

US vice-president makes menacing warning to China

Peter Symonds
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In a militaristic and bullying speech yesterday in Sydney, US Vice-President Joe Biden restated in unmistakable terms the determination of American imperialism to maintain its economic and strategic dominance in Asia through every means, including war if necessary.

Biden's speech was not only a menacing warning to China in the wake of last week's ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague against Chinese claims in the South China Sea. It was also directed at laying down the law to Canberra and other regional allies that Washington will not tolerate any equivocation in backing the US as its war preparations in the Indo-Pacific accelerate.

Biden cited the remarks made by President Obama in announcing the "pivot to Asia" in November 2011 in the Australian parliament: "In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in."

"We have made good on that promise," he declared. "We've shown our commitment to lead in the region over and over again. Anyone who questions America's dedication and staying power in the Asia Pacific is not paying attention."

Biden then boasted of America's "unparalleled" military strength: "We continue to outpace our competitors, spending more on our overall defence than the next eight nations of the world combined. We have the most capable ground forces in the world, an unmatched ability to project naval and air power to any and every corner of the globe and simultaneously... And we've committed to put over 60 percent of our fleet and our most advanced military capabilities in the Pacific by 2020."

The Obama administration's aggressive military build-up in Asia and provocative "freedom of navigation" operations challenging Chinese territorial

claims in the South China Sea have proceeded under the pretext of defending the international rules based system—that is, a global order in which Washington sets and enforces the rules.

Biden, however, bluntly declared that the United States in keeping "a laser focus on the future in the Asia Pacific" was "not doing anyone any favours. It's overwhelmingly in our interest." He stressed again: "Our resolve to play a part in shaping the future of this dynamic region is real. As the President said, we are all in. We are not going anywhere."

Biden repeated the lie that the American presence in the region "is essential to maintaining peace and stability, without which the economic growth and prosperity I believe would falter. America is the linchpin. And we want to ensure the sea lanes are secure and the skies remain open."

In reality, US imperialism has been the chief destabilising factor in the Asia Pacific. In the wake of World War II, it maintained its dominance in Asia through fighting two bloody neo-colonial wars—in Korea and Vietnam—that cost the lives of millions, as well as instigating and backing military dictatorships throughout the region, including in Indonesia where at least half a million people were slaughtered in the 1965–66 CIA-backed coup.

Now under the pretext of protecting "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea, the US navy has dramatically increased its presence in the disputed waters and recklessly sent warships within the 12-nautical-mile territorial limit of Chinese-controlled islets on three occasions. Such naval provocations will undoubtedly accelerate following the PCA ruling, heightening the danger of conflict with the Chinese military. The US is also demanding the involvement of its allies, particularly Australia.

Washington's focus on the South China Sea has nothing to do with protecting vital trade routes through South East Asia, but the opposite. The US is determined to maintain supremacy in waters adjacent to the Chinese mainland as part of the Pentagon's war strategy, which includes a naval blockade that would cripple China's economy.

Biden's impromptu trip to Australia following The Hague decision was to ensure the unalloyed support of the newly-elected government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull for Washington's sharpening confrontation with China. In 2011 and 2012, Turnbull publicly criticised the "pivot," reflecting concerns in sections of the Australian ruling elite that economic relations with China, the country's largest trading partner, would be compromised. While fully backing The Hague ruling, the Turnbull government has not publicly committed to carrying out Australian "freedom of navigation" operations.

In his speech, Biden emphasised not only the close economic and cultural ties but, above all, the US-Australian military alliance and shared history of reactionary wars. "The history that forged the foundations of our alliance in iron and baptised it in blood has long bound the fortunes of our nations," he declared. The remark was particularly chilling as the US insists on Australian support in its reckless provocations against China, which could precipitate war between nuclear armed powers.

The vice president stressed the complete integration of Australian forces into the American military, pointing to the major RIMPAC naval exercises currently underway as proof of Canberra's commitment to "meeting the threats in the Pacific as a united, interoperable front." He noted that an Australian officer, Major General Greg Bilton was "embedded in our chain of command" and had "direct command over American troops," adding that "we don't let that happen very often."

Indeed, Australian military forces and bases, including critical spy bases such as Pine Gap in central Australia, are so integrated into the Pentagon's war plans that they would automatically be involved in any war with China.

Biden delivered a rather pointed reminder of American economic clout to those in the Australian corporate elite concerned about trade and investment

with China. "I have read your editorials... The question was who we are, do we have the staying power? Do we have the economic capacity?" he said, replying: "I say this not to brag, but to reassure. The United States is going to remain the strongest economy in the world."

In what amounted to a thinly-disguised threat, Biden declared: "If I had to bet on which country is going to lead economically in the 21st century... I'd bet on the United States. But I'd put it another way: It's never a good bet to bet against the United States." In other words, to all those concerned to preserve economic ties with China at the expense of the US, expect to face American reprisals.

Despite Biden's declarations to the contrary, the US is in historic decline as the dominant global power and has resorted to military might repeatedly over the past 25 years in a desperate effort to shore up its position. Biden's speech makes clear that US imperialism, confronting a worsening global economic crisis, is redoubling its efforts to maintain its hegemony by seeking to subjugate China and, in the process, threatening to plunge the region and the world into a catastrophic war.



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