

US defence secretary warns China over Asian maritime disputes

Peter Symonds
9 April 2015

On his first trip to Asia since being appointed, US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter warned China against inflaming territorial disputes in the South China and East China Seas. Speaking yesterday in Tokyo alongside Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani, Carter declared that the US took “a strong stance against the militarisation of these disputes.”

Carter’s comments were in line with those of Admiral Harry Harris, commander of the US Pacific fleet, in Australia last week. Harris accused China of building artificial islands on disputed atolls and outcrops in the South China Sea in order to construct military facilities. “China is creating a great wall of sand with dredges and bulldozers,” Harris claimed.

In an interview published yesterday in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Carter declared that China’s land reclamations “seriously increase tensions and reduce the prospects for diplomatic solutions.” He called on Beijing to “limit its activities and exercise restraint.”

Carter’s remarks are entirely hypocritical. As part of its “pivot to Asia,” the Obama administration, far from exercising restraint, has provocatively encouraged China’s neighbours, including Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam, to more aggressively assert their maritime claims.

While proclaiming its neutrality in the territorial disputes, Washington is clearly backing China’s rivals. In Tokyo last year, Obama unambiguously committed the US to support Japan in any war with China over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea.

Responding to Carter’s remarks, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying called on the US to be “more responsible,” adding: “We hope the US side can respect the wishes of China and relevant countries to resolve the problem through dialogue.”

Just days before leaving for Asia, Carter delivered a

major speech in Arizona reaffirming the US commitment to the “pivot” or “rebalance” to the Indo-Pacific region. The “pivot” is a comprehensive diplomatic, economic and military strategy targeting China and aimed at ensuring the continued dominance of American imperialism in the world’s fastest growing economic region.

Significantly, along with the US military build-up in Asia, Carter focussed on the economic plank of the “pivot”—the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—which confronts US Congressional opposition. “You may not expect to hear this from a Secretary of Defence,” he said, “but in terms of our rebalance in the broadest sense, passing [the] TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier... It would help us promote a global order that reflects both our interests and our values.”

The comment underscores the TPP’s importance to Washington and its aggressive character. The US is aiming at nothing less than dictating the terms of trade and investment throughout Asia so as to benefit American corporations and economic interests. Carter emphasised that “our military strength ultimately rests on the foundation of our vibrant, unmatched and growing economy.”

Central to the TPP is the protection of the “intellectual property rights” on which giant US electronic, media and drug companies heavily depend, and the scrapping of all legal, regulatory and governmental obstacles to American investment. At this stage, China is not a party to the negotiations, but is instead pursuing its own trade and economic agreements.

Carter outlined the extensive build-up and restructuring of US military forces in the Asia-Pacific that are geared above all to a war with China. This

includes:

* New military hardware is being developed, specifically tailored to the Pentagon's AirSea Battle war plan, which envisages a massive air and missile assault on mainland China from US bases and naval assets in the western Pacific. In addition to "a new, long-range stealth bomber and a new, long-range anti-ship cruise missile," Carter explained that the US was working on "new weapons like a rail gun" using electromagnetic forces, and "new space, electronic warfare and other advanced capabilities, including some surprising ones."

* The Pentagon has already dispatched some of its most sophisticated weapons systems to Asia, including the latest Virginia class nuclear submarine and P-8 surveillance aircraft, as well as fighter aircraft and bombers. "We will continue to push our most advanced weaponry to the Pacific, including, for example, our newest stealth destroyer, the Zumwalt," Carter said.

* The US is comprehensively redistributing its military forces throughout the region, including new basing arrangements with Australia, Singapore and the Philippines. In North East Asia, the Pentagon is restructuring its bases in Japan, especially on Okinawa, and South Korea and transforming Guam into a "strategic hub" for the region. "In Japan, Korea and Guam," Carter boasted, "we are in the middle of four of the largest military construction projects since the end of the Cold War."

* The US is "constantly refreshing our alliances" in the region. Carter emphasised that this involved "establishing brand new partnerships" and maintaining "an increased tempo of training and exercises." As he spoke, the annual US-South Korean war games were underway. The US and the Philippines are about to begin their annual Balikatan military exercises, which have doubled in size from last year and also include Australian military personnel.

The main purpose of Carter's visit to Tokyo was to finalise new US-Japan defence guidelines that will integrate the Japanese armed forces more directly into US military activities, interventions and wars.

With Washington's encouragement, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pressed ahead with an expansion of the country's military and security apparatus and moved to end constitutional and legal restrictions on its activities. Last year, his government

"reinterpreted" the country's constitution to allow for "collective self-defence"—that is, to enable the Japanese military to take part in US wars of aggression.

The rewritten bilateral defence guidelines reflect this "reinterpretation." They will allow Japan to respond to an attack on US forces—real or concocted—even if the US was not acting in defence of Japan at the time.

An unnamed senior US defence official enthusiastically told the *Washington Post* that the new rules were "a big, big deal." He focussed particularly on the greater integration of anti-ballistic missile systems that the guidelines would enable. "With missile defence, the more radars you have and the more shots you have, the higher the probability of a [missile] kill is."

There is nothing "defensive" about the anti-ballistic missile systems that the US is jointly developing with Japan and South Korea. Above all, they are part of the Pentagon's strategy for fighting a nuclear war with China. In the wake of a US first nuclear strike, the anti-missile systems would seek to shoot down any remaining Chinese missiles.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact