

U.S.-China Military Tensions Grow

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Global Research, January 20, 2010

20 January 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Even though the U.S. military budget is almost ten times that of China's (with a population more than four times as large) and Washington plans a record \$708 billion defense budget for next year compared to Russia spending less than \$40 billion last year for the same, China and Russia are portrayed as threats to the U.S. and its allies.

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On December 23 of last year Raytheon Company announced that it had received a \$1.1 billion contract with Taiwan for the purchase of 200 Patriot anti-ballistic missiles. In early January the U.S. Defense Department cleared the transaction "despite opposition from rival China, where a military official proposed sanctioning U.S. firms that sell arms to the island." [1]

The sale completes a \$6.5 billion weapons package approved by the previous George W. Bush administration at the end of 2008. In the words of the Asia bureau chief of Defense News, "This is the last piece that Taiwan has been waiting on." [2]

Defense News first reported on the agreement and reminded its readers that "Raytheon already won smaller contracts for Taiwan in January 2009 and in 2008 for upgrades to the Patriot systems the country already had. Those contracts were to upgrade the systems to Configuration 3, the same upgrade the company is completing for the U.S. Army."

The source also described what the enhanced Patriot capacity consisted of: "Configuration 3 is Raytheon's most advanced Patriot system and allows the use of Lockheed Martin's Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles [and] Raytheon's Guidance Enhanced Missile-Tactical [Patriot-2 upgrade] missiles...." [3]

The PAC-3 is the latest, most advanced Patriot missile design and the first capable of shooting down tactical ballistic missiles. It is the initial tier of a layered missile shield system which also includes Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), Ground Based Interceptor (GBI), Ground-Based Midcourse Defense (GMD), Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), ship-based Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense equipped with Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) interceptors, Forward Based X-Band Radar (FBXB) and Exoatmospheric Kill Vehicle (EKV) components. An integrated network that ranges from the battlefield to the heavens.

The system is modular and highly mobile and its batteries are thus more easily able to evade detection and attack. It also extends the range of previous Patriot versions several fold.

“[T]he PAC-3 interceptors, enhanced by [an] advanced radar and command center, are capable of protecting an area approximately seven times greater than the original Patriot system.” [4]

If like the rest of the world Chinese authorities anticipated a reduction if not halt in the pace of American global military expansion with the advent of a new administration in Washington a year ago, like everyone they else have been rudely disabused of the notion.

Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei urged the United States to reconsider the Taiwan arms package in the sixth official Chinese warning in a week earlier this month, telling his nation’s Xinhua News Agency that “China had strongly protested the U.S. government’s recent decision to allow Raytheon Company and Lockheed Martin Corp. to sell weapons to Taiwan” and “The U.S. arms sales to Taiwan undermine China’s national security.” [5]

Later information added to the inventory and to China’s ire when it was revealed that “the Obama Administration would soon announce the sale to Taiwan of a package worth billions of U.S. dollars including Black Hawk helicopters, anti-missile systems and plans for diesel-powered submarines in a move likely to anger China.” [6]

In addition, the China Times reported that Taiwan was to obtain eight second-hand Oliver Hazard Perry-class frigates from the U.S. in addition to the 200 Patriot missiles. The warships were designed in the 1970s as comparatively inexpensive alternatives to World War II-era destroyers. The new deal will double the amount of U.S. Perry-class frigates that Taiwan already possesses to 16.

They will also factor into missile defense and at a higher level, as “The island hopes to arm them with a version of the advanced Aegis Combat System (see above), which uses computers and radar to take out multiple targets, as well as sophisticated missile launch technology....” [7]

While both Washington and Taipei will present the weapons transactions as strictly defensive in nature, it is worth recalling that last autumn Taiwan conducted its “largest-ever missile test...launched from a secretive and tightly guarded base in southern Taiwan” with missiles “capable of reaching major Chinese cities.” [8]

President Ma Ying-jeou observed the missile launches which “included the test-firing of a top secret, newly developed medium-range surface-to-surface missile with a range of 3,000 kilometres, capable of striking major cities in central, northern and southern China.” [9]

The Patriot Advanced Capability and SM-3 interceptor missiles the U.S. is providing Taiwan could well be employed to counter a mainland Chinese counterattack or at the least protect the launch sites of Taiwanese medium range missiles which, as noted above, are capable of hitting most of China’s major cities.

Beijing responded on January 11 by conducting a ground-based midcourse interceptor missile test over its territory.

