

# US demands Asian allies prepare for “imminent” war against China

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Speaking at the annual, top-level Shangri-la Dialogue last weekend, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth laid down the law to military allies and partners throughout the Indo-Pacific: Dramatically escalate your military build-up and put yourselves on a war footing for conflict with China.

Hegseth denounced “aggression by Communist China,” declaring that it was seeking to “become a hegemonic power in Asia.” Focusing on Taiwan in particular, he warned that any Chinese attempt to invade the island “would result in devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world. There’s no reason to sugarcoat it. The threat China poses is real. And it could be imminent.”

Posturing as champions of peace, Hegseth and the Trump administration stand reality on its head. As has repeatedly been the case for more than a century, imperialism goes to war under the banner of “peace” and engages in a massive arms race under the guise of “deterrence.”

It is not China, but US imperialism that has waged three decades of illegal invasions and wars in a desperate bid to maintain its global hegemony. As it escalates its war against Russia in Ukraine and fully backs Israel’s barbaric war in Gaza, the fascist Trump administration, beset by intractable economic and political crises at home, is plunging headlong into conflict with China, which it regards as the chief threat to US dominance.

Hegseth declared, “President Trump was elected to apply ‘America First’ on the world stage.” What that signifies is rapidly becoming clear. Far from being isolated events, the wars in Europe and the Middle East are coalescing with Washington’s war plans in Asia into a global conflict involving nuclear-armed powers.

The only “peace” that Trump is striving for is to realise the megalomaniac fantasy of a world utterly subordinate to the interests of US imperialism. That is the content of his overarching slogan of “Make America Great Again,” which recalls nothing so much as the Nazi hymn “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, über alles in der Welt” (Germany, Germany above all, above all in the world).

The Trump administration is already bludgeoning its

NATO allies in Europe to boost military spending and take a greater hand in accelerating the war against Russia in Ukraine. The latest military strike, destroying strategic bombers deep inside Russia, could not have taken place without the active involvement of the Pentagon and NATO headquarters.

“And as our allies share the burden [in Europe], we can increase our focus on the Indo-Pacific, our priority theatre,” Hegseth told the political and military leaders assembled in Singapore. “We ask—and indeed, we insist—that our allies and partners [in Asia] do their part on defense,” he said, making clear there would be “uncomfortable and tough conversations” with any country that did not fall into line.

The Trump administration’s war drive against China did not spring from nowhere. It was the Obama administration that initiated the “pivot to Asia”—aimed at undercutting Chinese diplomatic influence in the region, undermining its economy, and preparing for war. Obama’s goal of stationing 60 percent of America’s naval and air power in the Indo-Pacific by 2020 has long been achieved.

The previous Trump and Biden administrations only escalated the confrontation with China into what is now naked economic and trade warfare, along with an arms race and escalating diplomatic and military provocations that threaten to precipitate open military conflict.

While referring to other flashpoints for war in Asia, Hegseth focussed on the most sensitive—Taiwan—declaring that Chinese President Xi Jinping was preparing for an invasion of Taiwan by 2027. In reality, Chinese governments have always insisted that Taiwan is sovereign Chinese territory, and it has been recognised as such since the 1970s by most countries internationally, including the US, under the “One China policy.”

Over the past decade, however, the Trump and Biden administrations have systematically undermined the diplomatic and military protocols underpinning the “One China policy,” knowing full well that any declaration of Taiwanese independence or the return of US troops to the island could precipitate war. Just as the US and NATO

goaded Russia into invading Ukraine by encroaching on Russian borders, the Trump administration is seeking to provoke a Chinese invasion of Taiwan by seeking to bring the island, step by step, under American sway.

In Singapore, Hegseth boasted of the advances in American military technology and its integration of Asian allies and strategic partners into Washington's war plans through greatly expanded joint war games, basing arrangements, military technology R&D, and military industries. What he touched on included:

- The first-ever overseas deployment this year of the NMESIS mobile anti-ship missile system used by the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, "one of the US military's most capable and lethal formations," in joint exercises in the Philippines. War games, which also included US Special Operations Forces, took place on the strategically sensitive Batanes Islands in the Luzon Strait between the Philippines and Taiwan.

- Later this year the US Army will conduct a live-fire test of its Mid-Range Capability system in Australia. This will be the first time this weaponry, which has a range of up to 2,500 kilometres, will be test-fired on foreign soil. Australia will host the largest-ever Talisman Sabre exercises involving more than 30,000 military personnel from 19 nations.

- Within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad—the US, Australia, Japan and India—the US is "leading an initiative called the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network, enabling Quad partners to leverage shared logistics capabilities in the Indo-Pacific."

- The US is also pushing for "an integrated defense industrial base" to support a US-led war against China. It has formed the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience (PIPIR) involving 14 US allies and partners "to strengthen industrial resilience, expand our capacity, and accelerate deliveries."

However, Hegseth insisted that the extensive military build-up throughout the region is far from enough. Just as the US is demanding that its NATO allies dramatically boost military spending to 5 percent of GDP, so it is calling on its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to do the same.

Moreover, he stressed that governments throughout Asia had to end their attempts to manoeuvre between the US and China, which is the largest trading partner of virtually every country in the region. Beware of the temptation, he said, to seek "both economic cooperation with China and defence cooperation with the United States."

The Trump administration is wielding the economic weapon of tariffs not just against China, but as the means to bludgeon governments in the Asia Pacific to line up militarily against Beijing and to bear a far higher burden of the costs of war.

To view the spiral toward war in the Indo-Pacific as simply the result of the fascist Trump would be to overlook the depth of the global economic and political crisis centred in the US of which he is the product.

US imperialism embraced China in the 1970s as a means for undermining the Soviet Union and as a seemingly endless source of cheap labour, as long as its manufactures were limited to low-tech goods. The sheer expansion of the Chinese economy to become by some measures the largest in the world threatens to eclipse the US, including in a range of hi-tech fields such as electronics, green technology, electric vehicles and artificial intelligence.

The Trump administration is determined to prevent China from overtaking the US economically by all available means, including military—the sooner the better—even if it risks engulfing the region and the world in a nuclear conflagration. Facing rising popular discontent and opposition at home to its mounting attacks on democratic and social rights, it is recklessly driven to expand the wars already underway in Europe and the Middle East to Asia as the means of projecting extreme social tensions outwards against foreign foes.

Hegseth has just served notice to US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to line up with Washington in making all the preparations necessary for war against China.

The working class throughout the region and internationally must draw the necessary political conclusions. What is being demanded by Washington involves a doubling or more of military expenditure and far deeper inroads into the living conditions of working people, which cannot be imposed democratically.

The political fight to halt the plunge towards world war is thus intimately connected to the struggle to defend basic democratic and social rights. What is required is the building of a unified international and socialist movement of the working class directed at overturning the capitalist system—the source of war, social inequality and fascism.



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