

Biden-Xi meeting fails to resolve East China Sea crisis

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US Vice President Joe Biden held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday in Beijing, but failed to resolve the highly volatile situation in the East China Sea since Beijing declared an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) on November 23 that included the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, disputed with Japan.

Washington immediately sided with Tokyo, flying nuclear-capable B-52 bombers into the zone to challenge Beijing's authority. Biden met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday and reaffirmed the US commitment to its alliance with Japan in the event of a war with China. The US and Japan continued to fly military planes into the Chinese ADIZ over the past week. China has responded by scrambling fighters, heightening the danger of an accident or miscalculation that could precipitate a wider conflict.

The tensions were evident from the meeting in Beijing, which was scheduled to last just 45 minutes but extended to at least two hours. In Tokyo, Biden had promised to raise the ADIZ issue with "great specificity" in Beijing, accusing China of making moves to "unilaterally change the status quo" in the region. No joint statement was made by Xi and Biden, and the two leaders avoided any direct public comment on the dispute over the air defence zone.

Both Xi and Biden have attempted to play down the seriousness of the dispute, in large measure to keep the working class in China, the US and internationally in the dark about the mounting dangers of war. There is no doubt, however, that behind closed doors, sharp exchanges took place that find only a pale reflection in the remarks reported to the media by unnamed officials.

According to the *Washington Post*, "the vice president laid out in detail for Xi the objections of the United States, along with its allies Japan, South Korea, over China's declaration of an air defence zone over

the contested islands." Biden stressed that the US administration "will not recognize the flight restrictions China has sought to impose."

Xi "pushed back firmly, arguing that the islands—named Diaoyu in China and Senkaku in Japan—have been sovereign Chinese territory and complaining the United States, Japan and South Korea have refused to acknowledge the claim." According the *Post*, a central goal of the US delegation was to "persuade the Chinese not to aggressively enforce the air defence zone," but Xi "made no promises during the talks."

While Biden attempted to posture as a man of peace in Beijing, the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" over the past four years has deliberately stoked up tensions throughout the region as the US has sought to undermine China diplomatically and encircle it militarily. Washington's aggressive stance has encouraged successive Japanese governments to more forcefully assert their control over the small, uninhabited rocky outcrops in the East China Sea known as the Senkakus.

While the US bears the prime responsibility for the escalating tensions, the Chinese regime, which represents the interests of the country's ultra-wealthy capitalist elite, has responded with a mixture of craven appeals to American imperialism and reckless adventurism. As part of its campaign of whipping up Chinese nationalism to divert attention from acute social tensions at home, Beijing has transformed the dispute over the Diaoyu islets into a point of national honour, from which it can ill afford to retreat politically. In doing so, it has played straight into Washington's hands.

Biden has exploited the crisis to reaffirm and strengthen military ties with the right-wing Abe

government in Japan, and will seek to do the same with South Korea when he flies to Seoul tomorrow. In Beijing, the vice president is seeking to utilise the ADIZ standoff to send a message to the Chinese leadership that it must accept continued US dominance in Asia.

At the same time, Biden is seeking to extract whatever concessions he can from Xi and also Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, whom he was due to meet today. The *New York Times* report hinted at some of the areas under discussion with the Chinese president yesterday. Biden “welcomed” the far-reaching pro-market reforms announced at the recent Chinese Communist Party plenum which will offer huge new business opportunities for American corporations. Biden reportedly “pressed Mr. Xi to implement some reforms as quickly as possible.”

The situation in North East Asia bears a chilling similarity to that which prevailed before the eruption of World War I almost a century ago in 1914. Driven by a deepening crisis of world capitalism, the major powers engaged in escalating diplomatic intrigues, provocations and military interventions that produced a series of “war scares.” Ultimately, an apparently insignificant event—the killing of an Austrian archduke—unleashed the pent-up national rivalries and tensions, resulting in an unparalleled slaughter. Just a quarter century later, global capitalism and its bankrupt nation-state system again plunged humanity into the catastrophe of a world war.

Today, five years after the 2008 global financial crisis, world capitalism once more remains mired in slump and recession. The transformation of China over the past three decades into the world’s largest cheap labour platform has made it the focus of rivalries. US imperialism is determined to ensure its dominance in the new “Asian century” and is recklessly preparing for a new war to preempt China as a potential challenger and dictate terms to its other international rivals, including Japan.

The speed with which the Chinese declaration of an ADIZ in the East China Sea has loomed as a dangerous new flashpoint is a sharp warning to workers in China, the United States, Japan and around the world of the danger of war. All those who claim that the unprecedented global integration of all the major economies will prevent war are deluding the working

class. It is precisely that process of economic globalisation, constrained within the outmoded nation-state system, that is fuelling the rivalries and antagonisms.

The only means for halting the drive to war is to put an end to the bankrupt profit system that has already produced two world wars. The only social force capable of abolishing capitalism is the international working class, in the fight to create a world planned socialist economy.



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