



DANGEROUS MOVES: RUSSIA'S SALE OF MISSILE DESTROYERS TO CHINA

INTRODUCTION

An apparent relaxation in tensions between the United States and the People's Republic of China, signaled by the scheduling of a U.S.–China summit later this year, belies the growing strategic challenge the PRC poses to American interests throughout Asia. Of primary concern is China's steady building of a modern naval fleet with which to assert its national interests in Asia. The latest development in this military modernization program is Russia's reported decision to sell two, and possibly more, of its *Sovremenny*-class missile destroyers to China.¹

In addition to increasing the strength of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) significantly, this sale would provide China with advanced technology that could be used in future warships. In addition, the supersonic cruise missiles carried by *Sovremenny*-class destroyers may be capable of overcoming the existing ship-defense anti-missile systems of the U.S. Navy. China's ability to threaten U.S. aircraft carriers and smaller naval ships, as well as most warships in other Asian navies like those of the Republic of China (ROC), will be dangerously enhanced.

The Clinton Administration has ignored the strategic implications of this sale. When Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Vice President Albert Gore visit Beijing in the next few weeks, they must make it very clear to the Chinese government that actions like the military modernization program and the bullying of Taiwan in naval exercises have

1 Bill Gertz, "Pentagon says Russians sell destroyers to China," *The Washington Times*, January 10, 1997, p. A1. See also "China expands reach with Russian destroyers," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 15, 1997, p. 5. Although reports are not clear, China may have purchased two *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, launched in 1996, or may have purchased two ships yet to be built.

undermined peace in Asia. Washington must remind Beijing that the United States (as it demonstrated last March) remains ready to defend the freedom of the seas and will deploy its naval forces to deter such threats to the stability of the region from China.

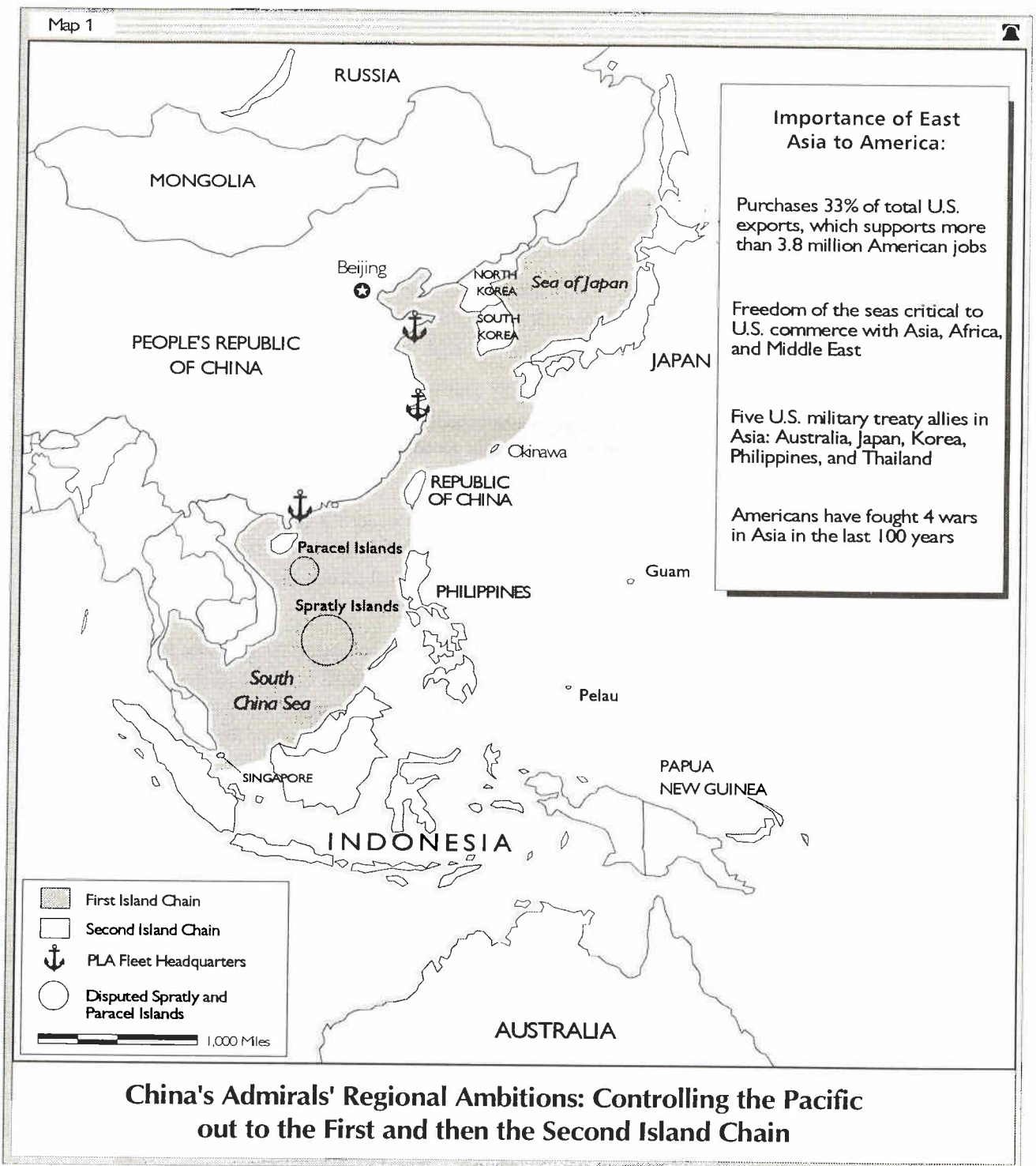
The Clinton Administration should move decisively to counter the Russian sale of destroyers to China. Specifically, the Administration should:

