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The threat of a new 'NATO' in East Asia

Hugh Goodacre

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Institute for Independence Studies, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX.

The threat of a new 'NATO in East Asia!

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1. Introduction: The anti-war movement and the drift to world war

The massive US military presence in East Asia constitutes a serious danger to world peace. In particular, for a great many years, the US, its south Korean followers, and Japan have effectively comprised a three-way military bloc of NATO type. This has been the central element in a surreptitious but dangerous militarisation of those East Asian states which remain under US influence. In recent months, it has become clear that the US now threatens to extend this bloc into a four-way alliance including Taiwan also, and thus to challenge the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China. This increasingly aggressive US stance in East Asia could at any time lead to a globalisation of conflicts that have so far been localised, such as the attacks on Iraq and Yugoslavia, and could thus result in an uncontrollable drift to world war.

A connecting thread runs through all the potential flash-points for international conflict in the world today -- the global confrontation between the forces of independence and the forces of neo-colonialism which seek to turn the clock back to the colonial period. This is fully illustrated in every respect by the current situation in East Asia, where the US and its allies still fail to accept the verdict of history and refuse to respect the independence of the peoples of the region. Only if we grasp this underlying continuity and inter-connection in international affairs can we build a permanent anti-war movement that can build links with all other forces for social justice and accumulate sufficient strength actually to affect the outcome of events in favour of world peace.

Members and supporters of our Institute include long-term friends of the East Asian peoples, some of whom have been involved in solidarity activities since the 1950s. For example, members of our Institute were instrumental in inaugurating and sustaining the Korea Friendship Committee,¹ and during the past year we have sent a delegation to China and People's Korea, we have organised a seminar on Korean reunification, and on May 11 we organised a demonstration against London's US embassy to protest at the bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade. Meanwhile, we have sustained our other anti-war activities, including co-ordinating the thousands-strong April 17 national demonstration against sanctions and war on Iraq.² Our Institute is thus relatively well-placed to contribute to the urgent task of alerting the anti-war movement and public opinion generally to the dangers of the new and disturbing developments in East Asia. The present session of our Peace Movement Policy Forum is intended as an initial step in accomplishing this task.

COLONIALISM AND INDEPENDENCE IN EAST ASIA

Independent East Asia

A glance at a map of the Pacific shows how outrageous the very notion of the US-led military bloc in East Asia is. It consists of an arc of land, air and naval bases extending around China and People's Korea in the most blatantly threatening fashion. It goes without saying that these two countries which the US wishes to 'contain' have no equivalent arc of island and mainland bases and naval and air forces pressing up against California, Oregon and Washington State! For this is the world whose contours remain those of the colonial era, an era from which we have far from recovered. Just as in the economic sphere, the world's rich get richer and the poor get ever more desperately poor,³ so also this situation is mirrored in the military and strategic disparity between the US and the independent countries of Asia. Such is the racist, neo-colonial world of today, a world in which for the peoples of Asia even to hope for peace and modernisation means at the

same time to defy the most massive and threatening display of military might the world's richest power can assemble.⁴

To understand why the US directs such enormous resources into sustaining this threat, it is necessary to take a broad look at the overall stage of the struggle of the peoples of East Asia for independence.

The October revolution in Russia and the extension of socialism to Mongolia and the Soviet Far East threw the East Asian region into revolutionary ferment, a ferment which became merged with the resistance to Japanese colonialism and aggression in Korea, China, and other countries. During the course of the second world war this independence trend became an irresistible force which led to the liberation of East and South East Asia from Japanese colonialist domination and the initial establishment of socialist power in Korea and Vietnam.

The US, however, was determined to steal the fruits of this victory over Japanese colonialism and re-establish the colonial order under their own domination. First, the US committed what has remained till today incomparably the greatest act of international terrorism ever committed, the nuclear-weapons attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Next, they mis-used their occupation of the southern zone of liberated Korea to rig up a puppet regime from remnants of those who had formerly served Japanese rule. Likewise, the British waged a criminal war against the Malayan and other national liberation movements which defied their rule, while the French, like the US in Korea, prevented the country-wide victory of socialism in Vietnam by shoring up the colonial order in the south.

Meanwhile the Chinese revolution was sweeping to power, and the People's Republic of China was eventually declared in October 1949. Refusing to accept the verdict of history, the US declared its allies, the defeated Kuomintang armies of Chiang Kai-shek who had taken refuge in Taiwan, to be the real 'Republic of China', a historic crime that has prevented the Chinese people from achieving complete liberation until today. People's Korea successfully defended itself against US-led aggression in 1950-1953. In Indochina the US had to take over the colonialist mantle from France, which had been unable to hold the line against the revolutionary advance; nevertheless, following their historic defeat of the US, the Indochinese peoples won complete national liberation in 1975.

This hard-won liberation of the independent countries of Asia from colonial domination was the most profound and durable international outcome of the second world war and its aftermath, establishing socialist and anti-imperialist power that has proved more lasting than that established in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

US ambitions curbed

The economies of the countries under US influence were rehabilitated by opening US markets to them, fostering export-dependant economic development referred to by neo-colonialist ideology as an 'East Asian miracle'. Japan's economy, relieved of the burden of military expenditure, grew to become the world's second largest. The common factor linking the so-called miracle economies, both the older miracle, Japan, and the newer 'tiger' economies of south Korea, Taiwan, etc., was of course the fact that they lay in a strategic arc around socialist China and Korea. This was an East Asian equivalent of the 'cordon sanitaire' which the Western powers had aimed to establish around the Soviet Union in the inter-war years.

