilateral summit meeting of Pakistan-Iran-Afghanistan has been organized in Tehran in May this year to discuss a strategy to resolve the issues in the region. Speaking at a news conference Qureshi said that the trilateral summit will help leaders from three important regional countries to focus on variety of key issues and to find out solutions. He said that an international conference on Afghan issue is being arranged in The Hague which would be attended by major players. However, Pakistan has urged Iran to also participate in the conference as it is a major regional player and Pakistan intends to engage Iran in the whole affair. He said Russia is also organizing SCO meeting on the 27th of this month that will discuss Afghan issue. Responding to a question about the prices of gas between Pakistan and Iran, he said that it was agreed but the increase in the prices of oil Iran wants to renegotiate the prices. In this connection Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister has been assigned the task to negotiate and finalize the agreement with Pakistan. He said Pakistan understands that Russia has also been a major player on Afghan issue and it should also be on board, therefore, Pakistan would actively participate in the conference.

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[North Korea to Start Military Exercises beneath NLL](#)

The Daily NK – March 19

Assemblywoman and national defense expert Song Young Sun forecasted on Thursday that “North Korea will provoke us, attempting military exercises south of the NLL (Northern Limit Line) soon after the end of ‘Key Resolve’... which will finish on the 20th.”

Song was speaking on a Peace Broadcasting Company (PBC) radio program, continuing, “North Korea is likely to provoke us between the 21st of March and the 15th of April, according to its past pattern of action. Especially, there is a higher possibility of North Korea provoking something from the 4th of April until the 8th, the period when North Korea has claimed it will launch a missile.”

Assemblywoman Song predicted that, “If we (South Korea) object and react against it, North Korea will be more likely to incite us by saying, ‘It is just a peaceful exercise. You held military drills with the United States between the 9th of March and the 20th, why is our military exercise considered an intrusion upon your sovereignty?’”

Song also pointed out that “Although South Korea needs to firmly respond, what is more important is deterrence. It is most important to show clearly where we stand so that North Korea will not even imagine provoking anything.”

Regarding the current Kaesong Industrial Complex incident, she believes that “Our government is not responsible for the incidents. Regulations have significance only when both parties are willing to stick to them. Such incidents will be repeated since in North Korea, Kim Jong Il’s words are more important than regulations.”

She continued, “It has been calculated that the losses in accordance with the closing down of the complex would be approximately 100 times more for North Korea than for the South. Nevertheless, North Korea seems to be closing it down as a consequence of using various pressures against us.”

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[Russia says missile defense deal with U.S. possible](#)

RIA Novosti – March 19

There is scope for Russia and the United States to reach an agreement on missile defense, the Russian Foreign Ministry's official spokesman said on Thursday. "In theory, we have every opportunity to agree on the missile defense issue," Andrei Nesterenko said. He also said Russia welcomed the Czech Republic's decision to put off a vote in parliament on the ratification of a deal to place a radar on its soil as part of a U.S. missile shield. "We believe this decision reflects prevailing public opinion in the country," Nesterenko said.

The United States has cited Iran's controversial nuclear program as one of the reasons behind its plans to deploy a missile base in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. The missile shield has been strongly opposed by Russia, which views it as a threat to its national security. The dispute has strained relations between the former Cold War rivals, already tense over a host of other differences.

The United States and other Western nations suspect Tehran of secretly seeking nuclear weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is purely aimed at generating electricity. Top Russian officials have repeatedly expressed their hope that President Barack Obama will not follow through with the missile defense plans of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

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[Georgia Says It Would Consider Hosting U.S. Base](#)

Defense News – March 20

Ex-Soviet Georgia would seriously consider hosting a U.S. military base if asked and is prepared to act as a transit route for Western forces in Afghanistan, senior Georgian officials said March 12. "If the United States thinks it wants to establish a base, we will seriously consider it," Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze told Japan's Nikkei newspaper in an interview published Thursday. He emphasized, however, that the U.S. and Georgia were not currently holding talks on the issue.

Georgia's deputy foreign minister, Giga Bokeria, said that as well as hosting a base the country was prepared to act as a conduit for troops and supplies to Afghanistan. "Georgia was and remains ready to cooperate with the United States both on the deployment of U.S. bases on Georgian territory, if the U.S. expresses such a desire, and in using Georgian territory as a transit route to Afghanistan," he told AFP.

The remarks came as the U.S. steps up efforts to find new transit routes to supply coalition forces in Afghanistan amid growing instability in Pakistan, its main transit route, and the announcement by Central Asian nation Kyrgyzstan last month of the closure of a key U.S. airbase on its territory.

This week U.S. military officials held talks with government and business representatives from Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan about using the Caucasus region south of Russia as a transit route. The two days of talks were held in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

There are nearly 70,000 international soldiers in Afghanistan helping the government fight an extremist insurgency led by the Taliban, who were in power between 1996 and 2001. The deployment of a U.S. base in Georgia could seriously strain Washington's relations with Russia, which fought a brief war with Georgia last year. Russia sent troops and tanks deep into Georgia last August in response to a Georgian military attempt to retake the Moscow-backed rebel region of South Ossetia. Russian forces later mostly withdrew to within South Ossetia and another rebel region, Abkhazia, which Moscow has recognized as independent states.

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[Russian navy to rely on tactical nukes](#)

International Herald Tribune – March 23

The role of tactical nuclear weapons in the Russian navy may grow, a news agency quoted a senior Russian admiral as saying Monday. Vice Adm. Oleg Burtsev told the state-run RIA-Novosti that the increasing range and precision of tactical nuclear weapons makes them an important asset. "Probably, tactical nuclear weapons will play a key role in the future," said Burtsev, the navy's deputy chief of staff. He added that the navy may fit new, less powerful nuclear warheads to the existing types of cruise missiles. "There is no longer any need to equip missiles with powerful nuclear warheads," Burtsev said. "We can install low-yield warheads on existing cruise missiles."

Tactical nuclear weapons have a much shorter range compared to strategic nuclear weapons. They are intended for use within a theater of battle. The United States and the Soviet Union decided in 1991 to eliminate some of their non-strategic nuclear weapons and withdraw others from duty, including those used by navy ships. But in 2006 Russia signaled it no longer intended to abide by that decision when then-Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that Russian submarines were carrying tactical nuclear weapons on patrol.

Last December, chief of the Russian military's general staff, Gen. Nikolai Makarov, said Russia will keep its arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons, which he said were necessary to counter a massive NATO advantage in conventional weapons. Burtsev said the navy will also build six new nuclear submarines carrying intercontinental ballistic missiles. The first sub in the series, the Yuri Dolgoruky, already has been built and is undergoing tests. However, the prospective Bulava missile designed to equip the new submarine has failed repeatedly in tests, making prospects of its deployment dim.

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[Indonesia, China vow to boost strategic partnership](#)

China View – March 23

Indonesia and China have agreed to step up strategic partnership ties amid the global economic recession, Indonesian acting Coordinating Minister for Economy SriMulyani said here Monday. Mulyani made the remarks to reporters after delivering her keynote speech at a seminar of East Asia's Response on Global Economic Crisis here in Jakarta. During her recent visit to China, Mulyani said she held talks with Chinese officials and both sides agreed to make efforts to strengthen the strategic bilateral cooperation. "The talks were about what are needed to be done by both countries to realize the strategic partnership," said Mulyani. She said one of the examples of the cooperation was in energy sector. A 10,000 mega watt power plant project will be built in Indonesia, in which China will provide financial assistance.

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[Ayatollah Rejects Obama Outreach Effort](#)

Global Security Newswire – March 23

Iran's top leader largely rejected an unusual overture made Friday by U.S. President Barack Obama, the *Washington Post* reported, but Ayatollah Ali Khamenei did offer some chance of reconciliation if Washington dramatically alters its policy toward his nation (see [GSN](#), March 20).

Obama released a video message Friday to the Iranian people to mark the country's new year celebration. He said the United States was seeking "engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect."

Khamenei, however, lashed out at the United States, thematically citing a portion of Obama's inaugural address in which he promised to U.S. adversaries that "we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

"They say, 'We have extended a hand toward Iran.' What kind of hand is this? If the extended hand is covered with a velvet glove but underneath it, the hand is made of cast iron, this does not have a good meaning at all," Khamenei said in a public speech.

