

In Focus Transatlantic Newsletter

An Electronic Newsletter of the Atlantic Council of Canada

#12, October 16, 2008

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US Weapons Sale to Taiwan

On October 3, 2008, the U.S. Congress was officially notified of a possible arms sale to Taiwan worth a total of \$ 6.46 billion. The proposed deal provides:

- 330 Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missiles
- 30 AH-64D Block III Apache Longbow Attack Helicopters
- 32 UGM-84L Submarine-Launched Harpoon Block II missiles
- 2 UTM-84L Harpoon Block II Exercise missiles
- 182 Javelin guided missile rounds and 20 Javelin command launch units
- Associated weapons, equipment and services

According to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO), Taipei welcomes and appreciates Washington's efforts to honor the U.S. commitment to Taiwan. It is an important step not only marking the end of an eight-year dispute over the issue but also symbolizing the arrival of a new era for Taiwan-U.S. mutual trust and cooperation. Furthermore, this sale is viewed as an opportunity to promote a peaceful development of cross-strait relations and the overall stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

China's response was stern. Foreign ministry spokesperson Qin Gang declared this plan to be a threat to peace in the region undermining stability across the Taiwan Strait. From the Chinese perspective, the proposed arms sale "has contaminated the sound atmosphere for (China-U.S.) military relations and gravely jeopardized China's national security." In answer to the U.S. assertion that they have faithfully abided by the U.S.-Taiwan Relations Act providing for sales of defensive weapons to Taipei, China reiterated that it had always opposed this law.

China's officials have made it clear that they find the U.S.-Taiwan deal unacceptable and consequently, they urge the United States to drop its military sales to Taiwan and put an end to its military ties to Taiwan so as not to further damage the peace and stability across the straits and China-U.S. relations.

In response to what it considers the objectionable arms sale, China had curtailed military exchanges with the United States. It is claimed that the country's participation in six-nation talks with North Korea about its nuclear weapons, as well as its participation in the international effort on Iran's nuclear program will not be affected. But an upcoming visit to the U.S. by a senior Chinese general, other similar trips, several port calls by naval vessels have been cancelled, and meetings on stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction have been indefinitely postponed.

China's tough stance comes as Taiwan prepares to mark its 60th Anniversary of separate government from China.

[Live links to articles: Pentagon Notifies Congress of Arms Package Sale to Taiwan, Arms Sale to Taiwan Threaten Peace, U.S. Approves \\$6.5 Billion in Taiwan Arms Sales, China Again Slams U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan, US Announces \\$6.5 Billion Arms Sale to Taiwan, China Opposes U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan.](#)

Russia-Venezuela Increased Cooperation

In September, Venezuela and Russia signed two energy cooperation pacts promoting closer ties between Russian Gazprom (natural gas monopoly) and Venezuela's PDVSA (state oil company). In addition, Russia will give a \$1 billion credit to Venezuela to buy military hardware while also increasing its investments into Venezuela's oil industry.

Being a harsh critic of the U.S. politics, President Chavez paid his visit to Russia as relations between Moscow and Washington soured in the wake of the August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia. Also in September, two Russian Tupolev-160 strategic bombers spent a week in Venezuela, engaging in training exercises off the Venezuelan and Brazilian coasts. The Tu-160s are long-range bombers, capable of carrying conventional and nuclear weapons, including long-range nuclear missiles. These training exercises were described as "the most provocative action taken by Russia in the western hemisphere since the end of the Cold War" (Daniel Erikson).

A deepening military relationship between Moscow and Caracas is further demonstrated by the upcoming naval exercises in the Caribbean Sea in November. It is known that 4 vessels have already left the Arctic seaport of Severomorsk. Experts say that the choice of ships for the military maneuvers shows the importance of this particular mission for Russia. The atomic-powered cruiser "Peter the Great" is considered one of the newest, most modern, and most capable weapons systems in the Russian Navy.

Without doubt, it is a response to NATO presence in the Black Sea and particularly to the fact that humanitarian aid was delivered by U.S. combat warships. Political science expert Viacheslav Nikonov affirmed that even though military exercises had been planned in advance, in the light of recent events in the South Caucasus they are also part of the counter measures.

Increased military cooperation with Venezuela also means a broader sphere of influence for Russia, along with a more pronounced military and political presence in the world. Russia is anxious to show to the world that it is ready and willing to take the steps necessary for protection of its national interests. At the same time, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov refutes Western media reports that the cooperation between Russia and Venezuela is aimed against the United States. "Neither Russia or Venezuela has any plans to attack anyone", Lavrov says, emphasizing that their cooperation is based on the norms of international law.

For his part, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez intends to send a message to Washington by taking part in naval exercises with Russia. Chavez is reaching out to Russia, "in part, to irritate the United States and to show his independence from them", says Erikson. Venezuelan president claims that partnership with Russia is aimed at countering possible threats from the U.S. As an example, he points to the re-establishment of the U.S. Fourth Fleet on July 1, which is responsible for operations in the Caribbean and in the Central and South American regions. Analysts argue, however, that it does not pose a threat to Venezuela as the Fleet has no permanent ships assigned to it.

