

Global Military Agenda: U.S. Expands Asian NATO To Contain And Confront China

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The U.S. ended the four-day Invincible Spirit joint military exercise with South Korea on July 28, which consisted of 20 warships and submarines, 200 aircraft and 8,000 troops “in the sea, shore and the skies” [1] of South Korea and in the Sea of Japan near the coasts of North Korea and Russia.

On the same day the Taiwan News ran a feature entitled “China reports: the US means to set up another NATO in Asia,” which cited Chinese news media, scholars and analysts warning that “The US is establishing another ‘NATO’ in Asia to contain China as evidenced in the ongoing high-profile naval exercise with South Korea and a perceived intrusion in South China Sea affairs. [T]hese moves including explicit intervention in Asian affairs underline the US’s schemes to challenge China over its growing presence in this area....”

Chinese scholar Shih Yongming is paraphrased as asserting that “The US is capitalizing on the contradictions among East Asian countries to form a front against China,” in reference to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton proposing “to include the controversy over the issues of South China Sea into the mechanism of international laws and [speaking] explicitly about US stakes in the disputed sea’s areas,” [2] an allusion to her comments at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in Hanoi on July 23.

Clinton’s signal that Washington would rally Southeast Asian nations engaged in disputes with China over claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea occurred at the end of a six-day tour of Asia – Pakistan, Afghanistan, South Korea and Vietnam – which followed by two weeks visits to Ukraine, Poland, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia on Russia’s western and southern flanks.

During her trips last month to nine nations from the Baltic Sea to the South China Sea, especially during her stays in Georgia and Vietnam, Clinton reiterated in no equivocal terms that the U.S. recognizes no “spheres of influence” by any other nation anywhere in the world, including ones by Russia and China on their borders and in their immediate neighborhoods [3], and that Washington reserves the exclusive right to intervene in regional conflicts around the world and to “internationalize” them when and how it sees fit.

Two days after Clinton left Vietnam the nearly 100,000-ton USS George Washington nuclear-powered supercarrier moved into the Sea of Japan for large-scale war games which also included the first deployment of U.S. F-22 Raptor fifth generation stealth warplanes to Korea. According to a local news source, “Two F-22s known as the best fighter aircraft in the world were shown combat-ready at Osan Air Base in Gyeonggi Province on [July 26].

“Saying the Raptor is the most lethal fighter, the US Air Force pointed out the jet’s stealth

design which prevents it from being detected by enemy radars.

“U.S. officials were also eager to remind North Korea of the supersonic jet’s presence as it can launch precise strikes at strategic targets.” [4]

The F-22s were not only within easy striking distance of Pyongyang but of Vladivostok, Russia’s largest port city on the Pacific Ocean. And not North Korea and Russia alone.

A research scholar with the Academy of Military Science of the People’s Liberation Army, Luo Yuan, wrote of the Invincible Spirit war games that the Pentagon deployed not only “a nuclear-powered super-carrier, but also its military aircraft, warships, [a] nuclear-powered submarine and [an] Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer for the joint drill.”

The naval, submarine and air exercises were conducted “only 500 km from Beijing. Considering that the nuclear-powered super-carrier USS George Washington’s radius of action is up to 600 km, and the aircraft it carries can reach a speed of 1,000 km an hour, the joint drill was dangerously close to China’s security threshold.”

The author asked a question that Russian authorities should also have posed, *mutatis mutandis*: “China has to be alarmed when other powers display their military might near its territory. Will the US allow China to conduct military drills with neighboring countries in the Gulf of Mexico?”

He added these concluding remarks: “[T]he military exercise was aimed at, it was a threat to China.

“The US has bandied about the ‘China threat theory’ for some time now. But this joint military exercise proves once and for all that the US, and not China, is a threat to the world.” [5]

South Korean new media have reported that the U.S. is to participate in monthly naval drills off the Korean Peninsula, in the Yellow Sea off China’s coast, next month. Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell announced on August 6 that USS George Washington will participate in a joint U.S.-South Korean military exercise in the Yellow Sea “in the near future.”

Before the military drills began, the influential China Daily contained an editorial that connected the expansion of a U.S.-led equivalent of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to a hostile policy toward China, stating, “the US has seemingly become less restrained in its move to push forward an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with its allies in the region.

“In so doing, Washington has harbored the obvious strategic intention of containing China – whose economic and strategic influence has kept increasing in the international arena – in a bid to preempt possible troubles that the fast-growing nation may cause to the US.” [6]

Recent articles by a U.S. geopolitical strategist and by a retired military official have renewed the demand for an Asian NATO [7], in the second case insisting that “The Asian ‘NATO’ must stand-up a credible, united effort against China’s intimidation and hegemonic actions much as NATO formed the backbone of our defense against the former Soviet Union.” [8]

Over six years ago Liu Xuecheng, a researcher with the China Institute of International Studies, sounded the following alarm:

“Almost as early as from the end of the Cold War, the United States began to promote a military mechanism in Asia similar to NATO.