Professor Tan Kaijia of the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) National Defense University told

Xinhua “If the ballistic missile is regarded as a spear, now we have succeeded in building a shield for self-defense.” [10]

Time Magazine characterized the significance of the test in writing: “There’s no chance China’s gambit will deter the U.S. from backing Taiwan....But the test does signal a ratcheting up of tensions between Beijing and Washington....” [11]

Both China and the U.S., the first in 2007 and the second the following year, with a Standard Missile-3 fired from an Aegis-class frigate in the Pacific Ocean in the American case, destroyed satellites in orbit. The dawn of space war had begun.

A January 15 feature on a Russian website titled “Possible space wars in the near future” provided background information. “It is hard to overestimate the role played by military satellite systems. Since the 1970s, an increasingly greater number of troop-control, telecommunications, target-acquisition, navigation and other processes depend on spacecraft which are therefore becoming more important...The space echelon’s role is directly proportional to the development level of any given nation and its armed forces.” [12]

China and Russia for years have been advocating a ban on the use of space for military purposes, annually raising the issue in the United Nations. The U.S. has just as persistently opposed the initiatives.

To comprehend the context in which recent developments have occurred, Washington has for three years increasingly and tenaciously included China and Russia with Iran and North Korea as belligerents in prospective future conflicts.

The campaign began in earnest in February of 2007 when then and still Pentagon chief Robert Gates testified before the U.S. House Armed Services Committee on the Defense Department Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Request and said among other matters:

“In addition to fighting the global war on terror, we also face the danger posed by Iran and North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and the threat they pose not only to their neighbors, but globally because of their record of proliferation; the uncertain paths of China and Russia, which are both pursuing sophisticated military modernization programs; and a range of other flashpoints and challenges...We need both the ability for regular force-on-force conflicts because we don’t know what’s going to develop in places like Russia and China, in North Korea, in Iran and elsewhere.” [13]

If it be objected that Gates was only alluding to general contingency plans, ones that could apply to any major nation, neither his comments nor any by U.S. defense officials since have mentioned fellow nuclear powers Britain, France, India and Israel in a similar vein, but have reiterated concerns about Russia and China with an alarming consistency. In fact China and Russia have been substituted for Iraq in the former axis of evil category.

Even though the U.S. military budget is almost ten times that of China’s (with a population more than four times as large) and Washington plans a record \$708 billion defense budget for next year compared to Russia spending less than \$40 billion last year for the same, China and Russia are portrayed as threats to the U.S. and its allies. China has no troops outside its borders; Russia has a small handful in its former territories in Abkhazia, Armenia, South Ossetia and Transdniester. The U.S. has hundreds of thousands of troops stationed in

six continents.

Russia and China both reacted harshly to Gates' statements in February of 2007 and only three days afterward, with Gates in the audience, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a speech at the annual Munich Security Conference in which he warned:

"[W]hat is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making.

"It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within."

"Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centres of tension. Judge for yourselves: wars as well as local and regional conflicts have not diminished....And no less people perish in these conflicts - even more are dying than before. Significantly more, significantly more!

"Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force - military force - in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts."

"One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations...." [14]

The warning was not heeded in Washington.

Three months later the Pentagon chief resumed his earlier accusations. In May of 2007 the Defense Department issued its annual report on China's military capability, citing "continuing efforts to project Chinese power beyond its immediate region and to develop high-technology systems that can challenge the best in the world."

"U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates says some of China's efforts cause him concern."

The report said "China is pursuing long-term, comprehensive transformation of its military forces" to "enable it to project power and deny other countries the ability to threaten it." [15] While Gates was in charge of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and responsible for almost half of international military spending he was offended that the world's most populous nation might desire to "deny others countries the ability to threaten it."

A year after Gates linked China and Russia with surviving "axis of evil" suspects Iran and North Korea, National Director of Intelligence Michael McConnell singled out China, Russia and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as the main threats to the United States, even more than al-Qaeda.

The Voice of Russia responded to McDonnell's accusations in a commentary that included these excerpts:

"Russia has demanded an explanation from America over a report by the Director of

American national intelligence in which Russia, China, Iraq, Iran, North Korea and al-Qaida are described as sources of strategic threats to the U.S....Quite possibly, the report by the U.S intelligence community amounts to accounting for the staggering sums of money that is allocated yearly for its upkeep. There could be other reasons to explain why Russia has been included among states posing a threat to America." [16]

Gates has remained as defense secretary for the new American administration and so has the anti-Chinese and anti-Russian rhetoric.