Pentagon officials affirm that they are not worried about the upcoming Russia-Venezuela military exercises in the Caribbean since it is a common practice for many countries and for the U.S. in particular. But analysts say there is a chance that the U.S. Fourth Fleet could be engaged in humanitarian missions in the Caribbean in November when Russian and Venezuelan ships are participating in joint military maneuvers.

[Live links to articles: Russia and Venezuela Confirm Joint Military Exercises, Russia Ties Help Venezuela against U.S., Russia to Sell Venezuela Rocket Launchers, Lavrov says Russia-Venezuela cooperation not targeting U.S., Russia, Venezuela Sign Energy Pact, Putin: Russia May Launch Nuclear Cooperation With Venezuela, Venezuela Increases Ties with Russia.](#)

Iraq-Turkey Tensions Rise

On October 3, a Turkish military outpost in the village of Aktutun, 4 kilometers from Turkey's border with Iraq, was attacked by the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK). According to the Turkish General Staff (TGS), 15 Turkish soldiers were killed in the attack, 23 were wounded, and another 2 soldiers were missing and presumed dead. It was reported that at least 23 were killed among the insurgents.

Friday's attack on Turkey proved to be the deadliest single incident since June 2004, when the PKK returned to violence after a five-year ceasefire. Moreover, it severely damaged the prestige of the Turkish military, which had argued that the PKK was a "spent force". Since Turkish officials had been successful in conveying a sense of security, for the Turkish population the emotional trauma was exacerbated by a sense of shock.

It is unlikely to have been a coincidence that the attack occurred only a few days before the Turkish parliament was due to convene on October 8 to renew the one-year mandate expiring October 17, which allowed the Turkish military to conduct cross-border operations against the PKK in Iraq. The PKK has demonstrated to both its supporters and its enemies that the cross-border raids have failed to destroy it.

Having resumed its insurgent activities in June 2004 the PKK had essentially been waging a psychological rather than a military war, using violence as part of a campaign of psychological and emotional attrition. They were hoping to eventually convince the Turkish authorities that the organization could not be destroyed by military means and that the only solution was to enter into a political dialogue. From this perspective, the attack on Aktutun was a major victory for the PKK.

In response to the attack, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and the Turkish military have pledged to intensify a campaign to crush the PKK. On October 6, they launched airstrikes against suspected Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq. Warplanes bombed the Avasin Basyan region after

spotting suspected members of the PKK. More air raids can be expected in the days and weeks ahead.

The cross-border offensives from either side have increased tensions between Baghdad and Ankara over the presence of rebel groups in Iraq. According to Turkish General Hasan Igsiz, the local Kurdish administration in northern Iraq refuses to cooperate with the Turkish military. Hasan Igsiz asserted that it is necessary for the Iraqi Kurds to recognize the group as a terrorist organization and to stop rendering them assistance. Iraq authorities refuted the accusations blaming their unsuccessful attempts to subdue the PKK on their geographically remote mountainous location.

The PKK has been fighting for the Kurdish southeast since 1984. It is viewed by Turkey, the European Union and the U.S. as a terrorist organization. Conflicts between the group and Turkey are estimated to have cost more than 40, 000 lives.

[Live links to articles: Turkey Launches Air Strikes on Kurdish Rebels in Northern Iraq, Turkish Warplanes Continue Airstrikes on Kurd rebels in Iraq, Turkey Searches for a Plan B after PKK Attack, Kurdish Rebels Kill 15 Turkish Soldiers.](#)

Afghanistan: Mission Impossible?

Last week, numerous news agencies unanimously declared: the war against radical Islamists operating in Afghanistan cannot be won militarily. It all started with Brig.-Gen. Mark Carlton-Smith, Britain's military commander in Afghanistan, saying that Western forces would never be able to win this war and might need to include Taliban in any long-term solutions. In his opinion, if the Taliban were willing to talk, it may be "precisely the sort of progress" needed to end the insurgency.

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman, however, asserts that Western forces are not losing the war in Afghanistan, but there is a recognition that they could be doing more there. As to the possibility of negotiations with the Taliban, he replied that it wasn't an element of their strategy since the insurgents had terrorized Afghan society for years. Similarly, Gen. David McKiernan, commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, believes that any reconciliation effort targeting present-day insurgents needs to be an Afghan-government led endeavor.

What the Afghan mission should be focusing on at this point is to reduce insurgency to a level where it is no longer a strategic threat and could be dealt with by the Afghan National Army. But to achieve this goal, a political surge is needed, meaning more political energy and political engagement, emphasized Kai Eide, the U.N. special envoy to Afghanistan. Faced with the persistent reluctance of some of its European allies to send more troops to Afghanistan or to actually allow them to fight once there, the U.S. has asked NATO countries and Japan to support the \$17-billion bill needed to build up the Afghan army. The stronger and bigger the Afghan army becomes, the less they will depend on foreign forces to provide security. Besides, building the capacity and strength of the Afghan army is strategically important for progress in Afghanistan and eliminating the insurgency's influence over the population.

