

Will the British, Once Again, Provoke a Sino-Japanese War?

by Mike Billington

Oct. 15—Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, has warned the political leaders of the Western nations—and especially his Commander in Chief, Barack Obama—that they are walking into the “Thucydides Trap,” with regard to China. When Athens rapidly arose as the center of culture and science in ancient Greece, Sparta viewed that rise as a threat which had to be crushed, leading to a long war which destroyed both city-states. Dempsey, speaking at a Washington forum in May, said, “One of my jobs as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and as an advisor to our senior leaders, is to help avoid a Thucydides trap. We don’t want the fear of an emerging China to make war inevitable.”

But the financial oligarchy in London and New York, facing the collapse of their bankrupt empire, are in fact setting the trap themselves, intentionally. Their greatest fear is that the United States, if restored under new leadership to its historic role as an enemy of Empire, and as a nation-builder, could ally with the great Eurasian powers, especially Russia and China, to create a new world economic order based on physical development, free of the worthless bubble of speculative debt created by London and Wall Street. In particular, with Asia emerging as the center of global economic development, the unity of the Asian powers, especially Russia, China, Japan, and Korea, is seen as a dangerous threat to the very existence of the Empire.

The Empire’s solution, as always, is war. In fact, the British have already provoked two wars between Japan and China—one in 1894, and one in the 1930s.

Over the past year, a series of dormant territorial disputes have erupted over islands in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, among China, Japan, Korea, and several Southeast Asian nations. These have sparked military and diplomatic crises across the region. The disputes had long been considered relatively unimportant, as long as no one picked a fight

over them. The policy-line heard repeatedly in the U.S. and the U.K., both by governments and in the media, is that China, a rising power, is testing its new strength, not only by asserting its territorial claims, but also by challenging the “freedom of navigation” of the Western nations in the crucial trade lanes in the western Pacific.

The U.S. neoconservative war planners accuse China of implementing an “anti-access/area denial” (2A/AD) policy, which aims to keep U.S. naval vessels out of the region. This has been used as an excuse for the so-called U.S. “pivot” to Asia—a military build-up of U.S. strategic forces in the Pacific in a “ring around China,” both in their existing bases, and in new locations made possible by agreements with nations surrounding China, which allow the U.S. unfettered military access to their ports and airfields. This includes the Philippines, Singapore, Australia, and possibly others.

Three Rocks

The most immediate threat of war is over the dispute between Japan and China over three rocks in the East China Sea, known as the Diaoyu Islands in China and the Senkaku Islands in Japan. These tiny, uninhabited rocks have strategic value, in terms of defining ownership of the raw materials in the surrounding sea, and in regard to navigation. The islands were seized (together with Taiwan) from China, by Japan after the 1894 war, which was waged to impose Japan’s control over Korea. Later, after World War II, the U.S. included the islands in territory “returned” to Japan. China, however, never relinquished its claim to them.

But the rightful sovereignty is not the real issue. Rather, it is being used as a convenient excuse for turning Japan and China against each other, while also creating an excuse for Western military involvement in the

region. The cover story of the London *Economist* Sept. 22 (see photo) gives it away: This is not a commentary, but a statement of British policy.

While the U.S. has insisted that it will not take sides in the territorial dispute, it has contradicted this policy by insisting at the same time that the islands do in fact fall within the purview of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, signed in 1960, which places Japan under the U.S. “nuclear umbrella.” Thus a real or manufactured Chinese move to militarily assert sovereignty over the islands, or to challenge similar moves by the Japanese military, could invoke a U.S. military intervention.

That such an intervention would quickly lead to a thermonuclear confrontation with China should not be doubted.

China is certain to do everything possible to avoid a military conflict. Beijing is painfully aware of the devastation which war has inflicted on the nation since the onset of the colonial period, and is fully committed to the concept of a “peaceful rise” to the level of a fully developed country. Also, Chinese leaders know that Japanese trade and investment are crucial for that development, as well as for peace in Asia generally. But China is no longer a subservient nation, and will not capitulate nor over-react to provocations, either from Japan or from the West.