Even at the height of the economic 'success' of its dependent states, the US remained strategically on the retreat, and for much of the period following its 1975 withdrawal from Indochina US ruling circles were left to gnash their teeth in fury at their setbacks, and try to hold the line against the ascendant independence trend. In the case of China in particular, the US was unable to hold out against the tide of history; from the early 1970s it

could no longer avoid opening contacts, and by the end of the decade it officially recognised the People's Republic.

The US was thus forced by the victories of the Asian peoples to accommodate itself to some extent to the independence trend. However, US ruling circles never ceased to take every possible opportunity to prepare for a strategic offensive in East Asia that could turn the clock back to the old world order of colonialism.

CREEPING MILITARISATION BY THE US IN EAST ASIA

Military exercises

While outwardly on the strategic defensive, the US of the post-1975 period embarked upon a programme of militarisation of the Pacific, with the aim of transforming it into an 'American lake'. Only now after two decades is the full extent of this militarisation coming into the light of day in all its awesome destructive power. This militarisation is the force with which the US seeks to overawe the Chinese and other Asian peoples and prevent their economic development from enabling them to present a strategic challenge to US domination.

A clear manifestation of this drift to militarisation in the Pacific was the institution of a number of series of massive air, land and sea military manoeuvres. For example, from 1976, the US began its so-called 'Team Spirit' annual exercise in the Korean region, which simulates a nuclear attack on People's Korea, followed by an air, land and sea invasion by up to 200,000 US, south Korean and Japanese troops. Though far from invisible to the peoples of the region it is designed to terrorise, Team Spirit has regularly taken place without major attention in the West due to silence on the subject in the US-dominated world media. In addition, for many years we have drawn attention to the fact that British military observers give valuable moral and diplomatic support to these exercises, behind the backs of and unbeknown to the public here.

It is such military exercises which have provided the mechanism through which the tripartite NATO-type military bloc of the US, south-Korea and Japan has been consolidated. These exercises, the most reckless, dangerous and potentially destructive events ever staged in human history, have on numerous occasions brought East Asia to the brink of war.

The revival of Japanese militarism

At the heart of the post-war world order lay the demilitarisation of Germany and Japan. This resulted in the fundamental contours of the post-war international political economy of the capitalist world. Relieved of the burden of military expenditure, Germany and Japan were able to undertake rapid and innovative economic development that placed them at the head of a whole 'second-division' of world capitalist powers. Western military expenditure was concentrated in the US superpower, which became the 'hegemon' or ring-leader of the imperialist powers. As part of the bargain for the demilitarisation of its two most aggressive former enemies, the Soviet Union agreed to the UN Security Council structure, which for all its shortcomings presided over a prolonged period when it proved possible to keep the big powers from going to war against each other and unleashing a new world war.

Thus not only did the second world war victories leave the old colonial order a pale shadow of its former self, but substantial progress was made in the struggle to limit the

ability of the colonial powers to unleash a new world war. The UN Security Council was invested with powers which proved to be effective in numerous situations in preventing threats to world peace, particularly when, from the 1960s, its membership was greatly expanded by newly-independent states from among the former colonies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. A global truce largely prevailed in Europe until the 1990s, while Japan was bound by Article 9 of its post-war constitution to refrain from rebuilding an offensive military capacity, a measure which responded to the wishes not only of the people of the former Japanese colonies but the people of Japan itself as well.

However, the US militarisation drive, exemplified in the Team Spirit and other military exercises, provided an opportunity for the Japanese 'Self-Defence Forces' to participate to an increasing degree in what are clearly offensive manoeuvres in violation of its constitution.

This advance in Japan's military posture has culminated in the approval by the Japanese legislature of measures authorising the extension of their military role in support of US forces. The scope of these measures is described as "areas surrounding Japan," an ominous phrase that noticeably fails to exclude China from future Japanese strategic planning.⁵ The final ratification of these measures took place on May 25 of this year (1999), on the eve of a visit to the US by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. This visit accordingly provided the opportunity for a great fanfare about plans for closer US-Japanese military co-operation.

Also in recent months has come the announcement that Japan aims to launch four reconnaissance satellites by 2004, as well as an armed engagement in March of this year (1999) in which, for the first time since the second world war, Japan opened fire on foreign vessels, on the pretext that they were 'spies' from People's Korea.⁶

Finally, in a gesture full of dire symbolism for the peoples of East and South East Asia, the Japanese cabinet has in recent days voted to initiate legislation that would confirm the official status of the rising sun flag and the imperial national anthem, two symbols of the fascist aggression of the colonial and world war period.⁷

In the face of this renewed militarism stands a powerful anti-militarist movement with deep roots in Japanese society, and in particular an anti-nuclear movement which keeps alive the memory of the US nuclear-weapons attacks. This movement is putting up strong resistance to these measures.

Covert nuclear arms race in East Asia

A particularly worrying aspect of the drift to militarisation in East Asia is the fact that Japan, south Korea and Taiwan have all become nuclear-weapons-capable states. Japanese technology is so far advanced that its non-nuclear status is merely a quibble, since at any given moment it could assemble nuclear weapons and their delivery systems with little more than the turn of a screwdriver. The south Korean military dictatorship, concerned in case the US might abandoned their bases following their defeat in Indochina, worked to develop nuclear weapons capability during the 1970s. This programme was 'abandoned' amid much fanfare and drama, supposedly under US pressure, but, as in the case of Japan, all the technology now exists in south Korea for a short sprint to nuclear weapons capability at any time. A similar drama took place in Taiwan, with its nuclear weapons development programme having been supposedly 'closed' in 1988.⁸ Even fissionable (i.e. weapons-grade) material is readily available, with vast stocks of so-called 'Depleted' Uranium now on international markets, without any monitoring of how 'depleted' it is.⁹

This surreptitious spread of nuclear weapons capability is only one example of how the vast destructive power of modern armaments can be transferred without effective control.

