

Biden's war summit with Japan and South Korea

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Last Friday's Camp David summit held between US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea marked an ominous milestone in the accelerating US drive to war with China.

Under the guise of maintaining "peace and stability" in Asia and "detering China," US imperialism and its two main military allies in North East Asia agreed to military and economic collaboration whose only meaning is the preparation for war. These include annual joint war games, expanded military intelligence sharing, the consolidation of supply chains and a three-way leaders' hotline to respond to crises.

The military cooperation of Japan and South Korea, both of which host major American bases and tens of thousands of military personnel, is essential to US plans for war with its nuclear-armed rival. Communications and intelligence-sharing are vital in any modern conflict. But it is particularly important for the coordination of sophisticated anti-ballistic missile systems in Japan and South Korea that are crucial to the Pentagon's strategy for nuclear war with China.

That Biden has been able to overcome the longstanding hostility engendered by Japan's brutal colonization of Korea has been applauded in American ruling circles. An opinion piece in the *Washington Post* hailed it as a "major Biden achievement," which represented a major step towards "a new trilateral alliance" to counter "growing threats from North Korea and China."

The *Wall Street Journal* devoted an editorial to "Biden's success in North Asia," declaring the summit to be "a diplomatic success in symbolism and substance." It dismissed criticism that the meeting had failed to establish a NATO-like pact committing the three powers to military action, stating: "The U.S. has forward-deployed forces in Japan and South Korea, and no one thinks those troops will sit in their barracks if one country is attacked."

At the same time, the editorial declared that Biden had to do far more to boost the US military and engage Japan and South Korea to sideline China economically. "In a region

where China is seeking military and economic dominance, there is no substitute for the influence that comes with hard U.S. military power and free trade," it wrote.

While North Korea is mentioned as a threat, no one has any doubt that China is the main target of the US-led trilateral military alliance. Even as it recklessly engages in an escalating war against Russia in Ukraine, US imperialism regards China as the chief threat to American post-World War II global hegemony.

A *Der Spiegel* interview this month with Elbridge Colby, a national security adviser in the Trump administration, is headlined "US Strategy in the Conflict of the Great Powers: Xi is much more dangerous than Putin." Colby, whose grandfather headed the CIA under President Nixon, "demands that the Europeans alone carry the burden of the war in Ukraine. The US needs all of its resources to prepare itself for a war with China," the German magazine explained.

Like the Ukraine war, which is the product of NATO's encroachment on Russian borders in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the 2014 US-backed extreme-right coup in Kiev, the mounting US confrontation with China has deep historic roots.

Following the Nixon-Mao rapprochement meeting in 1972, US imperialism exploited China as a battering ram against the USSR. Then, as the Chinese Communist Party embraced capitalist restoration, China was used as an immense source of cheap labour. However, the very growth of the Chinese economy to become the world's second largest has begun to undermine Washington's global position.

US preparations for war against China began with the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia"—an all-embracing diplomatic, economic and military strategy aimed at undermining Chinese influence in Asia, forging an economic block excluding Beijing, and boosting US military forces and alliances throughout the region. The military "rebalance," allocating 60 percent of the Pentagon's air and naval resources to the Indo-Pacific, was completed in 2020, and the military build-up continues apace.

The Trump administration continued the confrontation, imposing punitive trade tariffs and economic sanctions on China that have been maintained and greatly expanded under the Biden administration. In the name of “national security,” Biden, who served as vice-president under Obama, has imposed export bans aimed at crippling Chinese hi-tech industries and ensuring American technological dominance both in the economic and military spheres.

Biden’s forging of a trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea follows his elevation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad—a quasi-military grouping with India, Japan and Australia. In addition, last year he formalised the AUKUS pact with Britain and Australia that will provide Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines and greatly expanded missile capability, while transforming it into the southern anchor for a war with China by further opening its bases to US forces.

The US strategy in Asia has another parallel with the Ukraine war. Just as it goaded Moscow into invading Ukraine, so the US is deliberately undermining the entire basis for its diplomatic relations with China—the status of Taiwan. Washington has all but torn up the One China policy, under which it recognised Beijing as the de facto legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. By boosting economic and military arrangements with Taiwan, Washington is taunting Beijing into invading the island and providing the pretext for war.

The world is increasingly resembling the madhouse that preceded World War II, with the formation of economic blocs and military pacts that culminated in a disastrous global conflict that cost the lives of tens of millions. In response to the aggressive strategy of US imperialism and its allies, China and Russia are being driven together. At the current BRICS summit, involving the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, Chinese President Xi Jinping is calling for BRICS’ expansion and transformation into a grouping to counter US-led economic aggression.

Underpinning the accelerating plunge towards world war is the deepening crisis of global capitalism centred on American imperialism, which will stop at nothing to maintain its world dominance. In his introduction to the 2023 International Summer School of the Socialist Equality Party (US), David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site*, explained:

The understanding of the fundamentally existential character of the crisis requires the recognition that the deliberate provocation of this war and the reckless determination to escalate the confrontation with both Russia and China—two nuclear-armed

powers—is not the product merely of irrational aggression. As in the 1930s, the ruling classes see no way out of their crisis except through war. In 1938, Trotsky wrote in the opening of the Transitional Program that the imperialist powers were even less capable of averting World War II than they had been on the eve of World War I. It can now be said, with no less urgency, that the capitalist elites of North America and Europe are less capable of preventing World War III than they were in stopping the outbreak of World War II.

One must assume that the Biden administration is not entirely unaware of the high probability that a nuclear war would result in the deaths of tens of millions of people and the destruction of the United States—we should say hundreds of millions of people in the United States alone. But this can only mean that nuclear war is viewed by the ruling elites as a risk that must be taken to achieve objectives even more critical for the survival of American capitalism. Moreover, from the standpoint of the ruling class, an America without capitalism is a country not worth saving.

A world engulfed in a nuclear holocaust is not inevitable, however. The same contradictions of capitalism that are driving toward nuclear conflict are fueling the growth in the struggles of the international working class, which is being forced to bear ever greater economic burdens.

To halt such a catastrophe, workers must understand that the source of war and the class war being waged against their living conditions is one and the same—the profit system and its bankrupt division of the global economy into rival nation states. Nothing less than an international anti-war movement of the working class to overthrow capitalism and institute socialism is required to prevent war. That is the revolutionary perspective for which the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, fights.



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