

US Outlines Continued Primacy Over Asia at 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue

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Theme: [Defence](#), [Politics](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, June 30, 2022

[TheAltWorld](#) 21 June 2022

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The British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has hosted the “Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore since 2002. It is billed as “Asia’s premier security summit,” all while being almost entirely Western-centric in agenda and design. To help illustrate this, since the format was created, the first plenary meeting has always been centered around the US Secretary of Defense – the United States being a nation not even located in Asia.

This year was no exception, the West and its interests took center stage. Opening remarks by IISS Director-General and Chief Executive **John Chipman** centered around the conflict in Ukraine and the notion that “it is essential for the West to prevail.” Chipman also ensured that it was clear that the West prevailing in Ukraine is just one small part of the West’s “rules-based order” prevailing globally, including over the Indo-Pacific region.

While the opening and keynote address was given by Japanese **Prime Minister Kishida Fumio**, it might as well have been given by US President Joe Biden or another senior representative from Washington. Prime Minister Kishida’s “vision” was indistinguishable from that of the US State Department or the US Department of Defense’s, it consisted of various objectives for the region identical to American interests right down to the fact that nothing PM Kishida proposed would actually benefit the people of Japan and instead would be pursued on Washington’s behalf at the Japanese public’s expense.

This includes Japan adopting NATO-standard defense spending, something clearly aimed at China, a fellow East Asian state with which Japan does a considerable and growing amount of trade. This increased military spending will create opportunities for Washington to box Beijing in, but at the cost of Japanese-Chinese relations reaching their full potential as well as at the cost of regional stability.

US **Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin**’s [speech](#) at the first plenary meeting contained

nothing novel. It was a reiteration of decades of US policy in Asia, a policy of maintaining primacy over the region, its people, and its resources, all under the guise of upholding what is continuously refers to as the “rules-based international order.”

Like Chipman, Secretary Austin placed Washington’s proxy war with Russia at the heart of the discussion – accusing Russia of violating Ukraine’s sovereignty. Secretary Austin made these comments without any apparent sense of irony considering the United States currently illegally occupies large swaths of eastern Syria, continues its military occupation of Iraq against the desires of Iraqi representatives, and has only just recently withdrawn from Afghanistan, a Central Asian country left in ruins after 2 decades of US occupation.

Worse still, was the emphasis Secretary Austin placed on Taiwan, officially recognized by the US as part of China under the “One China Policy,” and with Secretary Austin himself clearly stating, “we do not support Taiwan independence,” but still placing it on Washington’s agenda for the region up to and including, “assisting Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability,” through the shipment of arms to Taiwan against the wishes of Beijing.

The United States condemning Russia for violating Ukraine’s sovereignty while blatantly violating China’s in regards to Taiwan is a continuation of American exceptionalism – the creation and adherence to rules when convenient, and the wholesale trampling of those rules when inconvenient.

Secretary Austin made several other paradoxical claims, the most troubling being the US supposedly not desiring “an Asian NATO” all while repeatedly declaring America’s intent to expand military exercises across the region to build up military cooperation and expand military interoperability – in other words – the pursuit of “an Asian NATO” in everything but official title and treaty.

At one point Secretary Austin would claim:

Next year, our Coast Guard will also deploy a cutter to Southeast Asia and Oceania. That will open up new opportunities for multinational crewing, training, and cooperation across the region. And it will be the first major US Coast Guard cutter permanently stationed in the region.

The US deploying its military thousands of miles from its own shores, and in this case, deploying the US Coast Guard on the opposite side of the planet from where America’s actual coasts exist, is done as a means of attempting to integrate regional military forces into a US-led military presence. It is being done precisely to threaten, constrain, encroach upon, and contain China in Asia.

This is what China is responding to, and yet China’s reasonable reactions to US military encroachment in Asia is depicted by the US as “the People’s Republic of China adopting a more coercive and aggressive approach.”

And while Secretary Austin condemns Russia for its alleged violations of Ukrainian sovereignty while clearly threatening China’s sovereignty regarding the Taiwan question, the US is also infringing on the sovereignty of its supposed “partners” across Asia and especially so in Southeast Asia.

It does this because while Secretary Austin claims America’s Asian partners share Washington’s vision regarding the region, this is not entirely true. They do so only to a point

- and that is the point at which US coercion and interference is minimal.

The notion of “ASEAN centrality” as defined by the US is Southeast Asia’s leading role in defining regional architecture. This is so simply because the US refuses to recognize China’s natural leadership role in Asia as the region’s largest nation by geography, population, and economy. It is also so because the United States feels that its influence over ASEAN is greater than any influence it could exercise over China. In many ways its is similar to the way the US influences or in many ways outright controls the European Union versus Russia.

As part of this process the United States funds and directs political opposition groups throughout ASEAN – groups that are anti-China, pro-West and more specifically, pro-American and seek to seize power in their respective nations, sabotage ties with China and fall into a US-led regional front against China. And just as it is similar to what the United States has constructed in Europe versus Russia it will likewise have a similarly destabilizing and destructive impact on Asia as a whole.

The United States, through political interference across ASEAN, is blatantly violating the individual sovereignty of ASEAN member states as well as creating a destabilizing effect on Asia as a region. The protests in Hong Kong, continued aspirations toward separatism in Taiwan, ongoing protests still taking place in Bangkok, Thailand, and persistent armed conflict in Myanmar are all the result of US political interference in Asia and Washington’s desire to disrupt the peaceful Chinese-led rise of Asia in order to maintain both its own, and Europe’s historical primacy over the region instead.

When Secretary Austin accused Beijing of “adopting a more coercive and aggressive approach,” he was actually projecting. While China will continue to assert itself against US encroachment, it will be the US, for a lack of a better alternative, who becomes increasingly aggressive in its political interference in the region, unable to compete with China in the material terms China increasingly excels at.

In the months and years to come, we will see a race between a Chinese-led rise of Asia economically, politically, and militarily, versus Washington’s attempts to disrupt and undermine it through engineered political strife just as it engineered in Eastern Europe from 2014 onward, or the Middle East from 2011 onward.

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