- **Insist that Russia halt its sale of missile destroyers to China.** Russia should be put on notice that its sale of missile destroyers and other high-tech weapons to China not only threatens peace in Asia, but also betrays America's generous foreign aid support and goodwill.
- **Assure America's allies in Asia that the United States will not let the balance of naval power shift in China's favor.** Washington should reaffirm its commitment to preserving the freedom of the seas in Asia by keeping the 7th Fleet based in Japan; by favoring this force with early deployments of modern naval weapons, including additional *Aegis* ships; and by improving its regular naval presence in Southeast Asia.
- **Sell new defensive naval systems to the Republic of China (ROC),** including the P-3 *Orion* anti-submarine aircraft, which Taiwan needs to bolster anti-submarine defenses that will be threatened by the Russian-made destroyers.
- **Request the Pentagon to study the sale of advanced conventional submarines to Taiwan.** Taiwan has a long-standing requirement for additional conventional submarines. The U.S. should consider Taiwan's request.
- **Insist that the U.S. Navy build and deploy advanced naval anti-missile systems.** The U.S. Navy should be given the funds to develop advanced defenses against Russian supersonic cruise missiles, including laser anti-missile systems.
- **Insist that the U.S. Navy build and deploy supersonic long-range cruise missiles.** To counter the supersonic Russian-made cruise missiles, the U.S. should build and deploy a supersonic cruise missile that will be more survivable than the current *Tomahawk* missile.

CHINA'S NAVAL AMBITIONS AND CAPABILITIES

Former Chinese Navy Commander Admiral Liu Huaqing, soon to retire as principal Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party, is credited with expanding China's naval ambitions. Liu contends that China must move beyond its coastal-oriented, defensive naval strategy in order eventually to control the seas from the coast of China to the "first island chain" that runs from the Kuril Islands north of Japan down through Taiwan, the Philippines, and most of Indonesia, including the South China Sea. Because naval weapon systems are achieving longer ranges, Liu now sees the need for China's navy to extend its operations even farther into the Pacific—to the "second island chain," which includes Guam, the Marianas, and the Carolines.²

2 Admiral Liu's comments quoted in Ai Hongren, "Zhonggong Haijun Toushi: Maixiang Yuanyang De Tiaozhan," ("An Inside Look into the Chinese Communist Navy: Advancing Toward the Blue-Water



Challenge”), October 1988, translated in *JPRS-CAR-90-052*, July 16, 1990, pp. 14, 27, and cited in Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, “The Chinese Navy’s Offshore Active Defense Strategy,” *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1994, p. 18. See also Lieutenant Commander Jeffery B. Goldman, “China’s Mahan,” *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1996, p. 45.

China could not possibly achieve its goal of contesting the “second island chain” until later in the next century. To do so would require a fleet of aircraft carriers, escorts, long-range strike aircraft, and very capable attack submarines that may take decades to construct. Moreover, China also would have to force Japan, Korea, and the states of Southeast Asia to end their military cooperation with the United States, and especially to end access by U.S. military forces to their bases.

Asserting its Presence. However, China already has asserted its presence in the much closer “first island chain.” For example:

- **November 1996:** China repeatedly has dredged the entrance to Mischief Reef, an atoll located about 130 miles west of the Philippine island of Palawan, to make it accessible to more Chinese ships.³
- **March 1996:** China conducted air and naval exercises north and south of Taiwan, firing four DF-15 short-range ballistic missiles into locations outside Taiwan’s two largest ports in an attempt to intimidate Taiwanese voters on the eve of last year’s presidential elections.
- **July–August 1995:** The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) held its first provocative DF-15 ballistic missile demonstration, firing six of these missiles to a spot about 90 miles north of Taiwan and then conducting large-scale naval exercises in roughly the same area.
- **February 1995:** The Philippine government revealed that China had built four housing structures around Mischief Reef. The atoll could make a useful shelter for Chinese warships, allowing them to venture much closer to major sea lanes than allowed by the other Chinese-occupied islands in the Spratly group.
- **October 1994:** A Chinese nuclear-powered attack submarine shadowed the U.S. aircraft carrier *Independence* in the Yellow Sea.⁴ After anti-submarine aircraft from the carrier shadowed the sub, China protested and even threatened to attack U.S. ships in the future.
- **April 1994:** China was revealed to have built an 8,500-foot runway on Woody Island in the South China Sea. China seized this island from Vietnam in 1974. The airbase allows the largest PLA bombers to stage operations much closer to critical sea lanes and in the disputed Spratly Islands to the south.⁵

To control the Pacific Ocean out to the “first island chain,” China would have to displace the United States as the dominant military power in Asia. Although it may not be able to do this yet, China can be expected to use its navy both to secure control of energy resources in the South China Sea and to secure routes to Middle Eastern oil, which has become increasingly important to China’s economy.⁶

3 As told to the author by Philippine officials during a visit to Manila in November 1996.

4 This incident was analyzed by Ronald W. Lewis in “Hunt for the Reds in October,” *Air Forces Monthly*, March 1995, pp. 16–21.

