

US vice-president to lay down law to China

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This week's trip by US Vice President Joe Biden to Asia is designed to send an unmistakable message to China that the US will call the shots in the region. In the wake of President Obama's no-show at key Asian summits in October, Biden's presence is to demonstrate to US allies that the Obama administration remains fully committed to its "pivot to Asia" aimed at encircling China and undermining its regional influence.

Washington's belligerent response last week to Beijing's declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea makes clear that the US will not hesitate to risk conflict with China to ensure its dominant position in Asia. Just days after China's announcement, the US air force flew nuclear-capable B-52 bombers into the zone to directly challenge Beijing's authority. US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel warned China that the US would support Japan in any war over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands included by Beijing in its ADIZ.

The American and international media have exclusively blamed China and its ADIZ announcement for the sudden rise of tensions in East Asia. The prime responsibility, however, rests with the Obama administration, which over the past four years has been engaged in a relentless diplomatic offensive and military build-up in Asia aimed at ensuring that China does not become a challenge to American interests. The basis of the aggressive policies of the Obama administration is clearly spelled out in the most recent issue of *Survival*, which is published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a leading imperialist think tank.

It writes that "American grand strategy has been framed by the overriding imperative of preventing the rise of an antagonistic 'peer competitor' capable of dominating Eurasia's core industrial centres of military and economic power. Ensuring that a power hostile to

its interests has not emerged to challenge the dominant order has been, and remains, America's primary interest in Asia."

In another statement of US "Grand Strategy," published in October, the Center for a New American Security declared, "The United States faces a strategic window of opportunity to enhance its military presence in Southeast Asia and Australia, strengthen its alliances and partnerships and reinforce US leadership in the region." The statement boasts that "US military access and presence enhances the ability of the United States to defeat potential adversaries in East Asia."

The "adversary" against whom this strategy is directed is, of course, China. Utilising the tactics of encirclement and intimidation, the US has deliberately encouraged allies such as Japan to take a more aggressive stance against China, dangerously inflaming regional flashpoints such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

It is no accident that Japan and Australia immediately joined the US in condemning China's ADIZ. Both countries are deeply integrated into the Pentagon's preparations for war against China. In Japan, Obama's "pivot to Asia" has led to the emergence of the right-wing government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who openly advocates Japanese remilitarisation and has in the past worshipped at the notorious Yasukuni Shrine that pays homage to Japanese war criminals of the 1940s. At recent ministerial meetings, the newly elected Australian government has given carte blanche to the US to transform the continent into a vast military base for a potential conflict with China.

Obama's installation in office in 2009 was associated with deep concerns within a powerful faction of the American ruling elite that the previous Bush administration had bogged the US in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and given China free rein in Asia. The transformation of China over the past decade from the

sixth largest economy in the world to the second largest poses a threat to American global hegemony.

As a result of the capitalist restructuring of its economy, China has come to function as the world's largest cheap labour platform. China's huge demand for energy and resources is bringing it into competition with the US throughout the world and dramatically increased its trade. Between 2000 and 2012 the US share of East Asian trade fell from 19.5 percent to 9.5 percent, roughly halved, while the Chinese share increased from 10.2 to 20 percent, almost doubling.

The challenge posed by China became particularly acute in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. The newly installed Obama administration turned to the "pivot" to reassert its dominance in Asia, above all through the use of its military preponderance to offset its economic decline. Containing China has become the overriding priority driving US foreign policy.

Obama's decision to pull back from an imminent attack on Syria in September, followed by the postponement of a war with Iran through last week's nuclear deal with Tehran, was less a retreat than a refocusing of its international strategy. Avoiding *at this stage* a military clash with Iran, the Obama administration believes it can concentrate its energies on its key strategic interests in the Asian Pacific. Moreover, a *détente* with Iran—if it can be achieved with minimal concessions—holds open the possibility that Iran can become another strategic asset in the encirclement of China.

These developments have exposed the key strategic fallacy of the Chinese Communist Party's grandiose plans to turn the country into a world power through a "peaceful rise" on capitalist foundations. Despite its immense economic growth, capitalist China has not—and cannot—evade this inexorable logic of a world imperialist system dominated by the United States.

The regime of the Chinese Communist Party—the political instrument of the ruling capitalist elite—has been thrown into crisis by the sudden escalation of tensions. Its efforts to counter the aggressive American "pivot" have combined frantic attempts to integrate China more completely into global capitalism and to catch up with the US militarily, with a reckless assertion of its interests in Asia that smacks of adventurism. Beijing's declaration of an ADIZ that included the disputed territories with Japan and South

Korea played straight into Washington's hands and has left China isolated as the US winds up the military pressure.

The policies of the Chinese regime are designed to defend the interests of a wealthy oligarchy that has enriched itself at the expense of the working class through the plunder of state assets and transforming China into the sweatshop of the world. Its whipping up of Chinese nationalism, aimed against Japan in particular, is to direct sharpening social tensions at home outwards. The logic of its actions is to set China on a collision course with US imperialism in a war that can only spell disaster for the working class in China, Asia and internationally.

As humanity approaches the centenary of World War I, the geo-political tensions building up in East Asia, accompanied by an accelerating arms race and sharpening rivalries, bear an eerie similarity to the conflicts that precipitated war in Europe. A clash between the US and China would inevitably involve all the major powers and heighten the danger of a nuclear war that would dwarf the horrors of the Great War.

The international working class is the only social force that is capable of halting the danger of war by putting an end to the bankrupt profit system and its outmoded division of the world into competing nation states. Workers in China, the United States and internationally share a common class interest in fighting for a socialist world that is free of war, exploitation and social misery.



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