

Beijing Warns Against War with the US. “Disastrous Losses to Both Sides”

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared on Tuesday in Canberra that a war between the United States and China was unthinkable because of the disastrous losses that conflict would bring to both sides. However, the very fact that Wang was questioned about the Trump administration’s belligerent stance toward Beijing is another indication of the growing fears of conflict between the two nuclear-armed powers.

Speaking at a joint press conference with his Australian counterpart Julie Bishop, Wang was asked by an Australian journalist for his reaction to statements by the new US administration signalling “a stronger and even more aggressive posture towards China on a range of issues... How concerned are you really by the possibility of war between the US and China?”

The journalist specifically highlighted the comments of Trump’s top adviser Steve Bannon, predicting war between the US and China in five to ten years over the South China Sea. Bannon, who was speaking last March on the extreme right-wing web site Breitbart, said:

“There is no doubt about that. They’re taking their sandbars and making basically stationary aircraft carriers and putting missiles on those.”

Wang was at pains to play down the danger of war, declaring that despite

“tough or sometimes even irrational failings on China-US relations” over the past four decades, the relationship had “defied all kinds of difficulties and has been moving forward continuously.”

Taking a shot at Bannon, Wang declared:

“Any sober-minded politician, they clearly recognise that there cannot be conflict between China and the United States because both will lose, and both sides cannot afford that.”

However, while continuing the confrontational stance of the previous Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against China, the Trump administration represents a fundamental shift toward a no-holds barred assertion of the interests of American imperialism. Trump’s “America First” demagoguery, which has been directed in particular

against China, signifies a ruthless determination to halt the historic decline of the US in a struggle against rivals and allies alike through all, including military, means.

Moreover, while Yang is dismissive of Bannon, Trump has placed the fascistic, former editor of Breitbart News on the top tier of his National Security Council—that is, the body tasked with responding to emergencies and crises, as well as preparing and overseeing provocations, military interventions and wars.

It is no accident that Bannon focused on the South China Sea, which the Obama administration transformed into a dangerous international flash point through its destabilising interventions into China's territorial disputes with its neighbours. Using China's land reclamation activities on a handful of islets, Obama gave the green light for three "freedom of navigation" operations—that is, the dispatch of US navy destroyers within territorial waters claimed by China.

Trump and his advisers have been critical of the Obama administration's actions for not being forceful enough in confronting Beijing over the South China Sea. In his confirmation hearing, Rex Tillerson, now US Secretary of State, said the Trump administration would "send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and, second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed."

Sending US destroyers within the 12-nautical-mile limits around Chinese islets was a reckless and provocative course that risked a military clash. Tillerson's threat to block Chinese access in its South China Sea could be implemented only by imposing a naval blockade in the disputed waters—a flagrant act of war.

Foreign Minister Wang suggested that the Trump administration in office was already moderating its hard-line, anti-China stance. He pointed out that James Mattis, the new US Defence Secretary, stressed the importance of diplomacy in relation to the South China Sea disputes.

Mattis, who visited South Korea and Japan in his first overseas trip, had already raised tensions with China by concluding an agreement with Seoul to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea and threatening North Korea with "overwhelming" force if it attacked the US and its allies. In Japan, Mattis affirmed that the US would back Japan in any war with China over disputed islets in the East China Sea.

Having provoked angry reactions from Beijing on these two volatile flash-points, Mattis's comments on the South China Sea were relatively low-key. He declared that China's land reclamation activities had "shredded the trust of nations in the region" but the US would exhaust diplomatic efforts to resolve the issues. "At this time, we do not see any need for dramatic military moves," he added.

While publicly calling "at this time" for diplomacy before conflict, privately, according to several news sources, Mattis spoke of far more aggressive military measures to top Japanese officials.

The *Nikkei Asian Review* reported: "Mattis said America would no longer be that tolerant of China's behaviour in the South China Sea. He pledged to take an active role in protecting freedom of navigation... Specifically, the US is set to increase the frequency of patrols within 12 nautical miles of man-made islands China has constructed in the sea."

The newspaper also noted comments by the US defence secretary

“likening China’s expansion today to an effort to re-create the tributary system of the Ming Dynasty... In Mattis’s telling, Beijing could be trying to use its military and economic might to re-create a similar set-up today, though such efforts will not be tolerated in the modern world.”

Confronted with a bellicose US administration and the threat of war, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) veers between trying to appease Washington and engaging in an arms race that only heightens the danger of conflict. A senior official with China’s Central Military Commission, Liu Guoshun, warned last month that “a war within the [US] president’s term, war breaking out tonight, are not just slogans but the reality.”

The Chinese regime, which represents the interests of a tiny ultra-rich elite, is organically incapable of making any appeal to the only social force capable of halting the drive to war—the working class in China, the United States and internationally.

The threats by the Trump administration to implement trade war measures against China, to tear up alliances and multilateral arrangements if they are not in the immediate interests of American imperialism and, above all, to expand and use the US military to enforce American dominance are destabilising the entire region. The disputes in the South China Sea are just one of the triggers that could precipitate a catastrophic war.

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