"They are congratulating the Iranian people," he added. "At the same time, they are accusing Iran of terrorism and the manufacturing of nuclear weapons. We ask, have you lifted the unjust sanctions against the Iranian people and returned (Iranian) assets you hold? Have you retracted hostile propaganda against Iran?"

"To prove its credibility, the new U.S. administration must change its policies toward Iran and the region, and to end its arrogant approach toward other nations," Khamenei continued. "We will wait and see. If you change your attitude, we will change, too. If you do not change, then our nation will build on its experience of the past 30 years" (Thomas Erdbrink, [Washington Post](#), March 22).

Khamenei's response demonstrated that any improvement to U.S.-Iranian relations will take time, analysts said.

"It's the first stage of the bargaining in classic Iranian style: Be tough and play up your toughness," said Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a professor at United Arab Emirates University. "The Iranian leaders are not about concessions at this stage. It's still all about ideology from the Iranian side."

Hard-line forces remain strong in Iran, slowing the speed of reforms, Abdulla said. "This is why this will be a very slow, very complicated process between Iran and the United States," he said. "Even the theocracy can be pragmatic. When they feel it's in the national interest to reach out to America, they will find a way" (Brian Murphy, Associated Press/[Google News](#), March 22).

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07/2009

13 Mar 09 – 27 Mar 09

"Ultimately, it takes two to tango, and at the moment hard-liners in Tehran who are not interested in having an amicable relationship with the United States have an inordinate amount of influence," agreed Karim Sadjadpour of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Caren Bohan, [Reuters](#), March 20).

Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs said Friday that the video was just the first gesture of a set of new efforts the administration would pursue when it completes a full review of its Iran policies (Agence France-Presse/[Google News](#), March 20).

That review, led by State Department top adviser on Iran Dennis Ross, should be completed by the end of the month, the *Wall Street Journal* reported (Solomon/Cummins, [Wall Street Journal](#), March 21).

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[Vietnamese, Chinese armies boost cooperation](#)

VOV News – March 24

The Vietnam People's Army (VPA) and the China People's Liberation Army (PLA) have agreed to further strengthen their cooperation, especially in personnel training, joint patrols and search and rescue activities. The agreement was reached during the talks in Hanoi on March 23 between Deputy Defence Minister Nguyen Khac Nghien, Chief of the VPA General Staff, and Chen Bingde, Chief of the PLA General Staff, who is on an official visit to Vietnam. Sen. Lieut. Gen. Nghien said the PLA delegation's visit will help promote mutual understanding between the two armies, thus bringing the Vietnam-China relationship to new heights. The same day, the PLA delegation paid courtesy visits to State Vice President Nguyen Thi Doan and Defence Minister General Phung Quang Thanh. Ms Doan affirmed Vietnam's consistent policy of considering China its comprehensive strategic partner. She expressed hope that cooperation between the two armies as well as the two countries will further develop in the future, especially in personnel training and the exchange of young soldier delegations.

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[U.S. Sees Chinese Military Rise](#)

New York Times –March 26

China is seeking technology and weapons to disrupt the traditional advantages of American forces, and secrecy surrounding its military creates the potential for miscalculation on both sides, according to a Pentagon study released Wednesday.

The annual report from the Defense Department to Congress, “Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2009,” catalogs efforts by China to supply its armed forces with weapons that can be used to intimidate and attack Taiwan and blunt the superiority of American naval and air power, at least near its territory.

“We have advocated time and again for more dialogue and transparency in our dealings with the Chinese government and military, all in an effort to reduce suspicions on both sides,” said Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon press secretary.

He said the report should be read as calling “for deeper, broader, more high-level contacts with the Chinese.”

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, dismissed the Pentagon report on Thursday as “a gross distortion of the facts” and interference in China’s internal affairs.

“This report issued by the U. S. side continues to play up the fallacy of China’s military threat,” he said at his regular news briefing in Beijing. He suggested that the Pentagon stop issuing the annual report to avoid “further damage to the two sides’ military relations.”

China suspended high-level contacts with the Pentagon last October in response to the Bush administration’s decision to sell a record \$6.5 billion in military equipment to Taiwan. But relations appeared to improve after the deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia, David S. Sedney, held two days of talks with his Chinese counterparts last month.

Military relations between the United States and China have tended to crest and then fall over recent years, with ties having just recovered from Beijing’s outrage over the sales to Taiwan.

But even the resumption of military-to-military talks was threatened this month after Chinese vessels shadowed and harassed an American surveillance ship in international waters of the South China Sea.

The Pentagon report describes how China’s military modernization has continued over the past year, with a particular focus on Taiwan, which China considers a renegade province. China has built up short-range

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missiles across from Taiwan, even though the report concludes that relations between the two have relaxed over the past year.

Even so, the study said China could not deploy and sustain even small military units far beyond its borders before 2015. Further, China would not be able to deploy and sustain large forces in combat operations far from China until well into the following decade, the report states.

Instead, the Chinese military appears to have embarked on modernization programs that would allow it to fight and win short conflicts fought with new weapons along its periphery.

To blunt traditional advantages of the United States, China has invested in new technologies for cyber- and space warfare, in addition to sustaining and modernizing its nuclear arsenal, the report said. The Chinese military also is expanding and improving its fleet of submarines, and hopes to build a number of new aircraft carriers, the report said.

The report does single out acts by the Chinese military to participate in international relief and rescue missions. Between 2002 and 2007, the People's Liberation Army joined at least 14 search-and-rescue missions at sea, and was involved in 10 emergency relief missions in 14 countries.

Between 2003 and 2007, China also sold nearly \$7 billion worth of conventional weapons around the world, mostly to Pakistan, the report said.

Rep. Ike Skelton, the Missouri Democrat who is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, released a statement on Wednesday that expressed concern at "some of the continuing trends and ambiguities regarding China's military modernization, including China's missile buildup across from Taiwan and the steady increase of China's power projection capabilities."

He said that "China's military budget continues a trend of double-digit increases and questions remain about China's strategic intentions."

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[90 Russian MiGs found unsafe to fly](#)

Google News – March 13

A large part of Russia's fighter jet fleet has been found unsafe during inspections made after a MiG-29 plane lost part of its tail on a training flight, the air force said Friday.

The air force grounded the entire MiG-29 fleet after the Dec. 5 crash in southern Siberia, an area where another of the jets had crashed in October. A check of the planes' condition began as a military panel investigated the cause of the December crash.

Air force spokesman Col. Vladimir Drik said Friday that about 90 MiG-29s had been found unsafe to fly and would need repairs. Over 100 of the planes have been cleared for flights, and a number of others remain to be checked, he said.

Drik did not say how many MiG-29s the air force has. Russian media reports put their number at about 300, and the entire fighter fleet at some 650. Drik would not say how long repairs of the faulty planes and checks of the remaining part of the fleet could take. "That will depend on the availability of funds," he told The Associated Press. Drik refused to provide a cost estimate or give any further details on the planes' condition.

Air Force Lt.-Gen. Sergei Bainetov said investigators continued looking into the reason for corrosion that caused the tail section to break off in December, Interfax news agency reported. The twin-engined MiG-29, codenamed Fulkrum by NATO, has been in service with the Soviet and then Russian air force since the 1980s. The two other types of fighters in the Russian inventory, the Su-27 and the MiG-31, also date from the 1980s.

The military may find it hard to afford costly repairs of the planes now, when slumping oil prices have drained the government coffers. During eight years of Russia's oil-driven economic boom, the military has upgraded only a few dozen fighter jets.

Grounding of the MiG fleet has dealt a blow to the Kremlin's effort to revive the nation's military and project its power worldwide. It may also jeopardize Russia's efforts to increase arms sales. In a humiliating blow to Russia, Algeria last year returned 15 MiG-29s, saying the quality was poor. Moscow has dismissed the claim, and the Russian military said it would commission the planes this year.

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[Taiwan Gets 12 Orion ASW Aircraft](#)

Defense News – March 15

The U.S. released 12 P-3C Orion anti-submarine warfare (ASW) patrol aircraft March 13 to Taiwan when the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced a \$665 million firm-fixed-price contract award to Lockheed Martin, Maritime Systems and Sensors Tactical Systems, under the Foreign Military Sales program. The award includes the procurement of phased depot maintenance, structural service life extension, and avionics modification on 12 P-3 aircraft.