5 “China boosts presence in South China Sea,” *International Defense Review*, May 1995, p. 10.

6 Barbara Opall, “China Widens Global Reach,” *Defense News*, January 27–February 2, 1997, p. 1.

In addition, China and Burma have established close military relations that may include, for the first time, Chinese access to Burmese ports in the Indian Ocean. The two countries recently signed a new military agreement that includes intelligence exchanges, arms sales, and the training of 300 Burmese air force and navy officers by China.⁷ Moreover, China has sold Iran extensive military equipment with which it can contest control of the Strait of Hormuz. This includes modern fast-rising mines that threaten U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf, and *Hudong*-class fast-attack craft with the 72-mile range YJ-2 (C-802) anti-ship missile and combat aircraft. Last September, Iran reached an agreement with China to purchase \$4.5 billion worth of new Chinese weapons.⁸

Modernizing its Fleet. One of Admiral Liu's goals is for China to acquire aircraft carriers to fulfill its naval ambitions in Asia. This remains controversial in China as well, mainly because of the great expense involved in building a ship, equipping it with its carrier air wing, and building the escorts needed to protect the carrier at sea. According to recent Hong Kong press reports, however, Chinese leader Jiang Zemin approved a plan to accelerate the construction of China's first carrier before the year 2000.⁹ Such reports require further confirmation. The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence notes that a report of the Chinese National People's Congress indicates that two 48,000-ton carriers, with up to 40 fixed-wing aircraft apiece, could be built by 2005.¹⁰

China also has explored acquiring a foreign aircraft carrier. Last year, China asked France to consider selling the 36-year-old *Clemenceau*. Although the French have denied any intention to sell the carrier to China, a credible report in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* noted that the French have gone as far as considering terms under which the sale could be made.¹¹

At present, most of the PLAN fleet is considered obsolete. Its 40-plus *Romeo*-class submarines are of a 1950s vintage Soviet design, and its warships lack effective anti-submarine and long-range anti-aircraft systems. The Chinese navy sorely lacks supply ships that would enable distant or even sustained deployments. However, China now is building a very capable 23,000-ton replenishment ship for Thailand that also could be built for its own navy.¹² Recent Chinese frigates and destroyers are beginning to combine modern propulsion systems with a balanced armament of anti-ship, anti-air, anti-submarine, and missile-defense weapons and modern combat-control systems. This trend is illustrated by the new 4,200-ton *Luhu*-class destroyer, currently the largest of China's

7 Rowan Callick, "China and Burma strengthen ties with military agreement," *Financial Review*, January 24, 1997, p. 24.

8 Deutsche Presse Agentur, "Iran confirms contract with China for weapons," *The Washington Times*, September 4, 1996, p. A12.

9 Mi Tung, "Jiang Zemin Approves Implementation of 'Two Craft Plan'; Beijing to Finish Building Aircraft Carrier in 2000," *Ping Kuo Jih Pao*, January 4, 1997, p. A14, in *FBIS-CHI-97-003*, January 4, 1997, from the Internet.

10 U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Naval Intelligence, *Worldwide Challenges to Naval Strike Warfare*, 1996, p. 29.

11 Nayan Chanda, "No-Cash Carrier," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 10, 1996, p. 20.

12 A *Hudong*-class replenishment ship was launched in 1995 and can carry 9,000 tons of fuel and supplies; see Captain Richard N. Sharpe, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1996-1997* (Surrey: Jane's Information Group, 1996), p. 716.

surface warships. Absorbing new technology will not be easy for China's navy, however. Chinese press reports recount that *Luhu's* crew needed new training in order to master the French-made combat control systems.¹³

Chinese anti-ship missiles like the YJ-1/YJ-2¹⁴ have a shorter range and are slow enough to be countered easily by defensive systems like the U.S. *Phalanx* anti-missile gun. Current Chinese surface combatants and submarines therefore pose only a mild threat to U.S. Navy surface ships. The Chinese navy cannot now match the power of a U.S. aircraft carrier task group that combines naval strike aircraft, the *Aegis* ship defense cruiser, and *Los Angeles*-class nuclear-powered attack submarines.

THE RUSSIAN-MADE DESTROYER AND ITS MISSILES

By purchasing the *Sovremenny*-class missile destroyer from Russia, China is signaling its intention to build a more capable navy to assert its interests in Asia. If China has purchased the two *Sovremennys* launched in 1996, as some reports suggest, then the PLAN could take delivery of these ship in a few years. Assimilating this ship into its fleet will pose expensive training and logistic challenges for the Chinese navy; but when fully incorporated, the *Sovremenny*-class destroyer will be the most technologically advanced and most powerful surface ship in China's fleet. In the future, Russian technology can be expected to benefit the Chinese navy's intentions in other areas in which it is now deficient.

