

East Asia: Japan takes role as Washington's deputy

Thursday 18 January 2007, by [CHENG Eva](#) (Date first published: 4 May 2005).

As Washington's scaremongering about the "threat" posed to the Western world by China's economy has been broadened to include painting Beijing as a military threat, Japan is emerging as one of the US's regional bullies.

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During the last few years, the administration led by US President George Bush has stepped up the China-bashing, particularly alleging that the country is artificially keeping its currency weak, thus benefiting Chinese exports, as evidence of an imminent danger to US economic supremacy. More recently, however, Washington has aggressively tried to create the impression that China is a dire military threat. This is despite the US military budget — US\$399 billion for fiscal 2004 and \$420.7 billion for fiscal 2005 — being nearly as big as the rest of the world put together and over eight times that of China.

China: a rising 'threat'

In mid-January, Condoleezza Rice used her confirmation testimony as the new secretary of state to set a critical tone on China. Stating that the US has "considerable differences about values" with China, she said that the new administration will police China to ensure it fulfils its obligations as a member of the World Trade Organisation.

On February 7 in Tokyo, under-secretary of state John Bolton, after thanking Japan for its "strong leadership role in the world", reprimanded Beijing for not doing enough to control the arms export by Chinese companies, stating it has no hesitation in using "sanctions to try and persuade China".

Bolton took pride in the fact that while Bill Clinton's administration only sanctioned Chinese companies eight times between 1992-2000, Bush's regime has done so 62 times in its first four years, adding "the US [arms] embargo is as comprehensive as is Japan's".

On February 16, CIA director Porter Goss told a Senate committee that "improved Chinese capabilities threaten US forces in the region". He said, disapprovingly, that China was "increasingly confident and active in the international stage, trying to ... counter what it sees as US efforts to contain or encircle China".

On February 19, the US and Japan issued a joint statement, noting against the backdrop of "excellent" cooperative relations between the two countries, that the Taiwan Strait is a "common

strategic concern". It also endorsed "Japan's active engagement to improve the international security environment", and expressed the US's strong support for Japan's bid to be a UN Security Council permanent member.

On March 17, US Defense Intelligence Agency director Vice-Admiral Lowell Jacoby hinted at a Senate committee hearing that one of China's real "crimes" was not having danced well enough to Washington's tune. Jacoby said: "Beijing remains concerned over US presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Beijing may also think it has an opportunity to improve diplomatic and economic relations, to include access to energy sources, with other countries distrustful or resentful of US policy."

In Tokyo on March 19, Rice continued the negative tone about China. She described China as a "rising factor" which has the potential "for good or for bad" and that it was US "responsibility" to "push and prod" and "persuade" it. Rice also made clear that the US's separate alliances with Japan, South Korea and India were "important in creating an environment in which China is more likely to play a positive role"

These zealous efforts serve one central objective: to portray China as a rising threat while assuring that "democracy defenders" such as the US and Japan are there with their military might to make sure "evil" China is kept in place.

Despite China going capitalist, the US empire still uses it as a bogey to justify its own military and economic domination of the world.

Japan: a rising 'white knight'

On March 19 in Tokyo, Rice described the US relationship with Japan as a "broad alliance" that "has provided an impetus for Japan to take on a global role ... that the [Japan's] Self-Defense Forces are carrying on, for instance, in Iraq". Japan's so-called humanitarian operations in Afghanistan and Iraq mark the country's first engagement in a combat zone since it committed to a "peace constitution" after WWII.

Continuing the imperialist tone, Rice asserted that "America's [military] presence in Japan ... is the umbrella under which Asia continues its transition and its changes".

In an April 2 article published on the Centre for Research on Globalisation website, William Engdahl argued that the US is seeking to use Japan as a proxy against North Korea and China, and is nurturing Tokyo's military ambitions. Engdahl further observed: "In addition to changing the Japanese Constitution recently to allow 'out-of-area' military missions, i.e., not Japan defense related, Tokyo is also in advanced talks with the Pentagon on building enhanced US command and control base facilities in Japan and cooperation on missile defense as well as force deployment."

Spoiling for a fight

Given Washington's favour, it is not too difficult to understand why Tokyo has gone overtime recently to provoke confrontations with nearly all its north-east Asian neighbours.

The recent flare up of anti-Japan protests in China and South Korea were portrayed in Western corporate media as due merely to Japan's new attempts to whitewash in Japanese school textbooks its war crime in Asia during WWII. They dutifully regurgitated Japanese right-wing commentators'

arguments that Japan has already “apologised” many times over the years, trying to blame the protesters for being “unreasonable”.

In light of the recent protests, Japan’s PM Junichiro Koizumi pulled another stunt on April 22 during the Asian-African Summit in Jakarta by declaring that Japan felt “deep remorse and heartfelt apology” for the country’s “colonial rule and aggressiveness”. But on the same day, 168 Japanese MPs visited the Yasukuni Shrine, the supposed “spiritual home” of many of Japan’s prominent wartime criminals.

Understandably, many Asians believe such visits affirm the “glory” of Japan’s militarist past in defiance of protests from other Asian countries. Koizumi himself has visited the shrine almost every year since becoming PM in 2001.

Japan’s “apologies” are not backed with any justice for the shrinking pool of ageing victims of Japan’s war crimes. Japan brutally forced tens of thousands of women in Asia to serve as sex slaves for its Imperial Army, and numerous attempts by surviving victims to seek redress had been rejected. On March 18, despite acknowledging that two such Chinese former sex slaves had been raped and suffered psychological and physical injuries, Tokyo’s High Court rejected an appeal for compensation from the two victims. It cited a 20-year statutory limit to civil lawsuits as excuse.

Japan’s Imperial Army left in China a huge amount of chemical weapons. Tokyo has ignored numerous calls to remove them.

Far from conceding to demands to amend the textbooks, Japan has gone on the offensive. On March 4, Japan’s foreign minister, Nobutaka Machimura, accused China of inculcating “anti-Japan” sentiment among Chinese students through “biased” history education. Despite repeated anti-Japan mass protests in South Korea and China in March and April, Machimura upped the ante on April 25, declaring that Tokyo will launch an official probe into Chinese and South Korean history books for “biased” views.

In December, in Japan’s latest defence guidelines, Tokyo provocatively named China as a potential threat.

Then there has been Tokyo’s efforts over the last few months to simultaneously escalate tension with Russia, China and South Korea over long-standing territorial disputes. All these disputed resulted from previous Japanese attempts at colonisation, and the fact that it was not clearly spelled out what conquests Japan renounced at the end of the Second world war.

The dispute with Russia relates to the Kurils/Northern Territories (Russian and Japanese names respectively) — four mostly inhabited islands north of Japan. The wrangle with China is over Diaoyutai/Senkaku (Chinese and Japanese names respectively) — eight uninhabited islets between Taiwan and Okinawa — as well as the maritime boundary in the East China Sea. The contention with South Korea evolves around Tokdo/Takeshima (Korean and Japanese names respectively), some uninhabited islets in the sea between the two countries.

Engdahl observed in his April 2 article: “Pentagon hawks refer to Japan as the ‘England of the Far East’, a reference to the wartime and current US-UK historic ‘special relationship’ in military and other strategic affairs.” Undoubtedly a permanent seat at the UN Security Council would help Japan to perfect the job.

P.S.

From: International News, Green Left Weekly issue #625 4 May 2005.