

# Senior Chinese military official warns of rising danger of war

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The official web site of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) published a commentary on the day of US President Donald Trump's inauguration warning that the danger of war between the two nuclear-armed powers was escalating. The article reflects the growing concerns in the Chinese regime over the bellicose remarks of Trump and his advisers toward Beijing over trade and a range of other issues.

Liu Guoshun, an official with the national defence mobilisation unit of the Central Military Commission, warned that "the possibility of war increases" as tensions around North Korea and the South China Sea heat up. "'A war within the president's term,' 'war breaking out tonight' are not just slogans, but the reality," he wrote.

The Central Military Commission, which is chaired by President Xi Jinping, is at the top of China's military command structure.

Trump has repeatedly condemned China for failing to take strong action to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. After Pyongyang at the beginning of the year declared it was preparing to test an intercontinental ballistic missile, Trump bluntly tweeted: "It won't happen." The obvious implication was that the US would resort to any means—including a military intervention—to prevent such a launch.

The statements of incoming US secretary of state Rex Tillerson on the South China Sea were even more inflammatory. Speaking at his confirmation hearing in mid-January, Tillerson berated China for its construction activities in the South China Sea and threatened to block Chinese access to islets under its control. Any US attempt to impose a military blockade against Chinese ships and aircraft would constitute an act of war.

White House press secretary Sean Spicer last week

reaffirmed Tillerson's threat, provoking a reaction from the Chinese foreign ministry that reiterated Chinese claims in the South China Sea and urged caution on the part of the US. The PLA commentary suggests that sections of the Chinese military are pressing for a more aggressive response and military preparations to counter US provocations in the South China Sea or elsewhere.

Jin Canrong, an academic at the Renmin University of China, condemned Tillerson's remarks. He told the state-owned *Global Times*: "If the new US administration follows this route and adopts this attitude, it will lead to a war between China and the US, and that would mean the end of US history or even of all humanity."

Jin bragged that if the US navy sent aircraft carriers into the South China Sea, the Chinese military had "the ability to destroy them all, even if they send 10." The *Global Times* and its contributors highlight the reactionary character of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) response to the threat of US aggression.

The CCP regime, which represents the interests of an ultra-rich oligarchy, seeks to manoeuvre for a deal with US imperialism, on the one hand, while engaging in an arms race and preparing for war, on the other. Under President Xi, China reacted to the Obama administration's massive military build-up as part of Washington's "pivot to Asia" by revamping the PLA to fight a war with the US.

Last year the PLA scrapped its seven military regions in favour of five theatre commands to enable the closer integration of naval, air and missile forces and greater control by the Central Military Command and the CCP.

Despite Beijing's denials, its land reclamation and construction in the South China Sea from 2015 clearly has a military component aimed at countering the US

build-up in the region. Major General Luo Yuan told the *Global Times*: “The islands with airports that we have built in the area are unsinkable aircraft carriers ... and we have DF-21D and DF-26 missiles capable of destroying large surface ships.”

Trump has called for a huge increase in the US military, including an expansion of its military arsenal. In response, the *Global Times* last week seized on unconfirmed reports that the Chinese military had moved its most advanced inter-continental ballistic missile, the Dongfeng-41, to the northeastern province of Heilongjiang to demand a boosting of the Chinese nuclear arsenal.

Advocating what would in effect be a nuclear arms race, the *Global Times* declared: “China’s nuclear capacity should be so strong that no country would dare launch a military showdown with China under any circumstance, and such that China can strike back against those militarily provoking it.”

Trump, who has turned unpredictability into a principle of foreign policy, has already inflamed tensions with China by threatening to impose trade war measures and to tear up the “One China” policy if Beijing refuses to accept his demands. The One China policy, under which the US recognises Beijing as the sole legitimate government of all China, has been the foundation of US-China relations for nearly 40 years.

Pang Zhongying, a professor at Renmin University, told the *South China Morning Post* that the danger of conflict was rising. “There is little doubt that a major storm is gathering. Both sides appear to have made few discernible efforts to hide the fact that they expect a rough ride for bilateral ties.”

Commentators in other countries are also ringing alarm bells.

Speaking to the Association of European Journalists in London last Friday, former British military chief, General Richard Barrons, warned that Trump’s confrontational approach to negotiation could provoke a war. He said Trump’s “win-lose” philosophy might be normal for a head of a major corporation, but could be “deeply dangerous” on the international stage.

Barrons outlined a scenario involving Chinese and American ships in the South China Sea that could rapidly escalate into a war between the two countries. “Wars generally start for really bad reasons and the red mist descends and you lose control,” he said. “I think

the risk of that is evident.”



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