Washington's big lie of "peace and stability" in Asia

Peter Symonds
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In the wake of last month's provocative intrusion by the destroyer, the USS Lassen, into Chinese-claimed territory in the South China Sea, US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter toured Asia last week seeking to further consolidate Washington's military alliances and strategic partnerships against China.

As he deliberately stoked up tensions with China, Carter's constant refrain was that the United States remained a force for peace and stability. Standing on the deck of the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the South China Sea, he declared the aircraft carrier was a symbol of the "stabilising influence that the United States has had in this region of the world for decades." The US military build-up in Asia, or "rebalance," was "intended to keep it going," he insisted.

No one should be taken in by this big lie. "Stability," in Washington's lexicon, is synonymous with American dominance, which it has always pursued in Asia and the world through ruthless and violent means. Indeed US imperialism announced its entry onto the world stage with its victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the brutal suppression of resistance to its colonial rule in the Philippines, which left hundreds of thousands of dead.

The United States secured its hegemony in Asia through the defeat of Japanese imperialism in World War II. By the early 1920s, the two powers were already colliding over which would predominate in China. Whereas the US had demanded an "open door" policy, as the best means for asserting its own interests, Japan, plunged into economic crisis by the Great Depression, invaded Manchuria in 1931, then China as a whole in 1937 to secure control over its resources. The Pacific War, which cost the lives of millions, ended with the US dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These terrible crimes were designed, above all, to send a message to the Soviet Union and the world that the US would use any and all means in pursuit of global dominance.

The ability of US imperialism to restabilise world capitalism in the wake of World War II, and establish its hegemonic position, rested on two main factors: firstly, its overriding economic strength and, secondly, on the political treachery of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, which betrayed the post-war revolutionary movements of the working class and oppressed masses. Nowhere did the United States face greater challenges than in Asia, where mass anti-colonial movements, of which the 1949 Chinese Revolution was part, threatened capitalist rule throughout the region.

Far from being a force for peace in Asia, US imperialism fought two protracted wars in the 1950s and 60s. The Korean War (June 1950–July 1953), launched by the US to defend the right-wing pro-US dictatorship of Syngman Rhee, devastated the Korean Peninsula and resulted in millions of deaths. The military stalemate ended in 1953, not with a peace treaty, but with a truce, leaving a continuing legacy of profound instability. The US war in Vietnam and the rest of Indo China (November 1955–April 1975), left four million dead, following years of indiscriminate US bombing raids, the utilisation of napalm and other atrocities. It concluded in a humiliating US withdrawal and the collapse of its puppet regime.

For decades, US imperialism maintained its position in Asia through CIA intrigues and by propping up police state regimes in Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. In Indonesia, a CIA-orchestrated coup (1965–66) installed the bloody Suharto dictatorship, and resulted in the slaughter of at least 500,000 people.

The US only finally "stabilised" Asia through the

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deal struck by President Nixon with Chinese leader Mao Zedong in 1972. Precisely when its defeat in Vietnam threatened to undermine US influence throughout the region, the Chinese Stalinists threw Washington a lifeline. The US-China rapprochement laid the basis for capitalist restoration in China and the conversion of much of the region into a vast source of cheap labour for global transnational corporations.

The globalisation of production since the late 1970s, however, and the rise of China as the world's pre-eminent cheap labour platform, have profoundly altered international economic and strategic relations. While China is not an imperialist power, the very size of its economy and the extent of its economic and trade relations in Asia and around the world constitute a challenge to American global supremacy that Washington cannot tolerate.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, US imperialism has resorted more and more aggressively to the use of military force to overcome its historic economic decline. In response to the 2008–09 global financial crisis, the Obama administration placed China firmly in its cross-hairs. Its "pivot to Asia" formally announced in November 2011, is a comprehensive diplomatic, economic and military strategy aimed at subjugating the world's second largest economy to Washington's interests, through war if necessary.

Over the past five years, the US and its allies have transformed what were obscure, regional territorial disputes in the South China and East China Seas into dangerous flashpoints for war. Throughout the region, Washington has been engaged in what former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called "forward-deployed diplomacy" to undercut Chinese influence. Its diplomatic intrigues are backed by a military build-up that will station 60 percent of all American naval and air force assets in the Indo-Pacific by 2020.

The historical record of US imperialism in Asia is a sobering reminder that it will stop at nothing, including the deployment of nuclear weapons, to maintain its dominant position. Its actions have placed the entire region on a hair trigger; any mistake or miscalculation in the South China Sea, or an incident in the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea, could escalate into a far broader conflict between nuclear armed powers.

The only social force on the planet capable of halting this reckless drive to war is the international working class, through the building of a unified, socialist anti-war movement aimed at putting an end to the outmoded profit system, which is the source of war. That is the perspective fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world.

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