OMNI


Everyone who has been watching and reading will find my newsletters on US Pacific/E.Asia Imperialism familiar. I compile them to give us a focused base of information with which to counteract the US Imperial-Corporate Media Propaganda Machine. While we in our homes and towns have organized to increase reason, cooperation, and peace, our leaders continued to threaten, prepare for, and engage in war. All the while the US was conquering and occupying the Middle East, the same leaders were expanding bases throughout the Pacific and E. Asia, until one day they decided to “pivot” troops from Iraq, as though it were a new idea. Already China is encircled by US bases (and Russia and Iran). But I think you would not be reading this if you were intimidated by the such aggressive power. You and I know that if we avert our eyes and energy away from our leaders’ compulsive urge to dominate the planet, we will lose our nation and our ourselves.

"To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."
- Robert H. Jackson, U.S. Prosecutor, Nuremberg Military Tribunal

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/2013/03/colonial-pacific-world-war-ii.html

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ For a knowledge-based peace, justice, and ecology movement and an informed citizenry as the foundation for opposition to empire, militarism, and wars.


My blog: It's the War Department
[http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/](http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/)

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CHECK THIS OUT, FROM HAW

"The Treaty That Ended World War II Still Haunts Asia Today"
By John Dower, History News Network, posted March 4
The author is a professor of history emeritus at MIT.

US MILITARY BASES

PENTAGON PREPARES FOR WAR IN PACIFIC/E. ASIA
WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is looking at new ways to disperse its forces throughout the Asia-Pacific as military planners explore alternatives to the large US super bases in the region vulnerable to cruise missile strikes.

Instead, the Defense Department is reviewing a host of options, including ways to operate combat aircraft in austere locations and strengthening overseas bases.

“I think we ... need to figure out better ways to defeat the enemy’s precision strike,” David Ochmanek, US deputy assistant secretary of defense for force development, said during a March presentation at a Precision Strike Association conference.
“Planners worry about what happens to our forward-based forces when they’re inside the threat range from ballistic missiles and cruise missiles if those weapons are accurate and if they’re deliverable in large numbers,” he said.

The US military has spent the past two years rebalancing its forces toward the Asia-Pacific region as China’s military grows. US officials maintain that the focus on the region is not the Chinese; however, senior defense officials have spent a significant amount of time in the region making military pacts with countries, including Australia and Singapore, to host American troops on a rotational basis.

At the same time, China has been developing a medium-range anti-ship missile, the DF-21D, which could target ships more than 900 miles off its coast.

For years, the US has not had to worry greatly about long-range attacks on its overseas bases. Over time, DoD has consolidated facilities, creating major hubs in Guam, Japan and South Korea in the Pacific, as well as across the Middle East and Europe.

Now, as potential adversaries develop more precise, mid- to long-range weapons, the US should consider spreading out its forces, particularly in the Pacific and Middle East, said Mark Gunzinger, a retired US Air Force colonel and analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

“As we look to the future and we think about what our competitors are doing, we’re going to need to come up with a different posture, certainly in the Pacific and ... in other regions,” Gunzinger said.

“We need a more diversifying basing posture in peacetime to reduce the potential of an unwarned attack to bolster our military posture in the Pacific,” he said.

Analysis has shown “promising results” from “dispersing the force more radically,” Ochmanek said.

“We’ve gotten used to basing the force very efficiently — 72, 100, 144 airplanes concentrated on a single forward base,” he said. “That’s going to be a very lucrative target, hard to defend against an ... attack.”

Spreading those aircraft out across a dozen bases, further diversifying assets within those bases and selected hardening of facilities is also important, particularly since ballistic and cruise missiles have limited impact points, Ochmanek said.
“That’s going to take some investment, but I think if we do it smart, we can ... get on the right side of that cost exchange curve,” he said.

Hardening could prove useful — particularly in Guam — but it’s expensive, Gunzinger said.

“While hardening is part of the answer, we simply can’t afford to harden everything at our main operating bases,” he said.

Hardening typically involves building bunkers, using reinforced concrete structures or shielding computer equipment from an electromagnetic pulse.

Ochmanek noted that it costs a lot to shoot down a ballistic missile compared to the cost of building a new missile.

“We need to keep ... trying to find more affordable ways to provide an effective defense,” he said.

