

China Slams Defense Plan as 'Groundless'

by William Jones

Jan. 14—The Pacific Rim has long been known as the “Ring of Fire,” denoting the turbulent volcanic area in the seas adjacent to the nations bordering it. But the new, belligerent Obama defense policy, the U.S. “pivot” to Asia, announced by President Obama at the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) in Honolulu last November, is threatening to create a different type of turbulence between the U.S. and China, which could quickly develop into a full-blown military conflict.

Obama's Asia “pivot” has also added grist to the mill of the neoconservatives, who are now eager for a major military build-up of U.S. forces in the Pacific region in spite of the general budget restraints placed on the Administration.

As Tensions Grow, China Reacts

While the Chinese press was immediately full of commentary about the new defense strategy after it was released by Obama at the Pentagon on Jan. 5, the Chinese government took its time to examine the report before making an official response. But when it did, the response was unequivocal. “The accusation against China in this document is groundless and untrustworthy,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, speaking on Jan. 9 to the official Xinhua news service. “China's national defense modernization serves the objective requirements of its national security and development, and it is a positive factor in maintaining regional peace and stability,” Liu said.

On the same day, Defense Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng issued a written statement similar in tone. “It is widely known that China's strategic intent is constant and clear,” the statement read. “China's peaceful development is an opportunity rather than a challenge for the international community, including the United States.”

Other commentators, meanwhile, probably reflecting more the “gut” feeling engendered by the Obama policy, have been less diplomatic. Gen. Luo Yuan, a frequent commentator on military affairs, who is involved in the new strategic policy planning institute set up by President Hu Jintao in the aftermath of Obama's Honolulu speech, wrote in the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s *Liberation Daily* of Jan. 9, “Casting our eyes around, we can see that the US has been bolstering its five major military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, and is adjusting the positioning of its five major military base clusters, while also seeking more entry rights for military bases around China,” Luo wrote. “Who can believe that the US is not directing this at China?”

In an article published on Jan. 8 in the same daily, Luo noted that in the defensive wars that China has previously fought, it never had the “intention” of going to war, and yet war was forced upon it by opponents who wished to “expand their wild ambitions,” and “were willing to take a risk to realize those ambitions.” Given the threatening tones of the new U.S. Asia shift, Luo called for China to increase its defense readiness, especially given the fact that the “threat” was coming from a militarily superior power. “Only by readying our capabilities, can we reduce tensions; only by daring to fight, can we make peace,” Luo wrote.

Neocons Embrace the Obama Doctrine

The Bush-era neocons have jumped on the Obama bandwagon, as was clearly expressed in a report issued by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) on



Gen. Luo Yuan, writing in “*Liberation Daily*,” comments on the Obama Administration build-up of U.S. military forces in the Asia Pacific: “Who can believe that the U.S. is not directing this at China?”

Jan. 10. CNAS was set up in 2007 during the final stages of the Bush Administration as a defense think-tank among whose purposes was to develop an alternative to the disastrous war policy of the Bush years for the next hoped-for Democratic administration. In the beginning, it therefore concentrated on how to effectively withdraw American forces from Iraq and Afghanistan. CNAS founders Kurt Campbell and Michele Flournoy have now taken up posts in the Obama Administration: Campbell as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Flournoy as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

But as Obama followed in the footsteps of the Bush/Cheney Administration in the Middle East, and then shifted to the present focus on China, the issues of counterinsurgency, so prominent in CNAS's initial period of putting an end to Bush's wars, were replaced by the new "Air-Sea Battle" doctrine of the Defense Department. CNAS president John Nagl, an expert in counterinsurgency, has therefore been kicked upstairs to teach at the U.S. Naval Academy, and CNAS is under new management.

The CNAS report presented on Jan. 10, "Cooperation from Strength: The United States, China and the South China Sea," written by Patrick Cronin and Robert Kaplan, really dots the i's and crosses the t's of the naval redeployment to the Pacific—what Kaplan calls the creation of a "Metternichean balance of power system." Kaplan earlier enjoyed a long cruise with the U.S. Navy in the Indian Ocean, prior to writing his latest work, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, warning of the growing naval power of China, and calling for a closer alliance between the U.S. and India to counter this.

