

Seven Days in May? US Global Hegemony, “Asymmetric Warfare” Directed against China

Carter Takes Over

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Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

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“Since its founding, the United States has consistently pursued a grand strategy focused on acquiring and maintaining preeminent power over various rivals, first on the North American continent, then in the Western hemisphere, and finally globally.”

-Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, [Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China](#), The Council on Foreign Relations Special Report, March 2015

“It is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.” -Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China

The United States will do whatever is necessary to maintain its dominant position in the world. Less than two years ago, no one thought that Washington would topple a regime on Moscow’s doorstep, insert a US-backed stooge in Kiev, arm and train neo-Nazi extremists in the Ukrainian Army, instigate and oversee a vicious war of aggression in the East, threaten to deploy NATO to within five hundred miles of the Russian capital, reassemble the Iron Curtain by building up forces, weaponry and missile systems in E. Europe and the Balkans, and repeatedly provoke a nuclear-armed adversary (Russia) by launching asymmetrical attacks on its economy, its financial system and its currency.

The reason Washington pursued such a risky strategy is because EU-Russian economic integration posed a direct threat to US global hegemony, so steps had to be taken to thwart the project. The US used all the tools at its disposal to drive a wedge between Brussels and Moscow, to sabotage the plan to create a free trade zone from “Lisbon to Vladivostok”, and to prevent the emergence of a new rival. Washington powerbrokers did what they felt they had to do to preserve their lofty position in the current world order. Now their focus has shifted to the Asia-Pacific where they intend to take similar action against another potential rival, China.

According to the Economist, China’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will surpass that of the United States by 2021. In other words, if present trends persist, China will become the world’s biggest economy in less than a decade. But what are the chances that present trends will continue if Beijing is embroiled in a conflagration with the US; a conflagration where the US turns China’s trading partners against Beijing like it did with Moscow, a conflagration in which more of China’s resources are devoted to national defense rather than economic growth, a conflagration in which oil shipments from the Middle East are interrupted or cut off completely?

If any of these things were to happen, China would probably slip into recession dashing its chances of becoming the world's biggest economy. The point here is that China's rise is not inevitable as many people seem to think. It depends on things that China cannot completely control, like Washington's provocations in the Spratly Islands which are designed to slow China's growth by isolating Beijing and drawing it into a confrontation that saps its energy and depletes its resources.

There was an interesting article on the US Naval Institute's website titled "Asymmetric Warfare, American Style" that explains in part what the Pentagon may be trying to achieve by harassing Beijing over its harmless land reclamation activities in the Spratlys. Here's a clip from the article:

"In the nuclear age, guarding the homeland from an unlimited counterstroke is about more than merely preventing invasion. Forestalling nuclear escalation means keeping the scope and duration of combat operations low enough—and thus unprovocative enough—that Beijing would not countenance using doomsday weapons to get its way. It is important, then, for Washington to limit its efforts through the type and amount of force deployed, staying below the nuclear threshold. American strategists' goal should be to design operations that insert "disposal" forces....to support allies while making life difficult for China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)" ([Asymmetric Warfare, American Style](#), Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, US Naval Institute)

This, I imagine, is the objective of the current policy; to inflict maximum punishment on China without actually triggering a nuclear war. It's a tightrope act that Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter feels he can manage judging by the way he has gradually increased the pressure on China and then watched to see what the reaction is. And there are indications that the Carter method is working too. On June 16, China's Foreign Ministry announced that it planned to complete land reclamation projects within days. While the announcement is a clear stand-down on Beijing's part, it did include one face-saving proviso that "China would follow up by building infrastructure to carry out functions ranging from maritime search and rescue to environmental conservation and scientific research." The carefully-worded statement will be taken by Washington as a sign that Beijing is looking for a way to end the crisis without appearing like it's caving in. China's reaction is likely to convince Carter that his approach is working, that China can be bullied into making concessions in its own backyard, and that more pressure can be applied without risking a nuclear war. Thus, rather than ending the dispute, the Foreign Ministry's announcement has paved the way for an escalation of hostilities.

Carter's approach to China is not particularly unique, in fact, it has a lot in common with the Soviet containment strategy propounded by the late George F. Kennan who said: The U.S.

"has it in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years, and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."

While it's clear that US policy relies heavily on coercion, the US is being far more reckless in its dealings with China than it was with the Soviet Union. Sec-Def Carter made his demands on China (to end all land reclamation activities) without ever seeking a settlement through

normal diplomatic channels. This suggests that the US doesn't really want peace, but wants to use the Spratly's for some other purpose, as a pretext for ratcheting up the tensions, for demonizing China in the media, for cobbling together an anti-China coalition in the region, and for encircling China to the West.