The advantage of such ‘technology transfer’ is that it evades the protests attendant on high-visibility arms purchases.¹⁰

The militarisation of surrounding regions

The US-led military bloc in East Asia is the core of a wider US military deployment stretching from the Arctic to Australia, and the recent accelerated drift to militarisation has spread beyond the East Asian zone of confrontation to affect neighbouring areas of the Asia-Pacific region.

The Philippines is one of a number of regional states with a long-standing Mutual Defence Treaty with the US dating back to the Cold War period.¹¹ Its close military link with the US appeared to have ended with the evacuation of the US naval and air bases in 1992 and the subsequent termination of joint exercises and US warship visits. However, a ‘Visiting Forces Agreement’ (VFA) has now been concluded which allows the resumption of US naval visits, and joint naval exercises are also to be resumed.¹² The VFA allows US forces access to all facilities of potential military use, places US military personnel under US criminal law, prevents the Philippine authorities from searching US naval vessels and consequently makes it possible for nuclear weapons to be secretly introduced in violation of the Philippines constitution. The Philippines, which has fought for its independence since it was first occupied by the US in a brutal colonial invasion a century ago, has thus once again effectively become a colony and a potential air and naval base for US aggression in East Asia.

In addition, the US has been raising the level of its military co-operation with Indonesia, Thailand, Australia and Singapore, the latter now being in the process of constructing naval facilities capable of hosting US aircraft carriers.¹³ Further afield, the US retains its high-level links with South Asian armed forces, while it has conducted military activities of various kinds, from joint exercises to seminars, with four of China’s neighbours on the Asian mainland – Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.¹⁴

THE US-LED MILITARY BLOC AND US-CHINA RELATIONS

The underlying long-term contradiction between the US and China

Against this background of creeping militarisation has come a series of incidents which have gone to show that whatever co-operation the US may undertake with China in particular fields at particular times, there nevertheless exists a long-term contradiction between the aspirations of the two countries in relation to the East Asian region.

The Chinese government never ceases to reiterate that its basic line is to take economic construction as the central task, opening the economy to the outside world and maintaining social stability, while defending state sovereignty and security. The goal of this policy is to build a “strong, modern, prosperous, democratic and culturally advanced socialist country.”¹⁵

As far as the US superpower is concerned, China’s success in such a historic project would be quite simply a threat. This neo-colonialist attitude, while it is often latent, has never disappeared, based as it is on the underlying reality that the US and China remain on opposite sides in the global confrontation between independence and neo-colonialism. The deterioration in global stability and security during recent months has been mirrored also in the deterioration of US-China relations as this underlying contradiction has come progressively further into the light of day.

Clinton's visit to China last year held out hopes for a period of strategic partnership between the world's richest and the world's most populous country. In contrast, however, the US visit by Premier Zhu Rongji in April of this year (1999) faced a catalogue of difficult tasks. The visit took place against a US propaganda barrage over alleged spying in the US by China in the field of nuclear technology. Alongside this issue were continuing allegations of China's financing of US electoral campaigns, renewed attempts by the US to drive through condemnation of China's human rights record at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the annual Congressional manoeuvring over the ratification of China's 'normal trade status' with the US,¹⁶ and constant negative press spin on the size of China's trade surplus with the US. It had been hoped that the centrepiece of the visit would be agreement on China's admission to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Though China had exercised great restraint throughout the past two crisis-ridden years of Asian economic turmoil, and had refrained from launching a devaluation-driven trade war, Zhu nevertheless had to face a refusal by the US to conclude a deal. It was becoming clear that the US attitude towards China was becoming increasingly arrogant and provocative.

'One country two systems'

By far the most sensitive aspect of US-China relations, however, is the issue of China's Province of Taiwan, which constitutes the most serious legacy of China's bitter past experience of colonialism and semi-colonialism. The total integration of this province into the US-dominated world capitalist economy continues to hamstring the economic development of China as a whole, grossly distorting the flow of international trade and finance and with them the distribution of technological and industrial resources. It is the central obstacle to the development of the unified national economy which China, like any country, needs if it is to unleash its full economic and social potential.

While China has since 1993 engaged in talks with ruling circles in Taiwan, its attempts to strengthen links across the Taiwan Straits are repeatedly sabotaged by those advocating 'Taiwan independence', 'two Chinas', 'one China one Taiwan', to say nothing of those who continue to nurture dreams of overthrowing China's socialism and staging a country-wide reactionary come-back. These political forces are in fact not driven by, nor do they respond to, the demands of any substantial section of society within Taiwan, but are rooted ultimately outside the Province itself in US strategic interests. Their most irredentist advocates are in fact not Taiwanese at all, even the most reactionary of the latter normally being open to some degree of compromise, but the blindly anti-communist pro-Taiwan lobby in the US Congress.¹⁷

Provocations from these quarters led to a serious crisis in 1996 when they attempted to use an 'election' charade as an opportunity for an anti-China coup. China responded by conducting military manoeuvres, including missile tests in the area. These defensive measures were met by the dispatch into the region of two US aircraft-carrier battle groups, resulting in the most serious crisis in US-China relations for decades. China's action in courageously facing down the US bullying tactics firmly established the fact that all aggressive military support to Taiwan constitutes an encroachment on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Alongside this robust response to US military threats, China has pursued with flexibility and imagination its policy of 'one country two systems'. The successful return of Hong Kong to the motherland in 1997 and the expectations for a similarly successful return of Macao at the end of this year¹⁸ have shown that China has all the experience and goodwill needed to handle the peaceful, constructive and mutually beneficial development of relations between the two social systems existing in East Asia. The application of this policy is based on the principle of building all possible links between people of different

circles from both sides, expanding exchange and co-operation in the economy, culture and other spheres, thereby demonstrating that “it is in the fundamental interest of all the Chinese people to achieve the complete reunification of the motherland; our state sovereignty and territorial integrity cannot tolerate being carved into pieces.”¹⁹

Until such time as it is reunited with Taiwan, China remains a divided country which is at any time liable to face the cruel prospect of its neo-colonialist enemies ‘playing the Taiwan card’, just as the Irish at all times face the prospect of Britain ‘playing the Orange card’. In this situation, the Chinese Government justifiably reserves its inalienable right to choose the time and the means for the return of Taiwan to the motherland.