On May 1 of last year Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that "The Obama administration is working to improve deteriorating U.S. relations with a number of Latin American nations to counter growing Iranian, Chinese and Russian influence in the Western Hemisphere...." [17] The month after she spoke those words a military coup was staged in Honduras and two weeks after that the U.S. secured the use of seven military bases in Colombia.

In September Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair issued the U.S.'s quadrennial National Intelligence Strategy report which said "Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea pose the greatest challenges to the United States' national interests. [18]

Agence France-Presse said that "The United States on [September 15] put emerging superpower China and former Cold War foe Russia alongside Iran and North Korea on a list of the four main nations challenging American interests" and quoted from Blair's report:

China was fingered for its "increasing natural resource-focused diplomacy and military modernization."

"Russia is a US partner in important initiatives such as securing fissile material and combating nuclear terrorism, but it may continue to seek avenues for reasserting power and influence in ways that complicate US interests." [19]

China is not allowed to deny other nations the ability to threaten it and Russia is not permitted to complicate U.S. interests.

The trend, ominous in its relentlessness, continues into this year.

The vice president of Lockheed Martin's Missile Defense Systems, John Holly, touted his company's role in the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System - components of which are being delivered to Taiwan - as "the shining star" of Lockheed's interceptor missile portfolio, and according to a newspaper in the city which hosts the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency "Pointing to missile programs in North Korea, Iran, Russia and China, Holly said, 'the world is not a very safe world ... and it is incumbent upon us in industry to provide [the Pentagon] with the best capabilities.'" [20]

Three days afterward the Pentagon's Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs Wallace Gregson "voiced doubts about China's insistence that its use of space is for peaceful means" and stated "The Chinese have stated that they oppose the militarization of space. Their actions seem to indicate the contrary intention." [21]

The next day Admiral Robert Willard, head of the U.S. Pacific Command, stated in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee that China's "powerful economic engine is also funding a military modernization program that has raised concerns in the region — a concern also shared by the U.S. Pacific Command." [22]

The U.S. Navy has six fleets and eleven aircraft carrier strike groups in or available for deployment to all parts of the world, but China with only a “brown water” navy off its own coast is a cause for concern to the U.S.

As Alan Mackinnon, the chairman of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, wrote last September:

“The world of war is today dominated by a single superpower. In military terms the United States sits astride the world like a giant Colossus. As a country with only five per cent of the world’s population it accounts for almost 50 per cent of global arms spending.

“Its 11 naval carrier fleets patrol every ocean and its 909 military bases are scattered strategically across every continent. No other country has reciprocal bases on US territory – it would be unthinkable and unconstitutional. It is 20 years since the end of the Cold War and the United States and its allies face no significant military threat today. Why then have we not had the hoped-for peace dividend?

Why does the world’s most powerful nation continue to increase its military budget, now over \$1.2 trillion a year in real terms?

What threat is all this supposed to counter?

“The US response has been largely military – the expansion of NATO and the encirclement of Russia and China in a ring of hostile bases and alliances. And continuing pressure to isolate and weaken Iran.” [23]

Observations to be kept in the forefront of people’s minds as China is increasingly presented as a security challenge – and a strategic threat – to the world’s sole military superpower.

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Notes

- 1) Reuters, January 7, 2010
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Defense News, December 23, 2009
- 4) http://www.missilethreat.com/missiledefensesystems/id.41/system_detail.asp
- 5) Russian Information Agency Novosti, January 9, 2010
- 6) Taiwan News, January 4, 2010
- 7) Agence France-Presse, January 11, 2010
- 8) Radio Taiwan International, October 14, 2009
- 9) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, October 14, 2009
- 10) Asian Times, January 20, 2010
- 11) Time, January 13, 2010
- 12) Russian Information Agency Novosti, January 15, 2010
- 13) <http://www.sras.org/news2.phtml?m=908>
- 14) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html>
- 15) Voice of America News, May 26, 2007
- 16) Voice of Russia, February 8, 2008
- 17) Associated Press, May 1, 2009
- 18) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 16, 2009
- 19) Agence France-Presse, September 15, 2009
- 20) Huntsville Times, January 10, 2010
- 21) Agence France-Presse, January 13, 2010
- 22) Washington Post, January 14, 2010
- 23) Scottish Left Review, November 17, 2009

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