

Chinese media on war footing

A correspondent from China
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As WSWs articles have been emphasising, a militarist atmosphere is being created in China. The theme is the imminence of war with Japan. In the past weeks, nearly every news report features the latest “provocation” by Japan over the disputed Diaoyu islands, for example, the fact that Japan discussed allowing its air force to fire warning shots to ward off Chinese aircraft. There are regular heated debates on various television “focus” programs, where participants call for war on Japan if any damage is done to Chinese vessels or aircraft.

For a number of academics, military and strategic “analysis” has become the latest boom industry. On TV shows they speculate endlessly about the various scenarios for the upcoming war with Japan, the implications of US strategic encirclement, and so on. They comment on the latest Chinese weapons and their use in such a conflict. A leading figure, Rear Admiral Zhang Shaozhong from the National Defence University, bragged on China Central Television that, if war broke out, China could “finish off Japan in 30 minutes.” During last year’s standoff with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal, Zhang proposed going to war with Manila because it would be a “one-sided fight”—assuming, of course, that the US did not intervene.

China’s people are being constantly bombarded by reports of new fighters, tanks and missiles. This month, the military unveiled plans to build six 20,000-tonne amphibious assault ships capable of carrying helicopters, tanks and marines, for the upcoming “island warfare” in the South China Sea or East China Sea. The media celebrated the testing of China’s first domestically-built military transport plane capable of delivering heavy tanks to a distant war. A diagram showed that the plane could reach North Africa, where thousands of Chinese nationals had to be evacuated during the Libyan war in 2011. The program also

showed that the plane could drop Chinese troops in Sydney international airport in the event of a war with Australia.

On the newsstands in the street, full colour magazine covers depict a dogfight with a Japanese warplane, or an anti-ship missile flying toward an American aircraft carrier. Jingoistic tabloids like the *Global Times*, owned by the official *People’s Daily*, are becoming increasingly influential. Not long ago, it featured an essentially racist “analysis” explaining that pre-war Japanese militarism was rooted in Japanese culture. An ad on the *Global Times* site referred to the fact that in Japan a man, who beat to death a Chinese student, was only jailed for a few years. It was designed to incite anti-Japanese racism.

Militarism is also being fanned on the Internet. The same analysts have xenophobic blogs attacking “foreign enemies,” and these helped to provoke the anti-Japanese demonstrations last year over the Diaoyu islands conflict. Just as Beijing gave the green light for these sometime violent protests, so the Internet police, who are quick to crack down on any government critics, seem to be allowing the ultra-nationalists on the web to say anything they like.

It is sometimes hard to distinguish private opinion from government views. As the discussion was heating up about Japanese warning shots, *Hefei Online*, the official news portal of Anhui province’s capital city, published an article calling for nuclear attacks on Japan if China failed to defeat the Japanese air force. It boasted that China could launch “2-5 waves of nuclear strikes against Japan within 24 to 72 hours.” After discounting Japan’s anti-missiles systems, the article concluded: “In such an initial nuclear war with Japan, large cities including Tokyo will be annihilated by nuclear strikes.”

I want to point out that this type of madness has only a limited appeal. Ordinary Chinese have no enthusiasm

for a war. No-one thinks of China as a superpower that can challenge Japan, and its ally, the United States. Most people have to exist on a few dollars a day, and they feel that they are living more in a Third World nation than in an advanced country.

But militarism is finding a response in some members of the new upper middle class, which has developed since the restoration of capitalism and the market in China in the 1980s. They have a dream of China becoming a world power, enriching themselves, and they regard the existing powers, especially Japan and the US, as obstacles to their ambitions. They have only contempt for the Chinese workers, and feel threatened by them. In fact, these rich Chinese have a lot in common with the very Japanese ultra-nationalists and “right-wing militarists” they denounce.

Of course, it would be wrong to think that every TV show, news program and magazine is devoted to militarism, but compared to even the recent past, there is a marked change. The voices of moderation are being sidelined. There are representatives of certain businesses who are afraid of international isolation, let alone war. But even the editorials that try to calm the most open militarists emphasise that China’s grand national strategy for rapid economic growth must include military preparedness to counter any attempt by the Western powers to change the game through “non-economic means.”

This ever-present discussion of war has another political purpose. It is trying to turn people’s attention away from the social crisis inside China and justify spending hundreds of billions of yuan on the military, instead of on public hospitals and schools. There are hardly any reports on strikes, protests in rural areas and street riots, which are all taking place, but it is very hard to find out about them.

Social inequality is getting worse. No one really believes that the government is serious about cracking down on corruption, which exists at every level. Rumours are spreading, for example, that thousands of officials are selling property to get cash to flee the country.

On the streets, you occasionally see a brightly-coloured luxurious European-made sports car while poverty-stricken rural migrant workers stand nearby, hoping that someone will stop and give them some sort of work. Everyone knows the driver is the son or

daughter of some well-connected Communist Party official or a rich businessperson.

Ordinary Chinese have new words and phrases to describe these members of the elite. They are called “the rich second generation” or the “power second generation,” who have gotten their fabulous wealth from their parents. No one sees them as the “hard working” entrepreneurs that Deng Xiaoping used to praise. Now they are regarded as aristocrats who have done nothing to deserve their extravagant life-styles.

These people will do anything to hold on to their wealth, prestige and power, including launching a war.



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