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China sub secretly stalked U.S. fleet

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A Chinese submarine stalked a U.S. aircraft carrier battle group in the Pacific last month and surfaced within firing range of its torpedoes and missiles before being detected, The Washington Times has learned.

The surprise encounter highlights China's continuing efforts to prepare for a future conflict with the U.S., despite Pentagon efforts to try to boost relations with Beijing's communist-ruled military.

The submarine encounter with the USS Kitty Hawk and its accompanying warships also is an embarrassment to the commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, Adm. William J. Fallon, who is engaged in an ambitious military exchange program with China aimed at improving relations between the two nations' militaries.

Disclosure of the incident comes as Adm. Gary Roughead, commander of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet, is making his first visit to China. The four-star admiral was scheduled to meet senior Chinese military leaders during the weeklong visit, which began over the weekend.

According to the defense officials, the Chinese Song-class diesel-powered attack submarine shadowed the Kitty Hawk undetected and surfaced within five miles of the carrier Oct. 26.

The surfaced submarine was spotted by a routine surveillance flight by one of the carrier group's planes. The Kitty Hawk battle group includes an attack submarine and anti-submarine helicopters that are charged with protecting the warships from submarine attack.

According to the officials, the submarine is equipped with Russian-made wake-homing torpedoes and anti-ship cruise missiles.

The Kitty Hawk and several other warships were deployed in ocean waters near Okinawa at the time, as part of a routine fall deployment program. The officials said Chinese submarines rarely have operated in deep water far from Chinese shores or shadowed U.S. vessels.

A Pacific Command spokesman declined to comment on the incident, saying details were classified.

Pentagon spokesmen also declined to comment.

The incident is a setback for the aggressive U.S.-China military exchange program being promoted by Adm. Fallon, who has made several visits to China in recent months in an attempt to develop closer ties.