Work will be performed in the U.S. and be completed in August 2015. The Maryland-based U.S. Naval Air Systems Command was the contracting activity.

The P-3 award follows the DSCA announcement in October for a \$6.4 billion arms package that enraged China. Beijing retaliated by discontinuing military-to-military exchanges with the U.S., now restarted with the Obama administration.

The October package included an E-2 Hawkeye aircraft upgrade, 30 AH-64D Block III Apache Longbow attack helicopters, 330 Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missiles, 32 UGM-84L sub-launched Harpoon Block II missiles, spare parts for F-5E/F, C-130H, F-16A/B and the Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF), and 182 Javelin guided missile anti-tank rounds. Missing from the list was a submarine design study and 60 Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters.

The P-3s and the October arms package release were part of the Bush administration's April 2001 arms deal to Taiwan that included eight submarines, now on hold. The Bush offer became a nightmare when members of Taiwan's legislature refused to approve budget requests and turned the deal into a political football.

The issue was resolved in early 2008 when the Beijing-friendly Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) unseated the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in presidential and legislative elections.

However, the long-delayed arms deal resulted in even more delays for other items, some going back a decade. Deferred procurements, or wish-list items, include four Aegis-equipped destroyers, M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks, Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM), AGM-88 HARM (High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missile) anti-radiation missiles, and 66 F-16C/D Block 50/52 fighter aircraft. Taiwan has also been discussing the idea of procuring F-35 fighters when and if they become available.

Taiwan's de facto embassy in Washington, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office (TECRO), is reportedly preparing to renew pressure on releasing F-16s.

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Taiwan's fighter inventory includes 146 F-16A/B Block 20, 128 Indigenous Defense Fighters (IDF), 56 Mirage 2000-5s and roughly 60 aging F-5s. There is a pressing need to replace the F-5s to maintain its current air power capability.

The U.S. is the last country selling arms to Taiwan. Due to Chinese pressure, Europe and Israel discontinued arms sales to Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s, and a French sale of Mirage fighter aircraft and Lafayette frigates in the 1990s resulted in a disastrous corruption scandal that ended all future arms from Paris.

In the past 10 years, Taiwan's indigenous arms industry has wilted in favor of reliable and tested U.S. arms. The result is a narrow non-competitive choice for arms from the U.S. that could now face an end as Chinese pressure on Washington grows.

Questions remain regarding the direction the new Obama administration policy will take on Taiwan. Economic and diplomatic pressure from Beijing will no doubt continue to influence Washington. A U.S. government source said China successfully pressured Washington to freeze arms sales to Taiwan in 2007 and 2008. It was not until intense lobbying by pro-Taiwan advocates in Washington that the Bush administration released the October arms deal.

With China holding \$1.9 trillion in foreign exchange reserves and Washington asking Beijing to buy even more U.S. debt, there are concerns Obama's pending Taiwan policy will favor no arms in the future.

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[Medvedev to Bolster Military in Russia](#)

The New York Times – March 17

President Dmitri A. Medvedev said Tuesday that Russia would begin a “large-scale rearming” in 2011 in response to what he described as continuing threats to the country’s security. In a speech before generals in Moscow, Mr. Medvedev cited encroachment by NATO as a primary reason for bolstering the armed and nuclear forces. Mr. Medvedev did not offer specifics on how much the budget would grow for the military, whose capabilities deteriorated significantly after the fall of Soviet Union.

Russia has increased military spending sharply in recent years, but with the financial crisis and the drop in the price of oil, the country’s finances are under pressure, suggesting that it will be hard to lift these expenditures further.

Even so, Mr. Medvedev’s timing was notable. He is expected to hold his first meeting with President Obama in early April in London on the sidelines of the summit gathering of the Group of 20, which comprises industrialized and developing countries and the European Union.

He has said recently that he is looking forward to the meeting, and both he and Russia’s paramount leader, Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin, have expressed measured optimism about improving relations with the United States under the new administration.

The Obama administration played down the significance of Mr. Medvedev’s remarks, with the White House spokesman, Robert Gibbs, saying they were “largely for domestic consumption.” He added that “NATO and the United States have worked and will continue to work with Russia on issues of mutual concern, specifically in areas like terrorism and proliferation.”

Nevertheless, Mr. Medvedev’s comments on Tuesday indicated that the Kremlin did not want the United States and its NATO allies to presume that Russia was coming to the table in London from a position of weakness. “An analysis of the military and political situation in the world shows that there are a range of regions where there remains serious potential for conflicts,” Mr. Medvedev said. “Threats remain that can bring about local crises and international terrorism. NATO is not halting its efforts to widen its military infrastructure near the borders of our country. All of this demands a quality modernization of our armed forces.” Mr. Medvedev emphasized that Russia would not be deterred in this plan by the financial crisis.

The announcement underscored how the Kremlin has offered the new administration a calculated mix of positive pronouncements about relations and policies that could be described as unfriendly.

The day after Mr. Obama won the election in November, Mr. Medvedev declared that Russia would deploy missiles on its western border aimed at Europe if the United States proceeded with an antimissile system proposed for Poland and the Czech Republic by the Bush administration.

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Mr. Medvedev later seemed to soften the threat, though he did not withdraw it. Last month, apparently at the urging of the Kremlin, the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia announced that it would close an important American air base that is used to assist NATO forces in Afghanistan.

But the Kremlin said it would allow NATO to transport non-lethal supplies by railroad across Russian soil to Afghanistan. And last week Mr. Medvedev said, "We have every possibility of opening a new page" in relations when he meets with Mr. Obama.

Mr. Medvedev's announcement on Tuesday comes as the Kremlin has already begun an effort to overhaul the operations of the armed forces, which are still run largely according to Soviet-style dictates. While Russia's far larger military easily triumphed over Georgia's in the conflict in August, the fighting exposed what many experts described as flaws in training, weapons and equipment.

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[China confirms plans to build aircraft carrier](#)

RIA Novosti – March 23

China's defense minister has reaffirmed the country's plans to build its own aircraft carrier, the Sina news agency reported on Monday. It quoted Liang Guanglie as saying that "among the big world powers only China does not have an aircraft carrier, so it cannot be without an aircraft carrier forever." China's Ministry of National Defense spokesman said in December last year that aircraft carriers were "a reflection of a nation's comprehensive power" and were needed to meet the demands of a country's navy. Experts have suggested construction could be officially announced in April, when the Chinese Navy marks its 60th anniversary. According to the Wall Street Journal, China's first aircraft carrier will enter service by 2020.

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[Robots take centre stage in U.S. war in Afghanistan](#)

Yahoo News – March 24

The U.S. military is deploying the robots to Afghanistan to navigate the country's treacherous terrain. Called [BigDogs](#), these robots are being deployed in addition to big guns.

The BigDogs - four-legged robots that can navigate the country's treacherous terrain - and pilotless helicopters than can transport tons of supplies to very remote bases are just two of the new weapons being tested in Afghanistan, reports Fox News.

The machine's creator, Boston Dynamics, has a motto - "dedicated to the way things move" - and that's precisely what is both jarring and fascinating about its invention. Using a gasoline engine that emits an eerie lawnmower buzz, BigDog has animal-inspired articulated legs that absorb shock and recycle kinetic energy from one step to the next. Its robot brain, a sophisticated computer, controls locomotion sensors that adapt rapidly to the environment. The entire control system regulates, steers and navigates ground contact. A laser gyroscope keeps BigDog on his metal paws - even when the robot slips, stumbles or is kicked over.

Boston Dynamics says BigDog can run as fast as 4 miles per hour, walk slowly, lie down and climb slopes up to 35 degrees. BigDog's heightened sense can also survey the surrounding terrain and become alert to potential danger. All told, the BigDog bears an uncanny resemblance to a living organic animal.

Routine helicopter flights operating 24 hours a day, year round, are crucial for the American mission. The Marine Corps has recently called for unmanned cargo flights to carry essentials to isolated areas that can be reached only by air.

Enter the [K-MAX](#), a remote-controlled helicopter designed to transport heavy loads - even in Afghanistan's high altitudes. The K-MAX's unique rotor design - two intermeshed rotors turning in opposite directions and slightly angled to prevent the blades from colliding - give this unmanned aircraft a distinct advantage. "All the energy goes into the lift and eliminates the need for the tail rotor," said Frans Jurgens, spokesman for Kaman Aerospace Corp, which manufactures the K-MAX. The design enables the relatively small chopper to tow up to 6,000 pounds. "The K-MAX is basically an aerial truck," Jurgens said.

