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Secretary Hagel, China's Defense Minister Build Military-Relations Model	1
Treasury Secretary Previews IMF, World Bank Meetings.....	2
Secretary Kerry Warns Russia to Stop Separatist Actions in Eastern Ukraine	2
Navy Team Detects Signals in Search for Missing Aircraft.....	3
Hagel: U.S.-Japan Partnership Critical to Regional Security	3
ASEAN-U.S. Forum Deepens Partnerships, Increases Opportunities.....	4
Collaboration, Vigilance Are Key to Disease Control	5

Secretary Hagel, China's Defense Minister Build Military-Relations Model

By Cheryl Pellerin | American Forces Press Service |
09 April 2014

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on April 8.

Beijing — At the invitation of Chinese Defense Minister General Chang Wanquan, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel visited the Chinese Defense Ministry's headquarters here April 8.

Hagel met with Chang and then a larger group of defense officials before he and Chang revealed during a news conference a new model for U.S.-China military-to-military relations.

"One focus of our discussion today was how we develop a new model of military-to-military relations," Hagel said about his meeting with Chang. "We've just finished a very good meeting, during which I restated that the United States is committed to continuing to build a constructive and productive relationship with China."

Hagel explained that the United States believes its approach should be to build a sustained dialogue, deepen practical cooperation in areas of common interest, and manage competition and differences through openness and communication.

In each area, he added, there is much work to do, but the nations are making strong progress.

"As General Chang announced, we agreed today on several new ways to improve our military-to-military relationship," Hagel said. First, the U.S. and Chinese defense agencies will establish an army-to-army dialogue as an institutionalized mechanism within the framework of the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship.

Second, the secretary said, "we agreed to participate in a joint military-medical cooperative activity. This will build on experiences gained at the 2014 Rim of the Pacific exercise, a U.S.-hosted multilateral naval exercise that China will participate in for the first time this summer."

Third, Hagel said, the defense agencies will establish an Asia-Pacific security dialogue between the assistant secretary of defense for Asia-Pacific security affairs and the director of the Chinese Defense Ministry's foreign affairs office to exchange views on a range of security issues.

"This dialogue will build on the discussions General Chang and I had today on regional security issues," the

secretary said, "including North Korea and the growing threat posed by its nuclear and missile programs."

Hagel added that continued instability in Northeast Asia is not in China's interest, and that the United States is deeply concerned about the threat North Korea poses to U.S. treaty allies and, increasingly, to the homeland.

"The United States and China have a shared interest in achieving a verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," he said.

Hagel and Chang also discussed tensions in the East and South China seas.

"I underscored that all parties should refrain from provocative actions and the use of intimidation, coercion or aggression to advance their claims," the secretary said. "Such disputes must be resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law."

Hagel noted that yesterday he toured China's aircraft carrier, met personnel aboard the ship and had an opportunity to listen. He will later speak to officers at the National Defense University and is looking forward to visiting with noncommissioned officers, whom he characterized as the backbone of all militaries.

"Exchanges like this at every level of command are critical for building mutual understanding and also respect," Hagel said. "Our vision is a future where our militaries can work closely together on a range of challenges, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions."

To reach this objective, the secretary said, "we must be candid about issues we disagree about, [but also continue] to deepen our cooperation in areas where we do agree. We have many common interests, and we agree on many things."

Regarding cybersecurity, Hagel emphasized the need for the United States and China to be more open about each other's capabilities and intentions in this critically important domain.

"Greater openness about cyber reduces the risk that misunderstanding and misperception could lead to miscalculation," he said. "More transparency will strengthen China-U.S. relations."

The U.S.-China relationship is important for stability and security in the Asia-Pacific, and for achieving prosperity for both nations in the 21st century, the secretary said.

"As President Obama has said," Hagel noted, "the United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful and prosperous China."

Treasury Secretary Previews IMF, World Bank Meetings

10 April 2014

Washington – Ahead of the April 11–13 Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew previewed the discussions in a television interview.

The Spring Meetings will focus on promoting global economic growth and development.

“On the U.S. economy, Secretary Lew discussed the importance of investing in infrastructure combined with business tax reform to bolster the continuing economic recovery,” said Holly Shulman, a Treasury Department spokeswoman. “The secretary noted how the tough decisions the U.S. made six years ago during the financial crisis have made us a leader in economic growth amongst advanced economies today.”

“There are many parts of the economy that still could do better,” Lew said, “and we have to continue to pursue policies to try and make sure that we boost the chances of that happening.”

Lew touched on Europe’s modest economic growth rates and the policy decisions that could be taken to help stimulate demand. “On China, he repeated how we have been clear with its senior government officials that they should move toward a market-determined exchange rate,” Shulman said.

Lew also discussed the growth in Japan’s economy after more than 15 years of deflation and stagnation, Shulman said.

