

Military build-up in Indo-Pacific region: US “pivot” to Asia threatens war with China

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The Obama administration’s “pivot” to Asia is a comprehensive military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region, greatly heightening the danger of war with China.

US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta announced in Singapore last weekend that by 2020 the greater part of American naval forces—including six aircraft carrier battle groups as well as a majority of the navy’s cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat ships and submarines—will be stationed in the Asia-Pacific.

Panetta also made clear that the Pentagon intends to maintain its “technological edge” and ability to “rapidly project military power” through the development of “an advanced fifth-generation fighter, an enhanced Virginia-class submarine, new electronic warfare and communications capabilities and improved precision weapons.”

The US is also investing in “new refuelling tankers, a new bomber and advanced maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft” to boost the capacity of US forces “to operate over the Pacific’s vast distances.”

While Panetta denied that this vast expansion of US military forces in Asia was “some kind of challenge to China”, there is no other plausible explanation. The Pentagon’s own strategic documents, including its annual report on the Chinese military, all identify China as the US’s number one target.

In his speech, Panetta reviewed the strengthening of military ties over the past three years with virtually every Asian country—except China. Washington is surrounding China with US allies and strategically located military bases and sowing the seeds for world war.

In North East Asia, the US is refashioning its military forces with allies South Korea and Japan, and, in partnership with Japan, transforming Guam into “a strategic hub” in the Western Pacific. Washington has extended its basing arrangements with its ally, Australia, and is seeking to do the same with the Philippines and Vietnam, enhancing the ability of the US navy to block Chinese shipping of vital energy and raw materials through South East Asian waterways.

In South Asia, the Obama administration has strengthened its key strategic partnership with India, while seeking to undermine Chinese influence in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Burma and Nepal. A decade of neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan has transformed that country, which borders China, into a key US base of operations in Central Asia.

US imperialism's consolidation of a network of military alliances has a relentless logic of its own. It compels China to seek its own allies, heightens competition, rivalry and tensions throughout the region, and poses the danger that one of the many regional powder kegs can trigger a conflict that rapidly assumes global proportions.

There is no clearer expression of the irrationality of capitalism as an international social order than this: the world's largest trade partnership, between the world's two largest economies US and China, also threatens to become the world's most dangerous military confrontation. The slide towards war is driven, not by the intentions of political leaders, but by the objective contradictions of the capitalist system: between world economy and the outmoded division of the globe into nation states, and between socialised production on a global scale and the private ownership of the means of production.

US imperialism depends on China as a vast source of cheap labour, yet China's economic expansion threatens to challenge the imperialist world order that the US has dominated since the end of World War II. Over the past two decades, Washington has recklessly plunged into one war after another in the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia in a bid to offset its historic economic decline. Obama's "pivot" to Asia has dramatically raised the stakes, by making clear that the US considers its main target to be a nuclear-armed power, China.

The working class in Asia, America and around the world confronts the danger of war amid a relentless assault on its living standards and social position. The capitalist classes have exploited the globalised character of production to depress living standards in both the advanced and developing countries. Since the eruption of the global financial crisis in 2008, these processes have accelerated markedly. Mass unemployment in Europe and the United States is being translated in China into falling demand for exports, a slowing economy and downward pressure on pay, conditions and jobs.

The international working class is the only social force on the face of the planet that can abolish the evils of war, mass unemployment and social misery. Chinese and American workers, along with their class brothers and sisters internationally, share a common class interest in abolishing the outmoded and anarchic capitalist system that serves the profit requirements of the wealthy few at the expense of the vast majority of humanity.

The working class is the bearer of new and higher productive relations—a planned socialist world economy. Under capitalism, globalised production only results in the never-ending drive for international competitiveness by rival capitalist nation-states, the relentless destruction of jobs and living standards in every country, and the drive to war. Placed under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class, the planned use of the same productive forces could provide a secure future and a decent standard of living for the whole of mankind.

That is the perspective of socialist internationalism for which the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections in every country fight.

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