

Obama-Xi talks underscore US war threat in Asia

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In Beijing yesterday after talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, US President Barack Obama boasted that the US-China military, climate change and trade agreements took the two countries' "bilateral, regional and global cooperation to a new level." In reality, the two days of discussions between Obama and Xi pointed to the growing war dangers underlying the geo-strategic tensions generated by the aggressive US "pivot" to Asia.

Since taking office, Obama has spearheaded a coordinated effort to maintain US imperialism's domination of the entire Asia-Pacific region by diplomatically and militarily encircling China. The "pivot," formally announced in November 2011, has also seen Washington fuel previously low-level territorial disputes between China and its neighbours, including with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and several South East Asian states over the South China Sea.

In the 18 months since Obama hosted Xi Jinping in southern California for their first meeting together, there have been a series of incidents in these contested locations that have threatened to trigger a regional military conflict, with the potential to escalate into an outright war between the US and China.

American imperialism is actively preparing its military to wage war against the rising Asian power, shifting 60 percent of its air and naval assets to the region and developing its "AirSea Battle" strategy, based on a devastating missile and air bombardment and naval blockade of China.

The Obama administration does not want, however, to be drawn into a conflict with China at a time and over an issue not of its choosing. This is why Washington has urged Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who met with Xi for the first time on Monday, to

reduce tensions with Beijing about the tiny and uninhabited islands in the East China Sea over which both countries claim ownership.

These calculations underlie the new military-to-military protocols agreed to by Obama and Xi this week. Ben Rhodes, a US deputy national security advisor, told reporters before the summit: "It's incredibly important that we avoid inadvertent escalation and that we don't find ourselves again having an accidental circumstance lead into something that could precipitate a conflict."

This comment represents a damning self-indictment of the Obama administration's reckless provocations in East Asia over the last two years, which now threaten an outright war between two nuclear-armed powers.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Chinese leadership previously "long opposed a military-encounters agreement with the US on the grounds that it implied an adversarial relationship like that between the US and the former Soviet Union." However, the article commented, this "changed in the last year as both sides have recognised that they can't reconcile their interpretations of international law on maritime issues, but also can't allow unintended military encounters to derail their overall relationship."

The new military "confidence-building mechanisms" resolve none of the issues underlying Washington's aggressive confrontation of China. One measure involves a mutual notification of "major military activities," including policy and strategy developments, while another covers "rules of behaviour for the safety of air and maritime encounters." A White House statement added that both sides had committed to developing more "confidence-building mechanisms," with Washington prioritising a measure for communicating information about ballistic missile

launches.

The agreements involve a significant concession by Beijing to Washington's constantly repeated call for "greater transparency" from China over its military affairs. As well as this demand being part of US propaganda to play up the "Chinese threat," the Pentagon in particular is seeking a greater insight into the military capacities of its potential foe.

In Beijing, deputy national security advisor Rhodes reiterated the Obama administration's long standing insistence that Beijing completely subordinate itself to the geostrategic and military framework developed in the Asia-Pacific after World War II under US domination. "We're going to be very clear when we believe that China's actions are actually pushing outside the boundaries of what we believe to be the necessary international norms that govern the relations between nations and the ways in which we resolve disputes," he declared.

During a joint press conference with Xi, Obama sought to put a positive gloss on the US-China tensions, declaring that "even as we compete and disagree in some areas, I believe we can continue to advance the security and prosperity of our people and people around the world."

The US president promoted new agreements covering various issues. A trade deal will eliminate tariffs on an estimated \$1 trillion in annual sales of semiconductors and other information and communications technologies. The *Washington Post* reported that the agreement would "benefit US companies seeking greater access to China as well as US and Chinese companies with plants in China aimed at making products for the American market." Another agreement develops new tourist and business visas for American nationals in China.

Most prominently promoted by the White House and the US media were new pledges on greenhouse gas emissions. Obama declared a "historic agreement" that will supposedly see the US reduce its net carbon emissions by 26-28 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2025. China pledged to peak its net emissions by "around 2030" and eventually source 20 percent of the country's energy from emission-free sources.

Claims that these new targets will mitigate the climate change crisis are an outright fraud. The United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC) has previously concluded that advanced economies' emissions must be 25-40 percent lower than their 1990 levels by 2020, and 80-95 percent by 2050. These figures, moreover, have been challenged by numerous climate scientists as significant underestimates of what may be required to prevent dangerous and potentially irreversible levels of global warming.

The Chinese leadership matched the paucity of Obama's grossly inadequate promise of 26-28 percent reduced emissions below their 2005 levels by 2025. Several reports indicated that China's carbon emissions were already projected to peak around 2030, with Xi's commitment involving little or no additional action to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

Following a series of debacles at high-level international summits to forge a post-Kyoto climate treaty, including Copenhagen in 2009, another round of talks are due to be held in Paris next year. Far from paving the way for an effective agreement at this summit, the Obama-Xi deal on carbon emissions only serves to underscore the impossibility of resolving the climate change crisis within the framework of the capitalist nation-state system.



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