

US calls for peace at Shangri-La Dialogue but prepares for war with China

Peter Symonds
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The annual Shangri-La Dialogue security meeting in Singapore last weekend was dominated by the extraordinary geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region being generated by the US-led confrontation with China, which threaten to trigger a catastrophic military conflict.

The looming danger of war with China has aroused concerns and fears in ruling circles in Asia and also Europe. The Biden administration played a thoroughly duplicitous role at the Dialogue: professing the need for improved relations with China, while parading its aggressive military build-up throughout the region.

Last Friday, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong expressed the deep unease among members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the prospect of conflict between China, their largest trading partner, and the US, with whom many retain close strategic ties.

"ASEAN is concerned ... about the tensions, or the relationship between the US and China," Wong told a joint press conference with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. "No country in ASEAN wants to be forced to choose sides. No one wants to be in a position where we have to either contain China's rise or limit America's presence."

Albanese, however, who delivered the keynote speech on Friday night, followed the lead from Washington. He sought to blame Beijing for the deterioration of relations and cast it as the aggressor. He appealed to China to engage in dialogue to establish guardrails on the competition between the world's two largest economies to prevent "an incident that could very, very quickly spiral out of control."

Albanese warned: "The consequences of such a breakdown, whether in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere, would not be confined to the big powers or the site of

their conflict, they would be devastating for the world."

In cynically posturing as an advocate of reason and peace, the Australian prime minister was standing reality on its head. The current Labor government in Canberra is continuing the role of its predecessors in functioning as the political point man for Washington as it has escalated its military buildup throughout the Indo-Pacific over the past decade in preparation for war with China.

Australia has opened its bases to the US military and joined two quasi-military alliances against Beijing—the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with India, Japan and the US, and the AUKUS pact with Britain and the US. The latter will provide the Australian navy with long-range nuclear-powered attack submarines, whose only purpose is to join the US in operations in waters off the Chinese mainland.

Albanese set the stage for the speech the following day by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, who continued in a similar vein. He took a cheap shot at his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu for refusing to hold a discussion with him, even though the immediate reason was perfectly obvious—the US imposed unilateral sanctions on Li personally for his involvement in the purchase of Russian arms in 2018.

Austin dutifully parroted the White House line, declaring: "The United States does not seek a new Cold War. And competition must not spill over into conflict. And the region should never be split into hostile blocs. Instead, we're working to strengthen the guardrails against conflict, and to redouble our diplomacy, and to bolster peace, and security, and stability in the region."

In reality, the US is doing exactly the reverse, as Austin himself made clear in outlining the US efforts to strengthen military alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific, such as the Quad and

AUKUS as well as expanding basing arrangements in Australia and the Philippines and joint war games. He highlighted in particular:

* “Last year, our annual Garuda Shield expanded from a bilateral exercise with Indonesia to include 14 countries with more than 4,000 troops. And this year, more than 19 flags will fly over Super Garuda Shield.

* “Next month, Exercise Talisman Saber with Australia will bring 14 countries together. It will be the largest iteration ever, with more than 30,000 people participating, including a significant contingent from Japan.” France, Germany and the UK will also take part.

The hypocritical character of Austin’s declarations was underscored by the fact that on the same day, the US Navy provocatively mounted another transit through the highly-sensitive Taiwan Strait by its destroyer USS Chung-Hoon, accompanied by the Canadian frigate, HMCS Montreal.

If Washington were genuinely interested in dialogue, it would at the very least put such activities on hold. The objective of US imperialism is not to create peace and stability but to prevent by all available means, including military, China from undermining Washington’s global economic and strategic dominance.

In an effort to allay fears among the audience, even as the US is seeking stronger military ties throughout the region, Austin deliberately downplayed the danger of conflict, saying it was neither “imminent nor inevitable.” Yet as one questioner from France noted, “active duty, high ranking American officers actually talk about the imminence [of conflict by] 2025 and 2027.”

Chinese Defence Minister Li, who spoke on Sunday, hit back at the US without naming it. He said “a Cold War mentality is now resurgent, greatly increasing security risks,” declaring that “mutual respect should prevail over bullying and hegemony.” In an obvious reference to US naval provocations in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, he said the best way of avoiding conflict was not to carry out operations close to other countries’ territories.

Well aware of concerns in southeast Asia about AUKUS and Australia’s procurement of nuclear submarines, Li warned: “In essence, attempts to push for NATO-like [alliances] in the Asia-Pacific is a way

of kidnapping regional countries and exaggerating conflicts and confrontations, which will only plunge the Asia-Pacific into a whirlpool of disputes and conflicts.”

Li also made clear that China would not compromise over the issue of Taiwan, which it regards as part of its territory and which the US and other countries tacitly acknowledged in supporting the “One China” policy. Under Trump and now Biden, the US has more and more openly sought to goad China into a war over Taiwan by boosting ties with the island, deliberately undermining the basis of its diplomatic relations with China for over four decades.

Li reiterated Beijing’s longstanding stance that while it strives for peaceful reunification, “we make no promise to renounce the use of force.” He warned that if anyone dared to separate Taiwan from China, the Chinese military “will not hesitate for a second, we will fear no opponents and resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, regardless of any cost.”

For all its talk of dialogue, negotiation and establishing guardrails to prevent conflict, the US is rapidly preparing for war with nuclear-armed China, even as it escalates the war against Russia in Ukraine.



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