

Hagel Receives a ‘Drubbing’ From Chinese Military Leaders

by William Jones

April 11—U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel ran into some serious flak as he navigated through his first visit as Secretary to Beijing. His problem: His boss in the White House, Barack Obama, on behalf of the City of London and Wall Street, is conducting a global drive for war, based on lying propaganda that Russia is out to restore the Soviet Union, and that China is aggressively utilizing its newly developed power to seize territory and exclude the U.S. from the South and East China Seas.

On the other hand, Hagel works very closely with U.S. Joints Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey. Dempsey has spoken openly against the war plans of Obama and his Cheney/neocon backers, and has intervened to stop Obama’s intended war on Syria, while promoting close cooperation with the governments and militaries in both Russia and China. Dempsey has often warned against the “Thucydides Trap” in regard to China—the danger that the U.S. believes it must confront China simply because it is now a rising power, as Sparta did with Athens in ancient Greece, leading to the disastrous Peloponnesian War.

Aware of the intense factional situation within the Obama Administration over China policy, however, Hagel’s Chinese hosts went out of their way to provide access to some of their latest military equipment, and agreed to the Pentagon request that the Secretary be given a tour of their new aircraft carrier, a renovated Soviet vessel which they had purchased from Ukraine, and refitted to Chinese specifications. Hagel was also invited to speak before a group of PLA (People’s Liberation Army) colonels at the National Defense University and to have lunch with a group of non-commissioned officers.

‘We Are Dissatisfied’

It was only after his visit to the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier, that Hagel ran into a buzzsaw. At a joint press conference with Hagel following a private meeting,

Defense Minister Gen. Chang Wangquan expressed his deep concerns about Hagel’s actions and statements at a recent ASEAN defense ministers’ meeting in Honolulu, and in meetings with his Japanese counterparts in Tokyo. “I’d like to reiterate that the territorial sovereignty issue is China’s core interest,” Chang said. “On this issue, we will make no compromise, no concessions, and not even a tiny bit of violation is allowed.”

Chang also issued a blunt warning to the U.S. against any attempt to “contain” China: “With the latest developments in China, it can never be contained,” Chang said. The U.S. is “a country of worldwide influence, and the Pacific Ocean is big enough to hold both China and the U.S. for common development, and also big enough to hold the other Asia-Pacific countries.”

Hagel was treated to more of this in his meeting with Gen. Fan Changlong, the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, the body governing China’s military. “I can tell you, frankly,” Fan told Hagel, “your remarks made at the ASEAN defense ministers’ meeting and to the Japanese politicians were tough and with a clear attitude,” but “the Chinese people, including myself, are dissatisfied with such remarks.” Fan was careful to make these comments in front of the press so that they would reverberate widely. What he told Hagel privately is anybody’s guess.

The following day, the official state news agency Xinhua editorialized: “The unusual harsh tone delivers a clear message. Beijing is resolved to defend its core interests, particularly territorial sovereignty, and will not allow any country to make waves. The frankness is expected to reduce the possibility of miscalculation by other countries when they gauge China’s red lines, and consequently reduce rashness in their China policy-making. As a responsible player in regional and global affairs, China expects the United States to respect its core interests, but has been repeatedly disappointed by the latter’s double-faced tactics.”

Nonetheless, reflecting the desire of China to bol-



DoD/Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo

While Defense Secretary Hagel received a verbal thrashing from some of the top Chinese military leaders, his meeting with the non-commissioned officers (shown here), was a bit more cordial. “I appreciate what you are doing for your country and I know your country is proud of you,” he told them.

ster U.S.-Chinese relations, Xinhua appealed to those who retain their sanity in the West: “Regardless of disagreements in various fields, both Beijing and Washington clearly know they are friends, not enemies, and a healthy U.S.-China relationship is a *sine qua non* for world peace and stability.”

U.S.-ASEAN—A New NATO?

The Chinese concerns were focused on the inaugural meeting of the U.S.-ASEAN forum in Honolulu last month, and the visit of Hagel to Japan just prior to his arrival in Beijing. Hagel had invited the ASEAN defense ministers at the Shangri-La forum last year to hold their next meeting in Honolulu. He established thereby a U.S.-ASEAN forum as a focus of cooperation. In Honolulu, where the ministers were fêted and shown much of the U.S. naval capability there, Hagel reiterated that the U.S. wished to strengthen its ties with the ASEAN nations. “It is trade, it’s exchanges, it’s about free people,” the Secretary observed. “And as I have said, and you all know, the United States has been a Pacific power for many years. We intend to continue to be a Pacific power [and] to cooperate with our ASEAN partners and all nations in the Asia-Pacific.”

But there is great concern—not only in China, but also in the Southeast Asia nations—that the U.S. “Asia

pivot” is also aimed at forcing ASEAN to choose between the U.S. and China. The U.S. has intervened in the maritime border disputes with China—especially in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia—in a manner which is viewed by Chinese military leaders as a move toward creating a NATO-like alliance in the Pacific, an alliance targeting them. While the U.S. officially denies taking sides in the maritime disputes, and claims it wants to create a “new major-power relationship” with China, these moves seem to contradict that intention.

