

U.S. Marshals Military Might To Challenge Asian Century

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Global Research, August 21, 2010

[Stop NATO](#) 21 August 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

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The first decade of what more than a generation ago was predicted to be the Asian Century is winding down, marking ten years since the end of the American Century.

China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy during the second financial quarter of this year and three-quarters of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) nations, the world's largest emerging economies, are entirely or primarily in Asia. During its first heads of state summit in Russia last year, BRIC "urged the creation of a new global financial security system." [1] At the time its members accounted for 15 percent of the global economy and 42 percent of international currency reserves [2] even after the advent of the U.S.-triggered world financial crisis in 2008.

60 percent of humanity lives in Asia and the continent is home to several of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Demographics and economics alike assure a preeminent role for Asia in any natural - which is to say peaceful - course of development.

Asia is in fact part of a broader land mass, Eurasia, which in turn is inextricably connected to the rest of what over a century ago British geographer Halford Mackinder called the World Island: Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The last has recently recorded a population exceeding a billion, making it the second most populous continent.

The Asia-Europe-Africa grouping contains the overwhelming majority of the human race, perhaps as many as 5.6 billion of the world's 6.8 billion inhabitants. The entire Western Hemisphere, by contrast, has a population under one billion and Oceania's numbers are negligible.

But for 500 years a small number of nations in the global West and North, a limited contingent of countries that collectively calls itself the North Atlantic community, has dominated most of the world.

With the demise in 1991 of an eastern power that for decades had presented them with the greatest challenge in their history, the Soviet Union, the major Western states, a coalition of all the main past colonial empires and the new American global superpower united in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization military alliance, viewed the entire world as being ripe for penetration and dominance, starting with the former Eastern European socialist bloc and the territories of the former Soviet Union.

Military formations were used to spread American and Western European influence

throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East – NATO and its numerous partnership programs, U.S. Africa Command, ad hoc “coalitions of the willing” – and into the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea basin, Central Asia and South Asia, in which last location the Pentagon and NATO are waging a nine-year-old war with 150,000 troops.

In the past eleven years the U.S. has obtained military, including missile shield, bases and facilities in parts of the world where the Pentagon had never ensconced itself before: Kosovo, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Israel, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Colombia.

Just since last year the Pentagon has conducted bilateral and multinational military exercises in and off the coasts of nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, East Timor, Finland, Sweden, the Baltic states, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Angola, Burkino Faso, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal and Uganda in addition to traditional Cold War allies and partners, including holding the first large-scale joint war games in Israel.

This month troops from the U.S. and other NATO nations have participated in military exercises in Mongolia and Kazakhstan, which both border Russia and China.

If Asia is superior with regard to economic growth and potential, resources natural and human, and other factors, the U.S. supersedes it in one key category: An overwhelming advantage in military firepower. The world’s largest expeditionary warfighting machine, U.S. Pacific Command, and its biggest naval “permanent forward projection force,” the U.S. Seventh Fleet, both are concentrated on East Asia.

The Pentagon withdrew troops and even closed bases in Asia after the end of the Cold War, but now it is returning.

In addition to three joint naval exercises in as many months – in the Sea of Japan in late July, the South China Sea this month and the Yellow Sea in September – the U.S. is massively expanding military facilities in Guam, has deployed 60 percent of its nuclear submarine fleet to the Pacific region and is considering increasing its naval fleet from 282 to 346 ships to “beef up U.S. maritime power in Asia.” [3]

In recent days Robert Scher, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia, was in the capital of Vietnam to meet with Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Minister of Defense, for the two countries’ “first high-level defense dialogue.”

On August 17, a week after a U.S. warship docked in Vietnam for the two nations’ first joint military exercise, the Pentagon official stated the event was “the next significant historic step in our increasingly robust defense relationship,” and confirmed that the discussions included sharing “impressions of Chinese military modernization.” [4]

The next day the chief of U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Robert Willard, was in the Philippines to meet with defense officials from the host nation including the head of the military, Lieutenant-General Ricardo David, and insisted that “the United States will maintain a presence in the South China Sea for many years,” with what he identified as increasingly “assertive” Chinese actions as the rationale for doing so. [5]

In respect to conflicting Philippine and Chinese claims on the Spratly islands, Willard said that the Pentagon “very much looks forward to working continually” with Manila’s military to ensure it is “shaped just right to meet the needs of this very complex archipelago that’s located in a very strategic area of the world.” [6]

This week the Japanese press announced that the nation’s military will conduct war games in December “simulating the recapture of an isolated island from enemy forces,” the first such exercises by the Self-Defense Forces which are “seen as a response to China’s recent naval expansion.”