Displacing about 7,500 tons, the *Sovremenny*-class destroyer is similar in size to the U.S. *Aegis*-radar equipped *Bunker Hill*-class cruiser. Conceived by Soviet naval planners as a way to help defend their nuclear ballistic missile submarines, the *Sovremenny*-class destroyer departed from previous Soviet ship designs in being given a balanced armament of anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles, long-range guns, and anti-submarine weapons. The *Sovremenny* can carry up to 44 30 mile-range SA-N-17 anti-aircraft missiles, one Kamov KA-27 anti-submarine helicopter, extensive electronic warfare systems, and point-defense systems to counter anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Its large 130mm guns can assist shore-bombardment missions.¹⁵

What makes Russia's sale of this ship to China most alarming is the ship's main armament: the SS-N-22 supersonic anti-ship missile.¹⁶ This missile was built to counter U.S. *Aegis* cruisers. It travels at more than twice the speed of sound and skims across the water as low as 23 feet, which decreases the chance of radar detection. When it approaches its target, it can execute pre-programmed evasive maneuvers to confuse defending guns and missiles. Early versions of this missile use a maneuver that allows the missile to dive into the target at about 4.5 times the speed of sound. The latest version of the SS-N-22 may have a range of 150 miles.¹⁷ Over-the-horizon guidance could be

13 "China gets to grips with 'Luhu' technology leap," *Jane's Navy International*, November 1996, p. 8.

14 The YJ-1/YJ-2 also is known as the C-801/C-802.

15 *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1996-1997*, p. 570.

16 This is a missile built by the Raduga bureau. The Russian designation P-80 is used for the 54-mile short-range version; P-270 designates the 150 mile-range version. This missile's NATO code name is *Sunburn*.

17 "SS-N-22 'Sunburn' (P-80/3M-80 Zubr)," *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems—Issue 22*, September 1996.



Naval Surface Combatant Datasheet

Sovremenny Missile Destroyer

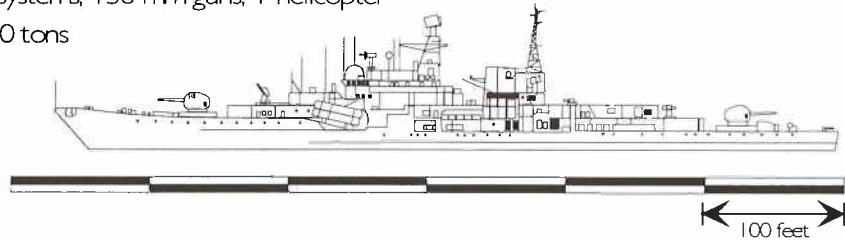
Mission: To attack surface ships, primarily
U.S. Aegis Guided Missile Cruisers

Armament: 8 SS-N-22 SSM; 44 SA-N-17 SAM;
4 Point Defense systems; 130 mm guns; 1 helicopter

Displacement: 7,600 tons

Crew: 296

Number: 19 launched by Russia;
2 in Chinese Navy



Luhu Destroyer

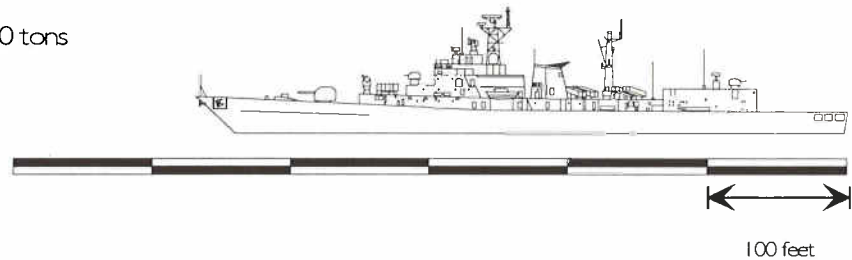
Mission: Anti-ship, anti-submarine escort

Armament: 8 YJ-1/YJ-2 SSM; 8+ Crotale SAM;
Point Defense System; 100 mm guns;
2 helicopters

Displacement: 4,200 tons

Crew: 230

Number: 2 in Chinese Navy,
1 under construction



Aegis Guided Missile Cruiser

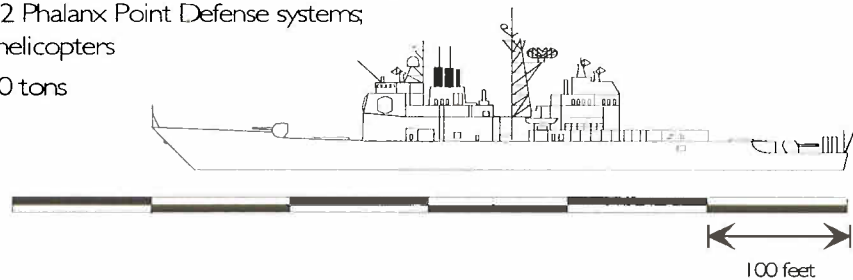
Mission: To defend U.S. aircraft carrier battle
groups from missiles, aircraft, and submarines

Armament: 122 Standard SAM and/or Tomahawk SSM;
8 Harpoon SSM; 2 Phalanx Point Defense systems;
127 mm guns; 2 helicopters

