Three days in March were enough to show how the toughening U.S. military stance, specifically on missile defense, is affecting international relations. On March 11 China announced a 17.7% increase in its military budget, the largest in 20 years. On March 12 North Korea cancelled Cabinet-level talks with South Korea just hours before they were due to begin. And on March 13 Russian President Putin agreed to resume sales of conventional weapons to Iran and to help Iran complete a nuclear power plant that some U.S. experts fear may be used to power nuclear weapons.

**China:** China's announced defense increases are expected to finance force restructuring and training, raise officers' salaries, and “modernize the ballistic missile program,” writes Craig S. Smith in the New York Times (emphasis added). China's military budget does not disclose the whole of its defense spending. Arms purchases are made from a separate fund, and from Russia alone have totaled $1 billion a year since 1992. Nicholas Berry, Senior Analyst at the Center for Defense Information, argues in a March 5 briefing that while China is not "pursuing world domination" and is "not even a regional empire," the situation may change dramatically if the U. S. NMD counters China's deterrent.

**Korea:** After a thaw that included a summit meeting between Kim Jong Il and Kim Dae-jung, reunions of families separated for nearly fifty years, and promises of millions of dollars in desperately needed aid flowing from South to North, North Korea's cancellation of the scheduled talks highlights continuing disagreements between Seoul, Washington and Pyongyang. The thrust of the recent meeting between Presidents Kim Dae-Jung and George Bush has angered North Korea, which now threatens to withdraw from the U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework, an elaborate agreement linking disarmament in the North with energy assistance from the South and the U.S. Chosun Iibo, an architect of the framework, writes in a Brookings Institute brief that "[w]hat is needed in Washington and Seoul is a renewed political commitment to this or it will continue to suffer. . . While it would be ironic in light of past Republican criticism, the Bush Administration is well positioned to provide such a renewed commitment.” But the recent chill in relations makes Congressional fiscal support for such a commitment unlikely.

**Russia and Iran:** It is still not clear, despite recent European visits by Secretaries Rumsfeld and Powell, how NMD/TMD will ultimately affect U.S. international relations in general and U.S. – Russian relations in particular. Especially important is the question of whether other U.S.-Russian arms-control treaties will stand if the U.S. withdraws from the ABM Treaty. But it is clear that American obduracy on missile defense, and the entire tone of U.S. global policy, is causing Russia to solidify alliances in the Middle East and Asia and to rely more heavily on arms sales to stabilize its own economy.

Despite recent attempts at improving relations between Washington and Tehran, Iran is still officially called a "state of concern" by the U.S. State Department, which warns that Iran could be developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. "The question," said Thomas Graham of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, quoted in the New York Times, "is what this does for the regional military balance. Does it give Iran a certain capacity in the Persian Gulf region that it didn't have before?" And could that disrupt a volatile, economically vital, region?

**Much Ado . . .** China, Russia, and North Korea are reacting to a missile defense program that to date can shoot down only one of three missiles even if the U.S. military knows when and where to expect them. As James K.
Galbraith, Chair of ECAAR, said at a recent meeting of ECAAR's missile defense study group, "It doesn't matter whether it works or not. The damage will be done either way." With China increasing its military expenditures, North Korea threatening to withdraw from disarmament agreements with the U.S. and South Korea, and Russia selling conventional weapons and dual-use technologies to Iran, we can begin to see what the damage will look like. New arms races, more nuclear and missile proliferation, heightened regional tensions: all results of a first-class boondoggle that will decrease rather than increase international security.

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