The U.S. sanctions against Russian and Ukrainian individuals and entities for actions undermining the sovereignty of Ukraine were a subject of discussion in the interview. “We want Russia to look for a way to make decisions that will reverse what it has done and not make further incursions into Ukraine,” Lew said. “The best thing for Russia and the best thing for the world is for Russia not to take the steps that cause further sanctions to be necessary. But there should be no illusion that we’ve done everything we can do. We’ve put in place a blueprint that makes clear there’s quite a bit more we could do.”

Secretary Kerry Warns Russia to Stop Separatist Actions in Eastern Ukraine

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer |
08 April 2014

Washington – Secretary of State John Kerry warned Russia to end its separatist actions in eastern Ukraine or

face tough new economic sanctions.

In congressional testimony, Kerry said the United States and its allies are willing to impose severe new sanctions on Russia against key economic sectors like energy, banking and mining. President Obama has signed an executive order to implement these measures if Russia does not stop exerting pressure and aggression against eastern Ukraine, he said.

“What we see from Russia is an illegal and illegitimate effort to destabilize a sovereign state and create a contrived crisis with paid operatives across an international boundary engaged in this initiative,” Kerry testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 8.

“No one should be fooled – and believe me, no one is fooled by what could potentially be a contrived pretext for military intervention just as we saw in Crimea,” Kerry added.

Kerry said Russian agents have been the catalysts behind substantial chaos in the previous 48 hours in which pro-Russian demonstrators seized government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Lugansk and other cities in the region. Since then Ukrainian Interior Ministry forces have retaken many of the seized buildings and driven out the pro-Russian demonstrators in Kharkiv and in Donetsk, according to Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov.

Kerry told senators he is meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Ukrainian officials and the European Union in Europe during the week of April 20. Kerry spoke with Lavrov by telephone April 7, and “he made clear that any further Russian effort to destabilize Ukraine will incur further costs for Russia,” State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

Finding a diplomatic resolution to the crisis and reducing tensions has been the Obama administration’s primary objective, Kerry added.

“But Russia should not, for a single solitary second, mistake the expression of that preference as an unwillingness to do what is necessary to stop any violation of the international order,” Kerry told senators.

The United States imposed sanctions March 20 that targeted 20 individuals inside and outside the Russian government and a private Russian bank, Bank Rossiya, because of their involvement in or direct support of the Crimean crisis. That round of penalties followed the first sanctions levied March 17 against 11 high-ranking Russian and Crimean officials.

The Senate committee reviewed U.S. foreign policies

broadly during a hearing to review the annual 2015 State Department budget request. The department is seeking \$50.1 billion for the department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and overseas contingency operations, a funding level equal to its 2014 budget. Kerry also addressed senators' questions about policies on Syria, the Palestinian-Israeli talks, and Iran's nuclear weapons development program.

Navy Team Detects Signals in Search for Missing Aircraft

By Claudette Roulo | American Forces Press Service | 08 April 2014

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on April 7.

Washington – U.S. Navy personnel continue their support of the search for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a Pentagon spokesman said April 7.

The United States has two P-8 Poseidon aircraft searching in the Indian Ocean, Army Colonel Steve Warren said.

Navy aircraft supporting the search have flown 24 missions, with 220 hours of flight time covering 336,000 square nautical miles, according to a U.S. 7th Fleet news release.

"Additionally, we have two pieces of highly sophisticated underwater detection equipment [engaged in the search] – the towed pinger locator and the Bluefin-21 [sidescan sonar]," Warren said.

Both underwater devices are operating from the Australian Defense Vessel Ocean Shield, the news release said.

The team operating the towed pinger locator detected signals April 6 that are consistent with sounds that would come from a black box, the release said. The signals were detected on at least three separate occasions for extended periods of time and at several different depths. The locator also detected two signals at the same frequency, but in different locations, which would be consistent with signals transmitted by both a flight data recorder and a cockpit voice recorder, the release noted.

The team is working to reacquire the signal and plans to use the Bluefin-21 to create a picture of any potential wreckage.

The search is a round-the-clock operation, and is currently focused on an area about 950 nautical miles northwest of Perth, Australia.

Determining the location and position of search assets is

"a very collaborative effort between Americans, the Australians, the Malaysians and others," Warren said. But, he added, "the Australians right now do have the lead."

Hagel: U.S.-Japan Partnership Critical to Regional Security

By Cheryl Pellerin | American Forces Press Service | 07 April 2014

A version of this article originally was published on the Defense Department website April 5. There are no republication restrictions.

Tokyo – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel landed in Japan April 5 as part of his fourth official trip to the Asia-Pacific region to reassure the nation's leaders that the U.S.-Japan relationship is one of America's strongest partnerships, friendships and treaty relationships.