US raises the tension over Taiwan

The goal of the reactionary Taiwan authorities is no less than to turn the island into an impregnable fortress. While Patriot anti-missile batteries have been installed in Taiwan for some time, their effectiveness has been limited by the lack of long-range radar, and this the US has now agreed to supply in the form of Aegis destroyers, which carry a sea-borne radar and anti-missile capability.²⁰

Most threateningly of all, the Pentagon last month published details of its proposal for a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system in East Asia, a ‘star wars’ system that would include satellite surveillance enabling anti-ballistic missiles to be launched beyond the atmosphere. This system could in fact readily be adapted to guide missiles for offensive use, which is of particular concern given Taiwan’s plans to construct cruise missiles by the year 2004, quite apart from being in violation of the repeated commitment of the US to sell Taiwan only defensive weaponry. Besides, being largely sea-based, the system could be sneaked into the Taiwan area at no notice.

US stalling tactics try to take the heat out of regional opposition by emphasising the tentative nature of the TMD proposal.²¹ It may also be noted that the proposal has met with a lack of enthusiasm from within south Korea²² and Taiwan.²³ However, this cannot hide the fact that a vast amount has already been spent on developing the technology (\$3 billion since 1992), and discussions are under way on budgeting an even greater amount in the coming period. Further, the central element of this technology, the anti-ballistic missile itself, the ‘Theatre High-Altitude Area Defence’ (THAAD) rocket, after a long series of technical failures, was eventually successfully tested this month (10 June 1999).²⁴

In short, all the elements for a new arms race are gathering momentum. Such a new arms race threatens to upset the global strategic balance and undermine hopes for disarmament in Asia. As a western commentator has noted, “it was China’s perception ... that the US would slow weapons sales to Taiwan that led Beijing to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.”²⁵ The proposal also clearly violates the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the US and Russia which is the cornerstone of hopes to prevent the militarisation of outer space. In fact at the recent G8 Summit in Cologne Yeltsin was evidently prepared to accept ‘modifications’ to the treaty that would enable the US to develop this programme further.²⁶ China’s President Jiang Zemin evidently had such a prospect in mind when he wrote: “Research for and development, deployment and proliferation of sophisticated anti-missile systems, and revision of, or even withdrawal from, the existing disarmament treaties, would inevitably exert a negative impact on international security and stability, triggering new arms races and obstructing disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.”²⁷

The global strategic context for this threat includes the menacing stance of NATO at its fiftieth anniversary meeting in Washington, which made general threats about future ‘out-of-area’ operations, and also threatened that the sovereignty of any country would be ignored in cases where NATO declares that a state is violating human rights.

One particular sub-plot of the worsening relations between China and NATO is the fact that in January of this year (1999) Taiwan succeeded in establishing relations with Macedonia, a state which has been a war base for the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, and has effectively become a NATO military protectorate.²⁸ The visit of Taiwan emissaries to refugee camps in that country was gloatingly trumpeted as evidence of Taiwan's world role in alliance with NATO,²⁹ and is now being followed up by aid worth £200 million.³⁰

This provides a vivid example of possible channels through which the dangerous war-drift on the Balkans-Gulf arc could globalise into a US-led pincer movement against Russia and China combined, or as a Chinese commentary recently put it "to turn NATO and the US-Japan alliance into a fortress over Europe and Asia."³¹

THE US-LED MILITARY BLOC AND KOREA

Korean reunification

The US troops in south Korea have long constituted a front-line force of the US in its confrontation with independent East Asia, as well as a nucleus for the formation of its NATO-style military bloc in the region. In the first instance they constitute a force of occupation under which the people of south Korea are subjected to colonial domination. This colonial domination takes place behind the facade of a US-backed military-industrial clique whose social origins lie ultimately among those who collaborated with the Japanese colonialists in the 1910-1945 period. However, the massive US military presence, not only the forty thousand US troops on Korean soil but also in the form of naval and air power that can rapidly be deployed into the area, is out of all proportion to any conceivable threat that could have been faced from People's Korea itself, and is plainly directed at threatening China and the entire region as well. The threat to make People's Korea a 'second Yugoslavia' is thus as much a threat to China's independence as the NATO attack on Yugoslavia is a threat to the interests and standing of Russia.

The history of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since its foundation in 1948 is one of outstanding achievements in socialist construction and national defence in the face of all the very worst that the US and its allies have been able to pit against it. In the past it has been described as a 'secretive' country by the US-dominated media who have used their control of information to prevent its achievements becoming better known. Only in the past few years have they focused more attention on it in their gloating coverage of the current hardships being suffered by its people. But the historical record of the construction of an independent socialist society in Korea will always remain as one of the great achievements of humanity and the most inspiring chapter in the history of socialism. Based on its people-centred ideology of the Juche idea, which our Institute believes to have universal application, Korean socialism has inspired generations of socialist and national liberation movements.³²

In strong contrast to the proud independence of the socialist north, a colonial society without a future exists in the south. Fostered by massive imports of its manufactures by the US, a dependant form of capitalism developed under the harsh repression of the US-backed dictatorships of the period following the Korean war. From the end of the 1960s, this economy entered a prolonged boom in response to the demand for goods and services by the US forces engaged in their war against the peoples of Indochina.³³ Even after that war, the Korean economy continued to boom in a fashion described in US propaganda as 'miraculous', though in fact the only miracle was the seemingly endless capacity of the US economy to consume the exports of its south Korean and other chosen 'miracle' economies in East Asia. Despite the claims of US racist propaganda that these very disparate societies

in some way shared an innate propensity towards capitalism, what they really shared was their location on the strategic arc of US allies with which the US sought to 'contain' socialism in East Asia. The repressive, nationally-nihilistic, dependant and militaristic society fostered by the US in south Korea presents the mirror of the future to any country in the world, whether it be in Asia or the Balkans, whose rulers allow it to become a military protectorate of the US and its allies.