The Pentagon’s Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) says DoD will enhance capabilities by dispersing “land-based and naval expeditionary forces to other bases and operating sites, providing the ability to operate and maintain front-line combat aircraft from austere bases while using only a small complement of logistical and support personnel and equipment.”

“A more resilient posture in the Pacific will be some hardening ... and diversifying of our basing posture, so we’re not as reliant as we are today on a relative handful of main operating bases,” Gunzinger said.

Spreading out forces complicates the planning of competitors in the region, Gunzinger said.

“They would have to attack many different locations because they don’t know where our forces are because we’ve dispersed,” Gunzinger said. “When you complicate an enemy’s planning, that enhances your deterrence posture.”


“In general, there is a concern that the United States may be less reliable as a stabilizing or balancing force in the region. Partly this is a perception based on continuing economic and budget problems, and partly it is a perception of deliberate US policy designed to rebuild after a decade of two protracted ground wars,” he said.
The United States is seeking to avoid costly engagements so that it can invest in future capabilities. By seeking to invest more in future innovation, however, the United States is in effect looking to allies and partners to shoulder greater burdens, particularly for their own defense. Others are waiting to see if the Trans-Pacific Partnership comes to fruition, because it more than any other single action will help shape opinions in the region about the comprehensive nature of US rebalancing policy.

The QDR strategy document, which is updated every four years, also says DoD will invest in rapid airfield repair capabilities and buy fuel bladders “to ensure survivability of supplies.”

The US could build new main operating bases; however, that would be an expensive endeavor at a time when the Pentagon’s budget is contracting.

“I think a better approach might be to invest in some facilities that are owned by the various host nations,” Gunzinger said.

DoD could upgrade military bases or civilian airfields in the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, Japan and other locations, “so we would be able to operate out of them if necessary and we wouldn’t have to create a new base from scratch,” he said. “[W]e would have equipment there prepositioned so we could deploy to it and operate with our allies and partners in the region.”

In peacetime, the US could hold exercises with those host nations.

Regardless of basing, DoD must also ensure that its force is mobile enough to fight in the vast Pacific region, particularly since there is no NATO-fighting structure.

“There’s such a divide technically, operationally and culturally between us that we have to be able to take all of our operations mobile and network them,” said Greg Glaros, a career naval strategist who now runs a small defense company in Virginia.

Sharing information during a Pacific war would be difficult, particularly since many regional nations have limited capabilities.

The multinational search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 — the commercial airliner that disappeared presumably into the Indian Ocean on a flight between Kuala Lumpur and Beijing in March — has shown the technical, operational and cultural divide that exists among Southeast Asian countries, even when they are working for a common goal, Glaros said.

“Stop trying to secure your bases, and start to make your operations mobile and figure out how you’re going to be able to network that information and remove latency and reduce your
ANSWER statement in solidarity with struggle against new U.S. base in Ukawa, Japan

U.S. bases out of Japan and Asia!

ANSWER Coalition banner at last year's international demonstration against the U.S. military base in Iwakuni, Japan

April 20, 2014. a demonstration will be held in Ukawa, Japan to protest the construction of a new U.S. X-band radar base. It is being organized by the Kinki Coalition Against the US X-Band Radar Base and Asia Wide Campaign (AWC), a well-known anti-war organization with a long history of struggle. X-band radar is an advanced system that is supposedly being put in place to defend against the non-existent threat of a North Korean nuclear attack against the United States. In fact, the new installation is part of a broader strategy by U.S. imperialism to expand its presence in Asia and dominate the region. Below are statements from the ANSWER Coalition that will be read at the demonstration.

Statement from the ANSWER Coalition - U.S. to the Asia Wide Campaign (AWC) and the Kinki Coalition Against the U.S. X-Band Radar Base

As people gather today in Kyoto to rally against yet another expansion of the U.S. military presence abroad, we anti-war activists from across the United States stand with the people from Kyoto, Okinawa, Iwakuni, Kanagawa and elsewhere who are opposing this expansion and demanding the end of the U.S. military occupation of Japan.

The brazen demand that the people of Japan host yet another U.S. base should earn the same outrage around the world as it does in Kyoto and throughout Japan. U.S. occupations serve a larger global agenda to keep the people of the world under U.S. militarism’s thumb, and so people around the world will continue to fight back against U.S. occupation, adventurism, militarism and imperialism. The ANSWER Coalition will continue to do its part in that important struggle from cities and towns throughout the United States.
We demand the closure of all U.S. bases in Japan, and throughout Asia and the world, and for an end to imperialist occupation. We stand firmly opposed to U.S. threats of war against North Korea and other countries.