As to Japan, although drastically damaged economically by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 2011, and by the success of the anti-nuclear hysteria which has closed down its nuclear industry, at least temporarily, the historic commitment to scientific and industrial development, going back to the Meiji Restoration (ca. 1868-1912), has not been destroyed, and should reassert itself, if the current British/Obama meddling can be contained.

Japan’s Role in the British Game

The current phase of the crisis erupted when the mayor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, speaking at the neo-



conservative Heritage Foundation in Washington in April, announced that he intended to use Tokyo’s public funds to buy the Senkaku Islands from a private Japanese owner. Ishihara is a notorious hyper-nationalist, racist, and war hawk, who claims that the Rape of Nanjing (1937) and other atrocities by the Japanese in occupied China are a myth, and that Japan’s colonial occupation was good for Korea; he is also reported to have been the funder of the terrorist cult Aum Shinrikyo, until it was caught pumping sarin gas into the Tokyo subway in 1995, killing and injuring dozens. Ishihara argues that Japan must build nuclear weap-

ons in order to counter “our enemies, China, North Korea, and Russia,” and that China “wouldn’t have dared lay a hand on the Senkakus” if Japan had nuclear weapons.

China responded that Tokyo’s purchase of the island would be a provocation, disrupting the standing agreement that there would be no moves by either side to challenge the claims of the other to sovereignty. But Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, a weak leader whose Democratic Party will almost certainly be voted out of office in the upcoming elections, jumped into the conflict in August, by saying that the national government itself would buy the rocks, nationalizing the islands. The Chinese were then forced to strongly object, calling this a direct challenge to China.

Demonstrations against Japan broke out across China, and then again in September, when the Japanese Cabinet approved the move. Small-scale violence against Japanese companies was widespread, and a popular boycott of Japanese goods has drastically reduced the sale of Japanese autos and other goods within China. China even refused to send top-level financial representatives to the annual IMF meeting, in Tokyo this month.

China’s strongest warning to Japan came in an unsigned editorial in the government’s newspaper, *China Daily*, on Aug. 8: “The commemoration of the first

atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima early this week should remind Japan that extreme nationalism almost destroyed it 67 years ago. Japan had waged horrifically aggressive wars throughout Asia from 1937 until the U.S. dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

ABM ‘Ring Around China’ and Russia

In the same time frame, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta visited Japan, and announced that the U.S. and Japan would build a second X-Band radar system in Japan. The U.S. is planning another such radar facility in the Philippines—thus creating a “ring around China”—claiming they were necessary to protect against North Korean missile threats. The Obama Administration has also announced plans to set up an enhanced anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system around China, claiming again that the target is North Korea, and has begun deployments of warships, fighter aircraft, and marine units in the Philippines (despite Philippine Constitutional restrictions against such deployments), and in Australia.¹

Former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser warned that Australia must not be drawn into a military confrontation with China, saying that “there is a danger that the U.S. is seeking to maintain supremacy, which could lead to war,” and that it is “an absurd allegation that China may wish to curtail freedom of the seas in the South China Sea.”

Just as Russia has ridiculed the notion that the ABM systems being installed in Eastern Europe along Russia’s border are intended to guard against Iranian missile threats, so too, the Chinese have no doubt about whom the new U.S. radar and ABM systems in Asia are targeting. *China Daily* reported Aug. 25, that “military experts in both the United States and China questioned the U.S. intentions, saying the expensive system, which is well beyond Pyongyang’s military capability, is actually looking at China.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry also weighed in, issuing a statement on Sept 18, saying, “The potential deployment of the second anti-missile radar on Japanese territory will considerably enhance the capabilities of the American missile defense system in the Asia-Pacific region. We are urging our American partners to balance their missile defense efforts against real

FIGURE 1



challenges and threats, so as not to damage the security interests of other members of the international community.”

Earlier statements by Russia’s political and military leaders have been less diplomatic. Then-President Dmitri Medvedev warned last year that the ABM systems, together with the recurring U.S. “regime change” wars on sovereign nations, could bring about a nuclear war. So also, China’s military leaders warned in July that efforts to undermine China’s response capacity with the new ABM systems could force China to upgrade its nuclear arsenal and even reconsider its “no first strike” policy.

