

# Trump's China policy threatens nuclear war

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The confirmation hearings for Donald Trump's cabinet nominees confirm that his administration intends to vastly intensify US demands for massive economic and strategic concessions from the Chinese regime. In pursuit of the predatory ambitions of a tiny layer of corporate oligarchs, policies are being put forward that could result in a military clash and trigger a nuclear exchange.

On Thursday, Rex Tillerson, Trump's proposed secretary of state, made unprecedented statements on the attitude the next US government will take toward China's land reclamation activities and construction of facilities on the islets and reefs Beijing claims as sovereign territory in the South China Sea.

Tillerson declared: "We are going to have to send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed."

The implications of such a policy are immense. The islands referred to by Tillerson are occupied by Chinese military personnel. The waters surrounding them are patrolled by the Chinese Coast Guard and Navy. The airspace above them is patrolled by the Chinese air force. The only conceivable way to deny China access would be through the large-scale deployment of US aircraft carriers and associated military forces into the South China Sea.

Media headlines around the world have reflected the recognition that war would be the most likely outcome of attempting to implement Tillerson's declaration. For its part, the Chinese state-owned publication *Global Times*, whose editorial line is believed to come directly from the highest echelons of the Chinese regime, has not hedged its words in response.

Its January 13 editorial states: "Unless Washington plans to wage a large-scale war in the South China Sea, any other approaches to prevent Chinese access to the islands will be foolish. The US has no absolute power

to dominate the South China Sea. *Tillerson had better bone up on nuclear power strategies* if he wants to force a big nuclear power to withdraw from its own territories [emphasis added]."

An analysis of the social forces and economic interests that stand behind Trump leaves no room for doubt that his administration is more than prepared to threaten a full-scale war with China, posing the risk of a nuclear exchange.

Before he is even sworn in, Trump and the cabal of billionaires and ex-generals who will comprise his cabinet have signaled they will provoke conflict with China over a range of issues. In addition to rejecting Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, these policies include imposing tariffs on Chinese exports; demanding Beijing force North Korea to shut down its nuclear weapons program; and threatening to repudiate the "One China policy" under which Washington, since 1979, has formally recognised that the island of Taiwan is part of China and not an independent state.

Adding to the possible list of provocations, one of Trump's chief supporters in the Congress, Arkansas Republican Tom Cotton, joined with Republican presidential aspirant Marco Rubio to introduce the "Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act" in November. The Act would require the US government to take action to ensure Hong Kong remains "sufficiently autonomous" from the mainland regime. Tibetan nationalists have enthusiastically welcomed Trump's election as a signal that their cause might also be taken up by the incoming administration.

The focus on China flows directly from the interests of a powerful faction of the American corporate elite who view it as their greatest immediate economic, geopolitical and potential military competitor.

Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of oil conglomerate ExxonMobil, personifies this layer. Under Tillerson, ExxonMobil aggressively pursued access to potential

oil and gas fields in the South China Sea, in partnership with Vietnam and in defiance of China's territorial claims. In 2014, one of its fields was occupied by a Chinese oil rig. ExxonMobil's ambitions for a stake in mainland Chinese energy production and distribution have been hindered also by the dominance of the Chinese state-owned companies that monopolise the domestic industry. Around the world—even in US-occupied Iraq—bids by American energy corporations for contracts have been undercut by their Chinese rivals.

The preoccupation of the Trump oligarchs with shattering Chinese competition is most clearly demonstrated in their willingness to defy the furious demands in the American ruling class for action first against Russia. Trump has thus far largely brushed aside the hysterical calls from the Democratic Party, figures in the Republican Party and the intelligence agencies for an immediate confrontation with Moscow over its alleged interference in the US election and its intervention in Syria to protect the regime of Bashar al-Assad from US-backed Islamist rebels.

At the same time, Trump's representatives have signaled that the nature of relations with Russia will be determined entirely by the extent to which the Putin regime bows down to US dictates. James Mattis, the nominee for secretary of defense, told a confirmation hearing yesterday that Moscow was a "principal threat." While he was "all for engagement," there were "decreasing number of areas where we can engage cooperatively and increasing number of areas where we're going to have to confront Russia."

Taken together, the predatory agenda of the American oligarchs toward China challenges the core interest of the Chinese capitalist class and the political stability, and even survival, of the Chinese Communist Party regime. The CCP, the representative of a brutal and corrupt Chinese oligarchy, is incapable of any response except to threaten US imperialism with nuclear war, while appealing behind the scenes for a compromise. The bankruptcy of American capitalism, however, and the desperation of its ruling elite to reverse the decline of its global dominance, excludes the prospect of any long-term retreat from its aim of transforming China into a semi-colonial client state.

On February 18, 2016, the International Committee of the Fourth International published on the *World*

*Socialist Web Site* its statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War." The ICFI advanced the need to build an international anti-war movement of the working class and youth against imperialism and outlined the socialist principles upon which such a movement must be based. The eruption of a third world war will only be prevented by the unification of the working class around the world in the common struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the national state divisions—the cause of war.

As a conflict looms between the US and China that could result in a nuclear holocaust, the fight for the perspective of the ICFI must be developed with the necessary sense of political urgency.



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