

The US and China on a collision course

Andre Damon
3 June 2019

In a series of provocative actions, the United States is making clear it is prepared to fight a war to block Beijing's rise as an economic and geostrategic competitor.

The "cold war" between the United States and China took a major step toward becoming a "hot" war over the weekend at the annual Shangri-La defense summit in Singapore. The *Financial Times*, not known for hyperbole, wrote that "The growing dispute between the US and China on trade and technology is increasing the risk of military conflict or outright war."

At the summit, representatives of the Pacific nations that would be caught in the crossfire of such a conflict warned of the imminent possibility of a new Pacific war.

"Our greatest fear, therefore, is the possibility of sleepwalking into another international conflict like World War One," said Philippines Defense Minister Delfin Lorenzana. "With the untethering of our networks of economic interdependence comes growing risk of confrontation that could lead to war."

US officials used the summit to continue their efforts to encircle China militarily and strangle it economically, with acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan declaring China to be "the greatest long-term threat to the vital interests of states across this region."

Just days earlier, Vice President Mike Pence, addressing the graduating class at West Point, predicted war in the Pacific, in Europe and in the Americas within the graduates' lifetimes.

"It is a virtual certainty that you will fight on a battlefield for America at some point in your life ... Some of you will join the fight on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific, where North Korea continues to threaten the peace, and an increasingly militarized China challenges our presence in the region. Some of you will join the fight in Europe, where an aggressive Russia seeks to redraw international boundaries by force. And some of you may even be called upon to serve in this hemisphere.

"And when that day comes, I know you will move to the sound of the guns and do your duty, and you will

fight, and you will win."

The United States' actions are extraordinarily reckless and provocative. Seeing a challenge to its dominance, it is seeking to use every tool at its disposal, including military force, to compel China's submission to its will. The United States is simultaneously escalating conflicts around the world—including its regime change operation in Venezuela and its dispatch of additional troops to the Middle East to "counter" Iran—to shore up its flagging global hegemony through military means.

Chinese Defense Secretary Wei Fenghe responded to the US threats with militarist bluster of his own, saying, "Should anybody risk crossing the bottom line, the [People's Liberation Army] will resolutely take action and defeat all enemies." He warned the United States against encouraging Taiwanese separatism, declaring, "If anyone dares to split Taiwan from China, the Chinese military has no choice but to fight at all costs."

The divisions between the United States and China are centered on the Chinese state initiative called "Made in China 2025." The plan envisions a substantial expansion of Chinese industry into high-value-added and high-technology manufacturing, areas traditionally dominated by the United States and its allies.

In recent decades, Chinese companies have made substantial developments in the high-technology sector, including robotics, mobile phones and IT infrastructure. This development was expressed most directly in the growth of Huawei, the Chinese mobile phone and telecommunications firm, which was on track to become the world's leading smartphone maker by the end of the year.

Last month, the United States moved to effectively destroy Huawei as a global competitor to Apple and Samsung by banning US companies from selling it software and components. Google locked the company out of the Android operating system and associated services, while Broadcom and Qualcomm announced they would no longer sell the company chips it needs to continue production.

The move enjoys broad bipartisan support beyond the Trump White House. There is an emerging consensus within the American ruling class that China must be prevented from becoming a global technological, and thus military, peer of the United States.

The growth of US-China tensions has overshadowed the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. At the summit, Wei defended the bloody crackdown against the 1989 protests by workers and students, declaring the protests were “political turmoil that the central government needed to quell, which was the correct policy.”

He continued, “Due to this, China has enjoyed stability, and if you visit China you can understand that part of history.”

But three decades of “stability”—the effective transformation of China into a gigantic sweatshop for American and world capitalism—have come at a tremendous cost. China is not an imperialist country. It remains dependent on foreign corporate investment and finance. Now, it is once again in the crosshairs of a nuclear-armed United States determined to go to any lengths to secure its global hegemony.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, the International Committee of the Fourth International wrote, “The repression in China is being carried out in the direct interests of the imperialists. In attacking the Chinese workers, the bureaucracy is acting as their agent, seeking to restore ‘labor discipline’ and to repress the mass opposition of the working class to the policies of capitalist restoration and the rampant exploitation and social inequality which it has engendered.”

While publicly condemning the massacre, the first Bush administration secretly made clear to the Chinese government that the event was an “internal affair” and affirmed the value of the Sino-American relationship “to the vital interests of both countries.”

The ICFI statement continued, “Imperialism gloats over the broken bodies of the Chinese workers, seeking to exploit them for the purpose of crude anticommunist propaganda, while at the same time calculating that the brutal state repression will translate into higher rates of exploitation and even greater profits from the tens of billions of dollars worth of direct investment and joint ventures already operating on Chinese soil.”

This is precisely what happened. Following Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour of 1992, in which he encouraged Chinese entrepreneurs to “get rich,” US

investment in China ballooned, leading to a profit bonanza for American corporations, along with the fantastic enrichment of the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party, through the exploitation of the Chinese working class.

The arguments by leading Chinese figures that an accommodation and partnership with US imperialism would offer a peaceful road toward China’s national development have proven to be a pipe dream.

If Chinese officials accept US demands, it will be a massive blow to the Chinese economy, causing mass unemployment and engendering protests and political turmoil. But to stand up to the United States means, sooner or later, to fight a war between nuclear powers, in which millions dead on both sides would be an optimistic scenario.

Thirty years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, all the arguments that the laws of imperialism identified by Lenin after the outbreak of World War I had been superseded by globalization and technological development have proven false. The capitalist system, riven by a new scramble for a re-division of the world, is hurtling toward a new world war.

The only thing standing between humanity and this catastrophe is the international working class. It is urgently necessary for the workers of China, the United States and the whole world to unify their struggles in a common fight against the capitalist system, which is the root cause of imperialist war. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in China and all over the world as the vanguard of a working class movement against imperialist war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact