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Diplomacy via B52s

Obama's Pacific-First Strategy

by NORMAN POLLACK

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China's air defense identification zone is all the rage in US national-security discussions and planning, a true godsend because furnishing pretext for heightening and accelerating the American geopolitical project embedded in the doctrine and being executed in the now-visible and already-famous *pivot* of military "assets" to the Pacific theater-of-war—yes, that, if carrier battle groups, long-range bombers, military alliances and joint maneuvers in the region mean anything at all. POTUS and his new Secretary of State are busy, scouring the globe for real and potential opposition to continued American political-economic-military-ideological hegemony, a task made difficult by the fact that American capitalism is slipping internally while the international structure of power is changing beyond US control into a multipolar framework and the resulting dispersal of power so that unilateralism is no longer possible.

The Middle East is a sideshow to the real scene of action: CHINA. Toughness with respect to Iran (the US, despite a show of negotiation, will continue to generate roadblocks to a settlement,

thereby maintaining intact its alliance system with “friends and allies,” including the overlooking of Egyptian atrocities) is intended as an object-lesson to the world as to American military virility. Yet, not entirely a sideshow, and more a base of operations which, nailed-down as a secure sphere of influence, allows the US the staging area for exerting pressure, part of Pacific-first, on China from the other side—a giant vise, on land, west to east, by sea, east to west, with suitable military bases for support, along with naval power, for mounting a pincer-like movement or formation. To what end? Even the vulturish national-security team doesn’t seem to know.

Burnishing predatory credentials, stoking the fires of huge defense expenditures, keeping in the foreground counterterrorism as a way of forging trade-partnerships across both oceans while simultaneously using massive surveillance at home to serve ultimately as the chilling of dissent, these all have a part to play in the power move toward China. But at rock-bottom, China is being cast as The Enemy, *a la* vintage Cold War mentality, both to preserve American global hegemony and, now more than previously, hide the evidences of US capitalism’s decline—decline at the hands of two self-created systemic trends: the financialization and militarization of capitalism, one the distortion that is eroding manufacturing capacity and capability, the other, the vast overextension of resources at home and belligerent accompaniment of market-penetration abroad.

First then, down to specifics in the last few days. Tania Branigan, writing from Beijing in the *Guardian* (Nov. 27), begins: “The open challenge by the US to China’s new air defence zone over the East China Sea was met by muted response in Beijing, as China faced growing resistance to its attempt to extend its authority in the region.” My query: Is China’s attempt to extend its regional authority (i.e., sovereignty over the disputed Senaku or Diaoyu islands with Japan) the real issue, or, as I believe, are both the Abe government’s re-militarizing of Japan in violation of its Constitution and Obama’s military deployment of forces to the Pacific primarily responsible for its actions?

Provocation lies largely on one side, as I’ll try to show, with these islands merely chess pieces on a board—threatening major conflagration—on which not only China and Japan are players, but also, complicating matters, the US and South Korea, with other nations, India, North Korea, possibly sucked in, and, if war should break out, impossible to escape.

The two B52s flying through the zone were obviously testing China’s will (and illustrated the practicality of round-trip missions from Guam, where their flight originated), unarmed, for this

occasion, yet making the point that courtesy had no place, i.e., the failure to identify themselves, customary in crossing such zones. There was “no attempted contact” by the Chinese military. Immediately, Australia jumped in, as though by prearrangement, and called in China’s ambassador “to voice its concerns.”

Psaki, US State’s spokesperson, might have been looking in the mirror when she charged that China’s complaint would “raise regional tensions and increase the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents”—the very things American battleships, aircraft carriers, B52s, incitement of Japan to rearm, US-Philippine joint-maneuvers, were actually accomplishing. The White House called the zone “unnecessarily inflammatory,” a theme picked up by the think tanks, along with the charge that Xi Jinping was using the zone as a diversion to hide the Communist Party’s lackluster economic performance.

Here Branigan adds, China is counting intrusions to its zone just as Japan is, to its zone, and further, the salient admission which should have come earlier: “China’s weekend announcement may also be in part a response to Japan’s *extension of its own zone this spring* and its recent warning that it was willing to shoot down unmanned drones it regarded as a threat to its airspace.” (Italics, mine) The article hints in conclusion that entering the zone may have to do with cyberespionage. From the People’s Daily, she paraphrases the views of Li Jie that “US flights sought to test China’s reaction, to discourage future interference as it continued [a direct quote] ‘reconnaissance, patrolling, and spying on Chinese information....’” A not unfounded assumption, in light of NSA operations elsewhere.