Displacement: 9,400 tons

Crew: 405

Number: 27 in U.S. Navy

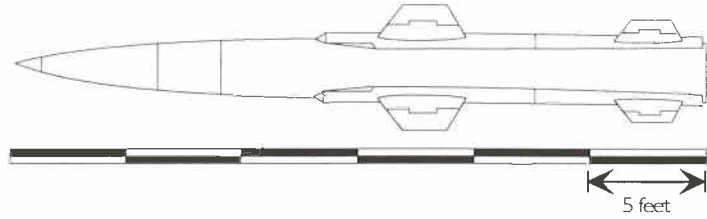


Source: *Jane's Fighting Ships*

Naval Missile System Datasheet

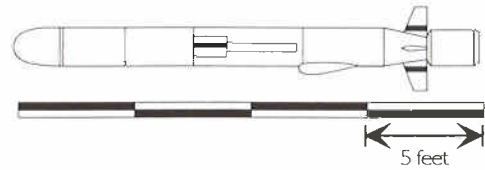
SS-N-22 *Sunburn*

Length: 30 feet
 Weight: 8,690 lbs
 Warhead: 660 lbs
 Range: Up to 150 miles
 Speed: Mach 2



Tomahawk Anti-Ship Missile

Length: 20 feet
 Weight: 3,200 lbs
 Warhead: 1,000 lbs
 Range: 270 miles
 Speed: subsonic



Source: *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*.

supplied by the 120 mile-range radar carried by the KA-27 helicopter. Such guidance also could be provided by the 200 mile-range *Searchwater* airborne radar that Britain is selling to China, to be fitted to the PRC's Y-8 maritime patrol aircraft.¹⁸

With its 660-pound conventional warhead, an SS-N-22 missile would devastate a U.S. aircraft carrier or any smaller ship. The missile also can be armed with a nuclear warhead. The closest U.S. missile system in capability is the *Tomahawk* Anti-Ship Missile (TASM), which has a range of 276 miles but travels only at subsonic speed, making it more vulnerable to the anti-missile guns of the *Sovremenny*-class destroyers. Only the U.S. Navy has the *Tomahawk* missile. The 78-mile-range *Harpoon* anti-ship missile is used more widely by the U.S. and allied navies.

The Threat to the U.S. Fleet. When aircraft carrier coverage is lacking—which often is the case during peacetime deployments—U.S. cruisers, destroyers, and frigates are vulnerable to the long-range SS-N-22, which is very difficult to shoot down because of its speed-and-attack profile. The U.S. *Aegis* phased-array radar that equips U.S. *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers and *Burke*-class destroyers, as well as Japan's *Kondo*-class destroyers, is capable of detecting the low-flying SS-N-22. Later models of the SM-2 *Standard* surface-to-air missile (SAM) have been modified to shoot down low-flying supersonic

18 The Y-8 is a Chinese copy of the Russian AN-12 four-engine transport and is similar to the U.S. C-130 in size and performance. Britain may sell China up to eight *Searchwater* radar units in a \$67.2 million deal; "China, Britain, Seal Deal for Searchwater Radar," *Defense News*, January 20-26, 1997, p. 2.

missiles. But even though the SS-N-22 has been in Soviet/Russian service since 1980, the *Aegis/Standard* combination has not been tested against targets that can simulate the SS-N-22. Not until last year did the U.S. Navy obtain a target missile—the supersonic Zvezda Kh-31—from Russia that can simulate the SS-N-22. This Kh-31 will be test-fired against an *Aegis* ship in March.¹⁹ Then it can be determined whether *Aegis* can defend against the SS-N-22.

No U.S. or Asian ships, other than the *Ticonderoga* class, *Burke* class, or *Kondo* class, employ the *Aegis/Standard* combination of missiles. Most U.S. ships and those of the navies of Australia, Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand use the U.S. *Phalanx* anti-missile system to counter attacking missiles. The *Phalanx* uses a radar-guided 20mm Gatling gun to destroy incoming missiles at short range. Even if they do hit the SS-N-22, however, the *Phalanx*'s 20mm shells may not destroy the missile sufficiently to prevent critical damage to ships from the rapidly moving debris. At such high speeds, the SS-N-22 would be hit by fewer 20mm shells. This means that larger missile fragments would remain that could still carry enough momentum to hit the target ship.

Chinese naval doctrine calls for massive missile attacks against enemy naval ships. Such methods were practiced during naval exercises near Taiwan in March of last year. Should China obtain a large number of SS-N-22s, or build hundreds of a new supersonic anti-ship missiles based on SS-N-22 technology, its forces might be even more capable of overwhelming U.S. defensive systems like those of the *Aegis*.

The Threat to Taiwan. If it acquired many more *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, the Chinese navy would be able to blockade Taiwan more effectively. Because Russian naval doctrine calls for close cooperation between surface ships and submarines, that capability also may be transferred to China with these destroyers. The *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, when added to the modern *Kilo*-class attack submarines that China acquired from Russia in 1995, will increase the ability of the Chinese navy to interdict civilian ships and to attack ROC navy ships. The SS-N-22 exceeds the reach of Taiwan's 36 mile-range *Hsuing Feng* and *Harpoon* anti-ship missiles, thereby increasing the danger to ROC destroyers and frigates that constitute Taiwan's first line of defense against Chinese submarines. China's *Sovremenny*-class destroyers also could carry formidable anti-aircraft defense in the form of the SA-N-17 SAM, making them less vulnerable to Taiwanese aircraft.