The existence of these two societies in the single country of Korea presents an enormous challenge for those who wish to see national reunification and reconciliation, and the resumption of a joint national life. The leaders, government and people of People's Korea have advanced as the basis for reunification the principles of independence, peace and great national unity. These principles are embodied in the proposal for a Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. In the course of advancing its reunification proposals and initiatives, People's Korea has developed a rich body of experience from which all those engaged in the struggle for independence, peace and unity can learn, in particular the peoples of Ireland, Cyprus, Yemen and all others who have faced the cruel experience of partition at the hands of Britain and other colonialist powers.³⁴

The achievement of Korean reunification will be a decisive step towards complete independence for Asia, and is absolutely essential for any real progress towards peace and security in the region. It will constitute an essential element in the development of peaceful and constructive coexistence between the different social systems existing on the East Asian seaboard. The joint experience of all those in the north and the south who wish to see the success of the reunification project, and the good will of the entire Korean people upon which they can count, hold out the prospect of a future powerful and prosperous country, innovative and creative in its social and economic development and utterly dedicated through its past history of national tragedy to the ideals of regional and global independence and peace.

US crimes and provocations against Korea

No aspect of today's world demonstrates more clearly the true nature of the neo-colonialist powers than their use of the weapon of hunger to terrorise the majority of the world's population. 'Aid' is offered on a selective basis not according to need but according to the possibilities its allocation offers for the entrapment of peoples and governments into serving the economic and strategic goals of the 'donor' countries. Not only do the neo-colonialist powers exploit existing hunger in this way but they also inflict it through economic sanctions and blockades, as seen not only in the literally genocidal blockade of Iraq since 1990, but also in the vindictive blockade of Vietnam from 1975 until the early 1990s, which dashed the hopes of a whole generation of Vietnamese for the reconstruction of the economy of their war-devastated country.

Of all the US-led blockades, the most long-standing is that inflicted on People's Korea since the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950. Such is the predominance of US economic interests in its sphere of influence that such a unilateral blockade as that of People's Korea or Vietnam effectively imposes a blockade by the entire non-socialist world. Nevertheless, People's Korea for many years succeeded in charting an independent course, placing the main emphasis on self-reliance, while satisfying its requirements for fuel and other essential imports on the basis of trade and exchange with its socialist trading partners.

The collapse of socialism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe dealt a cruel blow to the economic gains painstakingly built up in People's Korea, which had transformed it from a war-devastated wasteland into a model of independent and creative socialist development. Suddenly deprived of its resources of fuel and other essential supplies, and indeed of its entire international trading system, People's Korea was before

long confronted with a devastating series of floods and other natural disasters which would have severely strained its economy even at the best of times. At last the prolonged US-led blockade, whose effects the country had so far successfully warded off, were able to do their vindictive worst, leading to a serious situation in which there has been the need for large-scale outside emergency relief.

Insecurity of fuel supplies had already led People's Korea to turn to nuclear power as an alternative source of energy. Using this fact as a pretext, the US in 1993-1994 raised a furore about the alleged capacity this provided for a nuclear weapons programme. What really enraged the US, of course, was that People's Korea had survived the collapse of socialism elsewhere and was indeed, like Cuba, a symbol of socialist defiance by a small but unconquered people.

After a series of crises bringing the region to the brink of war,³⁵ a Framework Agreement was finally signed in 1994 following discussions between Korea's President Kim Il Sung and former US President Carter, in which Korea agreed to close down its reactor in exchange for two major commitments by the US: first, the US was to form an international consortium to construct two new nuclear reactors of a kind not producing weapons grade material; secondly, the US was to provide 200,000 tons of fuel oil annually to supply the energy shortfall until the new generators are operational. Opposed from the start by powerful lobbies in Washington, this Agreement has been dogged by US backsliding, with fuel deliveries constantly falling far behind schedule. The Agreement probably only gained the grudging support of US ruling circles through a majority of them gambling on the collapse of socialism in People's Korea – a gamble they are evidently losing.³⁶

The reality of the security situation in Korea is underlined by the fact that even now, forty-six years after the end of the Korean war, the US still refuses to replace the Armistice Agreement that ended the hostilities with a peace treaty with People's Korea. Thus technically still at war, the people in the north have for more than two generations faced the possibility that at any time they might face renewed attack by the US and its allies, probably including a nuclear attack. Against this background of intimidation, People's Korea has shown exemplary courage and determination. It has played a full part in all initiatives for global disarmament, for instance issuing in October 1986 a declaration calling for the Korean Peninsula to become a nuclear-weapon-free zone.³⁷ At the same time, People's Korea's Juche-based policy of self-reliance in national defence demonstrated its potential in August of last year (1998) when a long-distance rocket was successfully launched. Though on this occasion its purpose was the launch of an artificial satellite for peaceful purposes, the lesson could not be lost that People's Korea now has a potential military capability bringing even the US itself within its range.

