



INSIDE

- Herbal cures on the Belt and Road > p12
- New challenges for Chinese diplomacy > p15

EDITORIAL

US bullying doomed to failure

It would be wrong for Washington to consider China's tolerance of its provocations as a sign of weakness. This would be dangerous. Washington should know by now that China will never give an inch when it comes to its territory.

As China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said on June 6, China will not be intimidated no matter how many warships or bombers the United States sends to the South China Sea.

She was speaking after the US

air force confirmed that two B-52 bombers conducted exercises near China's Nansha Islands, and Washington is reportedly considering sending an aircraft carrier battle group through the Taiwan Straits.

These are just the latest provocative moves of the US. They join a long list, including the so-called freedom of navigation operations by its warships in the vicinity of or even within China's territorial waters in the South China Sea, its sales of weapons to Taiwan, its new "Taiwan Travel Act", and its officials'

or military officers' rhetoric about a "China threat".

It is all reminiscent of its past gunboat diplomacy.

However, as Hua said, if someone keeps displaying their muscles on your doorstep and peering through your windows, would you ignore it or would you take action?

The reiterations by Chinese leaders on numerous occasions that the country's rise is peaceful and it has no intention to subvert the current international order seem never enough to alleviate the suspi-

cions of Washington that China is a threat to US supremacy.

China knows how important its relations with the US are, not only to the interests of both countries but also to the peace and development of the world. And because of this, it tries as much as it can to keep the differences and even disputes with the US under control.

It always puts the large picture of China-US relations as well as the world situation before its grievances on specific matters.

But that does not mean it will

concede ground due to Washington's strong-arm tactics. It has its bottom line. Should the US send an aircraft carrier battle group through the Taiwan Straits, it would quite likely send the wrong signal to the secessionists on the island. And any move by the island to declare "independence" would be consequential.

The US should think carefully before rocking the boat in that way. No one should underestimate China's resolve to defend its territorial integrity. It will never compromise on this.

Trump's 'unusual ways' raise concerns

Dangerous mix of unilateralism, isolationism guides the current US administration's trade and security moves

On May 30, the United States Secretary of Defense James Mattis renamed the US Pacific Command as the US Indo-Pacific Command, in "recognition of the increasing connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans".

The US calls itself a Pacific nation, on the basis that it has five states bordering the Pacific Ocean and has a number of allies in the Asia-Pacific.

Outgoing commander of the former US Pacific Command, Navy Admiral Harry Harris, who has been nominated by US President Donald Trump as ambassador to



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the Republic of Korea, said "great power competition is back" in the Indo-Pacific region.

Mattis said: "... it's a region open to investment and free, fair and reciprocal trade not bound by any nation's predatory economics or threat of coercion, for the Indo-Pacific has many belts and many roads."

The US is squaring off for confrontation with China. Shortly before the name change, two US Navy warships sailed within 12 nautical miles of South China Sea islands China claims sovereignty over. And the Pentagon disinvented

China's People's Liberation Army Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific Exercise.

Trump's foreign policy in Asia is still not clear and may not work.

In an interview with CNN, former US vice-president Joe Biden said all that Trump seems to be trying to do is undo everything that his predecessor has done.

Among other things, Trump pulled the US out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement and declared former US president Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia" dead.

The Obama administration formulated a foreign policy vision that called for a central US role in Asia. Known as the "pivot to Asia", the policy involved coordinated efforts to boost US defense, diplomatic and economic ties with the Asia-Pacific.

But the Trump administration has not detached itself from the region. It has replaced the Obama administration's Asia-Pacific concept with an Indo-Pacific strategy.

At the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, a defense summit held in Singapore on June 1-3, Mattis outlined the vision for "a free and open Indo-Pacific". It is underpinned by tangible "security, economic, and development investments", including the replacement of third-generation fighters with fifth-generation aircraft, while augmenting the US' "most capable ships" in the Indo-Pacific Command's fleet.

The White House's 2017 National

Security Strategy (NSS) that named China a strategic competitor, and the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy that focused on competition with China and Russia, explicitly reveal the reasons that the Indo-Pacific has become a priority theater for the Trump administration.

The NSS defines the Indo-Pacific region as stretching from "the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States". It describes the Indo-Pacific as a region in which "a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place" and where "China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda".

The NSS calls for working in concert with US allies and partners, including boosting "quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia and India", also known as the Quad.

The renaming of the US Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific Command is believed to be a symbolic move to highlight the importance of India.

Delivering a keynote speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue on June 1, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his country does not consider the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy and an exclusive club.

The term Indo-Pacific, Modi said, "includes all nations in this geogra-

phy" as well as other countries that have stakes in the area. He noted the relationship between India and China is key to a positive future.

The Trump administration's withdrawal from the TPP undermines the US' influence on the rules of trade in the region. While Mattis re-emphasizes security alliances with nations rimming the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Trump administration's unilateral moves including increasing tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum imports on national security grounds, and threatening to shred economic pacts and to desert trade organizations, leave ruffled feathers in the region. US allies such as Japan are joining hands in a brewing global trade war against US protectionism.

The US' Indo-Pacific strategy does not have a NATO-like organization in Asia. Australia, India, Japan and the US launched the so-called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, in 2007. The informal security forum eventually fell apart.

They talked early this year about establishing a joint regional infrastructure plan. But distrust is something impenetrable that leaves security cooperation among the four nations unworkable.

India once again refused Australia's bid to participate in the 2018 Malabar exercises. India and the US initiated the Malabar exercises in 1992. The drills were expanded in 2007 to include Australia, Japan

and Singapore in multilateral official-level security talks. Australia withdrew from the fledgling Quadrilateral involving the US, India, Australia and Japan, and the Quad was dismantled in 2007.

The trilateral relationship between Delhi, Tokyo and Washington has been rapidly improving, with Japan's inclusion as a permanent member of the Malabar exercises in 2015. The 2017 Malabar exercises saw 16 ships, two submarines, 95 aircraft, Marine Commandos and Special Forces from India, Japan and the US.

But India's refusal to add Australia to the naval drills is bound to raise questions on how the quasi-alliance of the four nations works.

Mattis conceded to delegates at the Shangri-La Dialogue that the Trump administration often practices "unusual ways", urging patience because the US' larger economic and security interests and partnerships will not become casualties of temporary trade spats.

Trump's "Unilateralism" — the term coined by France's ambassador to the United Nations, Francois Delattre, for US foreign policy that is a dangerous "mix of unilateralism and isolationism" — will become a crutch when the US executes its global strategy.

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