

The Coming War on China: A pacifist appeal

Richard Phillips
14 April 2017

Written and directed by John Pilger

John Pilger's *The Coming War on China*, which was shown last year in Britain and recently screened in several Australian and New Zealand cinemas, is about the US military encirclement of China and the danger of a catastrophic war between the two nuclear-armed powers. The feature-length documentary will be broadcast on Australia's state-funded SBS network on April 16.

The film's aim, Pilger tells viewers, is to "break a silence" about the US aggression against China—the largest build-up of American-led forces in the Pacific since World War II. Washington's "pivot to Asia" was officially launched in 2011 with the active support of the Australian and Japanese governments and other key allies.

The film begins with the American national anthem playing against photographs of war devastation in Hiroshima and Vietnam. It cuts to Major General Franklin J. Blaisdell, former US Air and Space Operation Integration director, boasting about the destructive power of the US military.

US President Donald Trump appears in the final minutes of the documentary, declaring that "China is raping the US" but that "America is back, bigger, better and stronger than ever."

Andrew Krepinevich, from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, bogusly insists that the US is only responding to Beijing's "provocative" behaviour. Krepinevich, who has called for the use of nuclear weapons, tells Pilger that air strikes, US Special Forces, missiles and naval blockades have a "key role in punishing China."

An animated map shows the vast web of American bases surrounding China. The documentary notes that the Obama administration expanded America's nuclear weapons program.

The film includes other chilling statements from US

military strategists and anti-China hawks, and warnings from concerned American scientists, such as professors Ted Postol and Steven Starr, that a nuclear war would destroy human existence on the planet.

That Pilger, a veteran investigative journalist and documentarian, has decided to speak out on the danger of a US war against China is of significance. It serves to alert a wider audience to the immense dangers in the world political situation.

The film, however, has definite political weaknesses. It is not informed by a serious analysis of the immense tensions over trade, investment and global strategic influence behind the US turn toward confrontation with Beijing, especially under the Obama administration.

A far greater proportion of the film is devoted to the impact of US nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958 and significant popular protests against US bases in Okinawa, Japan and on South Korea's Jeju Island.

The treatment of the restoration of capitalist relations in China by the Stalinist Communist Party (CCP), and the country's transformation into a cheap labour platform and focus of transnational production, is particularly limited. The documentary includes an interview with Eric Li, a Shanghai venture capitalist, who ludicrously declares that China is "a vibrant market economy... not a capitalist country."

Pilger does point to the social inequality and growing class tensions within China. The CCP's response, however, has been the promotion of Chinese nationalism and chauvinism, combined with its own militarist build-up. While US imperialism is the chief factor in the drive to war, the CCP and Chinese capitalist elite—who attempt to conciliate at times with Washington while engaging in an arms race on the US—contribute to the risk with their reactionary policies.

The documentary includes particularly striking

comments by Steven Starr, a senior scientist at Physicians for Social Responsibility. Starr explains that tens of millions of people would be killed within an hour of the outbreak of a nuclear conflict between the US and China and that the ensuing nuclear winter would irreparably damage life on the planet.

The amount of time spent by *The Coming War on China* on the campaigns in the Marshall Islands, Okinawa and South Korea leaves the impression that protest is sufficient to prevent such a catastrophe.

Those seeking a way to stop nuclear war urgently need to mobilise. But these efforts, including protests, must be directed toward the construction of an international anti-war movement based on the working class. This requires a socialist perspective to put an end to imperialism and the capitalist profit system that is the source of war.

The Coming War Against China screens on Australian SBS at 8.30pm on Sunday, April 16.



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