Next, I should like to present important background documentation which makes intelligible the Chinese response to what can be termed (and perceived as such by them, from credible evidence of the Pacific-first strategy in operation) US-inspired isolation, encirclement, and containment of China, assuming the form increasingly of utilizing military means, in conjunction primarily with Japan and, despite its enmity toward Japan for World War II atrocities, including the sexual enslavement of its women, South Korea.

I refer to the US State Department’s communiqué, “Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee: Toward a More Robust Alliance and Greater Shared Responsibilities,” issued Oct. 3, 2013, signed by Kerry, Hagel, at Defense, and their Japanese counterparts, respectively, Kashida and Onodera. In sum, this is the paradigm of American encouragement of Japan’s rearmament, a bilateral agreement expressing the common purpose of Obama and Abe that a “robust” (I shudder whenever I see the word, usually in a military context) position toward China be

undertaken, codified to every jot and tittle even including the acquisition and employment of military hardware.

Although there was an earlier warning, in the memoirs of a Japanese former defense official, that the US was seeking to encourage, expressly in violation of Japan's Constitution, the construction of a nuclear weapon (specifically with China the designated enemy), the present Joint Statement, non-nuclear to be sure, nevertheless is fully intended to put Japan on a war-footing, indeed, conceptualizes a US-Japan Far East, with China odd-man-out, a partnership being projected every bit as close (yet like so much about the Obama administration, kept largely secretive) as with NATO.

The Joint Statement, identifying the signatories, begins: "On the occasion of this historic meeting, the SCC [Security Consultative Committee] reaffirmed the indispensable role our two countries play in the maintenance of international peace and security and reconfirmed the Alliance's commitment to the security of Japan *through the full range of U.S. military capabilities, including nuclear and conventional.*" (Italics, mine) This was no ordinary agreement, if the nuclear umbrella means anything at all. The succeeding flourish, tacitly linking free markets with social democracy, and implicitly, excluding China from the bounteous prosperity to come (the Trans-Pacific Partnership in fact excludes China from membership): "The two sides also set forth a strategic vision that, reflecting our shared values of democracy, the rule of law, free and open markets, and respect for human rights, will effectively promote peace, security, stability and economic prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region."

This is a heady brew, especially for a military document; the "shared values" appear ill-fitting in drawing the two powers together, given Abe's strident nationalism (with its strong element of militarism) and the paean to free and open markets—or perhaps not so strange, the militarism-markets nexus tightly drawn in US alliance-building, actually inseparable where there is resistance to market-penetration. However, it is the "evolving security environment" (itself not a stranger to market considerations) which draws Kerry & Company's notice, the need for taking "several steps to upgrade significantly the capability of the U.S.-Japan Alliance"—gobbledygook, repeated ad infinitum throughout the document, for absorbing Japan within a military partnership, and extended to subsequently wider alliance systems, where the commonly used term "regional" is code for the China threat/menace.

The US casts itself as the cheerleader for Japan's now-awakening military propensities under Abe, but given his election and presumed popularity, and US pressures in this direction, one

finds that America's urgings on Japan go back, I surmise, at least two decades, meaning, Obama, as in so much else, is carrying forward and *intensifying* the policies of his predecessors, and that Abe's own election can be attributed to a residual militarism in influential quarters (and possibly the broader electorate) to account for his actions.

Thus it continues, "Our strategic vision for a more robust Alliance and greater *shared* responsibilities is to be based on...[the upward revision of previous guidelines for] Defense Cooperation, expanding security and defense cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region *and beyond*, and approving new measures that support the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. The United States also welcomed Japan's determination to contribute more *proactively* to regional peace and security. The Ministers stressed the importance of *multilateral cooperation with regional and international partners*." (Italics, mine) I can already see the naval cadets marching in review (as in a recent BBC clip) and, as we note momentarily from the document, the war-planning apparatus (copying that of the US) installed in place. Through US involvement Japan is experiencing a long-term attitudinal change, China serving as scapegoat igniting forbidden thoughts in the wake of World War II of hegemonic influence.

I am frankly surprised at the agreed-upon formalization of design and purpose, a societal transformation for Japan, a willing partner for the military-expansionist aspirations of the US, as though, here, the Far East would become a joint-protectorate, excluding and at the expense of China, a policy trend occurring for some time, until now, under the radar, and making the region, insofar as acute tension is concerned, another Middle East, with Japan the New Israel, possibly even more-joined-at-the-hip than the original. The acknowledgment of the pivot is straightforward: "As the United State continues to implement its rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region it intends to strengthen military capabilities that allow our Alliance to respond to future global and regional security challenges, including in emerging strategic domains such as space and cyberspace."