This evening Hagel met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. According to Pentagon press secretary Navy Rear Admiral John Kirby, the secretary thanked Abe for his leadership and for helping the two militaries maintain a strong relationship.

Hagel expressed his firm commitment to the U.S.-Japan treaty of mutual cooperation and security and to working closely with the leadership of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to improve the nations' collective capabilities, Kirby said.

The leaders discussed a range of regional security issues, including recent provocations by North Korea, Chinese maritime claims and military activities, and the need for a continued focus on dialogue and cooperation among the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Hagel affirmed strong U.S. support for Japanese efforts at defense reform and thanked Abe for supporting the Japanese government in December 2013 in securing a landfill permit for the Futenma replacement facility.

On April 6, Hagel was to meet with Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera, Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy.

"There are challenges in this part of the world that include Japan's future," the defense secretary told reporters traveling with him.

"I'm visiting Japan ... not just [to] reconnect and recommit U.S. efforts but to build on the recent meeting President Obama had with Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Park [Geun-hye]," Hagel said, "as we look at new opportunities and challenges in this part of the world."

He added, "The Japanese-American partnership is a very critical anchor to peace and stability and security in this part of the world, so I look forward to conversations here in the next couple of days with the senior leaders of Japan."

Even before he landed in Tokyo, Hagel initiated and hosted in Honolulu an informal meeting of defense ministers of the 10 countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. The meeting was the first ever held in the United States.

"The ASEAN defense ministers conference was an important first step in what I'm doing here in the region because it represented the initial effort we have been working on as we continue to collaborate and coordinate with and strengthen our relationships in the Asia-Pacific," Hagel said.

As President Obama, Secretary of State John F. Kerry and Hagel himself have said many times, ASEAN is an important organization now and will continue to be important, the secretary said, because it represents the collective interests of the region.

ASEAN member countries are Burma, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

"When you add to [this] the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus members [which consists of the 10 ASEAN defense ministers and defense ministers from the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, New Zealand and Russia] ... that's a significant representation of this part of the world," Hagel observed.

The U.S. strategy of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region "is very much based on these relationships and all their variances and dimensions," the secretary said, "so to start [his fourth trip to the region in less than 12 months] spending a couple of days with ASEAN members was important."

Hagel landed in Tokyo April 5 at Yokota Air Base, whose host unit is the 374th Airlift Wing, and his first visit was with 200 U.S. service members and Japanese Self-Defense Forces troops.

In a hangar on a stage in front of giant flags of the United States and Japan, the secretary brought greetings from President Obama and thanked those from U.S. Forces Japan and their families for their service and sacrifice.

Hagel also thanked those from Japan's Self-Defense Forces "for what you do for your country and for our partnership, and for helping keep peace and stability in this part of the world."

In Hagel's discussions with Japanese leaders, a senior defense official traveling with the secretary said Hagel will have an opportunity to maintain the positive forward motion initiated in Tokyo in fall 2013 during the historic Two Plus Two meeting he attended with Kerry.

That progress, the official said, involved work on the bilateral U.S.-Japan alliance to revise the defense guidelines, move forward with the realignment of U.S. military forces in Japan, and strengthen and orient the alliance to focus on 21st century challenges.

Hagel and the Japanese leaders also will discuss building a common understanding of the regional and global security environment.

"Here the secretary will ... share perspectives with the Japanese prime minister and defense minister on what they're seeing on the Korean Peninsula, in the East China Sea and in the South China Sea," the official said, and conduct important alliance consultations on opportunities and challenges of the international security order.

The senior defense official said Hagel and Japanese officials also would discuss Japan's relationships with other countries in the region.

"The president and Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Park had a historic trilateral summit on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit at the Hague recently," the official said, "and there will be an opportunity to continue underscoring the importance ... we see in greater trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan and South Korea, and the United States, Japan and Australia, and how to move those relationships forward."

In Washington on April 17-18 the United States, South Korea and Japan will hold a sixth round of Defense Trilateral Talks, the official said, and in late April President Obama will visit Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia.

ASEAN-U.S. Forum Deepens Partnerships, Increases Opportunities

By Cheryl Pellerin | American Forces Press Service |
04 April 2014

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on April 3.

Honolulu — Success during the first ASEAN-U.S. Defense Forum held in the United States has strengthened friendships among nations and increased partnership opportunities that will help everyone in the region deal with new and enduring Asia-Pacific security challenges, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said April 3.

The 10 defense ministers of member countries that constitute the Association of Southeast Asian Nations accepted Hagel's June invitation and participated in the discussions and roundtables with purpose and energy, the secretary said during the forum's final news conference.

"This gathering was an important milestone in America's growing engagement with the ASEAN nations, and another signal of the important role ASEAN has to play in promoting regional stability and prosperity," Hagel said.

The Defense Department hosted the meeting, but the forum benefited from the participation of partners across the federal government, the secretary added, especially during the April 2 session on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations hosted by Kathryn Sullivan, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, and moderated by Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID.