SPECIAL OPS

The Warfare State At Work: The Peace Candidate’s Secret Wars In 134 Countries.  by **David Stockman** • April 4, 2014

In the post below, Nick Turse supplies chapter and verse on the mind-blowing extent of America’s global imperium. Crucially, he shows that the number of countries in which the US runs covert operations, drone raids, military training exercises and other violent interventions has soared from 60 at the end of the Bush term to 134 nations today—70 percent of the world.

Like it was once said of the British empire, the appalling fact today is that the sun never sets where US special operations forces — Green Berets and Rangers, Navy SEALs and Delta Force commandos, specialized helicopter crews, boat teams, and civil affairs personnel —are not deployed. As Nick Turse further explains:


Hyping the ‘Chinese Threat’

Media follow official line on East China Sea dispute

by Brendan P. O’Reilly

*EXTRA!* (March 2014).

US media “fearmongering” about China. “Despite the fact that China has not fought a war since 1979 [and has no overseas military bases], and is extremely dependent on foreign trade, any moves made by Beijing to counter US hegemony are automatically labeled as aggressive.” Orwell would add this to *1984*: US aggression is “defense,” Chinese defense is “aggression.”
Trade agreements are a subject that can cause the eyes to glaze over, but we should all be paying attention. Right now, there are trade proposals in the works that threaten to put most Americans on the wrong side of globalization.

The conflicting views about the agreements are actually tearing at the fabric of the Democratic Party, though you wouldn’t know it from President Obama’s rhetoric. In his State of the Union address, for example, he blandly referred to “new trade partnerships” that would “create more jobs.” Most immediately at issue is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, which would bring together 12 countries along the Pacific Rim in what would be the largest free trade area in the world.

Negotiations for the TPP began in 2010, for the purpose, according to the United States Trade Representative, of increasing trade and investment, through lowering tariffs and other trade barriers among participating countries. But the TPP negotiations have been taking place in secret, forcing us to rely on leaked drafts to guess at the proposed provisions. At the same time, Congress introduced a bill this year that would grant the White House filibuster-proof fast-track authority, under which Congress simply approves or rejects whatever trade agreement is put before it, without revisions or amendments. [Congress giving more power to Executive. –Dick]

Controversy has erupted, and justifiably so. Based on the leaks — and the history of arrangements in past trade pacts — it is easy to infer the shape of the whole TPP, and it doesn’t look good. There is a real risk that it will benefit the wealthiest sliver of the
American and global elite at the expense of everyone else. The fact that such a plan is under consideration at all is testament to how deeply inequality reverberates through our economic policies.

Worse, agreements like the TPP are only one aspect of a larger problem: our gross mismanagement of globalization.

Let’s tackle the history first. MORE http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/15/on-the-wrong-side-of-globalization/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&hp&rref=opinion&_r=1&

In general, trade deals today are markedly different from those made in the decades following World War II, when negotiations focused on lowering tariffs. As tariffs came down on all sides, trade expanded, and each country could develop the sectors in which it had strengths and as a result, standards of living would rise. Some jobs would be lost, but new jobs would be created.

Today, the purpose of trade agreements is different. Tariffs around the world are already low. The focus has shifted to “nontariff barriers,” and the most important of these — for the corporate interests pushing agreements — are regulations. Huge multinational corporations complain that inconsistent regulations make business costly. But most of the regulations, even if they are imperfect, are there for a reason: to protect workers, consumers, the economy and the environment.

What’s more, those regulations were often put in place by governments responding to the democratic demands of their citizens. Trade agreements’ new boosters euphemistically claim that they are simply after regulatory harmonization, a clean-sounding phrase that implies an innocent plan to promote efficiency. One could, of course, get regulatory harmonization by strengthening regulations to the highest standards everywhere. But when corporations call for harmonization, what they really mean is a race to the bottom.
When agreements like the TPP govern international trade — when every country has agreed to similarly minimal regulations — multinational corporations can return to the practices that were common before the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts became law (in 1970 and 1972, respectively) and before the latest financial crisis hit. Corporations everywhere may well agree that getting rid of regulations would be good for corporate profits. Trade negotiators might be persuaded that these trade agreements would be good for trade and corporate profits. But there would be some big losers — namely, the rest of us.