Speaking in New York April 9 on the subject of the U.S. military presence in the Asia Pacific, Cui Tiankai, the Chinese

Ambassador to the United States, warned against such an idea. “If your intention is to establish an Asian NATO, we are back in the Cold War era. This is something that will serve nobody’s interest,” he said.

Beijing also worries that the U.S. policy toward ASEAN is designed to counter its successful Maritime Silk Road diplomacy, announced by President Xi Jinping in Indonesia in October, which encompasses a program of extensive infrastructural development in the region. The U.S.-ASEAN forum also appears to be promoting the U.S.-backed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreements, whereby the U.S. hopes to create a free-trade zone which excludes and isolates China.

The Specter of Japan

More ominous, perhaps, in Chinese eyes, were Hagel’s statements in Japan with regard to the Diaoyu Islands (called the Senkaku in Japan). In addition to warning that the U.S. could impose the same type of sanctions against China that it has imposed against Russia for its alleged “annexation” of Crimea, were China to act with force on its claims of territorial legitimacy, Hagel also clearly stated that the Diaoyu Islands would be covered by Article V of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which means that the U.S. would come to the defense of Japan were its control of the Islands to be

contested. During the initial days of the crisis over the Islands, the U.S. was ambiguous as to whether the treaty would actually apply to the Diaoyu.

The U.S., in fact, has never before accepted Japanese sovereignty over these islands. On the contrary, during World War II, in the Cairo Declaration, and later in the Potsdam Agreements, all territory that had been taken from China by Japan was to be returned, including the Diaoyu. The U.S. refusal to recognize the new Communist government in China after the 1949 revolution allowed Washington to disregard these agreements. Japan was thus ceded “administrative control” over the islands.

Does this mean the U.S. is willing to go to war on behalf of the rather flimsy claims of Japan that the Diaoyu Islands are a part of their sovereign territory? This is a question which is still left in doubt—but with the financial system of the Anglo-American alliance collapsing, the imperial interests see no way to retain their power outside of war, and such seemingly minor territorial issues are precisely the means used by the Empire historically to provoke its desired war plans.

Hagel’s support for a more active role for the Japanese Defense Forces and for a more outward-looking JDF has become a cause of even greater concern for China. Leading figures have charged that this stance has encouraged Japanese right-wing forces to move more aggressively against China. This was underlined at the press conference with Chang, who warned the U.S. against encouraging Japan in this manner. The U.S., Chang said, must “be vigilant” and “keep [Japan] within bounds and not be permissive and supportive. . . . Japan is making provocative comments on China . . . and China is exercising maximum restraint. . . . But if you conclude China is going to resort to force against Japan, that’s wrong. On the Chinese side, we will not take initiatives to stir up trouble, but we aren’t afraid of any provocation.”

Hagel was again confronted with Chinese anger when he addressed 120 colonels and their staffs at the National Defense University in Beijing April 10. In his speech, Hagel called for greater cooperation between the two militaries. “As the PLA modernizes its capabilities and expands its presence in Asia and beyond,” he said, “American and Chinese forces will be drawn into proximity, increasing the risk of an incident, accident, or miscalculation. But this reality also presents new opportunities for cooperation.”

“The high cost of conflict will not make peace and

stability inevitable,” he went on, “so we must work together and in partnership with all the nations of the region, and develop and build on what President Xi and President Obama have called a new model of relations.”

But the young Chinese military officers openly expressed this skepticism, with one officer commenting that he felt the U.S. policy was to “make trouble and to hamper China’s development.” This put Hagel on the defensive, reiterating his claim that the U.S. was not interested in “containing China.”

Hagel, who was a non-commissioned officer in Vietnam, had an easier time of it when he was invited to have lunch with a group of Chinese non-coms. He noted that he was something of a “dinosaur” in their midst, having taken off his sergeant’s stripes so many years ago; he said he was flattered by their invitation to eat with them. He was given a badge with the Chinese characters for *Ba Yi* (Aug. 1), the date of the founding of the PLA. He said he would cherish the badge and display it in his Pentagon office. “This visit is very important to me,” Hagel said, “and I appreciate what you are doing for your country and I know your country is proud of you.”

Hagel Meets with President Xi Jinping

Before leaving, Hagel met with President Xi, which was far more diplomatic than his other encounters. Xi stressed the importance of the recent high-level visits and said these were leading the Sino-U.S. relationship in the right direction. He urged both sides to increase cooperation in a number of fields on the principle of “no conflict, no confrontation.”

“Both countries should manage differences and sensitive issues to establish a model of major-country relations and further develop military ties,” Xi told Hagel. Important agreements were made during the visit, including a commitment to closer institutional relations between the two armies, and to establish an Asia-Pacific Security Dialogue between the assistant defense secretary for the Asia-Pacific and China’s director of the Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Office.

Whether this “new relationship” can be realized depends on how quickly patriots in the United States can revoke, through impeachment of the President, the license of *this* President to run roughshod over the most important relations the United States has in the world—with Russia and China.