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CHINA PREPARING FOR ARMED CONFLICT 'IN EVERY DIRECTION'

December 29, 2010 The London Daily Telegraph reported: "China is preparing for conflict 'in every direction', the defence minister said on Wednesday in remarks that threaten to overshadow a visit to Beijing by his US counterpart next month.

"In the coming five years, our military will push forward preparations for military conflict in every strategic direction," said Liang Guanglie in an interview published by several state-backed newspapers in China. "We may be living in peaceful times, but we can never forget war, never send the horses south or put the bayonets and guns away," Mr Liang added.

China repeatedly says it is planning a "peaceful rise" but the recent pace and scale of its military modernisation has alarmed many of its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific, including Japan which described China's military build-up as a "global concern" this month.

Mr Liang's remarks come at a time of increasingly difficult relations between the Chinese and US armed forces which a three-day visit by his counterpart Robert Gates is intended to address. A year ago China froze substantive military relations in protest at US arms sales to Taiwan and relations deteriorated further this summer when China objected to US plans to deploy one of its nuclear supercarriers, the USS George Washington, into the Yellow Sea off the Korean peninsula.

China also announced this month that it was preparing to launch its own aircraft carrier next year in a signal that China is determined to punch its weight as a rising superpower."..."

ISRAEL DESTROYED SYRIA NUCLEAR REACTOR: WIKILEAKS

December 24, 2010 SpaceDaily.com reported: "Israel destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor in an air raid just weeks before it went online in 2007, said a US diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks and published on Friday in an Israeli daily.

"On September 6, 2007, Israel destroyed the nuclear reactor built by Syria secretly, apparently with North Korea's help," then US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice wrote in the cable published in Yediot Aharonot newspaper.

"Our intelligence experts are convinced that the attack targeted by the Israelis is in fact an atomic reactor of the same type built by North Korea in Yongbyon," she wrote in the message dated April 2008.

"We have good reason to believe that the reactor was not built for peaceful purposes," she said, adding the attack came only weeks before the reactor was to become operational.

Rice also noted the secrecy surrounding the construction of the nuclear facility, with the Syrian authorities refusing to invite the International Atomic Energy Agency or any media to inspect the site. Syria has always denied that the structure targeted by Israeli warplanes was a nuclear reactor, although it has admitted it was a "military site under construction."..."

SO YOUNG AND SO MANY PILLS

December 28, 2010 Online.WSJ.com reported: "Gage Martindale, who is 8 years old, has been taking a blood-pressure drug since he was a toddler. "I want to be healthy, and I don't want things in my heart to go wrong," he says. And, of course, his mom is always there to check Gage's blood pressure regularly with a home monitor, and to make sure the second-grader doesn't skip a dose of his once-a-day enalapril.

These days, the medicine cabinet is truly a family affair. More than a quarter of U.S. kids and teens are taking a medication on a chronic basis, according to Medco Health Solutions Inc., the biggest U.S. pharmacy-benefit manager with around 65 million members. Nearly 7% are on two or more such drugs, based on the company's database figures for 2009.

Doctors and parents warn that prescribing medications to children can be problematic. There is limited research available about many drugs' effects in kids...Although the effects of some medications, like cholesterol-lowering statins, have been extensively researched in adults, the consequences of using such drugs for the bulk of a patient's lifespan are little understood."..."

Researchers attribute the wide usage in part to doctors and parents becoming more aware of drugs as an option for kids. Unhealthy diets and lack of exercise among children, which lead to too much weight gain and obesity, also fuel the use of some treatments, such as those for hypertension. And some conditions are likely caught and treated earlier as screening and diagnosis efforts improve.

Gage, who isn't overweight, has been on hypertension drugs since he had surgery to fix a heart defect as a toddler, says his mother, Stefanie Martindale, a Conway, Ark., marketing-company manager.

Most medications that could be prescribed to children on a chronic basis haven't been tested specifically in kids, says Danny Benjamin, a Duke University pediatrics professor. And older drugs rarely get examined, since pharmaceutical firms have little incentive to test



medicines once they are no longer under patent protection.