RUSSIA'S KEY ROLE IN CHINA'S NAVAL EXPANSION

Russia's military-industrial complex is now the primary foreign subcontractor for the People's Liberation Army. In the areas of combat aircraft, missiles, and naval combatants, Russia is becoming China's most important source of modern weapon systems. China is paying \$800 million for the missile destroyers, which reportedly is part of a larger \$8 billion to \$10 billion deal that may include attack aircraft and other undisclosed weapon systems. Although China increasingly is purchasing ready-made Russian weapons, it also is taking new technology from these weapons to incorporate into future Chinese-made weapons. This may be especially true for the Chinese navy's

19 "MA-31 Missile Target Test Against Manned Ship Planned for March," *Inside Washington*, February 4, 1997.

modernization program. China also wants to modernize its domestic shipbuilding facilities so that it does not have to rely on Russia for all of its new warships. Russian weapon and technology sales to China have helped the Chinese navy, particularly with respect to:

- **Submarines.** Russia has sold China four *Kilo*-class conventionally powered submarines. Two were delivered in 1995.²⁰ The next two *Kilos* reportedly will be of an advanced version, which the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence rates about as quiet as the U.S. 688 I, an improved *Los Angeles*-class nuclear-powered attack submarine.²¹ Noise level is a key determinant of submarine combat success: The quieter the better. For this reason, China may decide to buy more *Kilos*. What China learns from the *Kilo* or from other Russian submarine technology may be incorporated into the *Song*-class conventional submarine now being put into production. *Jane's Fighting Ships* reports that Russian technicians are helping China build its new nuclear-powered Type O93 attack submarines.²² Russian submarine technology can advance China's competence significantly in the areas of quieting, combat control systems, torpedoes, sub-launched cruise missiles, sonar, and countermeasures.
- **Cruise Missiles.** China could purchase additional SS-N-22 missiles for its warships, or it could incorporate its advanced missile technology into its future cruise missiles. Russia also is marketing the 150 mile-range Raduga Kh-65SE air-launched cruise missile to China. This missile is much smaller than the SS-N-22 and could be modified easily to achieve a longer range. It is a short-range variant of the AS-15 strategic long-range cruise missile. The Kh-65 could help China build a family of *Tomahawk*-size strategic cruise missiles that can be used by submarines, ships, and aircraft. In addition, it is possible that Russia may sell China its 270 mile-range SS-N-19 anti-ship cruise missile in the future. This large 1,900 pound-warhead, Mach-1.6 missile outfits Russia's sole aircraft carrier and its *Kirov*- and *Slava*-class cruisers.
- **Surface-to-Air Missiles.** China has purchased Russia's 56 mile-range SA-10 SAM, which is comparable in capability to early U.S. *Patriot* SAMs. China already has produced a similar SAM, based largely on SA-10 technology, called the HQ-9. This missile is said by U.S. sources to use radar and command systems copied from the SA-10, a Chinese missile motor, and missile guidance systems derived from a U.S. *Patriot* missile. Also in the works is a naval variant of the HQ-9 that initially may be fitted to a future *Luhu*-class destroyer. China is likely to try to get the modern Russian SA-N-17 SAM with its *Sovremenny*-class destroyers. The missile's small size and high Mach-4 speed will provide a higher level of technology for future Chinese naval SAMs.²³

20 Antony Preston, "World Navies in Review," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, March 1996, p. 110.

21 Rupert Pengelley, "Grappling for Submarine Supremacy," *Jane's International Defense Review*, July 1996, pp. 50, 51.

22 *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1996-1997*, p. 115.

23 The SA-N-17, also known as the SA-N-12, is the naval variant of the SA-17 *Grizzly*, which can travel at four times the speed of sound; its phased-array radar can guide four missiles simultaneously. See John W. R. Taylor, "Gallery of Russian Aerospace Weapons," *Air Force Magazine*, March 1996, p. 80.

- **Warships.** With its purchase of the *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, China will obtain an advanced technology warship that integrates anti-ship, anti-aircraft, and anti-submarine systems inside one hull. This ship could assist the design of future Chinese destroyers and cruiser-size warships. Moreover, China could purchase key Russian components like power plant, missiles, and other combat systems to equip existing ships or to outfit future warships. In the not too distant future, it may be possible for China to build much larger warships armed with great numbers of ballistic missiles, supersonic or long-range subsonic cruise missiles, and SAMs. This ship could resemble the U.S. concept for an Arsenal Ship—a large ship-borne missile base that relies on off-board sensors and command systems—but is more likely to resemble the Russian *Kirov*-class cruiser, which carries a large number of surface-to-surface and anti-aircraft missiles guided by on-board sensors. In Chinese navy service, such a ship could be used for anti-naval or strategic strike missions in Asia.
- **Aircraft.** Russia is selling China advanced fighter and attack aircraft that could cover its naval forces. These advanced Russian fighters have a potential air-combat capability that could rival that of U.S. air forces in Asia.²⁴ China has received about 50 Sukhoi SU-27 jet fighters from Russia and last year completed a \$2.5 billion deal that may allow it to co-produce up to 200 more.²⁵ The SU-27 is very likely to be a slightly better dogfighter than the U.S. top-of-the-line F-15.²⁶ China's SU-27s are the only aircraft in Asia now armed with a helmet-mounted sight-cued missile: the AA-11 (NATO code-name *Archer*) air-to-air missile. In short-range or visual-range combat, this missile could provide a decisive advantage over U.S. or ROC aircraft. Although U.S. aircraft are not expected to have the helmet-sighted AIM-9X until 2003,²⁷ China now is putting into production a copy of the Russian helmet-mounted sight that will guide its PL-9 air-to-air missile.²⁸ This missile is being offered for export and will be backfitted to existing Chinese air force fighters.²⁹

