

# US defence secretary announces “third phase” of military build-up against China

Peter Symonds  
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US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced last Thursday a further dramatic expansion of the Pentagon’s “rebalance” or “pivot” to the Asia Pacific that will only heighten the already tense military confrontation with China in the region. He insisted that the Asia Pacific was “the single most consequential region for America’s future.”

Speaking on board the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in San Diego, Carter outlined what he called the “third phase” of the US military build-up and the strengthening of a “principled and inclusive security network” in Asia. While claiming that Beijing was not excluded from the “network,” every aspect of the “third phase” is aimed at preparing for a war with China.

The importance that Carter attached to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to “bind the United States more closely together with 11 other countries” underlines the real purpose of the “pivot:” to maintain American dominance and subordinate China to the interests of the United States. The very terms of the TPP ensure that Beijing will be excluded unless it accepts the rules set by Washington.

The defence secretary made clear US economic hegemony had to be underpinned by military might. In outlining the “third phase,” he declared that “the United States will continue to sharpen our military edge so we remain the most powerful military in the region and the security partner of choice.”

Carter indicated that the “first phase” of the “pivot” announced in 2011 involved a quantitative boost of the US military and the restructuring of its basing arrangements. Tens of thousands of American military personnel were redirected to Asia, with a commitment to station 60 percent of overseas naval and air assets in the region. The restructuring of US bases in Japan,

South Korea, Guam and Hawaii was begun and new basing arrangements reached with Australia.

The “second phase” involved sending the “most advanced capabilities” to the Asia Pacific, including F-22 and F-35 stealth fighter jets, P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and the navy’s newest surface warfare vessels, as well as continuous deployments of strategic bombers. It also included a concerted effort to expand military ties throughout the region in an effort to encircle China with allies and strategic partners. Carter highlighted strengthened security relations with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, India, Singapore, Vietnam and New Zealand in particular.

In order to maintain the “military edge,” Carter outlined extensive plans to “qualitatively upgrade and invest in our regional force posture.” He provided a list of hi-tech projects that will be funded, starting this year, including:

- \* Making Virginia-class nuclear submarines “more lethal and more capable” by trebling their cruise missile payload.

- \* Increased funding for multiple types of undersea drones, as part of more than \$40 billion in allocations over the next five years to maintain “the most lethal undersea and anti-submarine force in the world.”

- \* Providing \$12 billion over five years for the new B-21 Raider Long-Range Strike Bomber.

- \* Spending \$56 billion over five years to buy more than 400 stealthy F-35 joint strike fighters.

- \* Investing nearly \$16 billion over five years to upgrade the aerial tanker fleet.

- \* Re-purposing the SM-6 missile “so that it can also strike enemy ships at sea at very long ranges.”

- \* Investing in improving the “range and accuracy for land attack and anti-ship missiles,” as well as new torpedoes.

\* Making large new investments, to the tune of \$34 billion next year alone, in cyber, electronic and space warfare.

Every one of these new weapons and upgrades is geared to fighting a war with China, premised on the Pentagon's AirSea Battle strategy—a massive missile and air assault on the Chinese mainland supplemented by a crippling naval blockade.

Moreover, as Carter indicated, there were also “more surprises”—some “leap-ahead” investments—that will “keep our decades-old commitment to undergirding security in the Asia-Pacific, strong and unchallengeable.”

The “third phase” features the intensification of the “Asia-Pacific’s growing principled and inclusive security network,” which Carter declared was “not a formal alliance, nor is it an effort to contain or isolate anyone.” The use of the term “principled”—denoting “shared interests and values”—is designed to exclude China, by cynically and hypocritically contrasting a network of supposed “democracies” with the autocratic regime in Beijing.

Carter’s speech was delivered just before attending a meeting of the defence ministers of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), in order to draw these countries into the US-led “security network.” It is worth noting that the 10 ASEAN members are: the Thai military junta, Stalinist police-state regimes in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, virtual one-party states in Malaysia and Singapore, the absolute monarchy of Brunei, the Philippines currently headed by the fascistic President Rodrigo Duterte, along with Indonesia and Myanmar, whose militaries continue to play a significant political role.

Carter nevertheless declared that the second informal dialogue with ASEAN defence ministers would “reflect on our shared interests and principles and identify new ways to partner together to realise them.” The real purpose of the gathering is to draw the ASEAN countries into an anti-China alliance and ramp up pressure on China over the South China Sea.

The meeting, which focussed on “maritime security,” came in the wake of the July 12 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in favour of a US-backed challenge by the Philippines to Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Washington is increasingly concerned that Philippine

President Duterte is backing away from a confrontation with China over the issue and announced a loosening of military ties with the United States. In this context, Carter’s declaration that “our alliance with the Philippines is iron clad” is a thinly-veiled threat to Duterte not to move into Beijing’s camp.

Carter sought to impress the assembled defence ministers with a display of American military might with flyovers by F-22 Raptor fighters and a B-1B strategic bomber. Friday’s events concluded with a dinner on board the battleship USS Missouri, followed on Saturday by a tour of the destroyer USS Chung-Hoon.

The defence secretary outlined new maritime security initiatives, including an ASEAN maritime dialogue and a maritime domain awareness exercise. The Pentagon is already providing \$425 million over five years in a Maritime Security Initiative to provide hardware and boost collaboration with some ASEAN members—the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

There is nothing innocent or peaceful about the Pentagon’s determination to rapidly roll out the “third phase” of its rebalance to Asia. In the name of maintaining regional security, US imperialism is rapidly and recklessly preparing for a showdown with China, with potentially catastrophic consequences.



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