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[China's Arms Technologies Changing Balance in Asia](#)

Bloomberg – March 26

China is altering the balance of power in Asia by continuing to develop “disruptive” military capabilities, including cyber and anti-satellite technologies, the U.S. Defense Department said in a report to Congress. “China’s ability to sustain military power at a distance remains limited, but its armed forces continue to develop and field disruptive military technologies” such as missiles that would hinder adversaries from entering a battle zone, the Defense Department said in the annual report, released yesterday.

The term disruptive technology describes products or processes that marginalize older technologies. In the military, cyber warfare can disable computer-based weapons systems. In 2007, China destroyed one of its weather satellites in space with a kinetic weapon, leading lawmakers to question the safety of U.S. surveillance and communications satellites. China is also developing anti-satellite lasers and has the ability to jam some satellite transmissions, the report said.

The report “provides a very professional, factual description of what we see with the Chinese military,” Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell told reporters. “It provides some new details, some additional specificity, but there are no new major strategic insights or capabilities revealed,” he said.

The report said China’s lack of transparency in detailing its military spending and capabilities “poses risks to stability by creating uncertainty and increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation.”

Defense Spending

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang called the report a “gross intervention in China’s international affairs.” The report “continues the play up the fallacy of the China threat,” Qin said at a press briefing in Beijing. He urged the U.S. to “stop making groundless accusations against China so as not to further damage the two countries’ military relations.”

China’s defense spending has increased by more than 16 percent a year for the past decade, according to Chinese government figures. The Pentagon report puts China’s defense spending at the second-highest in the world after the U.S., with total spending at between \$105 billion and \$150 billion in 2008. The U.S. military’s budget in 2008, not including supplemental spending for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was \$488 billion.

China’s government said earlier this month that its military spending will rise to 480.6 billion yuan (\$70.4 billion) this year, up 14.9 percent from 2008. The Pentagon report said the Chinese budget “does not include major categories of expenditure.”

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Military Exercises

China's military is increasingly taking part in military exercises with other countries, the report said. This year three Chinese navy ships participated in anti-piracy patrols off Somalia. Earlier this month five Chinese vessels confronted a U.S. surveillance ship in the South China Sea.

Li Zhaoxing, the spokesman for China's legislature and a former foreign minister, said March 4 that "China's defense spending is relatively low in the world." "China's limited military power will be used solely to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Li said.

The Pentagon report said China is continuing to pursue military capabilities aimed at deterring Taiwan from declaring formal independence from the mainland. China considers Taiwan to be a renegade province. The U.S. is required by law to sell the island weapons for its defense.

Warming relations

In the past year, China and Taiwan ended a six-decade ban on direct shipping, air and postal links following the election of Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou, who abandoned his predecessor's pro-independence stance. "This modernization and the threat to Taiwan continue despite significant reduction in cross-strait tension over the last year since Taiwan elected a new president," the Pentagon report said.

"Tensions are reduced but they have not vanished," Admiral Timothy Keating, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, told the House Armed Services Committee March 24. Talks between the countries are "richer today and more productive" than before the election of Ma, he said.

The report says that Taiwan no longer enjoys air superiority over the waters separating the mainland and the island, reversing a conclusion the Pentagon first voiced in 2002. "Since 2000, the military balance in the Taiwan Strait has continued to shift in Beijing's favor, marked by the sustained deployment of advanced military equipment to the regions opposite Taiwan," the report said.

"In 2002, the department assessed that Taiwan 'has enjoyed dominance of the airspace over the Taiwan Straits for many years.' This conclusion no longer holds true," the report said. In particular, China has increased its force of mobile short-range missiles based in garrisons opposite Taiwan to as many as 1,150 in September from up to 790 in late 2005, the report said.

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[How Vulnerable is U.S. Infrastructure to a Major Cyber Attack?](#)

Popular Mechanics – April 2009

The next world war might not start with a bang, but with a blackout. An enemy could send a few lines of code to control computers at key power plants, causing equipment to overheat and melt down, plunging sectors of the U.S. and Canadian grid into darkness. Trains could roll to a stop on their tracks, while airport landing lights wink out and the few traffic lights that remain active blink at random.

In the silence and darkness, citizens may panic, or they may just sit tight and wait for it all to reboot. Either way, much of the country would be blind and unresponsive to outside events. And that might be the enemy's objective: Divert America's attention while mounting an offensive against another country.

Pentagon planners have long understood the danger of cyber attacks on U.S. military networks. Indeed, the Defense Department's Global Information Grid is one of the most frequently targeted computer networks on Earth. But the cat-and-mouse game of information espionage on military networks is not the only digital threat that keeps national-security experts up at night. There is a growing concern over the vulnerability of far more tangible assets essential to the economy and well-being of American citizens.

Much of the critical infrastructure that keeps the country humming—water-treatment facilities, refineries, pipelines, dams, the electrical grid—is operated using a hodgepodge of technologies known as industrial control systems. Like banks and telecommunications networks, which are also generally considered critical infrastructure, these industrial facilities and utilities are owned by private companies that are responsible for maintaining their own security.

But many of the control systems in the industrial world were installed years ago with few or no cyber-security features. That wasn't a big problem when these systems were self-contained. But in the past two decades, many of these controls have been patched into company computer networks, which are themselves linked to the Internet. And when it comes to computer security, a good rule of thumb is that any device that is computer-controlled and networked is vulnerable to hacking.

Bad-guy hackers pulling the plug on public utilities is a common theme of Hollywood films, including 2007's *Live Free or Die Hard*, but such scenarios present more than a mere fictional scare to U.S. intelligence officials. According to Melissa Hathaway, cyber-coordination executive for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the list of potential adversaries in a cyber attack is long, ranging from disgruntled employees to criminals to hostile nations.

Most experts agree that China and Russia routinely probe our industrial networks, looking for information and vulnerabilities to use as leverage in any potential dispute. James Lewis, a cyber-security expert for the policy think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), says that although cyber warfare couldn't cripple the U.S., it could serve as an effective military tactic. "If I were China, and I were

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going to invade Taiwan,” he says, “and I needed to complete the conquest in seven days, then it’s an attractive option to turn off all the electricity, screw up the banks and so on.” Could the entire U.S. grid be taken down in such an attack? “The honest answer is that we don’t know,” Lewis says. “And I don’t like that answer.”

Ghosts in the Machine

In January 2008, senior CIA analyst Tom Donahue dropped a bombshell on a small conference of government officials and power-company engineers from the U.S. and Europe. He told them that extortionists had managed to hack into utilities in multiple regions outside the United States and disrupt power equipment. “In at least one case,” he said, “the disruption caused a power outage affecting multiple cities.” The CIA has been highly secretive about the incident, and Donahue would not discuss where the blackouts occurred or what companies were affected. But he admitted that the CIA had no idea who had perpetrated the attacks. Hackers had shaken down a public utility, it seems, and had gotten away with it.

Some security professionals think that government officials have been guilty of as much drama-mongering on the issue as Hollywood has. “Honestly, I think the threat is overblown,” says Bruce Schneier, author of *Schneier on Security*. “The risks today are due more to errors than to malicious intent.” He sees Donahue’s story as nothing more than a tenebrous rumor. Nevertheless, Schneier thinks vulnerabilities in infrastructure will eventually become a real national-security threat.

The problem is that the errors that Schneier refers to can cause bad things to happen. Much of computer hacking is predicated on exploiting glitches in commonly used systems. Such exploits on a Windows PC are irritating, but at a nuclear facility, they can be unnerving.

In August 2006, a glitch shut down the Browns Ferry nuclear power plant in northern Alabama. Plant administrators lost control of recirculation pumps on one of the plant’s reactors because of excessive data traffic on the control-system network. The plant was forced to go offline temporarily.

Nuclear plants are designed to shut down in the event of major malfunctions to prevent a Chernobyl-style catastrophe. But they also generate almost 20 percent of U.S. power. What if a hacker exploited a coding error in a cooling system to shut down a sizable piece of the nation’s power supply?