“During the eight years of former US President Bill Clinton’s term, the United States confirmed Japan and Australia as its core allies in the Asia-Pacific region and respectively regarded the two countries as the northern and southern anchors of its East Asian security strategy.

“Through various military exercises and construction of a missile defence system, Washington subsequently succeeded in networking its bilateral military relations with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore.

“Following the Kosovo War, the perception that Europe’s security situation had [come] under [the] control of NATO while Asia-Pacific security was being threatened by more uncertain and unpredictable factors prompted the United States to begin to shift its military strategy eastward.” [9]

After September 11, 2001 that geostrategic transition was intensified, the author continued, and “the Bush administration...put its priority on countering terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Under those two banners, the United States has strengthened its strategic control of the V-shaped belt stretching from Northeast to Central Asia, to which China, India, Japan and Russia are closely adjacent.

“The US traditional energy transportation passage and nations Bush branded as part of the so-called ‘axis of evil’ also overlap this long arc.

“While strengthening its strategic control of the outstretched chain, the United States has also actively worked to extend the network of Asia-Pacific security alliances under its domination to the Indian Ocean and even to the Persian Gulf to join the southward-extending NATO.

“To expedite implementation of this strategy, Washington has promoted active participation of its traditional allies in the anti-terror war, and prompted them to co-ordinate its anti-proliferation moves and support its ambitious missile defence system.”

The preceding year an unsigned item appeared in China Daily which stated “The United States is designing a NATO-like multilateral military mechanism for Asia to better serve its own strategic interests....Washington’s basic purpose for closer ties with India and an Asian version of NATO is to extend its status as the world’s sole superpower.” [10]

When the seventh of what had become annual U.S.-India Malabar naval war games expanded to include Australia, Japan and Singapore in 2007, Indian journalist Praful Bidwai wrote: “The naval exercises...are the largest and the most complex that India has ever participated in and feature as many as 25 ships from India, United States, Australia, Japan and Singapore....China...sees India’s military collaboration with staunchly pro-U.S. states like Australia and Japan and Singapore, and above all, with the U.S. itself, as an attempt to set up what it calls ‘an Asian NATO’, and eventually, to encircle it.” [11]

What in fact the U.S. is doing to complete its status as history's first sole world military superpower, as its commander-in-chief Barack Obama referred to it in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, is to not only drag almost all Asia-Pacific nations into a military bloc analogous to NATO, but to integrate the East into a global military alliance with NATO as the foundation. [12]

As was remarked above, since the end of the Cold War the U.S. has incorporated almost all of Europe into the North Atlantic military bloc it controls. Every European nation (excluding microstates) except for Cyprus (for the moment, though it is also under pressure to join the Partnership for Peace) is now a member of NATO or part of the Partnership for Peace and even more advanced programs. 38 European nations have provided the bloc with troop contingents of varying size for the war in Afghanistan.

Having subjugated Europe, Washington moved onto Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Middle East with the Caribbean and Latin America slated to follow. In short, the entire planet.

The five former Soviet Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – are Partnership for Peace members, all except Tajikistan joining in the early 1990s and it in 2002. Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 NATO troops and warplanes have operated out of bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Pentagon has recently announced plans to open training centers in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in addition to the Transit Center at Manas in the second country through which 50,000 U.S. and NATO troops pass each month to and from Afghanistan.

This week Semyon Bagdasarov, member of the Russian State Duma's International Affairs Committee, commented on NATO's expanded plans for the region: "[T]here are plans to send 52 OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] policemen to Kyrgyzstan who are supposed to do something there. But what can 52 unarmed men do? Kyrgyzstan is not Kosovo. If anything happens to these OSCE policemen, orders will be given to bring in armed units to Kyrgyzstan. Who is going to send military units there? Of course, it's NATO. There's a US military base in Manas, a French air base in Dushanbe, a 154,000 NATO military contingent in Afghanistan. What's the problem? If that happens, we will witness a very interesting situation that will resemble the one in Kosovo." [13]

In recent years NATO developed a new category of military cooperation, what are termed Contact Countries, all of which are in the Asia-Pacific region: Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

Last week NATO announced that Malaysia had become the 47th nation to officially contribute troops for the bloc's war in Afghanistan, joining other new Asian contributors Singapore, Mongolia and South Korea. Australia has 1,550 troops in Afghanistan and New Zealand over 200, with more to be deployed in September. Australia wants yet more New Zealand forces to serve under an Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) command in the South Asian war zone. [14] The first soldier from the nation was killed in Afghanistan on August 3.