Hypocritically taking the opportunity to drum up regional support for a new arms race, the US unleashed a propaganda barrage against the construction in People's Korea of a massive underground facility. Such facilities are an entirely necessary feature of national defence in face of the immediate and wholly disproportionate US nuclear threat. Though in fact US agencies were perfectly well informed that, contrary to their propaganda claims, there were no nuclear facilities at this site, nevertheless an 'inspection' charade was demanded, and this was eventually agreed. It may be noted that, while the US-dominated world press kept its nuclear scare stories on the front page, it is characteristic that the 'discovery' that the site was empty was glossed over.³⁸

In Japan, the nuclear scare took on a wider resonance, with commentators attempting to spread concern that a reunified Korea would be a wealthy and powerful nuclear-weapons state. In fact, of course, what is of concern to reactionary circles in Japan is not the spread of nuclear weapons, but the fact that oppressed peoples, particularly those of their own former colonies, should raise their heads and take the path of independence.

The unending series of US-led provocations against People's Korea thus serve to create an atmosphere of tension in which the US can advance its strategic interests. This atmosphere is used as a pretext for continued US occupation of the south. It provides a climate of opportunity for the US to renege on its commitments under the 1994 Agreement. It serves as a rationale for the TMD proposal and with it a new arms race in East Asia. All claims by any section of the ruling authorities in the south to be adopting a more conciliatory stance can thus never amount to substantial progress towards reconciliation so long as they are liable to be sabotaged at will by US-engineered incidents in this way. For example, a simple fishing dispute this month resulted in a murderous attack by the south Korean puppet navy, and was followed by the dispatch of US battleships and more planes to the region.³⁹ It is quite evident in such a situation that People's Korea, if it is to protect its independence and its social system, has no alternative but to stand up against all such threats, refuse to submit to the weapon of hunger, and uphold its sovereignty and national rights with all means at its disposal.

US PROVOCATIONS AGAINST CHINA

The Belgrade embassy bombing

The most direct and dramatic of all recent US provocations against China occurred on May 7 when the US carried out a bombing raid on China's embassy in Belgrade in which more than twenty people were injured, three of them fatally.⁴⁰ China reacted swiftly and decisively, cancelling all military co-operation and dialogue with the US, all negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation issues and on China's application to join the WTO, as well as banning US warships from visiting Hong Kong. These measures made it very clear that US-China relations were now to be regarded as in question right across the board. This would remain the case until the fulfilment by the US of four demands: that an apology be made, that a full investigation into the incident be carried out, that the results of this investigation be published, and that those responsible be punished. There then followed another round of cold-war propaganda from the US against China, focusing on the release of a Congressional Report (the 'Cox Report') into allegations of China spying on US nuclear secrets, evidently intended to cause a diversion from the embassy attack.

Meanwhile, we await the results of any inquiry that becomes available, which will have the formidable task of explaining why three levels of review of targets (US Joint Staff, US European Command, and NATO) failed to show up this error, and why no better explanation could be found than the unconvincing tale about out-of-date maps – maps whose supply was the responsibility of a US Defence Intelligence Agency official who had himself been a regular visitor to the Chinese embassy!⁴¹

It should be noted that Britain's Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers stated, during a recent visit to China, that "US bombs which hit the Chinese embassy have nothing to do with Britain," and that the US target-selection process is "something which Britain doesn't know."⁴² This is not true; the procedure was clearly for all targets, whoever selected them, to be double-checked by NATO. This means that double-checking took place on the joint responsibility of, and presumably with the actual participation of, British NATO staff.

The feelings of Chinese everywhere were made very clear in the storm of protest which swept across China, which included the hurling of rocks at the US and British embassies. In an unprecedented display of unity across political divides, a prominent opposition leader headed a protest demonstration in Hong Kong, while in Taiwan protesters carried placards with the words: "Clinton, wanted for murder." The protests also extended to China's overseas communities in Asia, and all the way to Britain, where members of the Chinese

community joined our demonstration on May 11,⁴³ which was followed the next day by a demonstration by Chinese students in which we also participated.

For those who still choose to believe that the bombing was an error, it may be pointed out that the US was always very careful to avoid damaging the Russian and Chinese embassies in Vietnam;⁴⁴ at the very least, therefore, the bombing demonstrated carelessness rooted in a new and higher level of colonialist arrogance. Those who hold the attack to have been deliberate have put forward many theories. One suggested motive is that it ensured that the UN Security Council, deprived of China's co-operation, would be even further side-lined, and with it Russia's ability to exert its influence for an end to the attack.⁴⁵

One may perhaps speculate that the capacity for the US to stage provocations to disrupt the coalescence of international opposition to the NATO attack on Yugoslavia may well also be in evidence in the outbreak of the current hostilities in Kashmir. For this came at a moment which was suspiciously convenient for the US, just when a number of Russia's leaders were speaking of their hopes for a Russia-China-India alliance against the NATO attack on Yugoslavia.⁴⁶ The most serious fault-line in such an alliance would be the threat posed by India's current militaristic policies to China's security on its South Western flank, a threat which was thrown into sudden sharp focus by this flare-up.