Incidents of digital malfunctions that cause danger to human life are rare, but such events have happened. In June 1999, in Bellingham, Wash., shortly before a routine delivery of gasoline by the Olympic Pipe Line Co., a worker updated a database for the company’s pipeline computer-control system. According to a report by the National Transportation Safety Board, a simple typo in the database caused the system to fail, disabling remote control for the pipeline’s operators, 98 miles away in Renton, Wash. Pressure began to build in the line, so the operator issued a command to open a secondary pump to relieve it, but the system was unresponsive. A weak point in the pipeline ruptured, releasing 237,000

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gal of gasoline into nearby Whatcom Creek. An hour and a half later, the gasoline ignited. The ensuing fireball scorched more than a mile of riverbank, killing three people, including two 10-year-old boys, and damaged the city's water-treatment facility.

The Aurora Vulnerability

Conventional wisdom about digital attacks is that you can steal information, and you may even be able to shut down critical systems, but any damage would be temporary and superficial. A cyber attacker could generate a lot of confusion by killing the lights in California, but give the state and utility officials a few days to reset the systems, and everything would be back up and running. It's a phenomenon that infrastructure security expert Eric Byres, of Byres Security, refers to as "weapons of mass annoyance."

In 2007, however, a video leaked out of the Department of Homeland Security that showed an experiment the DHS had sponsored at Idaho National Laboratory. In the video, a massive, green diesel generator shakes violently and belches smoke as it goes into total meltdown. Dubbed the Aurora experiment, it demonstrated how an over-the-Internet cyber attack could cripple big, essential machines.

When the video hit CNN, it alarmed many in the utilities industry. Most of the details of the Aurora vulnerability have not been released, but DHS statements about the experimental hack describe it as a man-in-the-middle, or spoofing, attack, in which a malicious computer intercepts all traffic going between two other computers, essentially controlling the line of communication between them. According to Sean McGurk, director of control systems security for the DHS, the vulnerability was common to control systems throughout critical infrastructure.

The Saboteur's Story

The most Frequently told anecdote in the world of infrastructure cyber security is that of Maroochy Shire. The incident, which occurred in Queensland, Australia, is viewed by many in the industry as an object lesson in the damage that can be done when someone with computer skills and a grudge takes aim at a public system. In 2000, Vitek Boden, a computer expert in his late 40s who had been turned down for a job in municipal government, rigged up his laptop computer to a radio-frequency wireless transceiver to hack into the city's computerized wastewater management system. Over the course of two months, Boden broke into the system 46 times, instructing it to spill hundreds of thousands of gallons of raw sewage into rivers, parks and public areas. He was finally caught when a police officer pulled him over and found control-systems equipment in his car. The reason the Maroochy Shire incident is recounted so frequently is that it shows how difficult it is to thwart hackers who want to disrupt the infrastructure, since attacks can come from almost anywhere. An insider with detailed knowledge could target a specific company's system, or a hacker could launch an anonymous Internet assault from a distant country.

The Department of Homeland Security's Computer Emergency Readiness Team (known as US-CERT) encourages industry to report cyber accidents and intrusions, but there are few legal requirements for private companies to do so. It is possible that many more incidents have occurred, and companies have

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simply kept them quiet.

Infrastructure is meant to last a long time, so upgrades to existing systems tend to occur at a glacial pace. “There is a long life cycle associated with this,” says Jeff Dagle, chief electrical engineer at the Department of Energy’s Northwest National Labs. “Utilities are used to this equipment lasting 30 years.” Nevertheless, big utilities and industrial facilities are starting to see cyber security as a reliability issue, and are modernizing their equipment, building redundant, multitiered networks (a tactic known in military circles as “defense in depth”). The caveat is that with big utility networks such as the electrical grid, telecommunications or pipelines, a clever adversary wouldn’t attack the well-defended components of the system. “Why should I go after the company that put a lot of money into securing its networks when I can get into one that hasn’t and damage them both?” asks the CSIS’s James Lewis.

Ironically, the current weakness of the economy may provide a shot in the arm for the digital defenses of critical infrastructure. Much of President Obama’s stimulus package is aimed at revitalizing infrastructure, and as antiquated equipment gets upgraded, modern security technology can be built in. One example is the Smart Grid, a Department of Energy plan that could receive around \$4.5 billion to modernize the nation’s electricity delivery system with state-of-the-art computer controls. Of course, more computing technology in the grid allows for more potential attacks, but it could also mean a more robust and nimble defense.

The result may be infrastructure networks that are a lot like the Internet itself. The redundancy and flexibility of the Internet’s core architecture has allowed it to withstand two massive denial-of-service attacks—in 2002 and 2007—on the 13 Domain Name System root servers that make up the backbone of the system. In each instance, the servers absorbed incredible amounts of traffic as parts of the system either failed or came close to failing. To the engineers who run the system, it was terrifying, but the rest of the world barely noticed. If our infrastructure were that robust, the cyber war of the future might have little more impact on your life than a dimming of the lights and a shrug of your shoulders.

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[U.S. Naval Forces Arrive in Busan for Annual Defense Exercise](#)

Chosun – March 12

As the 12-day Korea-U.S. joint defense exercise called Key Resolve/Foal Eagle continues, a key U.S. naval force arrived at the Korea Fleet Command in Busan on Wednesday morning.

The Carrier Strike Group Three is led by the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis of the U.S. Navy 3rd Fleet. The carrier will dock in Busan for five days before heading toward the East Sea to take part in the Foal Eagle part of the joint exercise.

Foal Eagle is the primary field training exercise for the Combined Forces Command. Its purpose is to demonstrate Korea-U.S. military resolve on the Korean peninsula and to improve joint operations. In particular, the two nations' navies will test interoperability among vessels with a focus on fine-tuning the security of communications.

Mark Vance, commander of the Carrier Strike Group Three, said, "We are working with Korea's new Aegis platform as part of the exercise, and we actually have a number of scheduled events to do with that service platform and several others focused on making sure that our interoperability is good at the tactical level." The combined navies could perform drills with other allies during the exercise, though one officer declined to confirm which countries those are. They will also be involved in helicopter control, integrating with land forces and participating in search and seizure operations during the exercise.

After completing the Foal Eagle exercise, these sailors will continue onto the western Pacific for a six-month deployment. And they will be well prepared for a quick deployment to the Korean peninsula should there be a need.

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[U.S. Pacific Fleet announces Pacific Partnership 2009](#)

Navy Compass – March 13

Preparations are underway for Pacific Partnership 2009, the fourth in a series of annual U.S. Pacific Fleet humanitarian civic assistance missions, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT) announced on his blog March 3. “This year we plan to head to Oceania and bring much needed supplies, medical, dental, veterinary and engineering aid to this region that has such a rich history with the United States,” said Adm. Robert F. Willard in his blog posting.

The mission will visit Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga. “For the past three years COMPACFLT has conducted this important humanitarian civic assistance mission in concert with allies, partners, friends and NGOs (non- governmental organizations) throughout the Asia-Pacific region,” said Willard. “Lives have been saved and quality of life improved in many of the regions we’ve visited.”

Pacific Partnership works by, with and through partner nations, non-governmental organizations and other U.S. government agencies to execute a variety of humanitarian civic action (HCA) missions in the Pacific Fleet area of responsibility from a ship dedicated to this HCA mission.

The mission is being coordinated with several partner nations and will be carried out in conjunction with non-governmental relief organizations. A number of military and civilian agencies are planning myriad details that go into a months-long mission which includes a variety of engineering, medical and dental civic-action programs to provide humanitarian assistance to nations in the Oceania region.

This year’s mission will be based on board USS Dubuque (LPD 8), an Austin-class amphibious transport dock ship homeported in San Diego. This year’s mission will be more engineering focused, taking advantage of the unique capabilities Dubuque provides to transport and expeditiously unload construction equipment and supplies. Medical and dental civic action programs will be conducted ashore.

In 2008, USNS Mercy (T-AH 19), one of the U.S. Navy’s two hospital ships, conducted a four-month humanitarian mission, visiting the Republic of the Philippines, Vietnam, the Federated States of Micronesia, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. The Pacific Partnership 2008 team provided a variety of medical, dental, educational and preventive medicine services to more than 90,000 patients.

In 2007, amphibious assault ship USS Peleliu (LHA 5), conducted a four-month humanitarian mission, visiting the Philippines, Vietnam, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. During these humanitarian missions, the Pacific Partnership 2007 team provided a variety of medical, dental, educational and preventive medicine services to more than 31,600 patients. For this mission, Dubuque will be configured with humanitarian civic assistance equipment and a robust multi-specialized team of preventive medicine personnel, veterinarians, medical and dental teams, a construction battalion and engineering personnel.