The Yomiuri Shimbun revealed that “The island-reclaiming drills will be part of joint exercises with the U.S. military and the U.S. Navy’s 7th Fleet will provide support.” [7]

The drills will be held under a recently elaborated defense program for the Nansei Islands near territory southwest of Okinawa.

On August 19 the Japanese Foreign Ministry said that the Senkaku Islands, contested by Japan and China, are “subject to the Japan-US security treaty” and that Washington and Tokyo would “respond together” to any attack there. The ministry’s press secretary said, “It is natural that Japan and the United States respond together.” [8]

A senior Japanese Defense Ministry official stated “We’ll show China that Japan has the will and the capability to defend the Nansei Islands.” The war games will include “Air Self-Defense Force F-2 fighters, which have advanced air-to-ground and antiship attack capabilities, and Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C antisubmarine patrol aircraft” as well as C-130 Hercules transport planes, airborne brigade units and F-15 Eagle fighters.

“The planned exercises are a groundbreaking move....It will also be a good opportunity to reinforce cooperation between U.S. forces and the SDF.”

An article in the August 20 edition of a major Japanese daily stated: “It must be demonstrated to China, which has been strengthening its military capability and plans to expand its sphere of influence, that the SDF and the U.S. military form a watertight defense array.” [9]

This week Japan’s Defense Ministry said it would “keep paying attention to China’s military trend” and “Taiwan renewed its call...on the U.S. to sell it advanced weaponry as it joined Japan in vowing to keep a close eye on China’s rising military power.”

“Taipei and Tokyo were reacting to the release of a U.S. Defense Department report which warned that China’s expanding capabilities are changing the strategic balance in East Asia.” [10]

On the same day that the preceding account appeared, the Indian press disclosed that New Delhi will order a “large” amount of U.S. Javelin third generation anti-tank guided missiles used in last year’s Yudh Abhyas 2009 bilateral combat exercises with 1,000 U.S. and Indian troops, which featured “17 Stryker vehicles - the largest deployment of the vehicles outside of Iraq and Afghanistan,” and which showcased “the Javelin Anti-Tank Missile system, employed to defeat current and future threat armored combat vehicles.” [11]

Regarding the proposed Javelin acquisition, one of India’s main newspapers wrote: “Much to

the dismay of Russians and Europeans, India is increasingly taking the FMS [foreign military sales] route to ink big arms deals with the US. The biggest on the verge of finalisation...is for 10 C-17 Globemaster-III giant strategic airlift for upwards of \$3 billion." [12] President Barack Obama is scheduled to visit India in November to secure further arms deals which by some reports will establish the U.S. as the nation's main weapons supplier, replacing Russia in that role.

On August 19 one of Australia's main newspapers carried an opinion piece by Greg Sheridan, recently appointed by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. its Australian Scholar, in which he wrote:

"The US has five full military treaty allies in Asia: Japan, South Korea, Thailand, The Philippines and Australia, and one de facto ally, Singapore, and an increasingly critical strategic relationship with India.

"It is also developing a strong strategic relationship with Vietnam....It is also working hard on Indonesia and Malaysia...."

He quoted U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates at June's Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore affirming that "My government's overriding obligation to allies, partners and the region is to reaffirm America's security commitments in the region....The strength of US commitment and deterrent power will be expressed through the continued forward presence of substantial US forces in the region." Sheridan added, "You can't get much more explicit than that" concerning the "complex security equation in the Asia-Pacific."

The Australian analyst summed up his argument by calling for "a greater US naval and air force presence" in Darwin on the Timor Sea. [13]

The rise of a dynamic, integrated and dominant Asia in this century is inevitable and inexorable. Any attempt to retard or thwart it by military force from outside the continent will produce catastrophic consequences.

Notes

- 1) Voice of Russia, June 17, 2009
- 2) Russian Information Agency Novosti, June 17, 2009
- 3) U.S. Expands Asian NATO To Contain And Confront China
Stop NATO, August
- 4) Agence France-Presse, August 17, 2010
- 5) Chosun Ilbo, August 20, 2010
- 6) Bloomberg News, August 18, 2010
- 7) Yomiuri Shimbun, August 20, 2010
- 8) Agence France-Presse, August 19, 2010
- 9) Yomiuri Shimbun, August 20, 2010
- 10) Agence France-Presse, August 17, 2010
- 11) Embassy of the United States, India, October 19, 2009
- 12) Times of India, August 17, 2010
- 13) The Australian, August 19, 2010

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