

# The US “pivot to Asia” and the drive to war against China

Tom Peters  
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*This speech was delivered by Tom Peters, leading member of the Socialist Equality Party group in New Zealand, to the May 3 International May Day Online Rally, organized by the International Committee of the Fourth International.*

On this day last year, the International Committee of the Fourth International warned that the American ruling class was consciously preparing for war against China. Developments over the past 12 months demonstrate that such preparations are proceeding at a rapid pace.

To counter its profound economic crisis, the US ruling elite is determined to assert control over the profits extracted from the Chinese working class and the resources of the entire continent of Asia, no matter what the cost.

Almost four years ago, in November 2011, the Obama administration announced its “pivot to Asia.” This is a comprehensive strategy to militarily encircle China, undermine its economic influence in the region and compel Beijing to submit to Washington’s demands. The pivot has transformed the region into a seething cauldron of tensions and rivalries.

The reckless military build-up by the United States and its allies has been accompanied by endless denunciations of so-called Chinese “aggression” and “assertiveness” in disputed areas of the South and East China Seas. Obama recently accused China of using its size “to muscle other countries in the region around rules that disadvantage us.”

The hypocrisy of such claims is staggering. They turn reality on its head.

Just in the past month, the US conducted large-scale war games with South Korea and the Philippines, designed to threaten North Korea and China. Washington plans to hold 29 military exercises in a

dozen Asian and Pacific countries over the next five years. Over the same period 60 percent of the US navy will be deployed to the region.

The United States has poured thousands of soldiers into bases in the Philippines and Australia. It is developing a sophisticated missile defence system with Japan and Korea, as part of the Pentagon’s strategy to win a nuclear war against China.

Alongside the military build-up, the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership, currently being negotiated with 11 countries, represents the economic front of the anti-China pivot. Its purpose is to rewrite trade and investment laws to benefit US corporations. Defence Secretary Ashton Carter underscored its aggressive character by declaring that “passing [the] TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier” in order to promote a “global order” that serves American interests.

Inter-imperialist rivalries have begun to emerge over the carve-up of profits from China. Several European powers, including Britain, Germany and France, have joined China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, ignoring Washington’s objections. While currently functioning as allies of US wars and interventions around the globe, these countries have their own imperialist interests to pursue, which can rapidly bring them into conflict with the US.

Washington’s response will be to rely ever more heavily on its military superiority to secure its hegemony in Asia.

Japan, encouraged by the United States, is aggressively pursuing its dispute with Beijing over rocky islands in the East China Sea, referred to as Diaoyu in China and Senkaku in Japan. Obama last year committed the US to join Japan in a war with China in the event of conflict over these uninhabited

islands.

The government of Shinzo Abe, Japan's most right-wing and militaristic since the Second World War, is rearming and preparing for war. Having "reinterpreted" the constitution to remove restrictions on the Japanese military, Abe signed new defence guidelines with Obama last week to vastly expand the scope of their joint military operations outside Japan, greatly heightening the dangers of conflict.

While Tokyo is currently a US ally, the Japanese ruling elite will not be content to subordinate its long-standing imperialist ambitions to Washington. The Pacific war of 1941-45 between Japan and America was fought to determine which of the two imperialist powers would control China and the rest of Asia.

Throughout the region, the drive to war goes hand-in-hand with a deepening social crisis and attacks on democratic rights. In Vietnam, the Philippines, and elsewhere, the political establishment—including Maoist and Stalinist parties—has sought to divert workers' anger by whipping up anti-Chinese chauvinism.

The ruling elites fear, above all, their own populations. Workers and youth in every country have a deeply ingrained hostility to war and colonialism. Many countries continue to suffer the legacy of Japanese, American and European invasions.

The past two decades have not been lived in vain. Millions know that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were based upon lies about weapons of mass destruction and fighting terrorism.

For this reason, concerted efforts are underway to whitewash the crimes of imperialism. Just as right-wing German academics are seeking to relativize the crimes of the Nazis, the Abe government wants to suppress the history of Japanese atrocities.

Earlier this year, Abe personally attacked a US history textbook publisher for referring to the Japanese army's "comfort women"—the sex slaves rounded up from Korea, China, the Philippines and other countries during World War Two. Some of Abe's ideological allies in academia also deny that the 1937 Rape of Nanking occurred.

In Australia and New Zealand, both governments are spending hundreds of millions of dollars glorifying their involvement in the killing fields of the First World War. These ideological campaigns must be taken as the sharpest warning. The First and Second World Wars

are being sanitized and glorified to prepare a new generation for a Third World War.

The working class must make its own preparations. The Socialist Equality Party's recent Anzac Day meetings in Australia and New Zealand gave voice to the widespread revulsion for war in the working class—which finds no expression in the political establishment of any country. The SEP called for the building of a new antiwar movement, based on the principles of international socialism and the lessons of the Russian Revolution.

Our movement stands alone. The middle class pseudo-lefts and liberals, who led the mass protests against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 into a blind alley, have joined the camp of imperialism. They now assist the drive to war by echoing Washington's hypocritical denunciations of Chinese and Russian "imperialism" and "expansionism".

At this rally, we appeal to you to join the International Committee of the Fourth International and join the fight to build new sections throughout Asia and the Pacific. This is the only way to unite the working class across all borders against imperialist war and the capitalist system.



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