Last week it was announced that Britain will underwrite expenses for 275 marines from the South Pacific kingdom of Tonga to be deployed to Afghanistan.

Asian NATO is not a metaphor.

From July 19-23 the U.S. Air Force and the government of Singapore sponsored the 2010 Pacific Rim Airpower Symposium in the Southeast Asian country to which delegations from Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga and Vietnam were also invited to participate.

The U.S. Air Force's Lieutenant General Hawk Carlisle said of the gathering, "The U.S. Air Force looks forward to these events every year, and our 2010 editions are no exception." [15]

On August 1 the U.S. completed month-long biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) war games in Hawaii, the world's largest naval maneuvers, which included 36 warships, five submarines, 170 aircraft and 20,000 troops from 14 nations: Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Peru, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and the U.S. India and New Zealand were observer countries.

Vice Admiral Richard Hunt, commander of the U.S. Third Fleet and combined task force commander for the exercises, said, "This is the largest RIMPAC that we've had." [16]

"Diesel electric submarines from Japan and South Korea stalked the U.S. aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan in the final phase - simulating a growing undersea worry as nonallied nations build up their stock of quiet subs in the Pacific." [17]

Participants for the first time were one of NATO's three nuclear powers, France; Colombia, which is the first Latin American nation to provide NATO troops for the war in Afghanistan; and Singapore and Thailand, prominent members of the U.S. Asian NATO project.

On July 26 and 27 senior Indian air force leaders visited the Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico "to learn how the U.S. Air Force operators use simulators for different aircraft and how to do distributed mission operations....The visiting [Indian Air Force] leaders are interested in taking part in future Virtual Flag exercises....Virtual Flag exercises link geographically separated live, virtual and constructive weapons assets in a shared joint synthetic theater environment." [18]

Japan sent several officers from the Maritime Self-Defense Force to the recently concluded U.S.-South Korean war games in the Sea of Japan. A government panel recently issued a recommendation stating "existing defense guidelines, made in the Cold War era, are now seen as 'unsuitable,' and that it is necessary to respond proactively to limited, small-scale invasions and contingencies on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait," and proposed "lifting outright bans on development and possession of nuclear weapons and their transportation to Japan...." [19]

Regarding U.S. plans to recruit Asia-Pacific nations into its global interceptor missile system, United Press International announced on August 5 that "Japan may export the ship-launched Standard Missile-3 system, a change from the country's current ban on selling arms and weapons."

"The apparent move comes after a request last October by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates to Japan's Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa....The United States is expecting an answer by the end of the year...."

“The 21-foot SM-3 missile, designated RIM-161A in the United States, is a major part of the U.S. Navy’s Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System and is a compliment to the Patriot missile.” [20]

On July 31 the two-week U.S.-led Angkor Sentinel 2010 military exercises in Cambodia ended. The drills which formally are for training peacekeepers for worldwide deployments included military forces from the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Australia, Japan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Mongolia as well as the host nation. Like the latest RIMPAC war games, a combination of major NATO and Asian NATO participants.

The U.S. has just launched Khaan Quest 2010, reputed to be the largest of the annual military exercises it leads in Mongolia, and South Korean troops are to participate for the first time. [22]

On August 5 a Nepalese news sources disclosed that eight U.S. Army troops had arrived in the nation for a joint two-week military exercise.

Australia, which last year announced the largest military buildup since World War Two [21], has begun Exercise Pitch Black, a “three-week air combat exercise in Darwin, in northern Australia. The Royal Australian Air Force is being joined by military personnel from New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand.”

“Security analysts say the annual war games over Darwin and the Northern Territory are designed to boost Australia’s military ties with its strategic partners. In the past, Indonesian forces also have taken part.” [23]

A major Philippine newspaper recently reported that “The United States has pledged to provide the Philippines with \$18.4-million worth of precision-guided missiles this year to use in its fight against Islamist militants in the south....” [24]

On August 5 Agence France-Press revealed that the Pentagon will supply Taiwan with two more Oliver Hazard Perry class frigates. “Taiwan’s navy already operates a fleet of eight such frigates, but it has launched a five-year buildup beginning from 2008,” said a Taiwanese naval spokesman.

