

US Navy deploys three aircraft carriers to Pacific against China

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For the first time in three years, the US Navy has mobilised three aircraft carrier strike groups to the Pacific as a part of a provocative military build-up against China. The deployments underscore the strategic shift by the Pentagon from the so-called “war on terror” to great power competition that heightens the danger of conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

As of Thursday, the nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and their associated groups of destroyers and cruisers set to sea in a massive show of force. While there are no details of their planned movements and exercises, all will be operating in the Western Pacific in strategically sensitive waters off the Chinese mainland.

USS Theodore Roosevelt, which has been sidelined in Guam after a major outbreak of COVID-19, is now operating in waters off Guam. The USS Nimitz strike group left the US West Coast earlier this week while the USS Ronald Reagan together with its battle group has left its base in Japan and is currently operating in the Philippine Sea.

In comments to the Associated Press about the deployments, Rear Admiral Stephen Koehler, director of operations for the US Indo-Pacific Command, specifically referred to China as the chief target. He accused Beijing of slowly and methodically building up military outposts in the South China Sea and putting missile and electronic warfare systems on its islets.

Koehler declared that the US “ability to be present in a strong way is part of the competition... you’ve got to be present to win when you’re competing.” He then boasted: “Carriers and carrier strike groups writ large are phenomenal symbols of American naval power. I really am pretty fired up that we’ve got three of them at the moment.”

The dispatch of three aircraft carrier battle groups to waters near China comes as the Trump administration

has deliberately inflamed tensions with Beijing by blaming it for the global COVID-19 pandemic. Without a shred of evidence, Trump has accused China of covering up the outbreak and given credence to far-right conspiracy theories that the virus originated in a Chinese laboratory.

While Trump is attempting to deflect attention from his own criminal negligence in dealing with the pandemic, the scapegoating of China is part of Washington’s aggressive efforts that began under President Obama’s “pivot to Asia” to undermine and confront Beijing. US strategists regard China as the chief obstacle to American imperialism halting its historic decline and reasserting its global hegemony.

Under President Obama, the Pentagon launched a “rebalance” to the Indo-Pacific to station 60 percent of its naval assets and warplanes in the region by 2020. As part of this strategy, the US has been restructuring its extensive bases in Japan, South Korea and Guam, forging basing agreements throughout the region, including in Australia, Singapore, India and Sri Lanka, and strengthening military alliances and strategic partnerships.

In the current standoff with China, the Trump administration has encouraged India’s dangerous confrontation with China along their contested border. Both sides have mobilised thousands of troops who face each other at several points along their mountainous border areas. The two regional powers, both of which are nuclear-armed, fought a border war in 1962 and the border disputes have never been resolved.

The deployment of aircraft carrier strike groups is just part of the US build-up of military forces in the Western Pacific. Fox News reported this week that the US Air Force has deployed nuclear-capable B-1B

Lancer bombers to Guam last month that have been conducting operations over the South China Sea. The Air Force has also sent long-range, high altitude Global Hawk drones to Japan to carry out surveillance in the Western Pacific.

Under the Trump administration, the US Navy has stepped up its so-called “freedom of navigation” operations that deliberately violate territorial waters claimed by China around its islets in the South China Sea. In late April, the Navy carried out two South China Sea operations in as many days followed by another on May 7. On May 28, the guided missile destroyer USS Mustin passed within the 12-nautical-mile territorial limit of Woody Island in the Paracel group that has been occupied by China for decades.

Washington’s claim that it is simply asserting “freedom of navigation” is a fraud. The US Navy is determined to maintain a presence in the South China Sea which is critical to the Pentagon’s AirSea Battle plans for a massive assault on Chinese military bases in the event of war. The South China Sea is adjacent to sensitive Chinese military bases on Hainan Island, including for its nuclear submarines.

The US Navy has also increased its transits of the Taiwan Strait that lies between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan which China claims as part of its territory. On June 5, the guided missile destroyer USS Russell passed through the narrow strait—the second US warship to do so in three weeks and the seventh this year. The Chinese state-owned media responded by branding the transit as “another provocative move.”

Taiwan is another sensitive flash point that the Trump administration is deliberately inflaming. While not officially abrogating its “One China” policy recognising Beijing as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan, Trump has steadily strengthened diplomatic and strategic relations with Taipei. He has backed Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen whose Democratic Progressive Party advocates a more independent role for Taiwan from China.

The carrier group deployments follow a further escalation of tensions between the US and China when Taiwan’s defence ministry allowed a US Navy cargo plane to make an unprecedented flight through Taiwanese air space on its way from Okinawa to Thailand. Beijing responded by condemning the incident as “provocative.”

The Trump administration’s dangerous escalation of military tensions with China coincides with the global crisis of capitalism revealed and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Like his counterparts around the world, Trump is not only preparing class war against the working class, but is driven to force rival powers to bear the lion’s share of the burden of the economic crisis.

The reckless US military intervention in areas of key strategic importance for China risks a confrontation, whether by accident or design, that could rapidly spiral out of control into a catastrophic war that would envelop the world.



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