Thus, about 20,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan will be transferred from NATO to direct American command in an attempt to improve the training and coordination of the Afghan military and police. The troops will be under the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan command, which will give commander Gen. McKiernan better control of all U.S. military assets in the country and will also make him responsible for the training mission as a whole. "We are in a very tough fight – a tough counter-insurgency fight, and we are at a higher level of violence this time this year than

we were this time last year”, said McKiernan. Despite this, McKiernan is optimistic about defeating the insurgents saying, “I am more convinced than ever that the insurgency will not win in Afghanistan.”

Additional military capabilities are needed as quickly as possible, McKiernan said, to help quell rising violence in some eastern and southern provinces committed by the Taliban, al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. However, defeating insurgents in Afghanistan “is not just a question of more soldiers.” McKiernan believes that achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan will also require increased economic aid, more governance, and more political assistance for the Afghan government. In the counterinsurgency effort, a key element is to give people reason for hope, and this can never be achieved by merely military means.

Live links to articles: [Don't Downsize NATO's Mission, Afghanistan's Solution Primarily Political, Not Military](#), [Afghan Army's Growth Important to Progress, Afghanistan Says International Force Promises to Reduce Civilian Casualties](#), [U.S. to Unify Training Efforts in Afghanistan](#), [Victory Impossible in Afghanistan](#).

[Recommended Readings](#)

Thailand Sends More Troops to Cambodian Border

By Nopporn Wong-Anan and Ek Madra, Reuters, October 14, 2008

At the heart of the dispute is 1.8 square miles of scrub near the 900-year-old Preah Vihear temple. In 1962, the International Court of Justice awarded it to Cambodia, a ruling that has rankled in Thailand ever since. After Bangkok's backing of Phnom Penh's bid to list the Hindu ruins as a World heritage site in July, tensions have been on the rise.

On October 14, Thailand sent more troops to a disputed stretch of the Cambodian border. Eastern Region Commander Vibulsak Neepan said soldiers from both sides had retreated slightly but were facing off about 100 meters apart and Bangkok was sending in reinforcements in case the dispute escalated. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Canada's Afghan Mission Could Cost up to \$18.1 B

Report, CBC News, October 9, 2008

According to a government report, the military mission in Afghanistan could cost approximately \$18.1 billion or \$1,500 per Canadian household by 2011. In the past 6 years, Canada has already spent between \$7.7 and \$10.5 billion on its mission, and it is estimated that it will spend \$13.9 billion to \$18.1 billion by the end of 2010-2011 budget year. However, the report emphasizes a lack of government consistency or transparency that has made the figures difficult to estimate, therefore, tending to understate the full costs of the Afghan mission. *To read the full report, [click here](#).*

Israelis Unhappy over Jerusalem Plot's Return to Russians

By Batsheva Sobelman and Ashraf Khalil, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers, October 14, 2008

Russian Czar Alexander II bought a large plot of land in Jerusalem from the Ottoman Empire in 1860. Afterwards, the hilltop became a complex serving Russian pilgrims to the Holy Land, with a church, a consulate and the Russian religious delegation. Last week, Israeli Prime Minister

Ehud Olmert arrived in Moscow bearing a long-awaited gift, which finally settled Russian claim on the property.

This move, however, along with its timing (recent clash over Moscow's proposed weapons sale to Syria and Iran), has caused quite an uproar in Israel: the idea of yielding parts of Jerusalem has always been a serious taboo. Furthermore, the precedent can "open up a Pandora's box of other territorial demands." *Read the full article [here](#).*

EU Split on Kosovo Independence

By Michael F. Harsch for ISN Security Watch, October 13, 2008

On October, 8, the UN General Assembly adopted a Serbian drafted resolution which asks the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its opinion on whether Kosovo's declaration of independence was legal. It was a major defeat for the European Union as most EU members were among the 74 countries that abstained from the vote. The reason for the abstention was the fact that EU members could not credibly argue against Serbia's right to appeal to the ICJ. At the same time, despite various calls for European unity, they could not seem to reach a consensus. Fearing that Kosovo's recognition might spur separatist movements in their own countries, Slovakia, Spain, Romania, Cyprus and Greece voted with Serbia.

Although the decision rendered by the ICJ will only be an "advisory opinion," the majority of EU member states are worried that a pending court decision could hold back countries from recognizing Kosovo in the next few years. Moreover, a negative ruling would be a disaster for the Union's credibility on the global stage, as it likes to present itself as a champion of international law. *Read the full article [here](#).*

Sources: Associated Press, Reuters, RIA Novosti, Voice of America, World Politics Review , Los Angeles Times, Global Security, Defense News, CBC News, CNN, Inter Press Service, Novosti NEWSru, Al Jazeera, Interfax, Washington Post, Euro News, Global Security Newswire.

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