What security challenges? Hardly North Korea, or for that matter, India; only China is the prime candidate. With this alignment, war is peace: "Japan's security policy continues to reflect its long-standing commitment to regional and global peace and stability, as well as its intentions *to make more proactive contributions* to addressing the challenges faced by the international community. At the same time, Japan will continue *coordinating closely* with the United States *to expand its role within the framework* of the U.S.-Japan Alliance."

Like “robust,” the term “proactive” makes one want to seek cover, particularly when doing the business of the international community (aka, EU, NATO, etc.) is involved; but more important, the supposed granting of equal standing in the partnership (coordinating closely, expanding its role) further attaches Japan as an appendage to America’s confrontation with China (like “our partners” first in Iraq and then in Afghanistan). I promised the nitty-gritty: “Japan is also preparing to establish its National Security Council and to issue its National Security Strategy.”

These, of course, have a single intended purpose, and peace is not it. Immediately succeeding, the document refers obliquely to the necessity to amend the Constitution, so that military preparation is legitimated: “In addition, it is re-examining the legal basis for its security including the matter of exercising *its right of collective self-defense*, expanding its defense budget, reviewing its National Defense Program Guidelines, strengthening its capability to defend its sovereign territory, and broadening *regional contributions*, including capacity-building efforts vis-à-vis Southeast Asian countries.” (Italics, mine) This meticulous list leaves little more to be desired, confirming (one wonders if the Japanese public is in the dark as much as the American, about this war-provoking readiness and the consequences for the domestic political-social agenda and international obligations under the agreement) the cumulating state of Japan’s militarism, subjoined to America’s own geopolitical priorities.

The US is taking no chances, in for the pound not for the penny (projecting the same decade-long time span as Obama’s 2024 plan for US forces in Afghanistan), and taking for the close coordination of forces a still closer condition, an “interoperable...force posture,” between, among, in the midst—in sum, hand-in-hand marching toward the glories of empire, or at least seeking mutual advantage and possibly more in the international system. Hence, “To accomplish our *shared strategic vision* for the Alliance against the backdrop of a complex regional security environment, the Ministers recognized that the Alliance is the cornerstone of peace and security in the region. Over the next decade, the Alliance intends to continue to address security challenges through close cooperation and a more interoperable and flexible force posture that enables side-by-side and agile contingency response and *crisis management*.” (Italics, mine)

The jargon is compelling, from “the cornerstone of peace and security in the region,” hubristic and grandiose in tone, China now left out, to, if not the Halls of Montezuma or the Shores of Tripoli, then, addressing security challenges by means of an agile contingency response, we have a partially-coded exhortation to once again militarize and join the club—entirely with America’s approval: “The United States welcomed these efforts and reiterated its commitment to collaborate closely with Japan.”

Not to be undone, the document's overview concludes: "The United States and Japan resolve to be full partners in a more balanced and effective Alliance in which the two countries can jointly and ably rise to meet the regional and global challenges of the 21st century, by investing in cutting-edge capabilities, improving interoperability, *modernizing force structures*, and adapting Alliance roles and missions to meet contemporary and future security realities. To this end, our Alliance should emphasize improved cooperation and coordination, including information security equipment and technology, cyber security, and space security, in order to broaden and deepen cooperation across *a wide range* of Alliance issues." This, only the overview—the document has numerous sections implemental in character, from removing the 3,000 Marines from Okinawa (for reasons not printable in polite circles) to new and replacement squadrons for beefing up military capacity and capability.

My *New York Times* Comment on Thom Shanker's article, "U.S. Sends Two B-52 Bombers Into Air Zone Claimed by China" (Nov. 27), an even-handed account, although with emphasis on the two disputed islands, to the background and flyover incident I have been describing, follows:

This is not Xi vs. Abe, still less, some desolate islands where only goats roam, this is geopolitics big time, with, yes, the pivot doing what Obama and his national security advisers want: to provoke a confrontation with China. It has been in the works for some time, symptomatic of the US realization that it is no longer exclusively #1 in global political-economic affairs, and must begin to share its power with others in, now, a multipolar world, including China, Russia, Brazil, and, anxious to return to its militaristic ways, and therefore a fit partner for America in the Pacific, Japan.

We would not see China's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) were it not for Obama's military build-up in Asia, the Pacific-first strategy (aka rebalance) designed to—what? Unclear, because the utter destruction of China—now Obama's new obsession, along with that of his Strangelovian friends—seems beyond US capability, but certainly, pen it in, humiliate it, bully it, tighten military alliances surrounding it. Drone assassination nearby doesn't seem to appease Obama's appetite, nor does 2024 in Afghanistan, both of which are part of the China-containment policy. Nothing less than Asia as an American sphere of influence, the dumping ground of US commercial penetration, the cheap workshop for outsourced American industry, and expansion for its own sake, all prerequisites to returning the US to a position of unilateral world hegemony.