The South China Sea and US bloc politics

In this tense regional and international atmosphere, it is always necessary to be on the alert for US provocations of a more devious kind – those best characterised by the Chinese expression 'smile on face, dagger in heart'. One example is the well-known 25 July 1990 meeting of US Ambassador April Glaspie with Iraq's President Saddam Hussein in which she stated: "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait," thus clearly giving the green light for Iraq's move into Kuwait a week later.⁴⁷ Similarly, the US special envoy to the Balkans commented on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) last year (1998): "I know a terrorist when I see one and these men are terrorists," thus apparently signalling to the Yugoslav government that it would regard operations against them as legitimate counter-insurgency.⁴⁸

Such precedents perhaps need to be borne in mind in the case of tensions in the South China Sea, where a number of states⁴⁹ have been challenging China's sovereignty over island territories and their surrounding waters. The US has been indicating that it is unwilling to become involved in disputes with China on this issue so long as sea-lanes are not threatened. However, this apparently conciliatory standpoint does not mean that the US lacks any concern for its strategic interests in this area. On the contrary, vague and potentially threatening statements were recently made by Admiral Dennis Blair, the new Chief of US Pacific Command, to the effect that "the competing South China Sea claims provide nations with the opportunity to experience the benefits of collective dispute resolution." Almost in the same breath, he emphasised that the US intends to retain its military presence in the area. He called for so-called 'security pluralism' to 'replace the old balance-of-power thinking based on alliances'.⁵⁰ This US policy is being advanced in the full knowledge that it runs directly counter to China's insistence that negotiations on these issues be conducted on a bilateral basis, rather than in collective discussions which give the US the opportunity to muster regional forces against China.

The suggestion that alliances are 'outmoded' recalls to mind the false assurances given to Russia that a dissolution of the Warsaw Pact would not be followed by the expansion of NATO membership or other closer security relationships in Central Europe and the Baltic. The US itself is evidently not acting according to Admiral Blair's precepts, but on the contrary is advancing its policy of military bloc formation not only in East Asia, but also in other areas, from the Caspian region⁵¹ to South America.⁵²

It is in this context that leaders of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)⁵³ have spoken of ‘closing ranks against China’ over their South China Sea claims. In this way, the situation there, taking place as it does against the background of the regional drift to militarisation, provides opportunities for the US to fish in troubled waters and extend its military bloc politics into South East Asia as well.⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS: ANTI-WAR ACTION AND GLOBAL INDEPENDENCE

The aim of our Peace Movement Policy Forum is to provide an opportunity for anti-war campaigners to pool their experience not only with each other but with other campaigners for social justice, and to focus on issues which have a practical bearing on developing a strategy for the anti-war movement. The threat of a new and aggressive NATO-type military bloc in East Asia is precisely such an issue of immediate practical concern for the anti-war movement, since as we have shown it is a channel through which the conflicts on the Gulf-Balkans arc could become globalised. In particular, it demonstrates that the situation in the world as a whole represents in essence a single interconnected and continuous confrontation between the forces for independence and the forces of neo-colonialism.

It is on the basis of this perspective that we argue for a permanent anti-war movement centred not on a series of specific campaigns relating to particular international crises but on continuous campaigning by local grass-roots networks. This is essential if we are to establish continuity of vision and policy and thus counter the ‘stop-go-stop’ character which has brought so much damage to the anti-war movement in the past.

Further, we argue that such an anti-war movement should extend its links with the movements of resistance to racist attacks and the movement among the Irish communities in Britain to defend the Irish peace process and resist state-backed sectarian violence. The impact and profile achieved by these movements have in many cases surpassed anything achieved by the anti-war movement, and it is no coincidence that they represent precisely those forces in society which have broken most decisively with illusions in the benevolence of the colonialist state. It is clear that if the anti-war movement is to make a similarly powerful impact on broader sections of the people, it must find ways to learn from such movements and achieve the same break with the influences of colonialist society.

Such is our perspective for establishing a constructive and effective relationship with the forces for independence globally and within Britain so that the anti-war movement can accumulate strength and maximise its capacity to influence the outcome of international events in favour of world peace.

¹ The Korea Friendship Committee, which was active during the eleven years from 1982 to 1993, organised a great number of seminars, press conferences, street demonstrations, parliamentary lobbies, delegations, petitions and other activities, and was represented at numerous international conferences on Korean affairs.

² See *Justice!*, newsletter of the Institute for Independence Studies, April 1999.

³ “We can expect to start the next century with income disparity between the top and bottom 20 percent groups of perhaps 150 to 1, if we are not there already.” “A 150-to-1 ratio is too lopsided for comfort,” R W Baker and J Nordin, *International Herald Tribune (IHT)*, 5/2/99.

⁴ Around a hundred thousand US troops are based in Asia, about 47,000 in Japan (mostly on the island of Okinawa) and 37,000 in south Korea. Further, as the 1990-1991 deployment in the Gulf demonstrated, US military air transport can rapidly move vast numbers of additional troops into place in a war situation. The total US military budget is around \$270 billion per year.

⁵ “What are the Japan-US new defence co-operation guidelines up to?” Lu Zhongwei, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, 1999.

