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## US military “setting the theatre” for war with China

In a remarkably frank interview with the *Financial Times* yesterday, the top US Marine general in Japan declared that US-NATO successes against Russia in Ukraine were a product of advance planning and preparations—“setting the theatre” for war in military jargon. That was exactly what the Pentagon was doing in Japan and Asia, he explained, in preparing for conflict against China over Taiwan.



A US Marine launching a Javelin shoulder-fired anti-tank missile during the Resolute Dragon 22 exercise last year. [Photo: Cpl Scott Aubuchon/US Marine Corps]

“Why have we achieved the level of success we’ve achieved in Ukraine?” Lieutenant General James Bierman asked rhetorically. A big part of it, he explained, was that after what he termed “Russian aggression” in 2014 and 2015, “we earnestly got after preparing for future conflict: training for the Ukrainians, pre-positioning of supplies, identification of sites from which we could operate support, sustain operations.”

“We call that setting the theatre. And we are setting the theatre in Japan, in the Philippines, in other locations.” In other words, the US is setting a trap for China by goading it into taking military action against Taiwan in the same way that it provoked Russia into invading Ukraine following the US-backed coup in 2014 that toppled a pro-Russian government.

Lieutenant General James Bierman is commanding general of the Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) and of Marine Forces Japan. Significantly, the III MEF is the only Marine crisis response force permanently stationed outside the US. In other words, Bierman and his Marines would be on the front line of any US-led conflict with China.

As the *Financial Times* explained, the III MEF is “at the heart of a sweeping reform of the Marine Corps.” Its focus is being shifted from the “war on terror” in the Middle East to “creating small units that specialise in operating quickly and clandestinely in the islands and straits of east Asia and the western Pacific to counter Beijing’s ‘anti-access area denial’ strategy.”

The US plans for war against China—known as AirSea Battle—envisage a massive air and missile assault on Chinese military bases and strategic industries supported by warships and submarines. The Pentagon has been increasingly concerned about China’s military abilities to defend its territory and secure neighbouring seas—“anti access area denial” with its own missiles and naval vessels.

US war preparations with Japan are proceeding apace. As Bierman boasted, the two militaries have “seen exponential increases . . . just over the last year” in their activities on territory from which they would operate during a war. In recent exercises, the Marines for the first time established bilateral ground tactical co-ordination centres rather than liaising with a separate Japanese command point.

The aim is far closer integration of American and Japanese forces. Instead of Japanese military groups being rotated to operate alongside US forces in Japan, specific units have now been designated as part of the “stand-in force” alongside their US Marine, Navy and Air Force counterparts.

Bierman also pointed out that similar preparations are being made in the Philippines where the government intends to allow the US to preposition weapons and other supplies on five more bases in addition to five where it already has access. “You gain a leverage point, a base of operations, which allows you to have a tremendous head start in different operational plans,” he enthused.

The US-led war against Russia in Ukraine and its intensifying confrontation with China are two sides of a strategy to dominate the vast Eurasian landmass that threatens to plunge humanity into a nuclear holocaust.

While Bierman is highlighting the advanced operational planning for war with China, it is being matched by huge increases in military spending by both the US and Japan.

*Stars and Stripes* reported on January 2 that the new US defence budget approved last month by President Biden included billions of dollars for new military infrastructure and strategic initiatives across the Pacific. The Indo-Pacific Command already has some 375,000 military and civilian personnel working across the region.

The Command's headquarters in Hawaii get \$87.9 million for barracks; \$103 million for upgrading missile storage facilities; \$111 million for a company operations facility, and \$29 million for an Army National Guard Readiness Center.

The Navy will receive \$32 billion alone for new warships and 36 F-35 aircraft, each costing about \$89 million. The funding also includes \$621 million for two SSN-774 Virginia class attack submarines that are expected to conduct operations in the Pacific and receive maintenance at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

To counter Chinese weapons, the Army is upgrading artillery and missile systems, seeking new longer-range cannons and hypersonic weapons while modifying air- and sea-launched missiles and cruise missiles for ground launch by Army units.

The Japanese government announced last month that it would double military spending over the next five years between 2023 and 2027 to about \$US80 billion or 2 percent of GDP. The associated national defence documents explicitly identify China as “an unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge.”

The Japanese military will buy a range of offensive weapons, including cruise missiles like Lockheed Martin's Tomahawk and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). It is also planning to upgrade its own Type 12 guided missiles that can be fired from the surface, ships, or aircrafts to strike naval vessels, and to manufacture its own hypersonic guided missiles.

Japan will also boost its missile sites. It has already begun to militarise its southern islands immediately adjacent to Taiwan and off the Chinese mainland, including Amami, Miyako, Ishigaki, and Yonaguni Islands. Tokyo has deployed or intends to deploy missile and electronic warfare units to these islands, in addition to constructing ammunition and fuel depots.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida set off Sunday on a tour of Europe and North America focussed on bolstering military ties. He will visit both Britain and Italy, which are joint partners in a deal agreed last month to build new advanced fighters. He is also expected to sign an agreement in Britain to establish the framework for visits by each other's military forces.

Kishida's final stop will be in the US where he will hold talks with Biden at the White House that will discuss military collaboration, Japan's purchase of US missiles and efforts to block China's access to advanced semi-conductors. As part of the US economic war on China, Biden has imposed a series of bans on the sale to China of advanced computer chips or the machinery required to develop and manufacture them. The Japanese defence and foreign ministers are due to hold a round of talks with the American counterparts on Wednesday in Washington.

At the same time, the US is about to conduct a provocative, official trip to Taiwan—an island that it de-facto recognises under the One China policy as being part of China with Beijing as the legitimate government. Terry McCartin, the top US official responsible for trade with China, is due to arrive in Taipei on Saturday to lead a delegation that will include officials from other government agencies.

The visit to Taiwan by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi last August, sanctioned by the White House, provoked sharp tensions and a dangerous show of force by both sides in surrounding waters. By strengthening trade and military ties with Taipei, Washington is deliberately pushing Beijing into a corner to force it to fire the first shot in a war over Taiwan that the US has prepared for in advance.

As Lieutenant General Bierman crudely explained: “As we square off with the Chinese adversary, who is going to own the starting pistol and is going to have the ability potentially to initiate hostilities . . . we can identify decisive key terrain that must be held, secured, defended, leveraged.”

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