

Washington boasts of military buildup against China

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If anyone was fooled by the media analyses portraying President Barack Obama's speech at West Point last week as a turn toward "moderation" and "restraint," or tempted to think that the *World Socialist Web Site* was exaggerating in describing the address as a blueprint for "permanent and global war in pursuit of the interests of the US financial elite," they only need read the bellicose tirade delivered by his defense secretary, Chuck Hagel, in Singapore on Saturday.

The occasion for Hagel's provocative speech was the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual meeting of Asia-Pacific defense ministers, together with their civilian and military chiefs of staff. The conference is ostensibly a forum for "dialogue" and "confidence building" aimed at furthering regional security and cooperation.

Instead, the Pentagon chief delivered an address that spelled out in detail the measures Washington is taking to build up its military power in the Asia Pacific for the purpose of encircling China while containing and rolling back its influence in the region.

In essence, Hagel's speech is a corollary to the May 28 commencement address given by Obama at West Point. Critics of the presentation at the US Military Academy have pointed out that, while the administration had announced its "pivot to Asia" as a strategic axis of US foreign policy, Obama made no mention of this turn in what had been billed as a major foreign policy speech.

In point of fact, Obama did touch on the essence of the so-called "pivot" in his address, making a series of menacing statements in relation to China and suggesting that Washington would have to prepare for a military response to its rising global rival.

He placed China in the same category as Russia, presenting the two countries as threats to regional peace and security. "China's economic rise and military reach worries its neighbors," Obama declared.

He went on to describe the territorial disputes in the South and East China seas, which Washington has deliberately inflamed and turned into global flash points, accusing China

of "regional aggression" that could "ultimately impact our allies, and could draw in our military." And he vowed to back Southeast Asian governments in maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea.

Yet there was no mention of the "pivot," no declaration of a new over-arching strategic turn by the US and its massive military machine to confront China in the Asian-Pacific theater. Instead, the president told the American people that the principal threat faced by the United States was "terrorism," the same boogeyman that has been used to justify US aggression abroad since the beginning of the century. No doubt this lack of an explicit statement of US strategy in a major presidential speech was deliberate.

Hagel was asked directly by one of the participants at the conference in Singapore why Obama does not explain the "pivot" to the American people with the same forcefulness with which the defense secretary and other US officials promote it in Asia. The answer is obvious. The popular reaction to a public campaign in support of a policy of military provocation and aggression against a nuclear-armed China would be one of horror and virulent opposition. So, the thinking in ruling circles undoubtedly goes, better to lead the population unwittingly to the brink of a global conflagration than risk a political firestorm.

In the somewhat more discreet atmosphere of the Shangri-La Dialogue, Hagel felt under no such compunction. He positively boasted of the US military buildup in the region.

Hagel declared that the "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia "is not a goal, not a promise, or a vision—it's a reality."

He pointed to the ten-year Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) reached between Washington and the corrupt Aquino regime in the Philippines offering Washington virtually unrestricted rights to deploy US military forces in that country.

Similarly, he touted the close alliance established between the Obama administration and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who heads up the most right-wing Japanese government in postwar history.

"Consider that just three years ago, the strength of our

alliance with Japan was being overshadowed by disagreement over the future of the US presence in Okinawa,” said Hagel. “Today [after a change in government that was pushed by Washington], we have a fully agreed force realignment map ... We have also deployed our most advanced capabilities to Japan—including two Global Hawks at Misawa, F-22 fighter aircraft at Kadena, and MV-22 Ospreys on Okinawa.”

He also declared his full support for Abe’s proposal to engage in a more “proactive” use of Japan’s military, as the Japanese prime minister seeks to scrap the postwar constitution that was supposed to prevent a revival of Japanese militarism. US backing has served to underwrite Japan’s increasingly provocative confrontations with China.

On the tense Korean Peninsula, Hagel added, the Pentagon has “enhanced the US Army’s force posture and deployed even more advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.” He also pointed to the deployment of more than 1,000 US Marines in Western Australia.

Hagel made a point of stressing Washington’s increased military cooperation with India, saying the US welcomed “India’s growing defense capabilities and its commitment to freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean.”

“In the coming years, the United States will increase its advanced capabilities that are forward-stationed and forward-deployed in the entire region, particularly as we draw down our forces in Afghanistan,” Hagel declared. “And we will ensure that we sustain our freedom of action in the face of disruptive new military technologies.” No one needed to ask what country might be deploying these “disruptive” weapons systems.

The defense secretary went on to detail a new arsenal of warships that will be deployed in the region over the next four years, including the new Joint High Speed Vessel, another nuclear-armed submarine stationed in Guam, four Littoral Combat Ships and the Zumwalt-class destroyer. The new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, he added, will be sold to Japan, South Korea and Australia. By 2020, Hagel said, the US will have 60 percent of both its Navy and Air Force fleets operating in the region. He added that the Obama administration has pledged that no cuts in military spending will come out of the Asia-Pacific buildup.

The speech left no doubt as to which country this arsenal is directed against. China, Hagel charged, “has undertaken destabilizing, unilateral actions asserting its claims in the South China Sea.” He accused it of using “intimidation, coercion, or the threat of force to assert those claims.” And, he vowed, Washington “will not look the other way when fundamental principles of the international order are being challenged.”

Hagel delivered an ultimatum to Beijing, declaring that China had “a choice: to unite and recommit to a stable regional order, or to walk away from that commitment and risk the peace and security that have benefited millions of people throughout the Asia-Pacific, and billions around the world.”

The meaning is clear enough. Either China submits to the post-World War II arrangements establishing US hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region, or it will face the direct threat of war with the United States.

The chief of the Chinese military, Wang Guanzhong, responded angrily to the speech delivered by Hagel as well as to a previous address by Japan’s Prime Minister Abe, declaring them “unacceptable” and saying the two were singing “in chorus.” Hagel’s speech, he said, was designed to “stoke instability... to pick fights and incite disputes and conflicts.”

US imperialism is seeking to encircle China militarily. Its aim is to utilize its residual military superiority to suppress economic and political challenges posed in Asia and on a world scale by the growth of China’s economy. In the final analysis, its aim is to offload as much of the burden of the capitalist crisis that erupted in 2008-2009 onto its rivals, as it steps up the assault on the working class at home.

In Singapore, Hagel repeated Obama’s statement in his West Point speech that “America must always lead on the world stage. If we don’t, no one else will.”

In the conference discussion Sunday, Russia’s Deputy Minister of Defense Anatoly Antonov raised a question: “For me it is not clear why the US must lead,” Antonov said. “To lead what? To where?”

No one should have any doubts. US imperialism is leading humanity to a new eruption of militarism that poses the ever graver threat of a nuclear Third World War.



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