Under other conditions, these lunatics would probably be calling for the creation of a new NATO in the Pacific against the new "China threat," but they are aware that such a project just wouldn't fly. Warning bells would immediately sound in Beijing, and few Asian nations would come on board. "It's not possible to build a NATO-type of relationship," Cronin lamented. "We must rely rather on bilateral and multilateral relationships as the basis for the policy." One Chinese commentator characterized this policy as surrounding China with a "ring of fire."

Triple Entente in Asia?

To give some sense of the model on which this new "alliance-building" is based, one has just to look at the



Adm. Jonathan Greenert, Chief of [U.S.] Naval Operations, claimed the U.S. fleet is needed to preserve "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea, but "Liberation Daily" notes that Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean navies deployed there are sufficient to handle the situation.

formulations in the CNAS report. The following is how the Oxford-trained Cronin and his side-kick, Kaplan, the main authors of the report, depict Australia's role in this new menagerie: "Australia, lying at the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, could emerge as America's most vital partner in the Anglosphere because of its location, a 21st century equivalent of 20th century Great Britain." One senses that Britain's Lord Palmerston, rather than Metternich, is the real role model here.

Although the authors shy away from the term "hegemony" in their report, preferring to use the less loaded euphemism "cooperative primacy," in designating the role of the U.S. in the region, it is quite clear what they mean, reverting to Cold War jargon in warning of China's attempt to "Finlandize" its Asian neighbors.

The CNAS authors go even further than the Obama Administration, which finds itself hindered by its self-imposed budget restrictions, in calling for the type of 346-ship Navy recommended in the Quadrennial Defense Review Panel in 2010, rather than the 250-ship Navy that seems to be the basis for present planning discussions. When asked about the size of the Navy, Adm. Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations, who indicated he did want more ships, nevertheless, toed the official policy line, saying that he had just

about what he needed. The Chinese estimate that when all redeployment is done, the U.S. will have about one-third of its Naval forces deployed in the Pacific region.

The CNAS conference also provoked an immediate response in Beijing with a lengthy article quoting from the report, published in the *Liberation Daily*. It ridicules the argument raised by Greenert and the Administration that the U.S. fleet is needed to preserve “freedom of navigation,” noting that the Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean navies deployed in the region ought to be enough to deal with pirates and the like—the only real threat to navigation in the region.

The article notes that the new policy is really focused on bringing the U.S. into the maritime disputes over the South China Sea, and attempting to foment any latent anti-China nationalist sentiments among the disputants to take a harder line in their negotiations with China. Their ultimate goal: to prevent, or at least impede China’s economic development. The article quotes retired Adm. Yang Yi, whom no one can accuse of being a military firebrand: “The U.S. is repeating all the time that it is the ‘provider of security in the region,’ whereas in fact, it is all the time the ‘trouble-maker.’” Ever since

the high-handed pronouncement of the U.S. “return to Asia,” the atmosphere has gotten increasingly worse, he notes.

One Indian commentator, quoted in the *Liberation Daily* article, made the clearest comparison to the successful attempt of the British before World War I to bring together a similar alliance among France, Russia, and Great Britain—the Triple Entente—which set the stage for war. But things may not quite work out the same way in Asia. The nations of Asia, whatever disputes they may have with China, do not want a war in the region. As General Luo put it: “Some countries have been swindled by America, and now are walking alongside the United States out of their own interests, but in essence they don’t fit together. They share the same bed, but they have different dreams.”

Nevertheless, the level of tension that has been raised by the foolish British satrap of a U.S. President may indeed transform his envisioned “ring around China” into an “ring of fire” in the Pacific in which everyone gets burned. Only the immediate elimination of Barack Obama from the post of President could ensure that the Pacific remains just that—a sea of peace.

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