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[U.S. Strategic Submarine Patrols Continue at Near Cold War Tempo](#)

Defpro – March 16

The U.S. fleet of 14 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines conducted 31 nuclear deterrent patrols in 2008 at an operational tempo comparable to during the Cold War. The new patrol information, which was obtained from the U.S. Navy under the Freedom of Information Act, coincides with the completion on February 11, 2009, of the 1,000th deterrent patrol by an Ohio-class submarine since 1982.

The information shows that the United States conducts more nuclear deterrent patrols each year than Russia, France, United Kingdom and China combined.

Patrols by the Number

The 31 patrols conducted in 2008 top a 48-year history of continuous deterrent patrols. Since the USS George Washington (SSBN-598) departed Charleston, S.C., on the first nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) patrol on November 15, 1960, 59 SSBNs have conducted 3,814 patrols through 2008.

The annual number of patrols has fluctuated considerably over the years, peaking at 131 patrols in 1967. Declines occurred mainly due to retirement of SSBNs rather than changes in the mission. The retirement of the early classes of SSBNs in 1979-1981 almost eliminated patrols in the Pacific, but the new Ohio-class gradually rebuilt the posture. The stand-down of Poseidon SSBNs in October 1991 and the retirement of all non-Ohio-class SSBNs by 1993 reduced Atlantic patrols by nearly 60 percent. The patrols increased again in the second half of the 1990s and more Ohio-class SSBNs were added to the fleet, but started dropping from 2000 as four Ohio-class SSBNs were withdrawn from nuclear missions and four others underwent lengthy backfits from the Trident I C4 to the Trident II D5 Trident missile.

During the Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union, the vast majority of patrols were done in the Atlantic Ocean. Since the early 1990s, patrols in the Atlantic have plummeted and the SSBN force been concentrated on the west coast. The majority of U.S. SSBN patrols today occur in the Pacific.

The current number of patrols is significantly greater than the patrol levels of other countries with sea-based nuclear weapon systems. In fact, the U.S. Navy conducts nearly twice as many SSBN patrols each year as Russia, France, Britain and China combined.

High Operational Tempo

Although the total annual number of SSBN patrols has decreased significantly since the end of the Cold War, the operational tempo of each submarine has not. Each Ohio-class SSBNs today conducts about the same number of patrols per year as during the Cold War, but the duration of each patrol has increased, with each submarine spending approximately 50-60 percent of its time on patrol.

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The high operational tempo is made possible by each SSBN having two crews, Blue and Gold. Each time a submarine returns from a patrol, the other crew takes over, spends a few weeks repairing and replenishing the boat, and takes the SSBN out for its next patrol.

The data also reveals a couple of interesting spikes of increased patrols in 1963/1965 and 1991. The reasons for this increased activity is not known but the periods coincide with the Cuban missile crisis and the failed coup attempt in the final days of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Another way to examine the data is to see how many patrol days each submarine and the fleet accumulate each year. During the Cold War the larger submarine fleet averaged approximately 6,000 patrol days each year, with a peak of 8,515 patrol days in 1967. That performance declined to an average of 3,400 days in the post-Cold War era as the size of the SSBN fleet was reduced. With the removal of four SSBNs from nuclear operations and four others undergoing lengthy missile backfits, the fleet's total patrol days has now dropped to a little over 2,200.

Yet total patrol day numbers can be deceiving because they can obscure how each submarine is doing. Because the Ohio-class SSBN design was optimized for lengthy deterrent patrols, the average number of days each submarine spends on patrol has been higher in the post-Cold War period than during the Cold War itself. Patrols can be shortened by technical problems, but many Ohio-class submarines today stay on patrol for more than 80 days. Last year, the USS Maine (SSBN-741) conducted a 98-day patrol in the Pacific.

What is a Deterrent Patrol?

An SSBN deterrent patrol is an extended operational deployment during part of which the submarine covers its assigned target package in support of the strategic war plan. Each Ohio-class patrol typically lasts 60-90 days, but one submarine in late 2008 conducted an extended patrol of 98 days and patrols have occasionally exceeded 100 days. Occasionally a patrol is cut short by technical problems, in which case another SSBN can be deployed on short notice. As a result, patrols today in average last about 72 days.

Being on patrol does not mean the submarine is continuously submerged on-station and holding targets at risk. In fact, when the submarine is not on Hard Alert holding targets at risk in Russia, China, or regional states, much of the patrol time is spent on cruising between homeport, patrol areas, exercising with other naval forces, undergoing inspections and certifications, performing Weapon System Readiness Tests (WSRTs), conducting retargeting exercises, and Command and Control exercises.

Another activity involves so-called SCOOP exercises (SSBN Continuity of Operations Program) where the SSBN will practice replenishment or refit in forward ports in case the homeport is annihilated in wartime. In the Pacific, the SCOOP ports include Pearl Harbor, Hawaii (see Figure 5), Guam, Seward,

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Alaska, Astoria, Oregon, and San Diego, California. In the Atlantic they include Port Canaveral and Mayport, Florida, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, and Halifax, Canada. The SSBN may even return to its homeport and redeploy a day or two later on the same patrol.

Although patrols normally end at the base where they started, this is not always the case. An SSBN that departs Naval Submarine Base Bangor, Washington, might go on-station for several weeks in alert operational areas, conduct various training and exercises, and then arrive at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. After a brief port visit and replenishment the submarine typically resumes its patrol and eventually returns to Bangor. But sometimes the patrol will end in Hawaii, a new crew be flown in to replace the old, and the submarine undergo refit at the forward location as part of a SCOOP exercise. The SSBN then departs Hawaii on a new patrol, goes on-station in alert operational areas, conducts more exercises and inspections, and eventually returns to Bangor where the new patrol ends.

This type of broken up patrol where the submarine is allowed to do more than on-station operations is sometimes described as “modified alert” and said to be different from the Cold War. But SSBNs have never been on-station all the time, with most deployed submarines being in transit between on-station alert areas and other non-alert operations. In fact, “modified alert” patrols date back to the early 1970s.

Of the 14 SSBNs currently in the fleet, two are normally in overhaul at any given time. Of the remaining operational 12 submarines, 8-9 are deployed on patrol at any given time. Four of these (two in each ocean) are on “Hard Alert” while the 4-5 non-alert SSBNs can be brought to alert level within a relatively short time if necessary. One to three SSBNs are in refit at the home base in preparation for their next patrol.

The SSBNs on Hard Alert continuously hold at risk facilities in Russia, China and regional states with an estimated 384 nuclear warheads on 96 Trident II D5 missiles that can be launched within “a few minutes” after receiving the launch order. The targets in the “target packages” are selected based on the taskings of the strategic war plan, known today as Operations Plan (OPLAN) 8010.

What is the Mission?

But why, nearly two decades after the Cold War ended, are 28 crews ordered to sail 14 SSBNs with more than 1,000 nuclear warheads on 30-plus patrols each year at an operational tempo comparable to that of the Cold War?

The official line is, as stated last month by Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter during the celebration of the 1,000th Ohio-class deterrent patrol, that “the ability of our Trident fleet to [be ready to launch its missiles] 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, has promoted the interests of peace and freedom around the world....Since the beginning of the nuclear age, the world has seen a drastic reduction in wartime deaths.”

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STRATCOM commander General Kevin Chilton (left) and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead. General Chilton says SSBNs deter not only nuclear conflict but “conflict in general” and are “as equally important today, as they ever were during the height of the Cold War.”

The warfighters add more nuances, including Commander Jeff Grimes of the Trident submarine USS Maryland (SSBN-738) who at the start of a recent deterrent patrol explained it to Navy Times: “There are nuclear weapons in the world today. Many nations have them. Proliferation is possible in the growing technologies societies have. The power of the deterrent is the knowledge that the capability exists in the hands of controlled people. So on a global scale, deterrence is showing how it’s working every day. We haven’t had a global, world war, in a long time,” he said. “Intelligence is different, the threats are different, so we do adjust the planning and contingencies for strategic operations continually to face the threats that may or may not be seen....We’re there on the front line, ready to go,” Grimes declared.