These high stakes are why it is especially risky to let trade negotiations proceed in secret. All over the world, trade ministries are captured by corporate and financial interests. And when negotiations are secret, there is no way that the democratic process can exert the checks and balances required to put limits on the negative effects of these agreements.

The secrecy might be enough to cause significant controversy for the TPP. What we know of its particulars only makes it more unpalatable. One of the worst is that it allows corporations to seek restitution in an international tribunal, not only for unjust expropriation, but also for alleged diminution of their potential profits as a result of regulation. This is not a theoretical problem. Philip Morris has already tried this tactic against Uruguay, claiming that its antismoking regulations, which have won accolades from the World Health Organization, unfairly hurt profits, violating a bilateral trade treaty between Switzerland and Uruguay. In this sense, recent trade agreements are reminiscent of the Opium Wars, in which Western powers successfully demanded that China keep itself open to opium because they saw it as vital in correcting what otherwise would be a large trade imbalance.

Provisions already incorporated in other trade agreements are being used elsewhere to undermine environmental and other regulations. Developing countries pay a high price for signing on to these provisions, but the evidence that they get more investment in return is
scant and controversial. And though these countries are the most obvious victims, the same issue could become a problem for the United States, as well. American corporations could conceivably create a subsidiary in some Pacific Rim country, invest in the United States through that subsidiary, and then take action against the United States government — getting rights as a “foreign” company that they would not have had as an American company. Again, this is not just a theoretical possibility: There is already some evidence that companies are choosing how to funnel their money into different countries on the basis of where their legal position in relation to the government is strongest.

There are other noxious provisions. America has been fighting to lower the cost of health care. But the TPP would make the introduction of generic drugs more difficult, and thus raise the price of medicines. In the poorest countries, this is not just about moving money into corporate coffers: thousands would die unnecessarily. Of course, those who do research have to be compensated. That’s why we have a patent system. But the patent system is supposed to carefully balance the benefits of intellectual protection with another worthy goal: making access to knowledge more available. I’ve written before about how the system has been abused by those seeking patents for the genes that predispose women to breast cancer. The Supreme Court ended up rejecting those patents, but not before many women suffered unnecessarily. Trade agreements provide even more opportunities for patent abuse.

The worries mount. One way of reading the leaked negotiation documents suggests that the TPP would make it easier for American banks to sell risky derivatives around the world, perhaps setting us up for the same kind of crisis that led to the Great Recession.

In spite of all this, there are those who passionately support the TPP and agreements like it, including many economists. What makes this support possible is bogus, debunked economic theory, which has remained in circulation mostly because it serves the interests of the wealthiest.

Free trade was a central tenet of economics in the discipline’s early years. Yes, there are winners and losers, the theory went, but the winners can always compensate the losers, so that free trade (or even freer trade) is a win-win. This conclusion, unfortunately, is based on numerous assumptions, many of which are simply wrong.

The older theories, for instance, simply ignored risk, and assumed that workers could move seamlessly between jobs. It was assumed that the economy was at full employment, so that workers displaced by globalization would quickly move from low-productivity sectors (which had thrived simply because foreign competition was kept at bay through tariffs and other trade restrictions) to high-productivity sectors. But when there is a high level of unemployment, and especially when a large percentage of the unemployed have been out of work long-term (as is the case now), there can’t be such complacency.

Today, there are 20 million Americans who would like a full-time job but can’t get one. Millions have stopped looking. So there is a real risk that individuals moved from low productivity-employment in a protected sector will end up zero-productivity members of the vast ranks of the unemployed. This hurts even those who keep their jobs, as higher unemployment puts downward pressure on wages.

We can argue over why our economy isn’t performing the way it’s supposed to — whether it’s because of a lack of aggregate demand, or because our banks, more interested in speculation
and market manipulation than lending, are not providing adequate funds to small and medium-size enterprises. But whatever the reasons, the reality is that these trade agreements do risk increasing unemployment.

One of the reasons that we are in such bad shape is that we have mismanaged globalization. Our economic policies encourage the outsourcing of jobs: Goods produced abroad with cheap labor can be cheaply brought back into the United States. So American workers understand that they have to compete with those abroad, and their bargaining power is weakened. This is one of the reasons that the real median income of full-time male workers is lower than it was 40 years ago.