Reportedly, China also is negotiating with Russia for the sale of 50 advanced SU-30MK attack aircraft.³⁰ An upgraded two-seat version of the SU-27, the

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- 24 For a further explanation of this danger, see Richard Fisher, "China's Purchase of Russian Fighters: A Challenge to the U.S.," Heritage Foundation *Asian Studies Center Backgrounder* No. 142, July 31, 1996.
- 25 Nicolay Novichkov, "Sukhoi Set to Exploit Thrust Vector Control," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, August 26, 1996, p. 55.
- 26 Russian and Chinese press reports note that in mock combat exercises, the SU-27 has outperformed the F-15. See Vladimir Ilin, "Air Bases of Russia: Lipetsk—One of the Aviation Centers of Russia," *Vestnik Vozdushnogo Flota*, March 14, 1995, in *FBIS-UMA-95-148-S*, March 14, 1995, from the Internet, and "Exercise Between F-15D and SU-27UB," *Modern Weapons*, September 1996, p. 43.
- 27 David A. Fulghum and Michael A. Dorheim, "Hughes Captures AIM-9X Competition," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, December 23/30, 1996, p. 83.
- 28 David A. Fulghum, "China Broadens List of Air Combat Exports," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, December 16, 1996, p. 22. The PL-9 air-to-air missile is said by some analysts to be derived from the Israeli *Python 3* AAM, which China co-produces under the designation PL-8.
- 29 An early customer for the helmet-sighted PL-9 may be Iran, inasmuch as the PL-9 is to be fitted onto the new J-8IIM and J-7MG export model fighters that may be included in a new Chinese-Iranian \$4.5 billion arms deal. See "Iran and China negotiate FB-7/F-8IIM fighter deal," *Flight International*, December 4-10, 1996, p. 4.

SU-30MK retains much of the SU-27's air-combat capability but is equipped with all-weather navigation systems and laser or TV-guidance equipment that gives its precision-guided munitions pinpoint accuracy. The SU-30 also can carry the Kh-31 supersonic anti-ship missile or other supersonic cruise missiles Russia is developing, and thus poses a greater threat to U.S. and ROC vessels. These new combat aircraft can be made even more effective if Russia sells its Ilyushin Il-76 transport aircraft to Israel. The reason: Israel wants to outfit this aircraft with its 230 mile-range *Phalcon* airborne early-warning and control system (AWACS) and sell it to China.³¹ With AWACS, China can defend its ships better by organizing more effective attacks against enemy ships. Russia also is trying to sell the Ilyushin Il-78 aerial tanker to China; one aerial refueling can extend the radius of the SU-30MK from 930 miles to over 1,600 miles.

- **Aircraft carriers.** Should China finally decide to build aircraft carriers, it can be expected that Russia will be contracted to provide assistance in building and arming these ships. This would be cost-effective because China could capitalize on its already large investment in Russian naval and aircraft technology. The Russia-China SU-27 co-production deal allows China to produce the naval variant of this aircraft, the SU-33, which could be modified to perform air-superiority or naval and ground-attack missions. The KA-27 anti-submarine helicopter is likely to be the initial principal anti-submarine system for the carrier. A variant of this helicopter, the KA-31, carries a 155 mile-range airborne early warning radar and may be available to China as well. However, land-based airborne warning and control aircraft also may provide coverage for Chinese carriers during times of tension.

COUNTERING RUSSIA'S SALE OF ADVANCED NAVAL TECHNOLOGY TO CHINA

It is imperative that the Clinton Administration acknowledge that the sale of two *Sovremenny*-class destroyers to China would result in a significant challenge to the navies of both the United States and its friends in Asia. In a January 1997 *Washington Times* report on this sale, Pentagon officials admitted that China was buying these ships specifically to counter U.S. aircraft carriers. In March 1996, President Clinton deployed two aircraft carriers near Taiwan to signal the U.S. concern over China's military exercises to intimidate Taiwan on the eve of the ROC's democratic presidential elections. These deployments also were meant to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to defending the freedom of the seas against possible encroachment by the Chinese navy.

Nevertheless, the Administration apparently would prefer to ignore the sale of the new Russian destroyers to China. On January 10, 1997, State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns refused to oppose the sale because "there's nothing that we can see that contravenes international law or our own law."³² Such a legalistic response, in addition to

30 "China expands reach with Russian destroyers," *op. cit.*

31 Russia is holding out on this sale in hopes of advancing its own Beriev A-50 AWACS. See Steve Rodan, "Israel Pushes China Aircraft Deal Despite U.S., Russian Objections," *Defense News*, January 6-12, 1997, p. 22.

