

US has unveiled its Asia-Pacific strategy



Photo: El Ojo Digital

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During the exchange of attacks between India and Pakistan last May, the Pakistani military claimed that its Chinese-made JF-17 Thunder fighter jets had shot down several French-made Indian Rafale fighter jets. In the mountains of the disputed Kashmir region, Pakistan bombed Indian positions with long-range PL-15 missiles, which are also made in China. China supplies more than 80% of Pakistan's imported weapons.

This was the first time that these Chinese weapons had been deployed in actual combat. Western powers analysed the confrontation, aware that Beijing's arms development had enabled its ally Pakistan, whose military force is far inferior to India's, to withstand an exchange of attacks with the neighbouring country before the two agreed a truce.

Western experts agree that China's military rise is a major concern for Washington and has been one of the most important issues discussed at the Shangri-La Dialogue, the major Asia-Pacific military forum, which began last Friday at a hotel in Singapore with defence ministers, generals, and senior officials from 47 countries in attendance.

The most highly anticipated event was the intervention of US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, who made his first public statements on the Trump Administration's regional security policy on Saturday. Hegseth surprised attendees with his aggressive rhetoric, emphasising that the threat from China is real and urging his regional allies to increase their defence spending and reduce their reliance on Washington's protection. "There is no reason to sugarcoat it. The threat posed by China is real and could be imminent," he said. "It must be clear to everyone that Beijing is credibly preparing to potentially use military force to alter the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific," he continued.

He said that their Asian allies should take a cue from European countries and move towards Trump's spending target of 5% of GDP, as pledged by NATO members.

'Deterrence does not come cheap,' Hegseth stressed. On his country's strategy in the region, the senior military officer revealed that the US was 'refocusing on deterring aggression from Communist China' because Asia was Washington's 'priority theatre of operations'. 'We are committed to ensuring that China cannot dominate us or our allies and partners,' he concluded.

It transpired that Hegseth's purpose is to convince his Asian colleagues that the US is a much more reliable partner than China. This is a message that has not yet been fully understood by most countries in the region, for whom Trump's trade war and his erratic "diplomacy" are of equal or greater concern than China's stance on disputed territories such as Taiwan or the South China Sea islands.

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