American politics today compounds these problems. Even in the best of circumstances, the old free trade theory said only that the winners could compensate the losers, not that they would. And they haven’t — quite the opposite. Advocates of trade agreements often say that for America to be competitive, not only will wages have to be cut, but so will taxes and expenditures, especially on programs that are of benefit to ordinary citizens. We should accept the short-term pain, they say, because in the long run, all will benefit. But as John Maynard Keynes famously said in another context, “in the long run we are all dead.” In this case, there is little evidence that the trade agreements will lead to faster or more profound growth.

Critics of the TPP are so numerous because both the process and the theory that undergird it are bankrupt. Opposition has blossomed not just in the United States, but also in Asia, where the talks have stalled.

By leading a full-on rejection of fast-track authority for the TPP, the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, seems to have given us all a little respite. Those who see trade agreements as enriching corporations at the expense of the 99 percent seem to have won this skirmish. But there is a broader war to ensure that trade policy — and globalization more generally — is designed so as to increase the standards of living of most Americans. The outcome of that war remains uncertain.

In this series, I have repeatedly made two points: The first is that the high level of inequality in the United States today, and its enormous increase during the past 30 years, is the cumulative result of an array of policies, programs and laws. Given that the president himself has emphasized that inequality should be the country’s top priority, every new policy, program or law should be examined from the perspective of its impact on inequality. Agreements like the TPP have contributed in important ways to this inequality. Corporations may profit, and it is even possible, though far from assured, that gross domestic product as conventionally measured will increase. But the well-being of ordinary citizens is likely to take a hit.

And this brings me to the second point that I have repeatedly emphasized: Trickle-down economics is a myth. Enriching corporations — as the TPP would — will not necessarily help those in the middle, let alone those at the bottom.
TPP—‘The Largest Corporate Power Grab You’ve Never Heard Of’
Virtual media blackout of ‘NAFTA on steroids’
by Steve Rendall  **EXTRA!** (March 2014).
[I was never able to acquire this online.  –Dick]

**FOCUS | Noam Chomsky: How the US Is Playing With Fire in Asia**

*David McNeill, Japan Times*, Reader Supported News, March 12, 2014

McNeill reports: "Chomsky will make a rare trip to Tokyo in March, where he is scheduled to
give two lectures at Sophia University. Among the themes he will discuss are conceptions of
the common good."

READ MORE

[Here is a central passage on China, Japan, and US.  –Dick]

Some see the possible emergence of an Asian regionalism building on the dynamic of
intertwined trade centered on China, Japan and South Korea but extending throughout Asia. Under
what conditions could such an approach trump both U.S. hegemony and nationalism?

[Chomsky]: It is not just possible, it already exists. China's recent growth spurt is based very heavily
on advanced parts, components, design and other high-tech contributions from the surrounding industrial
powers. And the rest of Asia is becoming linked to this system, too. The U.S. is a crucial part of the system -
Western Europe, too. The U.S. exports production, including high technology, to China, and imports
finished goods, all on an enormous scale. The value added in China remains small, although it will increase
as China moves up the technology ladder. These developments, if handled properly, can contribute to the
general political accommodation that is imperative if serious conflict is to be avoided.

The recent tension over the Senkaku Islands has raised the threat of military conflict between
China and Japan. Most commenters still think war is unlikely, given the enormous consequences and
the deep finance and trade links that bind the two economies together. What's your view?

[Chomsky]: The confrontations taking place are extremely hazardous. The same is true of China's
declaration of an air defense identification zone in a contested region, and Washington's immediate
violation of it. History has certainly taught us that playing with fire is not a wise course, particularly for
states with an awesome capacity to destroy. Small incidents can rapidly escalate, overwhelming economic
links.

What's the U.S. role in all this? It seems clear that Washington does not want to be pulled into a
conflict with Beijing. We also understand that the Obama administration is upset at Abe's views on
history, and his visits to Yasukuni Shrine, the linchpin of historical revisionism in Japan. However we
can hardly call the U.S. an honest broker . . .
[Chomsky]: Hardly. The U.S. is surrounding China with military bases, not conversely. U.S. strategic analysts describe a "classic security dilemma" in the region, as the U.S. and China each perceive the other's stance as a threat to their basic interests. The issue is control of the seas off China's coasts, not the Caribbean or the waters off California. For the U.S., global control is a "vital interest."