STRATCOM commander General Kevin Chilton, who in a war would advise the president on which nuclear strike options to use, said recently that although some people thought the Trident mission would end with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the SSBNs “are as equally important today, as they ever were during the height of the Cold War....The application of deterrence can actually be more complicated in the 21st century, but some fundamentals don’t change,” he said and added: “And it is not just to deter nuclear conflict. These forces have served to deter conflict in general, writ large, since they’ve been fielded.”

These are strong and diverse claims that are also made in some of the command histories that each SSBN produces. Some of them state that the mission is to “maintain world peace,” which has certainly not been the case in the post-Cold War era. Others describe the mission as “providing strategic deterrence to prevent nuclear war” (my emphasis), which sounds more credible. But even in that case, can we really tell whether it is the SSBNs that prevent nuclear war and not the ICBMs or bombers?

The enormous differences between maintaining world peace, preventing wars, and preventing nuclear war demand that officials articulate the SSBN mission much more clearly. To that end, it would be good to hear why it takes 12 operational SSBNs with more than 1,100 nuclear warheads on 30-plus patrols per year to deter nuclear attack against the United States, but only three operational SSBNs with less than 160 warheads on six patrols per year to safeguard the United Kingdom.

Last year Russia’s SSBNs returned to sea at a level not seen in a decade and it plans to build eight new Borey-class SSBNs with new multi-warhead missiles. France is completing its fourth Triomphant-class SSBNs also with a new multi-warhead missile, and Britain has announced plans to build four new SSBNs. China is building 3-5 new Jin-class SSBNs with 8000-kilometer missiles, and India is said to be working on an SSBN as well. The U.S. Navy has also begun design work on its next ballistic missile submarine to replace the Ohio-class.

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révolutionnaire

07/2009

13 Mar 09 – 27 Mar 09

In short, the nuclear powers seem to be recommitting themselves to an era of deploying large numbers of nuclear weapons in the oceans. Most people tend to view sea-based nuclear weapons as the most legitimate leg of the Triad. Yet of all strategic nuclear weapons, sea-based ballistic missiles are the most difficult to track, the most problematic to communicate with in a crisis, the hardest to verify in an arms control agreement, and the only ones that can sneak up on an adversary in a surprise attack.

If the Obama administration wants to decisively move the world toward “dramatic reductions” and ultimately the elimination of nuclear weapons, then it must seek answers to these issues. In the short term, it needs to ask whether the Cold War operational tempo of U.S. SSBNs is counterproductive by sending a signal to other nuclear weapon states that triggers modernization of their forces and makes reductions harder to achieve than otherwise. In other words, what is the net impact of the SSBN patrols on U.S. national security objectives in an era of pursuing nuclear disarmament?

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[Russia, China to Hold Joint Military Exercises](#)

Defense News – March 18

Russia and China will conduct joint military exercises this summer on Chinese territory, Interfax news agency reported on March 18, citing a source in the Russian defense ministry.

"Consultations between the two countries' defense ministries will begin shortly, in which the forces and resources involved in the exercises are to be determined, as well as the thematic focus of the joint maneuvers," he said.

Counter-terrorism will be one element of the war games, said the source. He did not specify the timing of the exercises, but Interfax reported that they would take place in summer 2009 on Chinese territory.

"These will be bilateral Russian-Chinese exercises and not maneuvers under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)," the source said, referring to a six-nation regional group led by Moscow and Beijing.

Russia and China have stepped up their military cooperation in recent years, holding regular joint exercises since 2005, although analysts say the SCO has yet to become a full-fledged military alliance.

During the Cold War, Moscow and Beijing had a tense relationship as rivals for the leadership of the Communist world.

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[Singapore, Thailand and US complete trilateral air exercise](#)

Channel News Asia – March 20

Exercise Cope Tiger, an annual trilateral air exercise conducted by Singapore, Thailand and the United States, came to a close at Korat Airbase, Thailand, on Friday. Officiating at the closing ceremony were Singapore's Chief of Air Force, Major-General Ng Chee Khern; Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Air Force Itthaporn Subhawong; and Commander, Hawaii Air National Guard, Major-General Darryll D. M. Wong from the United States.

The first phase of Exercise Cope Tiger, a command post exercise, was held at Singapore's Paya Lebar Airbase from December 15 to 17, 2008. The second phase, a flying training exercise, was conducted at Korat and Udon Thani airbases, Thailand, from March 9 to 20, 2009. About 2,000 personnel, 118 aircraft and 37 ground-based air defence systems from the three countries were deployed for this year's exercise, which is the fifteenth in the series. As part of the exercise, the participants also provided medical and dental services to the local community in Korat in a two-day joint socio-civic programme.

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[Nuclear-Powered U.S. Sub Involved in Collision](#)

Global Security Newswire – March 23

A nuclear-powered U.S. submarine operating in waters near Iran was involved in a collision Friday with an amphibious U.S. vessel, Reuters reported (see [GSN](#), Feb. 20). The accident in the Strait of Hormuz did not damage the nuclear propulsion unit on the *USS Hartford*, according to U.S. Fifth Fleet spokesman Lt. Nathan Christensen. However, 15 sailors on the submarine suffered minimal injuries in the collision with the *USS New Orleans*.

"It was a nighttime event and the submarine was submerged at the time," Christensen said. "Both ships are operating under their own power and have passed through the strait."

The accident follows a 2007 incident in which another nuclear-powered submarine, the *USS Newport News*, hit a Japanese ship in the strait, Reuters reported (Raissa Kasolowsky, Reuters/[International Herald Tribune](#), March 20).

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[Japan Readies Missile Interceptors](#)

The New York Times –March 27

Japan authorized its military Friday to destroy any debris from a North Korean rocket that might fall on its territory. North Korea has said it intends to put a satellite into orbit as early as next week, and warned that fragments could fall into waters off northern Japan.

Japan, South Korea and the United States suspect the launch is a cover for a long-range missile test. In response, Tokyo will deploy missile interceptors and dispatch two warships to the waters between Japan and the Korean peninsula, Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada said.

A battery of Patriot land-to-air missiles will also be deployed in Tokyo, he said. “Whether it’s a satellite or a missile, we are extremely uncomfortable with the object flying over Japanese territory,” Mr. Hamada said. “It’s natural for Japan to seek to eliminate any threat.”

The government spokesman, Takeo Kawamura, called for calm on Friday, saying it was unlikely that debris would fall on Japan. “We need everyone to continue with their daily lives as usual,” Mr. Kawamura said.

Tension mounted this week after reports that a rocket is being prepared for launch at a pad near North Korea’s northeastern coast. Pyongyang has announced that a test would be conducted between April 4 and 8.

A United Nations Security Council resolution bars North Korea from testing missiles and nuclear devices. Japan, among other nations, imposed tight trade sanctions on North Korea in 2006 after it test-fired a missile and conducted a nuclear test. The United States, Japan and its allies have also demanded the North cancel the launch, and have threatened stricter international sanctions. Even a satellite launch would violate a United Nations Security Council resolution prohibiting ballistic activity, they say.

Also on Friday, Russia joined the chorus of nations condemning the upcoming launch. “We understand that the current situation in the region of North-East Asia is tense, and this is why it would be better if our partners in North Korea abstained from this, from this launch,” Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin told journalists, according to Reuters.

A successful test by North Korea would demonstrate that Pyongyang has the technology to launch a missile that could travel as far as the far western United States. The test would come amid continuing attempts to persuade the North to dismantle its nuclear weapons program.

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[Iran Rejects U.K. Pressure to End Uranium Enrichment Program](#)

Bloomberg – March 18

Iran rejected renewed U.K. pressure to scrap its uranium enrichment program and said Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government should adopt a "realistic attitude" instead of issuing "repetitive statements."

Aliasghar Soltanieh, Iran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, said his country is cooperating with the United Nations nuclear watchdog and is committed to the Non- Proliferation Treaty. "There has been no evidence of diversion of nuclear material" for building atomic weapons, Soltanieh told the state- run Press TV satellite channel yesterday.

He was speaking hours after Brown called on Iran to end uranium enrichment in return for western help to develop a civil nuclear plan. The U.K., the U.S. and other allies say the nuclear program is a cover for weapons development. The government in Tehran rejects the accusation and says the project is intended to generate electricity for its growing population.

