

Chinese leader calls for “strong nation” and “strong military”

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In his lengthy address this week to the 19th Chinese Communist Party congress, President Xi Jinping repeatedly declared that in the next period China would become a “great power” and a “strong power.” This will be, he said, “an era that sees China moving closer to center stage.”

Xi made ritual reference to “the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” In reality, he was elaborating the aspirations of the new bourgeoisie, who have accumulated vast wealth through four decades of capitalist restoration and whose further advancement requires Beijing to play a more assertive role on the world stage.

Xi’s “China Dream” of a strong, rejuvenated China inevitably comes into collision with the interests of the existing imperialist powers, above all the United States, which is desperately seeking to shore up its dominant position in the world through military force. The “new era” of which Xi speaks will not be one of peace and stability, but rather of war and revolution.

Xi made no reference in his speech to the looming danger of a catastrophic US war with North Korea that could quickly drag in China, Russia and other major nuclear-armed powers. US President Trump has flatly rejected Beijing and Moscow’s proposal for new talks, and has primed the American military for the “total destruction” of China’s only formal military ally.

The reckless US war drive is not simply the product of the fascistic individual Trump, but rather of the historic blind alley in which American imperialism finds itself. China’s economic rise over the past four decades, on the basis of a flood of foreign investment to exploit its cheap labour, has been accompanied by greater Chinese economic and political influence around the world, as it seeks raw materials and markets. Increasingly unable to match China’s economic

assistance, or “soft power,” the US is resorting to its hard power, or military, to challenge Beijing.

The Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” was a comprehensive strategy aimed at undermining Beijing diplomatically and economically throughout the Indo-Pacific, and encircling China militarily. Obama deliberately exacerbated dangerous flashpoints, such as the Korean Peninsula, and created new ones, including by militarily challenging Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Trump is pursuing the same objectives more aggressively, greatly heightening the danger of war. Having dismantled Obama’s plan for a trade and investment bloc against China, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Trump threatens Beijing with trade war. The military build-up for conflict with North Korea is also preparation for war with China. The calculation being made in American strategic circles is that, given the continuing decline of the US, the confrontation with China is preferable sooner rather than later.

On Wednesday, just hours after Xi’s speech, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson implicitly challenged Chinese ambitions. “China, while rising alongside India, has done so less responsibly, at times undermining the international, rules-based order,” he declared, homing in on “China’s provocative actions in the South China Sea.” The “international rules-based order” is, of course, the world order established in the aftermath of World War II, in which Washington dominated and set the rules to suit itself.

Xi’s speech signals that China’s economic and strategic interests cannot be accommodated within the current world order. He warned other countries not to underestimate China’s willingness to stand up for itself. “No one should expect China to swallow anything that undermines its interests,” Xi told

Congress delegates.

Far from backing down on Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, Xi declared, near the start of his report, that the consolidation of Chinese control of islets in the disputed waters was a highlight of his first five years in office. He also boasted of his “One Belt, One Road” initiative, a massive infrastructure plan to integrate the Eurasian landmass via road, rail and sea, thus linking China with Europe and directly undermining US encirclement.

In response to the US military build-up and threats in Asia, Xi foreshadowed a further acceleration of the arms race, setting specific targets to culminate in a “world class” Chinese military by 2050. “A military is prepared for war. All military works must adhere to the standards of being able to fight a war and win a war,” Xi bluntly declared.

Xi’s speech reeked of the stench of nationalism from start to finish. “The Chinese nation is a great nation; it has been through hardships and adversity but remains indomitable. The Chinese people are a great people; they are industrious and brave and they never pause in pursuit of progress,” he said.

Like Trump in the United States, Xi whips up patriotism not only to aggressively promote the interests of the Chinese ruling class, but also to subordinate the multi-millioned working class to those same interests. Xi is acutely aware of the social tensions that have been produced by capitalist restoration and the deep gulf between a tiny layer of the ultra-wealthy and the vast majority of the population. The social divide will only further widen, leading to rising social unrest, as the drive to war accelerates, which is why Xi also calls for a strengthening of the repressive state apparatus.

Without the intervention of the working class, conflict is inevitable, whether over North Korea, the South China Sea or the myriad other flashpoints in Asia and internationally. US imperialism regards China as the chief challenge to its world hegemony, and Chinese capitalism strains against the restrictions of the current world order established and dominated by Washington.

Workers and youth in China and the United States, throughout Asia and the world, have no interest in being used as cannon fodder in a war to defend the interests of the ultra-rich. It is only by uniting in an international movement based on genuine

socialism—that is, the reconstruction of society to meet the pressing needs of the majority, not the massive profits of the few—that the drive to war can be halted. That is the perspective fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections around the world.



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