1. See: Mike Billington, “China Joins Russia: Warns vs. Obama Drive for World War,” *EIR*, April 6, 2012.

How the British Provoked Wars in Asia

The two historical cases of British instigation of war between Japan and China are well known to the Chinese, if not to those educated in the West. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan underwent a dramatic transformation and modernization, which was deeply influenced by the American System of political economy. It is not surprising that the Japanese turned to the British to build up and modernize their Navy, since the British were by far the strongest naval power at the time. But by the 1880s and '90s, even though Britain virtually ruled China (after two devastating Opium Wars in the 19th Century), the British were, at the same time, actively preparing Japan for a war on China, including providing Japan with detailed intelligence on Chinese military capacities and weaknesses. In 1894, as part of Japan's war against China over control of Korea, Japan crushed China's Northern Fleet in the Yellow Sea.

In the 1895 peace treaty ending that war, Japan took control of Korea, Taiwan, and the Senkaku Islands, but also demanded that China turn over Liaodong Province. France, Germany, and Russia intervened to prevent this imperial land grab, but the British made no objection, and proceeded to set up a military alliance with Japan. Their purpose was to use Japan to stop Russia's dramatic move to open up a land route to Asia via the Trans-Siberian Railway, which undermined British control of Asian trade via the sea routes. Indeed, in 1905, Japan went to war with Russia, and in the process, established a permanent military presence in China's northeastern provinces, including the last leg of the rail connections through Manchuria to the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Later, in the 1920s, after China's republican forces under Sun Yat-sen had overthrown the monarchical system, the British moved forcefully to undermine Sun's republican policies, backing various warlords, and successfully dividing China into warring sub-states. The British and their Wall Street assets controlled foreign investment in China by imposing a Consortium with the power to approve or deny foreign loans, and succeeded in preventing any investment whatsoever in China's real economy. The Consortium was run by Sir Charles Addis of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, England's preeminent drug bank, and Thomas Lamont of J.P. Morgan, the by-name-only American banker, who in fact served the British in all matters.

But Lamont was at the same time active in Japan,

and was lobbying for official U.S. financial support for Japan's expanding control over Manchuria, and especially the South Manchurian Railway, arguing that "The state of China's administration—divided, corrupt, unofficial, and torn by strife—ruled out any possibility that China could develop [Manchuria] itself," and that the Japanese would do a far better job. Leading forces in the U.S. were working with Sun Yat-sen to implement his plan for the "Industrial Development of China," and J.P. Morgan's efforts to get approval for direct loans to Japan's occupation of Manchuria were rejected.

But, as we see again today, the British banks often have more power than the elected government in the U.S., and Lamont managed to circumvent his government's veto on financial backing to the Japanese/British imperial designs on China, hiding the investments as support for earthquake relief and similar fronts. When the Japanese used a "Reichstag Fire"-style incident in Manchuria in 1931—blowing up part of the South Manchurian Railway, and blaming it on "insurgents," in order to justify a full military takeover of the region—Lamont and his British sponsors continued to lobby for support for Japan.

Even when full-scale Japanese war against the entire Chinese nation was declared in 1937, as part of the lead-up to World War II, Lamont and his British sponsors opposed any sanctions on Japan, even as they were offering appeasement to Hitler at Munich.

Deal in the Works?

Private diplomacy between China and Japan to cool down the situation is taking place as of this writing. China has proposed that Japan simply acknowledge that China believes it has a claim to the islands, while not giving up Tokyo's own claim, nor its effective control over the area at this time. This has been tentatively agreed to in Tokyo.

However, in the current global strategic and financial crisis, with the world closer to thermonuclear war than at any time in the modern era, normal procedures and processes do not apply. Almost anything could spark a new war, if the underlying causes of the global financial and strategic crisis are not addressed. As *The Economist* wrote in its wishful projection on the potential for a Sino-Japanese war: "Disputes about clumps of rocks could become as significant as the assassination of an archduke."

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