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- ⁶ “Stronger US-Japanese ties can bolster Asian stability,” M Nishihara, *IHT*, 22/4/99.
- ⁷ “Japan votes to recognise flag,” AP report in *IHT*, 12-13/6/99.
- ⁸ “Defending Taiwan,” Melinda Liu, *Newsweek*, 17/5/99.
- ⁹ “The recovery of the residual uranium-235 contained in the depleted uranium no longer is a matter of the future; it has been practised for several years now.” Peter Diehl, “Depleted Uranium: a by-product of the nuclear chain,” in: *Depleted Uranium: a post-war disaster for environment and health*. Laka Foundation, May 1999.
- ¹⁰ “China will predictably protest every high-profile Taiwanese purchase, such as the F-16s bought from the Bush administration [in 1992]. Less glamorous purchases of plans and licenses, on the other hand, attract less heat. Taiwan’s constant appetite for state-of-the-art components has kept American defence contractors humming along for decades.” Liu, *ibid*.
- ¹¹ The others are Japan, south Korea, Thailand, and Australia.
- ¹² The VFA was signed late in 1998, and finally ratified by the Philippines legislature on 27 May 1999.
- ¹³ “China and the Philippines,” *Economist*, 27/5/99.
- ¹⁴ “China maps changes in defence strategy,” J Pomfret, *IHT*, 12-13/6/99.
- ¹⁵ Jiang Zemin, Speech at the meeting welcoming back Chinese workers in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 13/5/99.
- ¹⁶ Formerly termed ‘Most Favoured Nation’ status.
- ¹⁷ “It will come as a surprise to self-styled friends of Taiwan in the US, but not many are gloating over the rapid cooling of US-Chinese relations... The Taiwan lobby in Congress consists of too many people who are viscerally opposed to Beijing.” “Put Taiwan’s real interests first,” P Bowring, *IHT*, 11/6/99.
- ¹⁸ Macao, for long a Portuguese colony, will return to China on 20 December 1999.
- ¹⁹ Jiang Zemin, *op. cit*.
- ²⁰ Liu, *op. cit*.
- ²¹ Albright has attempted to brush aside Chinese objections to TMD as directed against ‘proposals that have not been made regarding technology that does not yet exist.’
- ²² One commentator refers to south Korea’s “much-advertised rejection of membership in the proposed US-Japanese theatre missile defence project.” “Beyond the gunboats,” P Bowring, *IHT*, 17/6/99.
- ²³ “Taiwan is not even sure that it wants to be part of a regional system [the TMD] which would be costly and ... would primarily serve US strategic interests.” *Ibid*.
- ²⁴ “A defence test succeeds,” *IHT*, 11/6/99. Thanks also to Lionel Trippett, information and education officer of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), for helping to clarify these matters.
- ²⁵ Pomfret, *op. cit*.
- ²⁶ This was of course only one element in a whole package of concessions which he offered in return for the US putting pressure on the IMF to release more funds for Russia. “Protect IMF and WTO from politics,” R Dale, *IHT*, 22/6/99.
- ²⁷ “The way to get on with nuclear disarmament,” Jiang Zemin, *IHT*, 16/6/99.
- ²⁸ Macedonia is the only European state apart from the Vatican to have relations with Taiwan.
- ²⁹ “For Asians, battle for Kosovo is distant,” J Vinocur and M Richardson, *IHT*, 14/4/99.
- ³⁰ *Morning Star*, 9/6/99.
- ³¹ *China Daily*, quoted in “Arms across the Taiwan Straits,” J Gittings, *Guardian*, 9/6/99.
- ³² An outline of the achievements of People’s Korea and of the Juche idea is included in “People’s Korea after fifty years,” H Stephens, Institute for Independence Studies, 1998 (also reprinted in the Australian periodical *New Dawn*, November-December 1998).
- ³³ “Revenues from the Vietnam War made up as much as 40 per cent of its foreign exchange earnings.” *The two Koreas: a contemporary history*, D Oberdorfer, 1997.
- ³⁴ “Korean reunification and global independence,” H Stephens, Institute for Independence Studies, February 1999.
- ³⁵ Our Institute was active in solidarity, calling a meeting at the House of Commons on 21 April 1993 and a demonstration opposite the US embassy on 26 March 1994, as well as conducting press, lobbying and other activities.

³⁶ As a leading US spin doctor ruefully comments: “Washington now confronts the dilemma of having to follow through on a nuclear agreement struck with Pyongyang in 1994, when it was assumed that the beleaguered regime would not survive long enough to benefit from the accord’s most ambitious features.” “North Korean provocation keeps getting worse,” J Hoagland, *IHT*, 1/4/99.

³⁷ “Olympic Games and world peace” (interview with Ho Dam, former DPRK Foreign Minister), H Stephens, *Asian Times*, 15/7/88.

³⁸ It was announced in the *International Herald Tribune* in a short note in its ‘Briefs’ column of 28/5/99, a fuller report only appearing in a subsequent issue.

³⁹ The warships include the infamous guided-missile cruiser *Vincennes*, which shot down an Iranian passenger flight over the Gulf on 3 July 1988.

⁴⁰ Those killed, two women and one man, were Xu Xinhua (31) and Zhu Ying (27), a recently-married couple, along with Shao Yunhuan (48). They were all journalists.

⁴¹ “Outdated map led to targeting of Chinese Embassy,” B Graham and S Pearlstein, *IHT*, 11/5/99.

⁴² *Morning Star*, 22/6/99.

⁴³ “Demonstration against US Embassy in London demands: Hands off China!” Press release issued by the Institute for Independence Studies, 11/5/99.

⁴⁴ Graham and Pearlstein, *op. cit.*, *IHT*, 11/5/99.

⁴⁵ Peter Gowan, talk to the Conference “War and militarism” called by New Left Review and International Socialism, London, 6/6/99.

⁴⁶ This had long been a feature of the policy of former Prime Minister Primakov, but was now reiterated by Chernomyrdin and others.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *The fire this time*, Ramsey Clark, 1992, page 23.

⁴⁸ Ambassador Gelbard in a BBC interview, quoted by Peter Gowan, “The twisted road to Kosovo,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, 62 (page 44).

⁴⁹ Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, as well as the authorities in China’s Province of Taiwan.

⁵⁰ “US moves to temper Asia role,” M Richardson, *IHT*, 24/5/99.

⁵¹ Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, all of whose leaders were invited to NATO’s fiftieth anniversary, have been described as forming an “informal anti-Russian association, with US approval.” “The crisis in Moscow puts relations with NATO at risk,” W Pfaff, *IHT*, 15/5/99,

⁵² Argentina appears to regard itself as having a special relationship with NATO.

⁵³ Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

⁵⁴ An example of the tension in the area was seen on 23 May 1999, when a Chinese fishing vessel sank during a confrontation with the Philippines navy.