

Foreign Affairs article lays out path for war against China

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An article published May 7 in *Foreign Affairs*, one of the most prominent mouthpieces of the US political establishment on international relations, lays out what amounts to a blueprint for escalating economic warfare against China, integrated with planning for a military conflict.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the US-NATO war against Russia, the military backing for Israeli genocide in Gaza, the attacks on Iran are not isolated developments. They are components of the ever-expanding war front directed at securing the domination of US imperialism over the Eurasian landmass where China is the central target.

The article began by criticising as insufficient the widespread and ever-expanding sanctions against China, especially in the area of high-tech with the imposition of bans on the export of computer chips.

The author Emily Kilcrease is a senior fellow at the Centre for New American Security who has been centrally involved in framing measures directed against China. Pointing to where US policy should go, she said the economic warfare measures should be greatly expanded.

“The United States has many powerful sanctions at its disposal—including those that could eject major Chinese firms from the global financial system, and weaponize the central role of the US dollar in it.”

However, she continued, the US had opted for a more limited approach only using sanctions on technology and the imposition of tariffs.

This approach could be “dangerous” as it might encourage China to think it would not face harsher measures if conflict broke out over Taiwan, the South China Sea, or other potential flashpoints.

This issue was becoming more pressing, Kilcrease wrote, as “the United States grows increasingly

concerned about China’s support of Russia’s industrial defence base,” an issue that was at the top of Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s agenda on his recent visit to Beijing.

Underscoring the integrated character of the Ukraine war and the offensive against China, she said Washington had to decide “whether to ramp up the use of its most powerful sanctions on Beijing now, as part of the broader effort to support Ukraine” or to preserve them for use in a “direct confrontation between the United States and China.”

It is significant that such a confrontation is taken as a given. It is not a question of if it will happen, but when and how will the US be best positioned to undertake it. In the past a *Foreign Affairs* article might well have been dealing with how such a confrontation should be averted. Those days are well and truly gone.

In order to enhance its position, she wrote that together with its partners, the US had to “urgently devise a clearer sanctions strategy” that keeps China within the global financial system “in order to maintain a key US advantage.”

This use of economic and financial sanctions, however, is not an alternative to war but an integral component in its preparation as Kilcrease went on to make clear.

The US had to transform its policy “through a strategic process that is integrated with military planning and carried out with key international partners. War planning must be embedded within the economic agencies, critical supply chains delinked from China, and this strategy must also clearly convey Washington’s willingness to impose serious sanctions, when warranted. The United States must also work to strengthen its economic resiliency. As well as that of its partner countries around the globe, to withstand the

economic shocks that would follow from a military conflict with Beijing.”

Such comments reflect the blasé attitude in US imperialist circles to the danger of nuclear war. A military conflict between two nuclear-armed powers would not only produce economic shocks—on an unimaginable scale in the form of the collapse of the global economy and its financial system—but threaten the very future of civilisation.

Any belief that economic and financial sanctions represent some alternative to outright war ignores the lessons of history—the war in the Pacific in World War II got underway as a result of the sanctions imposed by the US against Japan in the 1930s.

The key ban was on oil—the lifeblood of economic development at the time—as computer chips and high-tech are today.

As far as the ban on chips was concerned, Kilcrease made clear she wanted them vastly extended.

“Having already denied the export of goods with direct military application, the United States now faces the difficult task of slowing the growth of China’s commercial technology ecosystems that might have military use, regardless of whether the technologies are designed specifically for military purposes.”

At present, she noted, US export control policy is focused in denying China access to “chokepoint technologies” of which the US and its allies are the dominant producers. But this was insufficient.

“Focusing solely on chokepoint technologies, however, is too narrow a perspective as it does not eliminate Chinese leverage to exert its own coercive economic pressure on the United States at other points in the supply chain.”

Kilcrease raised the prospect of a ban on energy supplies. Recognising that many countries would not comply with US sanctions in this area, “more aggressive measures, such as secondary sanctions that threaten third-party countries that sell energy to China, could be considered.”

But in the final analysis if the US really wanted to halt energy supplies “economic tools alone will be insufficient.” In other words, war would be necessary.

Her conclusion was that Washington had to “institutionalise a strategic planning process for economic statecraft, as well as planning for a range of potential crisis or conflict scenarios with China. Such

planning would mature economic statecraft strategy, enable greater integration of economic tools with military options and facilitate deeper conversations with our international partners.”

Once again, underplaying the real dangers to humanity in the present situation, she said, “war with China would be an economic catastrophe” but sanctions “can help avoid it” provided the US played its hand well.

However, as her own article made clear, the expanded sanctions regime being proposed is not a means of avoiding war but another major step towards it, indicative of the kind of war planning discussions now taking place daily in the agencies of US imperialism.



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