

# US vice president issues bellicose diatribe against China

By Bill Van Auken  
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US Vice President Mike Pence delivered a blistering diatribe against China Thursday designed to ratchet up already intense economic and military tensions that have produced a growing trade war and increasingly dangerous confrontations between US and Chinese forces in the South China Sea.

The speech came amid reports that the Pentagon is preparing to launch a massive and provocative series of military exercises centered in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait next month as a direct challenge to China.

CNN quoted military sources as saying that the Pentagon was planning a “global show of force as a warning to China and to demonstrate the US is prepared to deter and counter their military actions.”

An unprecedented concentration of US military forces would be deployed in back-to-back exercises staged over the course of one week, the CNN report states. US warships and combat planes, as well as ground troops, would be mobilized for the operation.

While military officials acknowledged that Beijing sees even far smaller exercises in the region as provocations and that there are “concerns about reactions from China,” the Pentagon has “no intention to engage in combat with the Chinese.”

Of course, such a statement of purported intent is itself an acknowledgement that US imperialism is risking just that: a military confrontation between two major nuclear-armed powers.

China’s state-owned tabloid *Global Times* issued an ominous response to the report of the planned exercises: “As the US continues to provoke, it will face stronger reactions from the PLA [People’s Liberation Army], and the warships of the two sides will be drawn closer in the situation of confrontation. If that happens, China-US strategic relations and peace in the Asia-Pacific will be in the hands of pilots, ship commanders, and even chief engineers. Peace and stability could be on the edge of collapse at some point. If Washington wants to play this way, China will have to respond accordingly.”

Pence’s speech served to provide a reactionary and duplicitous justification for Washington’s plans for military escalation.

Expanding on the provocative allegation made by US President Donald Trump at the United Nations Security

Council last week that Beijing was interfering in the US midterm elections, Pence claimed that China is “pursuing a comprehensive and coordinated campaign to undermine support for the President, our agenda, and our nation’s most cherished ideals.”

He delivered the speech to a right-wing Washington, DC think tank, the Hudson Institute. Founded by former Rand Corporation strategist Herman Kahn, known for his advocacy of a “winnable” nuclear war and reputedly the real-life inspiration for film character Dr. Strangelove, the institute has long advocated an aggressive military posture toward China.

Mixing together crude anticommunism, economic nationalism and outright military threats, Pence’s speech resembled nothing so much as the kind of tirades delivered by the McCarthyite Republican right at the height of the Cold War.

Charging China with military “aggression,” Pence cited an incident last Sunday in which the USS Decatur, a guided missile destroyer, deliberately sailed within 12 nautical miles of Chinese-claimed territory in the South China Sea as part of a so-called “freedom of navigation” operation. It was confronted by a Chinese destroyer, with the two vessels coming within 45 feet of each other.

“Despite such reckless harassment, the United States Navy will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows and our national interests demand,” Pence declared. “We will not be intimidated; we will not stand down.” Indeed, as the CNN report indicates, Washington is preparing far more massive and dangerous provocations.

“China now spends as much on its military as the rest of Asia combined, and Beijing has prioritized capabilities to erode America’s military advantages—on land, at sea, in the air, and in space,” Pence said.

Of course, the American vice president neglected to mention that Beijing’s military spending amounts to barely a third of the amount allocated by Washington.

“China has initiated an unprecedented effort to influence American public opinion, the 2018 elections, and the environment leading into the 2020 presidential election,” Pence said. “To put it bluntly, President Trump’s leadership is working, and China wants a different American president.

China is meddling in America's democracy.”

“To that end, Beijing has mobilized covert actors, front groups, and propaganda outlets to shift Americans' perception of Chinese policies,” the vice-president added.

The attempts by Pence to substantiate these charges alternated between ludicrous and sinister. Exhibit A was a four-page paid supplement taken out by the Chinese government—and identified as such—in the *Des Moines Register*, described by the vice president as “the paper of record in the home state of our Ambassador to China, and a pivotal state in 2018.” While consisting largely of innocuous articles on “Xi's fun days in Iowa” and Kung Fu, the supplement included a single piece suggesting that the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods and the threat to double them will damage the economic interests of people in both countries.

Cited by Pence as a measure of menacing Chinese influence was the digital altering of an abysmal 2012 remake of the equally mindless and reactionary 1984 potboiler “Red Dawn” to change the villains invading America into North Koreans rather than Chinese, thereby making the film marketable in China.

Pence also, however, targeted the more than 300,000 Chinese students studying in the US and Chinese student organizations as potential “fronts” to be countered as Washington puts the US on a war footing against China and its threat to US economic dominance.

The threats and bullying were peppered with hypocritical expressions of concern for human rights in China and charges that the ruling Chinese Communist Party is carrying out a virtual pogrom against Christians, “tearing down crosses” and “burning Bibles.”

He demanded that Google immediately halt the development of its “Dragonfly” search engine for the Chinese market on the grounds that it would facilitate “censorship and compromise the privacy” of users, ignoring the fact that the US government is engaged in precisely such efforts—with the full complicity of Google and other technology companies.

Pence claimed that an unnamed “senior career member of our intelligence community” had told him that “what the Russians are doing pales in comparison to what China is doing across the country.”

The remark was interpreted by some sections of the media as an attempt by the Trump administration to deflect from special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian “meddling” in the US election and possible complicity on the part of the Trump campaign.

The US ruling establishment has been torn since the 2016 election by a bitter conflict between those layers, centered around the Democratic Party and influential sections of the US intelligence apparatus, that have insisted that Washington direct its main fire against Russia in the struggle for predominance in the Middle East and the broader Eurasian landmass, and those

demanding that China, US imperialism's principal economic rival, be the main target.

Significantly, Pence framed his remarks from the outset within the parameters of the “National Security Strategy” document unveiled by the Trump administration last December that made “great power competition” and countering so-called “revisionist states,” i.e., Russia and China, the new axis of US global strategy, supplanting the so-called “war on terror.”

He boasted of the Pentagon's \$716 billion budget, declaring: “We're modernizing our nuclear arsenal, we're fielding and developing new cutting-edge fighters and bombers, we're building a new generation of aircraft carriers and warships, and we're investing as never before in our Armed Forces. This includes initiating the process to establish the United States Space Force to ensure our continued dominance in space ...”

Pence's speech and the revelation that the Pentagon is preparing an unprecedented set of provocative military maneuvers off China's coast follows by just days the statement by Washington's ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, that the US is prepared to “take out” Russian missiles, raising the specter of a preemptive strike that could trigger an all-out nuclear war.

Underlying Washington's pursuit of trade war and its growing threat of direct military confrontation with the world's other two major nuclear powers, Russia and China, is an increasingly desperate bid by US imperialism to reverse its protracted economic decline from its former position of global dominance.

The recklessness and bullying of Trump and Pence are merely a political expression of this immensely dangerous and destabilizing factor in world affairs, which can be successfully countered only by means of the international mobilization of the working class against war and its root cause, the outmoded capitalist system.

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