Keep in mind, that the so called pivot to Asia –which President Obama referred to as the United States “top priority”– is, at its heart, a plan for economic supremacy. The foofaraw in the Spratlys is just the military component of the broader “Grand Strategy” which is aimed at dominating the prosperous Asian markets for the next century. Carter admitted as much in a speech he gave at the McCain Institute earlier in the year where he said the rebalance was about “access to growing markets” ..”to help boost our exports and our economy”...”and cement our influence and leadership in the fastest-growing region in the world.” These are Carter's own words, and they help to explain why the US is hectoring China. Washington needs an excuse for intensifying hostilities in the South China Sea so it can use its military to achieve its political and economic goals. At the same time, any retaliation on China's part will be used as a justification for upping the ante; for deploying more troops to the region, for enlisting proxies to challenge Beijing in its own territorial waters, and for tightening the naval cordon to the West.

The Obama administration is fully committed to the new policy, in fact, there was an interesting report in last week's Washington Times about the sacking of high-ranking government officials who were insufficiently hostile towards China. Here's a clip from the article:

“The Obama administration appears to be in the early phase of a policy shift on China. Tougher rhetoric and policies, most recently demonstrated by remarks in Asia from Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, coincide with the departures of two key officials long known for advocating more conciliatory policies toward Beijing...

Paul Heer, who for years held the influential post of national intelligence officer for East Asia....was known for a steadfast bias that sought to play down the various threats posed by China in favor of more conciliatory views (while) A second major personnel change was the departure last week of the White House's senior China specialist, Evan Medeiros, whowas regarded by critics as among the most pro-China policymakers in the White House's highly centralized foreign policy and national security power structure.” ([Ashton Carter's remarks suggest an Obama policy shift on China](#), Washington Times)

This is what's going on behind the scenes. The doves are getting their pink slips while the hawks are sharpening their knives. If it looks like the uber-confident Carter is setting policy, it's because he is. Obama seems to have been sidelined while the Pentagon is calling the shots. Does the name “Seven Days in May” ring a bell?

So what can we expect now that foreign policy is in the hands of a hawkish neocon who believes that the US must preserve its dominant position in the world by quashing all potential rivals?

What we can expect is more military adventurism, more needlessly provocative displays of force which increase the probability of another world war. Carter's belief that the military can be used to achieve political objectives suggests that he would not be opposed to implementing a risky plan to lure China into a conflict that would exhaust its resources while

“tying down significant portions of its war-fighting capacity”. Authors Yoshihara and Holmes [describe](#) this very scenario in the piece cited above. Check it out:

“Landing forces in China is a clear nonstarter, but introducing ground troops at select points along Asia’s offshore island chain or in continental Southeast Asia would help fulfill Washington’s modest goals. A limited maritime campaign would afflict China with a nagging “ulcer,” much as the Duke of Wellington’s 1807–14 campaign in Portugal and Spain...inflicted on France what Napoleon termed a “Spanish ulcer.”...

Consider one scenario—The Ryukyu Islands, a chain stretching from Japan’s Kyushu Island to Taiwan, stand out as a prime candidate for waging war by contingent. The islands straddle critical sea lines of communication connecting the Yellow and East China seas to the open waters of the Pacific.....the archipelago’s strategic location offers the United States and Japan a chance to turn the tables on China. By deploying anti-access and area-denial units of their own on the islands, American and Japanese defenders would slam shut an important outlet for Chinese surface, submarine, and air forces into the Pacific high seas. Effective blocking operations would tempt PLA commanders to nullify these allied disposal forces. Such exertions, however, would tie down significant portions of China’s war-fighting capacity while depleting manpower and matériel...

Abundant, survivable, inexpensive weaponry such as the Type 88, then, could coax China into exhausting expensive and scarce offensive weapons for meager territorial gain and uncertain prospects of a breakthrough into Pacific waters. Relatively modest investments in disposal forces could spread Chinese forces thin—helping the allies reclaim command of the commons as envisioned by AirSea Battle...

In the best case from Washington’s standpoint, Beijing might desist from ever attempting to upend the U.S.-led order in the region...

The allies’ capacity to foreclose Chinese military options—and give China a debilitating ulcer—offers perhaps the surest way of deterring Chinese aggression before it happens...

Would a puffed-up neocon like Carter be willing to initiate a plan that would weaken China militarily while forcing it to “desist from ever attempting to upend the U.S.-led order in the region” again?

You bet he would.

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