Enriched uranium can be used to fuel a reactor and, at higher concentrations, may form the core of a bomb. In his speech in London yesterday, Brown said Iran would get guaranteed supplies of uranium from nuclear states, providing safeguards were in place. Iran, under UN investigation since 2003, says it has the right as an NPT signatory to pursue enrichment on its own soil.

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[No uranium sales unless India signs NPT: Australia](#)

Express Buzz – March 19

Despite the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) nod for the historic India-US nuclear deal, Australia, one of the world's largest producers of uranium, is unwilling to export it to India unless New Delhi signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the country's envoy says. "The NSG decision cannot affect our policies and decisions. We are very clear that we would not supply uranium to any country that has not signed the NPT," Australian High Commissioner to India John McCarthy told IANS here. "The present labour government (of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) is very particular about this issue and there is no chance of laxity in its stand," the envoy, who was here for a media seminar, added. "In fact, the previous prime minister of Australia, John Howard, was somewhat lenient and ready for negotiations with India. If this deal had happened during his government then the situation could have been different," McCarthy stated.

At the same time, the uranium issue would not cloud trade ties between India and Australia, the envoy maintained. "However, this stance of Australia would not affect trade relations between the two countries. Our bilateral trade is increasing at good pace and our negotiations are on to increase it in coming days." McCarthy said. After India and the US signed their watershed nuclear deal and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) approved India-specific safeguards, the 45-nation NSG in September gave its nod for lifting a global ban on nuclear trade with India, ending nearly 34 years of the country's isolation.

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[North Korea Presses for Light-Water Reactors](#)

Global Security Newswire – March 19

North Korea has suggested that it would accept full verification of its nuclear operations and holdings if it is promised light-water nuclear power reactors in return, Kyodo News reported today (see [GSN](#), March 18). North Korean nuclear negotiator Kim Kye Gwan offered the deal in February during a meeting in Pyongyang with his Chinese counterpart, Wu Dawei, according to sources familiar with the six-nation nuclear talks. The diplomatic process stalled last year over the question of verification. Pyongyang denied that it had agreed to allow collection of nuclear samples as part of the process, and delegates could not break the deadlock during their most recent meeting in December.

Pyongyang wants two reactors, one source said. However, the source indicated that Washington is not likely to agree to the offer after already removing North Korea from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism in hopes of moving the verification plan ahead.

North Korea was supposed to receive two reactors under the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Clinton-era plan to dismantle facilities involved in the Asian nation's nuclear weapons efforts. The deal collapsed nearly a decade later after the Bush administration alleged that Pyongyang was conducting secret uranium enrichment activities. After several years of talks, the Stalinist state signed a denuclearization deal in 2007 and has reached the second of three phases of dismantlement of its atomic infrastructure (Kyodo News, March 19). China this week called on North Korea to help move the process forward, the Associated Press reported.

North Korean Premier Kim Yong Il met with his Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao, along with Chinese President Hu Jintao during a trip to Beijing. Wen said yesterday during his meeting with Kim that Beijing hopes to "actively push forward" the talks, according to the official *People's Daily* newspaper.

Other nations in the region have hoped to see China, North Korea's primary ally and host of the six-party talks, persuade the Stalinist state to resume negotiations. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang offered no insight into how Beijing might handle the matter, but said the government "sincerely hopes" to see the talks resume in short order. It would be a matter of scheduling and "whether the conditions are right," he said (Associated Press/[Washington Post](#), March 19).

Meanwhile, a large-scale U.S.-South Korean military exercise has mostly finished, the Xinhua News Agency reported. Pyongyang had complained bitterly about the event that involved tens of thousands of U.S. and South Korean military personnel, calling it "nuclear war exercises designed to mount a pre-emptive attack." U.S. officials denied the claim.

The training is complete and an evaluation of the exercise is scheduled for tomorrow, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry ([Xinhua News Agency](#), March 19).

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[Russia, U.S. could agree new START treaty by December](#)

RIA Novosti – March 20

Russia and the United States have every chance of reaching an agreement on a new arms reduction treaty to replace START-1 by December this year, a Russian deputy foreign minister said on Friday. "There is ample time before December to work out a serious and detailed document," Sergei Ryabkov said.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-1) signed between the Soviet Union and the United States in 1991 places a limit of 6,000 strategic or long-range nuclear warheads on each side. The treaty expires in December 2009. Ryabkov also said that Moscow was pinning great hopes on a forthcoming meeting between President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart, Barack Obama, scheduled for April 1 in London.

"The widely discussed 'reboot' initiated by our American partners has really begun. We are doing well. We hope that further development of the dialogue and its reinvigoration ... will enable us to build up the positive quality of bilateral relations," he said.

Relations between the former Cold War archrivals have been strained in recent years over a host of differences, including the planned U.S. missile defense in Eastern Europe and Russia's armed conflict with U.S. ally Georgia in August.

The two countries' top diplomats made a symbolic reboot to improve ties when they met in Geneva earlier this month.

Ryabkov warned, however, that Russia would never mindlessly go along with the U.S. plans for a missile shield. "We are ready for cooperation on the missile shield, but not in the role of a draft horse that puts on a harness and pulls in the direction ordered by a teamster," he said.

The United States has cited Iran's controversial nuclear program as one of the reasons behind its plans to deploy a missile base in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic. The missile shield has been strongly opposed by Russia, which views it as a threat to its national security. Top Russian officials have repeatedly expressed their hope that President Obama will not follow through with the missile defense plans of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

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[Secretary-General welcomes entry into force of historic treaty on nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia](#)

Department of Public Information, United Nations – March 20

The following statement was issued today by the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General welcomes the entry into force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia. Opened for signature on 8 September 2006, it has now been ratified by all five Central Asian States and will enter into force on 21 March 2009.

The Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, for which the Government of Kyrgyzstan is the depositary, has five States parties: the Republic of Kazakhstan; the Kyrgyz Republic; the Republic of Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Treaty is of particular significance. This will be the first nuclear-weapon-free zone to be established in the northern hemisphere and will also encompass an area where nuclear weapons previously existed. It will also be the first nuclear-weapon-free zone that requires its parties to conclude with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and bring into force an Additional Protocol to their Safeguards Agreements with IAEA within 18 months after the entry into force of the Treaty, and to comply fully with the provisions of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Treaty, the Secretary-General would like to urge the States concerned to address any outstanding issues that may affect its operation.

As the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons approaches, the Secretary-General trusts that the entry into force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia will reinforce efforts to strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, underline the strategic and moral value of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as the possibilities for greater progress on a range of issues in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons.

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[India links CTBT signing to nuclear disarmament](#)

Times of India – March 24

India has asserted it would not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty - a top non-proliferation priority of the Obama administration unless the world moves "categorically towards nuclear disarmament in a credible time-frame." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Special Envoy for Nuclear Issues and Climate Change, Shyam Saran, Monday acknowledged that the CTBT is "an issue that has been seen as potentially, a contentious one in our relations with the new US administration."

"President (Barack) Obama has made clear that he will seek Senate ratification of, which the US has signed, and India has not", he said in a keynote speech at The Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank on "The US-India Nuclear Agreement: Expectations and Consequences." "He has also promised to launch a 'diplomatic effort to bring on board other states whose ratifications are required for the treaty to enter into force,'" Saran noted citing from Obama's letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in September.

"India has been a consistent votary of a CTBT but did not sign the CTBT as it eventually emerged because it was not explicitly linked to the goal of nuclear disarmament," the former foreign secretary said. "For India, this was crucial since it was not acceptable to legitimise, in any way, a permanent division between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states," he said.

He said that the "other reason was the manner in which the CTBT was pushed through, bypassing the Conference on Disarmament, which works by consensus, and bringing the issue before the UN General Assembly. This was done to over-ride Indian objections and was justifiably seen in India as a not too subtle attempt to foreclose India's options."

"Additionally," Saran noted, "India was included in a category of states whose signature and ratification was deemed necessary in order for the Treaty to come into force, again an unusual provision, directed at putting international pressure on India to join a Treaty whose provisions it did not agree with." "It was against this background that India did not sign the CTBT," but said however, that since the Pokhran tests in May 1998, "India has observed a unilateral and voluntary moratorium and is committed to its continuance," he explained. But if "the world moves categorically towards nuclear disarmament in a credible time-frame, the Indo-US differences over the CTBT would probably recede into the background," Saran said.

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