

Kerry's Asian Trip and the Build-Up to War with China

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Global Research, February 17, 2014

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Region: [Asia](#)

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US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Beijing last Friday was the latest move in the Obama administration's provocative "pivot to Asia," the purpose of which is to undermine Chinese influence and build up US military forces and alliances in preparation for war. Having deliberately inflamed dangerous flashpoints in Asia over the past four years, the US is seeking to press home its advantage, regardless of the consequences.

In Beijing, Kerry sought to lay down the law to the Chinese leadership across a range of sensitive issues. On the volatile Korean Peninsula, he insisted that China use "every tool at its disposal"—including crippling economic sanctions—to force its ally North Korea to bend to US demands on denuclearisation. In relation to the fraught situation in the East China and South China Seas, he called on Beijing to adopt "a calmer, more rule-of law based, less confrontational regime"—implicitly blaming China for the tensions that the US has deliberately stirred up.

For good measure, Kerry also pressed the Chinese leaders to support the US-led regime-change operation in Syria and toe the US line on Iran in the UN, and expressed concerns about "human rights" in China—"especially with respect to the Tibetan and the Uighur areas." This last reference was calculated to play on justifiable Chinese fears that the US will exploit separatist movements in these areas of China to fracture the country.

Kerry dressed up Washington's provocative demands in the language of "peace", "democracy" and "security." The US intervention in longstanding maritime disputes between China and its neighbours takes place under the banner of "freedom of navigation." The standard US refrain is that Beijing must abide by the present rules-based global order—that is, one dominated by US imperialism, where the "rules" are set in Washington. All of this is put into circulation by an utterly submissive media without a word of criticism.

The US, however, operates around the world with complete lawlessness and reckless disregard for the rules it lectures others on. President Obama, following on from President Bush, has arrogated to the US the right to wage "pre-emptive" wars—that is, wars of aggression to further Washington's global interests and ambitions. The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was followed by the wars in Iraq and Libya as well as countless provocations, sanctions and military threats against a string of countries, including Iran and North Korea. Waging a war of aggression is a fundamental breach of international law and was the criminal charge underpinning the Nuremburg trials of Nazi leaders after World War II.

The criminals in the White House treat "human rights", along with international norms and

laws, with complete contempt. Under the bogus “war on terror”, the US pursues a program of murder and assassination by drone strikes without restriction, including against American citizens. Rendition, torture and indefinite detention without trial continue. Within the United States, basic constitutional rights are flouted. Whistleblower Edward Snowden has exposed the National Security Agency’s vast spying operations on the entire American population and people around the world, as well as US cyber warfare and hacking programs against nominal friends and foes alike.

What would the US response be to similar actions by China or any other country? What would happen if foreign warships routinely patrolled waters just off the US coast under the guise of “freedom of navigation”, or a rival established a military base—let alone a string of bases and alliances—anywhere in Latin America, or criticised US abuses of “human rights”, or supported Cuban claims to Guantanamo Bay? To ask the question is to answer it. Any one of these acts would elicit a belligerent response, including the threat of war.

The Obama administration’s actions over the past four years have transformed the whole Indo-Pacific region into a highly unstable powder keg.

* By encouraging Japan and the Philippines, in particular, to press their claims, the US has transformed long-running and largely low-key maritime disputes in the East China and South China Seas into major international flash points. The US signalled its intention, just prior to Kerry’s trip, to wind up tensions in the South China Sea even further by throwing off its pose of “neutrality” in the territorial issues and lining up openly against China.

* On the Korean Peninsula, the Obama administration has refused to take part in any international talks on North Korea’s nuclear programs unless Pyongyang meets all US demands. The US has recklessly courted disaster on more than one occasion by reacting to any incident with a massive show of force. Last March/April, in response to North Korea’s bellicose but empty rhetoric, the Pentagon sent nuclear-capable B-52 and B-2 bombers, as well as warships, to South Korea, and announced a major upgrade of its anti-missile systems in North East Asia.

* The Obama administration has upgraded the US military posture throughout the region, with plans to shift 60 percent of all naval and air assets to the Indo-Pacific by 2020. The US has strengthened alliances, particularly with Japan and Australia, is restructuring or establishing basing arrangements in Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore and the Philippines, and is boosting strategic ties with virtually every country in the region. US think tanks closely connected to the military establishment publicly discuss plans, preparations and strategies for war with China.

Far from being a force for “peace” and “security”, US imperialism is the most destabilising factor in world politics today. Five years after the 2008–09 global financial meltdown, the US is seeking to overcome its continuing economic crisis by foisting new burdens onto the working class at home and its rivals abroad. The Obama administration is exploiting American military superiority to ensure continued US hegemony in Asia, which has become the globe’s chief cheap-labour hub, with China at the centre. Its “rules-based” global order seeks to reduce China to the status of a subservient semi-colony.

In opposing the US drive to war against China, no support can be given to the Chinese leadership, which is deeply hostile to the working class and seeks above all to strike a deal with Washington. The Chinese Communist Party has greatly weakened any ability to resist

US aggression through the dismantling of nationalised property relations and the integration of China in global capitalism as a vast cheap labour platform over the past three decades. The CCP is above all organically hostile to any independent mobilisation of the Chinese and international working class, the only social force capable of ending the danger of a catastrophic war through the abolition of its root cause—the bankrupt profit system and its outmoded nation-state system.

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