

US prepares for war against China

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The Pentagon's new strategic guidance, "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence", released last week places China squarely at the centre of American war planning. It formalises the shift in American foreign and military policy from the Middle East to Asia that has been under way since President Obama took office.

"US economic and security interests," the document declares, "are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean and South" signifying that "we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia Pacific region." It calls for an expansion of the network of US military alliances and partnerships, specifically naming India as "a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region."

China is the only country named as a threat to American interests, with a call for "greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region." The document declares that the US in conjunction with its allies will "protect freedom of access throughout the global commons." Under the rubric of "freedom of navigation", the US has already greatly heightened tensions in the South China Sea by challenging China's maritime claims in these strategic waters.

The Pentagon's military reorientation to Asia goes hand-in-hand with an aggressive US diplomatic offensive to undercut growing Chinese economic and political influence throughout Asia and internationally. Powerful sections of the US political and foreign policy establishment backed Obama for the presidency in 2008 out of deep concern that China had gained while the US was mired in the Bush administration's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These sentiments were voiced in an essay last November entitled "Reorienting America" by Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations. He warned that the US had "become preoccupied with the Middle East... and had not paid adequate attention to East Asia and the Pacific, where much of the twenty first century's history will be written." Welcoming the "rediscovery of Asia" under Obama, Haass declared that it was "difficult to exaggerate the region's economic importance", adding that the US had to ensure "China is never tempted to use its growing power coercively."

Initially, in the midst of the 2008/09 global financial crisis, the Obama administration was compelled to tread softly with China—the world's largest holder of US bonds. However, the US rapidly shifted onto the offensive on all fronts. In July 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared at an Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit that the US was "back in South East Asia."

At an ASEAN meeting the following year, Clinton deliberately inflamed tensions with China by declaring that the US had "a national interest" in the South China Sea and was prepared to mediate territorial disputes between ASEAN members and China. The Chinese foreign minister reacted by branding the remarks as "virtually an attack on China." Encouraged by the US, the Philippines and Vietnam have aggressively asserted their claims in the South China Sea, provoking a series of conflicts.

Over the past two years, the US has steadily strengthened its military alliances and ties throughout the Indo-Pacific region, especially with Japan, India and Australia. It has provided warships to the

Philippines, held joint exercises with Vietnam, based new littoral combat ships in Singapore, announced a huge new weapons sale to Taiwan and lifted the ban on US cooperation with Indonesia's notorious Kopassus special forces. President Obama visited Australia last November and announced the positioning of 2,500 Marines in the northern city of Darwin, as well as the more extensive use of Australian naval and air bases.

Central to US military strategy is naval dominance over key "choke points" through South East Asia, above all the Malacca Strait, through which China imports vital energy and raw materials from the Middle East and Africa. "Freedom of navigation" for American warships through these strategic waterways also means the ability of the US navy to blockade China and to bring the Chinese economy to its knees. In its 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review, the Pentagon foreshadowed a shift away from the Atlantic, with the allocation of at least six aircraft carriers and 60 percent of America's submarines to the Pacific.

On the economic front, the Obama administration has repeatedly demanded that China revalue the yuan against the US dollar—a move that would wipe out significant sections of China's export industries. At the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November, Obama announced a new trading bloc, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, aimed at forcing Beijing to accept US trade terms. US military actions also have a deliberate economic impact: the NATO war on Libya and the mounting US threats against Iran have undermined China's investments and energy supplies.

The driving force for this US confrontation with China is the relative economic decline of American imperialism, which is determined to prevent the rise of a potential strategic rival. The Pentagon's latest strategic guidance calls for the maintenance of the present "rules-based international order" but that signifies a continuation of a global order dominated by the US, in which the Pacific Ocean has been considered for a century "an American lake", China is hemmed in by a network of US military alliances, and Beijing's economic and strategic interests are subordinate to Washington's.

The danger of the world sliding into a catastrophic global conflict centred between the US and China does not arise out of the subjective intentions of individual political leaders, but from the geo-political competition fuelled by the deepening global economic crisis. The US is recklessly using its military might to undermine its rivals and force them to bear the burden of the economic breakdown. It necessarily comes into conflict with China, which is upsetting the present international order as it seeks to secure raw materials and energy around the globe. Any number of flash points—North Korea, Taiwan, the South China Sea, to name just three—can become the trigger for war.

The only social force capable of preventing a new world war is the international working class through the abolition of its underlying cause—the capitalist system and its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states—and the establishment of a world-planned socialist economy. That is the perspective of the international Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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