

WWII battle commemoration boosts US anti-China offensive in the Pacific

John Braddock, Tom Peters
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The recent commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the World War II battle of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands was seized upon by the Biden administration as part of its campaign to reassert US imperialism's hegemony in the Pacific, as it prepares for a new and even more devastating war against China.

The anniversary of the battle usually goes unnoticed by governments around the world, but this year it was transformed into a major international event. The US sent a high-powered delegation led by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and US ambassador to Australia Caroline Kennedy (daughter of the late president John F Kennedy). General Steven Rudder, commander of the US Marine Corps in the Pacific, also attended.

Also in attendance were the defence ministers of Japan and New Zealand, and Australian Minister for Defence Industry Pat Conroy and Navy Vice Admiral Mark Hammond. All three countries are US allies and are integrated into the increasingly provocative operations aimed at goading China into war. The Solomon Islands event followed US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, accompanied by an aircraft carrier and other naval vessels, which dramatically escalated the risk of open conflict.

The commemoration, intended as a show of unity behind the US and its allies, in fact revealed deepening geopolitical tensions brought about by Washington's belligerent efforts to push back against China's influence in the Pacific.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare boycotted the main commemoration event on August 7. His government has been subjected to destabilisation by US-backed factions in the country, and threatened with invasion by the US, after signing a security cooperation agreement with Beijing earlier this year.

Sherman's visit was part of Washington's escalating campaign to lay down the law to the Solomons and other

Pacific countries that such agreements with China will not be tolerated. It follows Vice President Kamala Harris' intervention at last month's Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji, where she pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to expand the US military and diplomatic presence in the region, as part of its "Partners in the Blue Pacific" initiative.

Speaking to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sherman menacingly declared that Sogavare "will have to answer to his own citizens about why he made the choice that he did." She added that "we will all watch very carefully" to see whether China establishes a military base in the Solomons, something that Sogavare has said will not happen. Sherman declared that such a presence would be a "threat, potentially to all the Pacific islands."

Sherman stated that "international leaders gathered to say that the work with Solomon Islanders, at the time of World War II, was decisive in victory, in ensuring freedom and democracy," and that Sogavare had "missed an important opportunity" by not attending.

In fact, the Guadalcanal campaign was one of the bloodiest episodes in the war fought by the US and its allies against Japanese forces, not to bring about "democracy" but to determine which imperialist power would control Asia and the Pacific.

The US invasion force included 75 allied warships and transports supporting about 60,000 US troops, against a Japanese occupying force about half that size. For seven months, beginning August 7, 1942, a series of fierce land, sea and air battles were fought. Some 7,100 US and allied troops, and more than 20,000 Japanese soldiers were killed or died from disease.

Boosted by international media coverage, both Sherman and Kennedy highlighted that their fathers had fought at Guadalcanal. Kennedy met with the children of two men who saved the life of her father, after his patrol boat was sunk in nearby waters.

Casualties among Solomon Islanders were not recorded. Thousands of unexploded bombs continue to litter the country, regularly killing and maiming people.

Sherman's claim, in her speech, that the US was fighting to "help build a better, safer, more democratic world," is an outright lie. The war concluded three years after Guadalcanal with the decision to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, incinerating hundreds of thousands of people. This horrific war crime was aimed at securing Japan's unconditional surrender while demonstrating the willingness of US imperialism to use the most barbaric methods, as it prepared to confront the Soviet Union.

Sherman drew a direct line between World War II and the present. In a clear reference to the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, and the coming war against China, she said: "Today we are once again engaged in a different kind of struggle—a struggle that will go on for some time to come" against "leaders who believe that coercion, pressure and violence are tools to be used with impunity."

She threatened that "the rules-based international order that has enabled peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and around the world for generations"—i.e., the rules imposed by the US following World War II to ensure its own hegemony—cannot be "ignored and undermined, diminished and destroyed."

These staggeringly hypocritical statements come from the representative of the most heavily armed and violent imperialist country on the planet. In the last 30 years alone the US military has invaded, bombed and otherwise intervened in more than a dozen countries, including Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, killing well over a million people and destroying entire societies.

These wars were no more about "democracy" or "human rights" than the present war against Russia or the escalating confrontation with China. In response to the deepening crisis in the American economy, the US ruling class intends to establish its unchallenged domination over the entire Eurasian landmass and to reduce Russia and China to the status of semi-colonial puppet states.

As was the case in World War II, militarism is also viewed as the means for imposing anti-democratic forms of rule, while whipping up nationalism and xenophobia, to suppress and divert the rising anger in the working class at home. In the US, Europe and internationally, workers are being driven into struggles against soaring levels of social inequality and the criminal "let it rip" pandemic policies responsible for tens of millions of

COVID deaths worldwide.

Sherman's visit to Guadalcanal was the focus of a broader diplomatic tour of the region, which included Samoa and Tonga, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Washington plans to open new embassies in both the Solomon Islands and Tonga to enhance the US presence in the region.

Shortly after her visit to New Zealand, the Labour Party-led government there announced it would send an additional 120 soldiers to assist with training Ukrainian forces in the UK. This doubles the number of NZ troops in Europe providing support for the war against Russia.

Meanwhile, Fiji's leader Frank Bainimarama travelled to Washington this month to meet with Vice President Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. Bainimarama, a military strongman who seized power in a coup in 2006, emphasised his support for the US in the war over Ukraine, and reiterated his support for the "Blue Pacific" initiative.

Fiji served as a forward base for Allied forces during World War II and, like the Solomon Islands, is seen as strategically critical in preparing for the next war. To further cement Washington's position in the region, the US Indo-Pacific co-ordinator, Kurt Campbell, recently announced that Biden will host a summit with several Pacific Island leaders at the White House next month.

The Guadalcanal commemoration must serve as another warning that the entire Pacific region is being placed on the front lines of a war that will eclipse even the horrors of World War II. The only force that can stop such a catastrophe is the international working class, united in a global struggle based on a socialist program, to put an end to the capitalist and nation-state system that is the fundamental cause of war.



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