

# US defense secretary delivers war-mongering speech in Singapore

**Mike Head**  
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The Trump administration's Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth dramatically escalated the decade-long US confrontation with China in a provocative speech on Saturday at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, the annual premier Indo-Pacific military forum.

Hegseth's war-mongering remarks, delivered to a gathering of defense ministers, government leaders, and military generals, had three major prongs. First, he declared that a war with China, ostensibly over Taiwan, was "potentially imminent."

Second, he demanded that Asian countries massively increase their military spending to 5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—requiring the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars—to join a US offensive against Beijing.

Third, he insisted that Asian governments must not try to balance between the US and China. They must "choose" to line up with Washington.

As has always been the case for US imperialism, Hegseth presented the US-led military acceleration as one of "deterrence" in the interests of peace and stability. In reality, successive US governments—both Republican and Democrat—have aggressively escalated the conflict with China since the Obama administration announced the US military and strategic "pivot to Asia" in 2011.

Repeated US administrations have designated China, because of its sheer economic growth, as an existential threat to the global hegemony that the US asserted after defeating its German and Japanese rivals in World War II.

While speaking of deterrence, Hegseth threatened China with the prospect of an all-out war, almost certainly a nuclear war, that would have catastrophic consequences for the region in which billions of people live, and for the globe as a whole.

Hegseth, a former military officer who took part in the US occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, invoked the "warrior ethos" of the US armed forces. He said that "if deterrence fails, and if called upon by my Commander in Chief, we are prepared to do what the Department of Defense does best—fight and win—decisively."

Hegseth asserted that recent increases in the intensity of Chinese military exercises around Taiwan showed Beijing was "rehearsing for the real deal." He stated: "We are not going to sugarcoat it—the threat China poses is real. And it could be

imminent."

Any attempt by China to conquer Taiwan "would result in devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world."

That is a threat now overshadowing the population of the entire region and the world.

Hegseth asserted: "It's public that [Chinese President] Xi has ordered his military to be capable of invading Taiwan by 2027." In fact, the record shows that Beijing has declared its intent to seek a "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan, which was a Chinese province before it was occupied by the US-backed Kuomintang regime in 1949.

Hegseth further turned reality on its head, accusing China of "credibly preparing to potentially use military force to alter the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific." He declared: "China seeks to become a hegemonic power in Asia, no doubt."

It is the US that has increasingly sought to use military means to reassert its post-World War II grip over the region, including by provoking Beijing by pouring weapons and military "trainers" into Taiwan in violation of Washington's de facto recognition of Chinese sovereignty in 1979.

In his speech, Hegseth boasted that the Trump administration had boosted the US military budget to \$1 trillion and pressured the European NATO powers to raise their military spending to 5 percent of GDP, in order to confront Russia. He demanded that US "allies" in Asia match that to combat China.

"NATO members are pledging to spend 5 percent of their GDP on defense, even Germany," he stated. "So it doesn't make sense for countries in Europe to do that while key allies in Asia spend less on defense in the face of an even more formidable threat, not to mention North Korea."

Currently, according to a recent study, Asian governments spend, on average, about 1.5 percent of GDP on their militaries. Raising that to 5 percent would mean slashing social spending and the conditions of workers, triggering explosive political unrest.

Hegseth made clear that this was not a matter of choice. "We ask, and indeed we insist, that our allies and partners do their part."

This demand will be a central item in talks with regional governments over the Trump White House's potentially crippling tariffs, along with demands that they radically shift

their economies away from dependence on China.

Hegseth warned governments against splitting their relationship between Washington and Beijing.

“We know that many countries are tempted by the idea of seeking both economic cooperation with China and defense cooperation with the United States. Now that is a geographic necessity for many, but beware the leverage that the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] seeks with that entanglement.”

For governments across the region, China is their main trading partner. Hegseth’s Biden administration predecessor, Lloyd Austin, used his speeches at the Shangri-La Dialogue to try to reassure such countries they would not need to take sides, while maintaining that Beijing and Washington could keep their competition from spiraling into war. Those pretenses have been replaced by naked bullying and saber-rattling.

Hegseth made a series of provocative announcements. He said more than 30,000 military personnel from 19 nations would participate in the 11th Talisman Sabre exercise, the largest ever, to be led by Australia and the US in July and August. It will be staged in Australia and, for the first time, in Papua New Guinea.

These war games include live-fire and field training exercises, force preparation activities, amphibious landings, ground force maneuvers, air combat, and maritime operations.

Hegseth also said the US Army would soon conduct “its first live-fire test of its mid-range capability system in Australia.” This would be “the first time that system is fired west of the International Date Line, the first time it’s been tested on foreign soil. Deployments like this represent a commitment to the region, and there are many more planned.”

Hegseth’s pronouncements were accompanied by unsubstantiated accusations by President Trump that China had breached a deal to temporarily pause US anti-China tariffs of up to 145 percent, an effective embargo on Chinese imports.

“China, perhaps not surprisingly to some, HAS TOTALLY VIOLATED ITS AGREEMENT WITH US. So much for being Mr. NICE GUY!,” Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform.

Trump did not specify how China had violated the agreement or what action he would take against Beijing.

Kevin Hassett, White House chief economic adviser, interviewed on Sunday morning on ABC (US), spelled out the direct connection between the latest expanded US steel tariffs and war plans. He said an American steel industry was essential “because if we have cannons but not cannonballs, then we can’t fight a war.”

The Chinese government protested Hegseth’s speech. A Chinese foreign ministry statement condemned his claim that China was trying to become a “hegemonic power” in the region. “No country in the world deserves to be called a hegemonic power other than the US itself, who is also the primary factor undermining the peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific,” it said.

“The United States has deployed offensive weapons in the South China Sea, fanned the flames, and created tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, turning the Asia-Pacific region into a ‘powder keg,’ causing deep concern among regional countries.” The ministry accused Hegseth of “playing with fire” on “the Taiwan question.”

The huge Talisman Sabre exercise in Australia underscores the Albanese Labor government’s acceleration of the transformation of that country into a platform for war against China.

Hegseth later released a statement publicly asking the Labor government to lift its military spending to 3.5 percent of GDP “as soon as possible.” Hegseth said he conveyed the message to Australian Deputy Prime Richard Marles in a meeting at the Shangri-La Dialogue.

Marles had earlier said the Albanese government was “up for” a “conversation” with the Trump administration on the issue. Fearing a public outcry, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese initially sought to downplay the US demand, telling the Australian Broadcasting Corporation: “We’ll determine our defense policy, and we’ve just invested across the [four-year] forwards an additional \$10 billion on defense.”

That is not enough as far as Washington is concerned, however. The Trump administration’s demand requires quickly lifting military outlays from about 2 percent—or from \$56 billion to \$98 billion annually based on this year’s allocation.

That illustrates the scale of the war preparations being insisted upon across the entire Indo-Pacific region, at the inevitable expense of the social programs, living conditions, and lives of the working class, which will fuel convulsive workers’ struggles.

The threat of a cataclysmic world war can be defeated only by unifying these struggles on a global scale against all the governments and the capitalist profit system itself, in the fight for world socialism.



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