“Taiwanese media have said the planned buildup includes eight conventional submarines, as well as an undisclosed number of frigates and guided-missile patrol boats.” [25]

An article that appeared in the International Herald Tribune this week, “Washington Shores Up Its Strategic Assets in Asia,” included these observations:

“The United States has been gravely weakened by its Iraq and Afghan wars and consequent neglect of the strategic importance of East Asia. But two recent moves by Washington — the joint naval exercises with South Korea and a spirited diplomatic defense of the freedom of the South China Sea — have shown a renewed concern with America’s security interests in Northeast and Southeast Asia.”

“America’s military maneuvers with South Korea last week reminded China of the overwhelming naval superiority that the U.S. and its allies still enjoy in the region. Meanwhile, at the meeting last month in Hanoi of the Asean regional forum, which brought foreign ministers from the 10 Southeast Asian nations together with U.S., Chinese and other officials, Vietnam successfully conspired with the United States to get the South China Sea

issue back on the table for discussion at international meetings.”

“The United States, by declaring in Hanoi that it has an interest in freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the settlement of disputed claims by international law, has put itself firmly in the camp of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and other nations with stakes in the outcome....” [26]

Last week a bipartisan, congressionally mandated defense panel headed by former White House National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley and former Defense Secretary William Perry “challenged the Pentagon to broaden its focus beyond counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq and expand the Navy to deal with threats from rising powers in Asia.” The panel’s report called for the U.S. Navy to expand its current 282 ships to 346 ships to “beef up U.S. maritime power in Asia.”

The report stipulated confronting “an accelerating global competition for resources” and “the rise of new global great powers in Asia.” [27]

The allusion, those phrased in the plural, was to China.

The perspective of a looming conflict is shared on the Chinese side, albeit in regards to developments in China’s own region and not thousands of miles away. Wang Jisi, director of Peking University’s Center for International and Strategic Studies, wrote on August 5 that “In early 2010, conflicts between China and the US came thick and fast, leading to the most serious political disturbance between the two countries since the plane collision in 2001....The gap between the two sides’ perceptions on major international issues is getting bigger. US strategists are still trying to take advantage of China’s weak spots in domestic and foreign affairs. [I]n the future the strategic cooperation space between the two will be squeezed, and major competition is inevitable.” [28]

The tone of commentary in the Chinese press is increasingly grave and even ominous, as is indicated by these samples from Global Times:

“The Chinese government has not sent a clear signal, though there is heated debate among the public as how to respond to the aggressive US policy. Ideas range from military action to leveraging China’s financial holdings of US assets, to more diplomatic communication. Admittedly, China has fewer means to counter the US than the US can use against China.

“China won’t follow a path to war like Japan did in World War II, but that does not mean that China will surrender to US strategic containment....Taking on China as a competitor may serve as an incentive to the US. If the US takes China as an enemy, the result would be disastrous.

“Plenty of water has passed under the bridge for China and the US since President Obama took office. What started out warmly soon turned chilly, and many feel the Sino-US relationship is heading toward a dangerously uncertain era.” [29]

China’s first direct experience with NATO occurred on May 7, 1999 when five of the Alliance’s bombs hit its embassy in Yugoslavia in a strike approved by President Bill Clinton. Three Chinese citizens were killed and over 20 wounded in what the Chinese government branded a “crime of war” and a “barbarian act.”

In the intervening years NATO has moved to China’s borders – in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan

and Tajikistan – and China's neighbors are being recruited into an Eastern extension of the world first global military bloc.

Notes

- 1) Navy NewsStand, July 28, 2010
- 2) Taiwan News, July 28, 2010
- 3) Clinton Renews U.S. Claims On Former Soviet Space
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- 4) Arirang News, July 28, 2010
- 5) Luo Yuan, Big Brother flexes muscles
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- 6) China Daily, July 12, 2010
- 7) Max Boot, Building an East Asian NATO
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- Robert Maginnis, Winning the New Cold War
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- 8) Human Events, August 6, 2010
- 9) People's Daily, June 3, 2004
- 10) China Daily, July 18, 2003
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- 13) Russia Today, August 3, 2010
- 14) New Zealand Press Association, July 29, 2010
- 15) Pacific Air Forces, July 15, 2010
- 16) Navy Times, July 6, 2010
- 17) Honolulu Star-Advertiser, July 31, 2010
- 18) U.S. Air Forces in Europe
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- 19) Agence France-Presse, July 27, 2010
- 20) United Press International, August 5, 2010
- 21) Australian Military Buildup And The Rise Of Asian NATO
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/03/31/mongolia-pentagon-trojan-horse-wedged-between-china-and-russia>

- 23) Voice of America News, August 4, 2010
- 24) Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 31, 2010
- 25) Agence France-Presse, August 5, 2010
- 26) International Herald Tribune, August 2, 2010
- 27) Washington Times, July 29, 2010
- 28) Global Times, August 5, 2010
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