

US Defense Secretary Threatens Russia and China

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US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter delivered a pointed warning of future wars Saturday in an address to a forum at the Reagan Library in southern California. The reckless and provocative character of the Pentagon chief's speech is underscored by the targets of his saber-rattling: Russia, with the world's second largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, and China with the third.

The subject of the forum was the restructuring of the military-intelligence apparatus to deal with the threats that strategists for US imperialism anticipate in the coming years. As Carter noted, "After 14 years of counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism—two skills we want to retain—we are in the middle of a strategic transition to respond to the security challenges that will define our future."

Giving only brief mention of the ongoing US wars in Afghanistan and against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Carter said he wanted "to focus my remarks this afternoon on another kind of innovation for the future, which is how we're responding to Russia, one source of today's turbulence, and China's rise, which is driving a transition in the Asia-Pacific."

Carter paid tribute to the warmongering of the Reagan administration (1981-1989) in which he served, holding his first Pentagon job as an aide to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. He credited Reagan with a military buildup that contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, particularly "America's support for the mujahedeen in Afghanistan," although Carter was diplomatically silent about this support giving rise to Al Qaeda.

The defense secretary claimed that both Russia and China, in different ways, were challenging the foundations of international order laid down by successive US administrations throughout the period since the end of World War II. "The principles that serve as that order's foundation," he said, "including peaceful resolution of disputes, freedom from coercion, respect for state sovereignty, freedom of navigation and overflight—are not abstractions, nor are they subject to the whims of any one country."

Actually, those principles have been systematically violated by the US in war after war over the quarter century since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was the existence of the USSR, not any respect for "principles," that set limits to the depredations of US imperialism.

From 1991 on, Washington has felt itself empowered—its strategists wrote openly of a "unipolar moment" in world history—to use military force in an increasingly unrestrained and reckless fashion. Wars and other military interventions have followed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Haiti, Yemen and now Syria, along with the ongoing buildup of US forces along the western border of Russia and the coastal waters of China.

Towards the end of his speech, Carter referred in passing to the “more than 450,000 men and women serving abroad, in every domain, in the air, ashore and afloat.” That figure exceeds the total number of troops deployed by all other countries in the world outside their own borders. By itself, that number demonstrates the basic reality of 21st century global politics: US imperialism considers itself the policeman of the world, entitled to intervene in any country, to bomb and kill at will, against any challenge to its domination.

According to Carter, “Russia appears intent to play spoiler by flouting these principles and the international community. Meanwhile, China is a rising power, and growing more ambitious in its objectives and capabilities.”

After denouncing Russia for “violating sovereignty in Ukraine and Georgia”—actions which, however bankrupt, pale by comparison with the US invasion and destruction of Iraq—and for its recent intervention in Syria, Carter raised the danger of what he called “Moscow’s nuclear saber-rattling,” which he said “raises questions about Russia’s leaders’ commitment to strategic stability, their respect for norms against the use of nuclear weapons, and whether they respect the profound caution nuclear-age leaders showed with regard to the brandishing of nuclear weapons.”

Carter used this nonexistent danger to justify the vast US expansion of its own nuclear arsenal, by far the world’s largest, in an Obama administration initiative now estimated to cost more than \$300 billion.

He then hinted enthusiastically at the potential of new weapons for use against Russia, including “new unmanned systems, a new long-range bomber, and innovation in technologies like the electromagnetic railgun, lasers, and new systems for electronic warfare, space and cyberspace, including a few surprising ones that I really can’t describe here.”

The defense secretary reiterated the US commitment to Article V of the NATO charter, which requires an all-out war by NATO in the event of a conflict between Russia and one of the Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, each ruled by rabidly anti-Russian cliques and with large Russian-speaking minorities. Few citizens of the United States—or Britain or Germany, for that matter—realize that their governments are committed to war with a nuclear-armed Russia in the event of a border clash with Estonia.

Carter also hailed recent NATO exercises, including Trident Juncture, simulating a Russian invasion of one of the NATO countries in Eastern Europe, in which 4,000 American troops participated. He also noted, “[W]e’re providing equipment and training to aid Ukraine’s military as it confronts Russian-supported insurgents in Eastern Ukraine.” This includes training forces from neo-Nazi militia groups now integrated into the Ukrainian military.

On China, Carter was less openly confrontational, and he revealed that he had accepted an invitation from Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Beijing in 2016. Militaristic rhetoric was unnecessary, however, since he was coming straight from a well-publicized appearance on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt. The ship is one of the American aircraft carriers redeployed from the Middle East to the Pacific as part of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” aimed at confronting China with a massive military buildup.

The visit to the aircraft carrier took place shortly after a US destroyer, the USS Lassen, made a provocative sally in Chinese waters around an islet in the South China Sea, not far from

the carrier task force. The US deliberately challenged the 12-mile limit China has declared around its islets in that sea, on the grounds that the islets are either manmade or have been artificially expanded.

Responding to questions in media reports about whether the US Navy engaged in what is technically known as “innocent passage,” which would concede Chinese territorial claims, or a “freedom of navigation exercise,” which asserts that the waters are international, not Chinese, Carter made it clear that it was the latter.

He emphasized the connection between the repositioning of US military assets to the Pacific, the establishment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an anti-Chinese trade bloc dominated by the US and Japan, and the buildup of US alliances in the region. He added, “We are also changing fundamentally our operational plans and approaches to deter aggression, fulfill our statutory obligations to Taiwan, defend allies, and prepare for a wider range of contingencies in the region than we have traditionally.”

Just as important as the rampant militarism of Carter’s speech was its bipartisan character. Carter is a lifelong Democrat, and his threats to Russia and China have the full backing of the liberal wing of the US ruling elite. His remarks were not impromptu or offhand comments, but part of a carefully prepared, deliberately bipartisan event, a forum on the “Force of the Future” sponsored by the Reagan Foundation, which operates the presidential library in Simi Valley, outside Los Angeles.

The Obama administration was represented by Carter, his deputy Robert Work and Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John McCain and House Armed Forces Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry represented the congressional Republicans.

The permanent security apparatus, which calls the shots regardless of which party occupies the White House, was represented by no less than three of the five members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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