

US Secretary of State directs fire on China at Asian summit

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15 October 2024

The US and its military allies turned the East Asia Summit in Laos last Friday into a thinly-veiled, propaganda platform as the US accelerates its preparations for war against China throughout the Indo-Pacific. The annual summit is organised by the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is increasingly riven by Washington's provocative actions.

While also lashing out at "Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine" and North Korea's "destabilizing behaviour," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken directed his main criticisms against China, which American imperialism regards as the chief threat to its global economic and strategic dominance.

"We remain concerned about China's increasingly dangerous and unlawful actions in the South and East China Seas, which have injured people and harmed vessels from ASEAN nations, and contradict commitments to peaceful resolution of disputes. The United States will continue to support freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight in the Indo-Pacific," Blinken declared.

In reality, these tensions can be traced directly back to a statement by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2010 at the East Asia Summit declaring that the US had a "national interest" in disputes in the South China Sea. Her comment transformed what had been low-level regional disputes, in which Washington had taken little interest, into a potential flashpoint for great power conflict. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi responded by calling Clinton's remarks "virtually an attack on China."

Over the past decade, successive US administrations have escalated provocative "freedom of navigation" operations by warships and warplanes close to Chinese-controlled reefs and islets in the South China Sea to

challenge Chinese maritime and territorial claims. At the same time, they have backed Japan's aggressive stance on the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets in the East China Sea that it provocatively "nationalised" in 2012. Washington has repeatedly declared that its military treaty with Japan covers the uninhabited rocks, meaning the US would back Japan in a war with China over the islets.

Blinken also declared in Vientiane that there had to be a "shared commitment to protect stability across the Taiwan Strait." Under Trump and now Biden, the US has transformed the Taiwan Strait into potentially the most dangerous trigger for a US-China war. It is deliberately goading China into taking military action by systematically undermining the One China policy that has underpinned diplomatic relations with China for decades. Under the policy, the US has de-facto recognised Beijing as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan.

Blinken's comments are a mantra repeated ad nauseum by the US and its allies in international fora and regurgitated uncritically in the associated media. However, a new element was introduced in a proposed statement at the East Asia Summit designed to further inflame tensions. While the text has not been released, a draft seen by Reuters added a subclause to the 2023 statement, declaring the UNCLOS (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) "sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out."

While China has ratified UNCLOS, it has rejected the outcome of a US-orchestrated case taken by the Philippines to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague in 2016, invalidating China's historic claim to much of the South China Sea. The US was compelled to use the Philippines, firstly as it has no standing in

any of the South China Sea disputes, and secondly, because it has never ratified UNCLOS.

The proposed statement was reportedly the consensus outcome of ASEAN discussions last Thursday, but it was undoubtedly heavily influenced by the demands of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Acting in concert with Washington, his administration has deliberately provoked confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels over disputed features in the South China Sea.

Marcos again lashed out at China, saying: “It is regrettable that the overall situation in the South China Sea remains tense and unchanged. We continue to be subjected to harassment and intimidation.” He declared China’s actions could not be ignored and called for greater urgency in the stalled negotiations for an ASEAN-China code of conduct.

What appeared to be a small amendment in the joint statement was calculated to inflame divisions. As reported by the *Guardian*, an unnamed US official on Saturday accused Russia and China of blocking the adoption of the statement.

Predictably, the US, Japan, Australia and India, which form the anti-China Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, and South Korea, which has a trilateral security agreement with Japan and the US, declared they would all support the statement.

According to the anonymous US official, “The Russians and the Chinese said that they could not and would not proceed with a statement.” Another clause added to the 2023 statement spoke of “challenges” to the international environment, particularly citing Ukraine.

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov told a news conference on Friday the statement was not adopted because of “persistent attempts by the United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand to turn it into a purely political statement.”

A proposal for an “Asian NATO” by the newly installed Japanese prime minister, Shigeru Ishiba, all too clearly exposes the aggressive intent of the US and its allies, even though it was not discussed, let alone adopted at the summit.

Ishiba’s plan is to link so-called “democracies” far more strongly together into a multi-lateral NATO-like alliance against “autocratic” China based on a formal obligation to come to each other’s defence. It would

consolidate existing security partnerships, including the Quad, AUKUS—a military pact between Australia, the UK and US—as well as the trilateral alliance between the US, Japan and South Korea. South East Asian countries, particularly the Philippines would also be included.

Ishiba has also proposed that the new alliance would need to consider the US “sharing of nuclear weapons or the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region”—as the US already does with several of its NATO allies in Europe.

There are undoubtedly a number of considerations behind Washington’s reluctance to embrace Ishiba’s proposal—at least at present. Already embroiled in escalating wars in Ukraine against Russia and in the Middle East alongside Israel, the formation of a US-led Asian NATO armed with nuclear weapons would explicitly draw the battle lines against China.

Reflecting Washington’s views, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese bluntly rejected the plan in comments prior to meeting with Ishiba. “We have our own arrangements, and it’s not a matter of containing [China],” he said, before trotting out the mantra about assuring “international rule of law applies” and that we have “peace and security in the region.”

All the while, as was clear at the East Asia Summit, American imperialism and its allies are preparing to do precisely the opposite—opening up a third front against China in a rapidly emerging global conflict already aflame in Europe and the Middle East.



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