We might also recall the fate of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama when he followed the will of the large majority of Okinawans, defying Washington. As The New York Times reported, "Apologizing for failing to fulfill a prominent campaign promise, Hatoyama told outraged residents of Okinawa on Sunday that he has decided to relocate an American air base to the north side of the island as originally agreed upon with the United States." His "capitulation," as it was correctly described, resulted from strong U.S. pressure.

China is now embroiled in territorial conflicts with Japan and the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea as well as the air defense identification zone on its contested borders. In all of these cases, the U.S. is directly or indirectly involved. Should these be understood as cases of Chinese expansionism?

China is seeking to expand its regional influence, which conflicts with the traditional U.S. demand to be recognized as the global hegemon, and conflicts as well with local interests of regional powers. The phrase "Chinese expansionism" is accurate, but rather misleading, in the light of overwhelming U.S. global dominance.

It is useful to think back to the early post-World War II period. U.S. global planning took for granted that Asia would be under U.S. control. China's independence was a serious blow to these intentions. In U.S. discourse, it is called "the loss of China," and the issue of who was responsible for "the loss of China" became a major domestic issue, including the rise of McCarthyism. The terminology itself is revealing. I can lose my wallet, but I cannot lose yours. The tacit assumption of U.S. discourse is that China was ours by right. One should be cautious about using the phrase "expansionism" without due attention to this hegemonic conception and its ugly history.

WESTWARD....AND NORTHWARD

Navy Preparing for Conflict with Russia over Arctic Zone by Thomas Friedman. [via Global Network  [globalnet@mindspring.com]]

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/opinion/sunday/friedman-parallel-parking-in-the-arctic-circle.html?ref=opinion&r=0&version=meter+at+7&region=FixedCenter&pgtype=article&priority=true&module=RegiWall-Regi&action=click
Op-Ed Columnist

Parallel Parking in the Arctic Circle

MARCH 29, 2014

By Thomas L. Friedman

ABOARD THE U.S.S. NEW MEXICO IN THE ARCTIC

I NEVER thought I’d ever get to see what the Arctic ice cap looks like from the bottom up.

It’s quite stunning — blocks of blue ice tumbling around in a frigid sea amid giant, jagged ice stalactites. I was afforded that unique view while surfaced from beneath the Arctic Circle last weekend aboard the U.S.S. New Mexico, an attack submarine. I had spent the night on the sub as part of a group accompanying Adm. Jonathan Greenert, the chief of naval operations, who was observing the Navy’s submarine arctic warfare exercise.

We had flown into the Arctic by small plane and landed on a snow airstrip at the Navy’s ice research station Nautilus, 150 miles north of the North Slope of Alaska. When we got there, the New Mexico, which had been patrolling the waters below, had already found an opening of thin ice and slushy water. The sub used its conning tower, or sail, to smash through to the surface, then “parallel park,” as one officer put it, between two floating islands of thick ice, and pick us up.

As we slipped back under water, the ship’s upward-looking camera (specially installed for underice travel where you can’t raise the periscope) carried a view of all the ice that had frozen around the sub in its few hours on the surface, which then cracked into huge chunks as we headed down. With the sub’s officers constantly checking the sonar and camera — and barking out speeds and directions to the two pilots steering the sub with a joystick and digital readouts that glowed in the dark control room — we gently submerged. The trick was to avoid the ice keels — forests of ice stalactites that extended down from the thicker surface ice into the arctic waters. Once we safely descended about 400 feet, we proceeded on our way.

Watching these officers maneuver an 8,000-ton nuclear sub, 377 feet long, through islands of unstable Arctic ice — we surfaced the same way — was a breathtaking and breath-holding experience.

[ESSAY BEGINS HERE –Dick]

But this wasn’t tourism. Climate scientists predict that if warming trends continue,
the Arctic’s ice cap will melt enough that — in this century — it will become a navigable ocean for commercial shipping year round, and for mineral and oil exploration. Russia has already made extensive claims to the Arctic, based on the reach of its continental shelf, beyond the usual 12 miles from its coastline; these are in dispute. To prepare for whatever unfolds here, though, the U.S. Navy keeps honing its Arctic submarine skills, including, on our trip, test-firing a virtual torpedo at a virtual enemy sub, studying how differences in water temperatures and the mix of freshwater from melted ice and saltwater affect undersea weapons and the sounds a sub makes (vital for knowing how to hide), as well as mapping the Arctic’s seabed topography.

