

NEW SECURITY IDEAS

Written by Harvey M. Sapolsky

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HARVEY M. SAPOLSKY, SEP 16 2009

I believe in making security a lighter, more fun topic. In this quest to bring stand up comedy to what is basically a sit down field, I offer the following new ideas in part gleaned from conversations with colleagues who surely will not mind my skipping the attributions.

Why not ask China what it would pay for us to provide for its defense? Right now thanks to the US-Japan Security Treaty, the US is obligated to defend Japan. Because of our sharp negotiators, Japan, of course is not obligated to defend the US. For this one sided and very expensive bargain (US has to supply trained and well equipped forces), Japan offers some bases and covers about \$ 3 billion a year of our costs. This seems to me not a good deal. How about we ask China what it would pay for the US to defend China from Japan and Russia and India and whoever is out there? Surely it is worth more than \$ 3 billion to China to have us on China's side. Japan might then provide a more reasonable amount of money for our effort to stay on its side. I see competitive bidding as a great way to have some rich countries both foot the bill for our vast military effort and maybe even to offer to help us in return, say by sending combat forces to Afghanistan.

NATO shouldn't be neglected. I have long been a critic of NATO expansion, the effort for the US to take on obligations to defend the former elements of the Soviet empire from both their own bad behavior and any resurgence by Russia. This is like the Japan Security Treaty: almost all obligation on our part and little to no compensation in return. Why not, a friend suggested, just keep moving the NATO membership boundary eastward to include Russia. Never mind the nonsense qualifications. With Russia in, our NATO obligations quickly go to zero. NATO members don't fight each other and often not at all.

Let's stop building ships. We can get them for free. The US Navy has recalculated the number of ships it has under its command and discovered it has already passed its coveted goal of 1000. A roll call of its various task forces and fleets around the world last week revealed that it has been sailing with many more ships than the Navy had previously listed. Instead of the 280 ships it had claimed, the US Navy now admits that with proper counting of the British, French, Italian, Canadian, Japanese, German, Dutch, Danish, Polish, and US Coast Guard ships it had tagging along, the Navy had closer to 1200 ships patrolling the global commons. It turns out most of these ships fell into our formations when we asked their governments for battalions to aid in the Global War on Terror. Battalion is a word that apparently translates into frigate in most languages.

About the author:

Harvey M. Sapolsky is Professor of Public Policy and Organization, Emeritus, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former Director of the MIT Security Studies Program. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Michigan and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In the defense field he has served as a consultant or panel member for a number of government commissions and study groups. His most recent books are *US Defense Politics* written with Eugene Gholz and Caitlin Talmadge and *US Military Innovation Since the Cold War* edited with Benjamin Friedman and Brendan Green, both published by Routledge.

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