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Inside the Ring

China arming terrorists

New intelligence reveals China is covertly supplying large quantities of small arms and weapons to insurgents in Iraq and the Taliban militia in Afghanistan, through Iran.

U.S. government appeals to China to check some of the arms

shipments in advance were met with stonewalling by Beijing, which insisted it knew nothing about the shipments and asked for additional intelligence on the transfers. The ploy has been used in the past by China to hide its arms-proliferation activities from the United States, according to U.S. officials with access to the intelligence reports.

Some arms were sent by aircraft directly from Chinese factories to Afghanistan and included large-caliber sniper rifles, millions of rounds of ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades and components for roadside bombs, as well as other small arms.

The Washington Times reported June 5 that Chinese-made HN-5 anti-aircraft missiles were being used by the Taliban.

According to the officials, the Iranians, in buying the arms, asked Chinese state-run suppliers to expedite the transfers and to remove serial numbers to prevent tracing their origin. China, for its part, offered to transport the weapons in order to prevent the weapons from being interdicted.

The weapons were described as "late-model" arms that have not been seen



in the field before and were not left over from **Saddam Hussein's** rule in Iraq.

U.S. Army specialists suspect the weapons were transferred within the past three months.

The Bush administration has been trying to hide or downplay the intelligence reports to protect its pro-business policies toward China, and to continue to claim that China is helping the United States in the war on terrorism. U.S. officials have openly criticized Iran for the arms transfers but so far there has been no mention that China is a main supplier.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Wednesday that the flow of Iranian arms to Afghanistan is "fairly substantial" and that it is likely taking place with the help of the Iranian government.

Defense officials are upset that Chinese weapons are being used to kill Americans. "Americans are being killed by Chinese-supplied weapons, with the full knowledge and understanding of Beijing where these weapons are going," one official said.

The arms shipments show that the idea that China is helping the United States in the war on terrorism is "utter nonsense," the official said.

John Tkacik, a former State Department official now with the Heritage Foundation, said the Chinese arms influx "continues 10 years of willful blindness in both Republican and Democrat administrations to China's contribution to severe instability in the Middle East and South Asia."

Mr. Tkacik said the administration should be candid with the American people about China's arms shipments, including Beijing's provision of man-portable air-defense missiles through Iran and Syria to warring factions in Lebanon and Gaza.

Apologists for China within the government said the intelligence reports were not concrete proof of Chinese and Iranian government complicity.

Pentagon spokesmen declined to comment. A spokesman for the Chinese Embassy did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

Iran boat threat

Iran is adding Chinese-made small boats armed with anti-ship cruise missiles to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps navy that can be used in attacks on shipping in the oil-rich Persian Gulf, according to the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI).

"Iran still states that the [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps navy] will employ swarming tactics in a conflict," ONI analyst **Robert Althage** said in an e-mail, noting that the paramilitary organization "continues to add boats armed with anti-ship cruise missiles, such as the FL-10, to its inventory."

China began supplying Iran over the past several years with small, high-speed C-14 catamarans armed with the optically guided FL-10 anti-ship cruise missiles.

Mr. Althage said in response to questions posed by Bloomberg News that recent exercises by the Iranians did not show any new capabilities and that the maneuvers appeared designed "for publicity."

Currently, Iran operates three Russian-made Kilo submarines but has not yet mined waterways, the ONI analyst stated.

A 2004 ONI report said the Iranian IRGC navy has more than 1,000 small boats ranging in length from 17 to 60 feet, and many are concentrated near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, where a large majority of the world's oil passes.

The boats can be used in attacks against shipping and include infantry weapons, unguided barrage rockets, recoilless guns, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles and rocket-propelled grenades.

North Korea watch

U.S. intelligence agencies think North Korea is continuing development of nuclear weapons, as well as working on "miniaturization" of weapons for missile warheads, according to a senior Bush administration official.

Since the February nuclear accord reached in Beijing, North Korea has continued work on weapons, said a senior Bush administration official involved in North Korean affairs.

"There are no indications that they are not pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, to include the weaponization and miniaturization," the official said.

U.S. intelligence officials think North Korea, which received equipment through the covert Pakistani nuclear-supplier network headed by **Abdul Qadeer Khan**, obtained Chinese documents on designing a small warhead, the key to developing a nuclear weapon small enough for missile warheads.

The Chinese-language warhead design documents were first uncovered in Libya, which gave up its nuclear program in 2003.

Three recent missile tests in North Korea over the past several weeks were anti-ship cruise missiles fired during exercises that were not unusual for North Korean military forces at this time of year, the official said.

"Those who are looking at the six-party process and where we are today with [the Banco Delta Asia funds transfer] are very disappointed," the senior official said. "This doesn't build confidence. This is a time that is very tense and we want to go to implementing the 13 February agreement. So even though this is a normal exercises, I think there is an element of disappointment that North Korea would move in that direction."

North Korea has shown no signs of preparing of another underground nuclear test but "they could have a nuclear test at any time with minimal or no warning," the official said.

The October test was a "nuclear event" but the blast caused by the test was smaller than North Korea had hoped, the official said.

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