

US Defence Department report inflates the “China threat”

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The US Defence Department last week released its annual report on what it regards as the “pacing challenge” to the interests of US imperialism—China and its military, or People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Backgrounding journalists on the report, a senior Defence Department official bluntly declared that China was continuing its efforts to overturn the so-called international rules-based order and building an increasingly effective military to further these aims.

In reality, as the US escalates its buildup for war against China—consolidating alliances, joint war games and basing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific—it grotesquely exaggerates the real balance of military forces to justify its own bellicose actions and provocations.

The international rules-based order is the US-dominated imperialist order established after World War II in which Washington set the rules to meet its economic and strategic interests. In its decline, the US is determined to maintain its global hegemony by all means, including military.

Even as it prepares for war against China, the US and its NATO allies are waging war against Russia in Ukraine and backing Israel’s genocidal bombardment of Gaza to the hilt, threatening a wider war in the Middle East.

The report, which reeks of hypocrisy throughout, is mandated by Congress. It is largely confined to developments in 2022.

The Biden administration’s provocations aimed at China centre on inflaming tensions over Taiwan—an island claimed by Beijing that is crucial both strategically and economically. Just as it goaded Russia into invading Ukraine, the US is rapidly upending the status quo established in the 1970s when it accepted the One China policy—that is, Taiwan is part of China and

de facto that Beijing is the legitimate government of all China.

The report repeats US propaganda declaring that China has “amplified diplomatic, political, and military pressure against Taiwan in 2022” and the PLA has “increased provocative and destabilising actions in and around the Taiwan Strait.” These “included ballistic missile overflights of Taiwan, sharply increased flights into Taiwan’s self-declared ADIZ (Air Defence Identification Zone) and a series of major military exercises near Taiwan.”

The report does not refer to Washington’s overturning of long-standing diplomatic protocols that limited official contact with Taipei. Despite protests from Beijing, a stream of top American officials has visited Taiwan, paralleled by supposed “transits” by Taiwanese officials, including President Tsai Ing-wen.

What the Pentagon’s report refers to as the PLA’s “increased provocative and destabilising actions” are in fact responses to Washington’s closer diplomatic and military ties with Taipei, which undermine the fiction that the US adheres to the One China policy. The major Chinese military exercises across the Taiwan Strait in 2022 took place as US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi arrived in Taipei in August—accompanied by a US aircraft carrier battle group stationed in nearby waters.

In seeking to paint China as “coercive” and “intimidating,” the report claims an increasing number of unsafe intercepts of US, allied and partner vessels and aircraft operating in the Indo-Pacific region, including “over 180 instances of coercive and risky air intercepts against US aircraft” between 2021 and 2023. The vast bulk, if not all, of these incidents were undoubtedly in strategically sensitive airspace and waters close to the Chinese mainland where the US has been escalating its military presence and provocative

military “freedom of navigation” operations.

China’s own military build-up, which is the subject of a considerable portion of the Pentagon report, has taken place over the past decade since President Obama announced his aggressive “pivot to Asia” against China in 2011. Obama, followed by Trump and Biden, launched a broad campaign throughout the Indo-Pacific to undermine China economically, diplomatically and strategically.

The Pentagon report declares that the PLA Navy is **“numerically** the largest navy in the world with an overall battle force of over 370 ships and submarines, including more than 140 major surface combatants. [emphasis added].” However, when compared by tonnage, the US Navy is more than double the size of its Chinese counterpart. The US has 11 huge aircraft carriers; China has three.

The report makes much of Chinese efforts to establish a global military footprint. The PLA has one support base in Djibouti in the strategic Horn of Africa and, as of last year, “access to parts of Cambodia’s Ream Naval Base.” The document then enters the realm of speculation, declaring that China probably has considered other countries as locations for PLA logistics facilities—listing 18 countries from Burma and Thailand to Solomon Islands and Tajikistan.

However, there is nothing speculative about the Pentagon’s foreign military bases, numbering over 750 in some 80 countries as of 2021, nor the numerous basing, logistical and other military agreements that the US has with other countries. In the Asia-Pacific region, the US has major military bases in Japan, South Korea and Australia—all formal American allies—and is strengthening ties between its NATO allies and those in the region—directed against Beijing. China has one formal ally—North Korea.

A particular focus of the Pentagon report, and its coverage in the US media, is China’s “rapid nuclear expansion”—estimated to be more than 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023 and “probably” over 1,000 by 2030. It claimed that China has “probably completed” three new fields of silos to house Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) fuelled with solid-propellant. Unlike liquid-propellant missiles that have to be fuelled before launch, those with solid propellant can be launched instantaneously.

The US preoccupation with China’s nuclear

capability stems from the fact that Washington, already at war with nuclear-armed Russia, is also recklessly preparing for conflict with nuclear-armed China. The US nuclear arsenal currently stands at more than 3,500, with billions being spent each year on developing and upgrading nuclear weapons, and on the triad of delivery systems—ICBMs, strategic bombers and nuclear submarines. In addition, in preparation for waging nuclear war against China, the Pentagon is constructing an anti-ballistic missile system in the Indo-Pacific involving Japan and South Korea.

In its approach and purpose, the Pentagon report is certainly an exercise in anti-China propaganda aimed at poisoning public opinion as the Biden administration accelerates its war drive against Beijing. However, it also reveals just how closely the US Defence Department is following China’s military capacities as it draws up US war plans for a catastrophic conflict that could engulf the world.



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