32 Bill Gertz, "U.S. not against Russia-China deal," *The Washington Times*, January 11, 1997, p. A4.

being shortsighted, ignores the dangers this sale could pose to U.S. sailors and interests in Asia. Before President Clinton and President Jiang Zemin meet later this year, the United States should formulate its official response to Russia's sale of missile destroyers to China. Specifically, the Administration should:

- **Insist that Russia halt its sale of missile destroyers to China.** The Administration should be forceful in insisting to the Yeltsin government that arming China in this way destabilizes the balance of power of Asia and amounts to a betrayal of American generosity. If Russia proceeds with this sale, Congress should consider decreasing financial support for economic assistance to Russia. When Secretary of State Albright visits Beijing in late February and Vice President Gore travels to China in March, China's rapid military modernization and its bullying of Taiwan should be placed at the top of the agenda. Both should warn Beijing that military modernization and hostile action inhibit the building of a mutually agreeable relationship. In addition, the Clinton Administration should ask Britain and Israel not to sell advanced airborne early warning radar systems to China, and France should be warned not to sell the aircraft carrier *Clemenceau* to China.
- **Assure America's allies in Asia that the United States will not let the balance of naval power shift in China's favor.** The United States should reaffirm its intention to keep the 7th Fleet and its aircraft carrier battle group based in Japan. Furthermore, this fleet should receive new weapons, such as the *Lower Tier* theater missile defense system, A/F-18 E/F fighter-attack aircraft, and new attack submarines, as soon as they are available. The fleet also should receive additional *Aegis* cruisers or destroyers to counter China's more modern ships and supersonic cruise missiles. To demonstrate U.S. determination to preserve the freedom of the seas, the 7th Fleet should exercise regularly in the open seas to the north and south of Taiwan. China's expansion into the South China Sea makes it necessary for the U.S. Navy to begin to redress the loss of presence in Southeast Asia caused by its 1992 departure from Subic Bay in the Philippines. The Navy should start by reviving cooperation with the Philippines in the form of exercises and the sale of weapons, with the goal of gaining regular ship and naval aircraft access to Philippine bases.
- **Sell new defensive naval systems to Taiwan.** The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act obligates the U.S. to sell Taiwan weapons necessary for its self-defense. China's acquisition of the *Sovremenny*-class destroyer and the *Sunburn* missile threatens ROC navy ships that would be called on to defend against China's large submarine fleet. To preserve a balance of power in the Taiwan Strait, Washington should offer to sell Taipei the P-3 *Orion* anti-submarine aircraft to supplement the ROC's anti-submarine ships. This long-range patrol aircraft carries excellent anti-submarine sensors, torpedoes, and anti-ship missiles. With the P-3 *Orion*, the ROC adds more depth to its anti-submarine defenses and redresses the threat to its anti-submarine ships posed by the *Sovremenny* and its supersonic cruise missiles.
- **Request the Pentagon to study the sale of advanced conventional submarines to Taiwan.** The P-3 *Orion*, however, may not be sufficient to defend Taiwanese ships against Chinese submarines and improved warships. Therefore, the Clinton Administration should direct the Department of Defense to study the

impact of selling advanced conventional submarines to Taiwan as an option to increase Taipei's ability to deter military pressure from Beijing. Taipei repeatedly has requested that the United States build and sell it such submarines. The ROC navy has only two modern conventional submarines of the Dutch *Zwaardvis* class. The Pentagon should study the impact on deterrence in the Taiwan Strait of selling Taiwan six to ten more conventional submarines. Critics of the sale of U.S.-built submarines to Taiwan argue that such systems would give Taipei a much greater offensive military capability. The Pentagon should explore whether selling only a small number serves only to defend Taiwan, because they are not likely to be capable of sustaining offensive operations against China.

- **Insist that the U.S. Navy build and deploy advanced naval anti-missile systems.** It also is important that the U.S. Navy be given the funds to develop advanced ship-defense systems to counter advanced Russian anti-ship missiles like the SS-N-22 and (in the future) supersonic Chinese anti-ship missiles. First, it is imperative that the *Aegis/Standard* missile system be improved to enable it to counter the SS-N-22. The solution, in part, may be to build and deploy the much faster *Upper Tier* naval Theater Missile Defense (TMD) missile that has been modified to counter low-flying missiles. The Navy also should be directed to develop small laser-based weapons to defend against low-flying supersonic missiles.
- **Insist that the U.S. Navy build and deploy supersonic long-range cruise missiles.** Russia's sale of an advanced supersonic anti-ship missile to China points to the need for the United States to develop and deploy a successor to the subsonic *Tomahawk* cruise missile. Such a missile is needed to surmount the advanced defenses China currently is developing from Russian SA-10 technology. One suggestion that should be pursued is to build a Mach-5 *Fasthawk* cruise missile to succeed the *Tomahawk*.

CONCLUSION

Instead of adopting a shortsighted and legalistic approach to Russia's sale of missile destroyers to China, the Clinton Administration should view this sale as a call to action. Russia, a country that receives support from American taxpayers, is rapidly selling China the military means to threaten U.S. interests and U.S. military forces in Asia. President Clinton should make clear to the Russian government that the arming of China is creating a future military threat to Russia and amounts to a betrayal of the generosity of the American people.

The Administration also must make it clear to its allies and friends in Asia that it is committed to protecting the freedom of the seas and will not let the naval balance shift in favor of an aggressive China. The United States should sell Taiwan the defensive naval equipment it needs to meet the threat from China's new missile destroyers—such as the P-3 *Orion* anti-submarine aircraft. The United States also should study the sale of advanced conventional submarines to Taiwan. Finally the United States should build and deploy laser-based anti-missile systems and new supersonic cruise missiles to increase the combat capability of its warships.

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