Still, a growing number of studies have been done under a Food and Drug Administration program that rewards drug companies for testing medications in children. In more than a third of these studies, there have been surprising side effects, or results that suggested a smaller or larger dose was needed than had been expected, Dr. Benjamin says. Those findings underscore that children's reactions to medicines can be very different than those of adults. Long-term effects of drugs in kids are almost never known, since pediatric studies, like those in adults, tend to be relatively short.

"We know we're making errors in dosing and safety," says Dr. Benjamin, who is leading a new National Institutes of Health initiative to study drugs in children. He suggests that parents should do as much research as they can to understand the evidence for the medicine, confirm the diagnosis, and identify side effects."..."

Parents and doctors also say nondrug alternatives should be explored where possible...But only about 10% of families adhere to his diet and exercise recommendations, he says."..."

SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT RAMPS UP AGGRESSIVE STANCE TOWARDS NORTH

December 27, 2010 The London Daily Telegraph reports: "South Korea's armed forces will 'respond relentlessly' if they are attacked again by North Korea, the country's president warned on Monday, providing further evidence that Seoul is determined to maintain a newly aggressive posture against Pyongyang.

'We have now been awakened to the realization that war can be prevented and peace assured only when such provocations are met with a strong response,' said President Lee Myung-bak in a national radio address, 'Fear of war is never helpful in preventing war.'

Mr. Lee's hard-line government has been under pressure in recent weeks after critics said it had failed to respond fiercely enough to the North Korean bombardment of an island off the South's west coast in November that left four dead. The government has responded by firing its defense minister, installing more hawkish commanders and staging a series of US-backed live-fire exercises along the land and sea borders with the North in a bid to deter any further attacks.

The South said it was planning more drills this week, despite objections from Russia and China who have urged calm on both sides and increasingly bellicose rhetoric from Pyongyang which promised a 'sacred' nuclear war if the South impinged on its territory."..."

NUCLEAR TREATY GOES EASY ON RUSSIA

December 28, 2010 SpaceDaily.com reported: "SpaceDaily.com reports: "The new Russia-US nuclear arms pact may have been hailed as historic but analysts said that all Moscow really has to do is phase out Soviet-era missiles and warheads that are already out of date.

The new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was ratified by the US Senate on Wednesday after a passionate months-long debate and given initial approval by Russia's State Duma lower house of parliament two days later. It will face two more hearings in Russia and almost certainly come into force within the next few months.

The first nuclear pact in two decades has been feted as vital to global security because it reduces old warhead ceilings by an impressive 30 percent and sets a streamlined new inspection procedure designed to eliminate cheating. The new START limits each side to 1,550 deployed warheads and 700 deployed long-range missiles -- including those fired from submarines -- and heavy bombers...

But analysts said that Russia's real problem was that even these lower missile and launcher ceilings were too high for the country to keep pace with the United States. Soviet-era missiles such as the Saber SS-22 are rapidly approaching their expiry date and technical specifications mean the weapon has no purpose if its nuclear warheads are taken out of commission..."

EURO TURNS TO PROBLEM FOR EASTERN EUROPE

December 30, 2010 The Associated Press reported: "Bells pealed and fireworks shot across midnight skies in Bratislava two years ago, as Slovaks celebrated not only the New Year but also their country's long-sought entry to the club of nations using the continent's common currency, the euro.

Fast forward to the dying days of 2010 after the eurozone's debt crisis forced the bailouts of Greece and Ireland and painful austerity measures across the region_ and one thing is clear: while Slovaks will again turn out in droves on Dec. 31, the cheer will have nothing to do with belonging to the euro.

The pride felt back then at being the first in the former Soviet bloc to adopt the euro has been tempered by the responsibilities that come with sharing a common European currency.

Two years ago, the euro was viewed as a safe haven of financial stability, insurance against wild swings of national currencies that could throw national budgets out of kilter and threaten economic growth. For Slovakia, it also signaled arrival into the prosperous club of EU nations less than two decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Now, as eurozone nations are asked to help bail out others overwhelmed by debt and the risk of contagion spreads beyond Ireland and Greece, adopting the common currency is no longer a top priority for former communist countries still outside the zone. And in newcomer countries, like Slovakia, some...see the euro as a burden, not a blessing...Some in the Slovak leadership are even looking for a way out."..."

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