"Coming only hours after a tsunami advisory was lifted for Hawaii, the NOAA presentation and roundtable underscored that natural disasters and humanitarian crises will [define 21st century] security challenges, not only for Southeast Asia but for the world," Hagel said.

"We can expect that the frequency and the complexity of disaster relief and humanitarian assistance missions will increase," he noted, adding that such missions demand cooperation among nations and across their government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and their private sectors.

"The discussions we had yesterday, which focused on lessons learned from recent operations, will help identify new proposals to improve our preparedness and cooperation in the future," he told reporters.

In discussions April 2, for example, Singapore proposed using Changi Naval Base as a regional humanitarian assistance and disaster relief crisis coordination center.

"This could be an important venue for nations in the region to coordinate military responses to disasters, and it's an idea that we're going to pursue," the secretary said. "This was among many ideas that came out of our last couple of days of discussions."

Discussions on April 3 addressed a range of regional security matters, including improving maritime security cooperation and addressing tensions in the South China Sea, Hagel said.

"I told the ministers that the United States is increasingly concerned about the instability arising from territorial

disputes in the South China Sea," he added. "The rights of all nations must be respected. It's important that all claimants avoid the use or threat of force or intimidation or coercion."

He said the United States urges all claimants of land in the disputes to clarify their claims, including the basis of the claims in international law, and to use internationally accepted rules and standards of behavior.

On April 4, the secretary said, he will continue the rest of his fourth official visit to the Asia-Pacific region, including stops in Japan, China and Mongolia.

"This trip and the ASEAN-U.S. Forum shows America's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific remains a critical part of our national security strategy," Hagel said. "We are committed to the security and the prosperity of the region because of our interests, and also [because of] our close relationships, alliances and commitments."

He added, "America has a long-standing engagement and commitment with the Asia-Pacific region. It's a commitment that we will continue to meet in the 21st century."

Collaboration, Vigilance Are Key to Disease Control

04 April 2014

Washington — Nations of the Americas have one of the world's best records in collaborating to fight disease, and health officials from across the region say their collaboration must grow even stronger in the face of emerging health threats.

Top public health leaders from North and South America discussed shared challenges April 4 in an intercontinental telephone briefing organized in recognition of World Health Day April 7. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) hosted the briefing from its Washington headquarters.

PAHO is the Western Hemisphere affiliate of the World Health Organization (WHO), which coordinates the annual event. Activities in 2014 focus on preventing vector-borne diseases — with the slogan, "Small bite, big threat." Each year 1 billion people are infected and sickened by one of the many diseases that are carried by mosquitoes, ticks and other pests. WHO estimates that these ailments kill 1 million people each year.

The Western Hemisphere was the first region of the world to overcome smallpox, a disease now eradicated worldwide. The region came close to beating the most fatal vector-borne diseases — yellow fever, malaria and dengue — in the mid-20th century, said PAHO's director, Dr. Carissa Etienne. Lessons of the past must also inform

future public health decisionmaking, she cautioned.

“Unfortunately, but also predictably,” Etienne said, “[these diseases] re-emerged after countries cut back on investment in vector control.”

Millions of people throughout the hemisphere remain at risk for malaria and dengue, but new diseases also challenge public health officials. Chikungunya, a mosquito-borne virus originating in Africa, made its first appearance in the Caribbean in December 2013. Since that arrival in the Americas, it has already spread to nations from Brazil to Canada, probably because of the many travelers from throughout the hemisphere who visit tropical island vacation spots.

The director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urged health care providers to be mindful of the capability of microbes to travel aboard airplanes along with vacationers. Dr. Tom Frieden said all patients who appear with fever and joint pain should be considered candidates for chikungunya infection if they have recently visited another country where it has appeared.

Frieden said nations of the hemisphere must maintain disease-tracking skills and equipment “so we can detect and stop outbreaks and prevent further spread.”

West Nile virus is another rapidly spreading disease that is a vector-borne newcomer to the Western Hemisphere, arriving in 1999. Also transmitted by mosquitoes, West Nile has caused 3 million cases in the United States alone since its first appearance, Frieden says.

Though as many as 80 percent of humans infected will not show symptoms, West Nile virus can sometimes lead to years of disability or even a fatal neurological condition.

Chikungunya and West Nile virus are just two examples of new disease threats.

“We, as a world, are in some ways more vulnerable than ever,” Frieden said. “And that means we, as a world, must collaborate more effectively than ever.”

Frieden said the United States looks forward to further collaborations with other nations of the hemisphere to strengthen public health systems to better contain disease.

In the face of these new threats, public health officials are heartened by recent progress in reducing the occurrence of malaria, another vector-borne disease. In Latin America and the Caribbean, malaria cases have decreased by 60 percent in the last eight years.

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