

War Drums Beat Louder Against China as Japanese Imperialism Re-emerges

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Two significant shifts in geopolitics emerged from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Australia this week and his address to its national parliament.

The first is the escalation of pressure against China and the implicit threat that the three major imperialist powers in the region, the US, Japan and Australia, will undertake military action against it, as part of US imperialism's anti-China "pivot" to Asia.

The second, and no less important development—independent of the US pivot—is the re-emergence on the world arena of Japanese imperialism, following the Abe government's decision earlier this month to "reinterpret" the country's constitution to allow Japan to take part in joint military action with its designated allies.

While his address to the Australian parliament was peppered with references to upholding "democracy," "freedom" of the seas and international "rules"—all terms used by Washington to justify its military build-up against China—Abe's speech contained only one direct reference to the US. It was very much a "coming out" event. Abe announced to the world that Japan was breaking from the shackles of the past, imposed by the post-war "pacifist" constitution that formally outlawed war, and was back on the global stage as an independent military power.

Even before Abe concluded his visit, the stepped-up push against China was revealed in an interview given by Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Bishop declared that it had been a "mistake" for previous governments to avoid criticising China because it "doesn't respect weakness." Reticence, she said, only caused confusion.

Bishop asserted that while the optimal situation was "deeper engagement" with China, Australia had to be "clear-eyed" about what could go wrong and "hope for the best but manage for the worst."

Read in connection with her remarks on June 30 to an "Australian Leadership Forum", held at the Australian National University in Canberra, it is clear that managing for "the worst" means preparing for war.

Delivering a keynote address to that gathering, Bishop pointed to the possibility of conflicts breaking out over the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas—which involve China against Japan and the Philippines, both US allies. While insisting that she was not drawing "any direct parallels," she recalled the consequences of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo, which was the immediate trigger for the outbreak

of World War I.

The constant refrain of the imperialist powers is that China's rising economic power is leading to increased aggression by Beijing, threatening the "stability" of the region. In fact, the inflammation of tensions over long-running territorial disputes, some of which extend as far back as World War II, is a direct outcome of both the US pivot and the increasing assertiveness of Japan, which is most directly associated with Abe.

Abe spoke of a "special relationship" with Australia, couched in terms of a sporting analogy. Having deepened their economic ties, the two countries would "now join up in a scrum, just like rugby, to nurture our regional and the world order."

Just as in a rugby scrum, where players link arms to push forward, Abe—independently of the United States—has called for an interlocking "diamond," comprising Japan, the US, India and Australia. It would "safeguard the maritime commons," stretching from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific. The target is clearly China.

Abe advanced an earlier incarnation of the proposed alliance, dubbed the "Quad," during his previous term as prime minister in 2007. It provoked furious opposition from China, which denounced it as an Asian version of NATO. The plan was abandoned in early 2008, after Australia, under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, indicated it would not support the idea due to Chinese sensitivities.

The political landscape, however, has changed markedly in the past six years. In June 2010, Rudd was ousted in a parliamentary coup organised by forces in his Labor Party who were described by the US embassy as "protected sources." Rudd's removal opened the way for Australia's alignment with Washington's anti-China pivot under new Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

In Japan, just weeks before the coup against Rudd, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who had expressed the need for Japan to orient to China, was ousted after a conflict with the US. His removal ultimately opened the way for the return of Abe, espousing a right-wing nationalist and increasingly militarist agenda.

The strenuous efforts by the political establishment, backed by their faithful servants in the corporate media, to portray Japan as defensively responding to Chinese "assertiveness" rip the present situation out of its antecedent historical development. From its very origin as a capitalist and imperialist power in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Japan sought to dominate China, culminating in the brutal invasions of the 1930s.

There are immediate parallels with Germany, another late-developing capitalist power. Germany has now directly intervened in Ukraine, which it twice invaded in the twentieth century, helping to install an extreme right-wing puppet regime, amid a media campaign denouncing "Russian imperialism."

In both Japan and Germany, as their ruling classes seek a more enhanced global role, efforts are being made in political, academic and media circles to whitewash their respective roles and crimes in World War II.

While the address to parliament was the centrepiece of Abe's visit, his trip to Australia's northwest—the heart of iron-ore mining and natural gas production—was integrally bound

up with the underlying agenda of the Japanese-Australian “special relationship.”

Throughout its history, the Achilles heel of Japanese imperialism has proved to be its dependence on foreign sources of critical mineral and energy requirements. Acutely conscious of this fact, Abe is eager to secure guaranteed access to such resources as Japan seeks to establish itself as a major force on the global arena.

Far from creating a new period of peace and prosperity, much less the rule of law, the re-emergence of Japanese imperialism confronts the working class of Japan, Australia and the entire region with consequences potentially more catastrophic than the events of World War II. The development of a mass anti-war movement, interlocking the Japanese, Chinese, American and Australian working class, and workers throughout the Asia-Pacific region, is increasingly becoming the question of the hour.

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