“In our lifetime, what was [in effect] land and prohibitive to navigate or explore, is becoming an ocean, and we’d better understand it,” noted Admiral Greenert. “We need to be sure that our sensors, weapons and people are proficient in this part of the world,” so that we can “own the undersea domain and get anywhere there.” Because if the Arctic does open up for shipping, it offers a much shorter route from the Atlantic to the Pacific than through the Panama Canal, saving huge amounts of time and fuel.

You learn a lot on a trip like this, starting with the fact that I’m not claustrophobic. Sleeping in the middle rack of three stacked beds, appropriately called coffins, I now know that.

More important, you learn how crucial acoustics are when operating deep under ice with no vision and no GPS satellite to guide you. Or, as the New Mexico’s captain, Todd Moore, 40, put it: It’s like every day “engaging in a knife fight in a dark room: the only thing you can do is go after what you hear.” You can’t see the adversary. You can’t see the ice keels, but you can hear enemy subs, surface ships, whales, calving icebergs, schools of fish and bounce sound waves off them with sonar to measure distances. The New Mexico not only carries supersensitive sonar but also tows a giant electronic ear 1,000 feet behind it that can listen to the ocean without interference from the sub’s own engine noise.

“We can hear shrimp crackling 200 feet under water,” explained Lt. Cmdr. Craig Litty. They can also hear someone drop a wrench in the engine room of a Russian sub several miles away.

You certainly learn how self-contained a sub is. The New Mexico repairs its own broken parts, desalinates its own drinking water, generates its own nuclear power and makes its own air by taking purified water, zapping it with electricity, separating the H2O into hydrogen and oxygen, then discharging the hydrogen and circulating
the oxygen. The only thing that limits them is food-storage capacity and the sanity of the 130 crew; 90 days underwater is no problem.

My strongest impression, though, was experiencing something you see too little of these days on land: “Excellence.” You’re riding in a pressurized steel tube undersea. If anyone turns one knob the wrong way on the reactor or leaves a vent open, it can be death for everyone. This produces a unique culture among these mostly 20-something submariners. As one officer put it: “You become addicted to integrity.” There is zero tolerance for hiding any mistake. The sense of ownership and mutual accountability is palpable.

And that is why, said Adm. Joseph Tofalo, the Navy’s director of undersea warfare, who was also on the trip, “There is no multiple-choice exam for running the sub’s nuclear reactor.” If you want to be certified to run any major system on this ship, he added, “everything is an oral and written exam to demonstrate competency.”

Late at night, I was sipping coffee in the wardroom and a junior officer, Jeremy Ball, 27, came by and asked me if I could stay for Passover. He and two other Jewish sailors were organizing the Seder; the captain and several other non-Jewish shipmates said they’d be happy to join, but there was still room. Ball said he’d been storing “a brisket in the freezer” for the holiday and would pick up matzo when they surfaced in Canada.

Thanks, I said, but one night’s enough for me. But I had to ask: How do all of you stand being away from your families for so long underwater, receiving only a two-sentence “family-gram” once a week?

“Whenever you board this submarine in port, that American flag is flying and you salute that flag,” said Ball. “And every time I salute that flag, I remember the reason I joined the Navy: service to country, being part of something bigger than myself and in memory for the attacks of 9/11.”

Remind me again what we’re doing in Washington these days to deserve such young people?

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Contact President Obama: Try this: find someone who will talk with you, and then call again, strike up an acquaintance. Up against US permanent war we must be resolute and innovative.

From the White House: Write or Call
President Obama is committed to creating the most open and accessible administration in American history. That begins with taking comments and questions from you, the public, through our website.

Call the President

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Write a letter to the President
Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure your message gets to the White House as quickly as possible.
1. If possible, email us! This is the fastest way to get your message to President Obama.

2. If you write a letter, please consider typing it on an 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of paper. If you hand-write your letter, please consider using pen and writing as neatly as possible.

3. Please include your return address on your letter as well as your envelope. If you have an email address, please consider including that as well.

4. And finally, be sure to include the full address of the White House to make sure your message gets to us as quickly and directly as possible:

   The White House  
   1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
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**END US WESTWARD IMPERIALISM, PACIFIC/E. ASIA NEWSLETTER #12**

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Dick Bennett

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