

Washington pressures Peru to line up with US war policy against China

Cesar Uco
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The Trump administration is strongly pressuring the crisis-ridden and deeply unpopular Peruvian government of President Dina Boluarte to distance itself from China and closely align with US imperialism's drive to reassert its hegemonic position in Latin America.

At a meeting held at the Pentagon at the beginning of last month between US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Peruvian Minister of Defense Walter Astudillo and Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmer Schialer, Hegseth warned Peru that China poses a "significant threat to peace and security in Latin America."

The Pentagon chief continued, telling the visiting Peruvian officials:

Beijing is investing and operating in the region for unfair economic gain and together, in order to prevent conflict, we need to robustly deter China's potential threats in the hemisphere.

The meeting was billed as an event designed to "strengthen cooperation between the two countries." Hegseth stressed that "putting America first also means we're putting the Americas first considering what we're up against. We share a lot of the same challenges and common threats that require a very serious response."

Responding to Hegseth's demands for mutual commitment to unleashing "a very serious response" against China, General Astudillo made a subservient declaration of Peru's "commitment to this relationship", going on to declare Washington "a historic, and key partner."

Schialer went further, declaring that for Peru, the US constituted an "historic ally in many things" including supposedly shared "values ... from the Western world". He emphasized that the Peruvian government wants to

"upgrade" its ties to Washington to achieve "a comprehensive or integral strategic relationship".

The statements made by Hegseth, Astudillo, and Schialer go beyond the typical rhetoric of bilateral dialogue. They take as their starting point that a confrontation between US imperialism and China in South America is imminent, as Washington turns to militarism as a means of offsetting its diminished economic influence in the region.

As for the obsequious tributes by the visiting Peruvian ministers to a supposed "historic" partnership and shared "values", they failed to elaborate on that record for good reason. Washington's ties to Peru, along with the rest of the region, are based upon ruthless exploitation of labor and natural resources, along with the fomenting of coups and support for regimes based on mass murder, "disappearances" and torture.

Among Washington's "gifts" to Peru was Vladimir Montesinos, the US School of the Americas-trained officer who became a long-time CIA "asset" and the power behind the throne of dictator Alberto Fujimori, directing death squad massacres and a ferocious campaign of military repression whose legacy still scars Peru.

Peru has become the epicenter of Washington's clash with China over dominance in Latin America in part because of the recent opening of the mega seaport of Chancay, built by the Chinese state-owned company COSCO.

Located 73 kilometers north of Peru's capital, Lima, the Chancay seaport was constructed to serve as the central hub for exports from South America to China. In its completed phase, it is expected to serve as the final link in a pipeline bringing exports from across the region, with modern rail and road networks running from Brazil's Atlantic coast all the way to the Pacific. Built using the most modern technology, it can also serve Chile and Ecuador, with ships departing from Valparaiso and

Guayaquil towards Chancay, where exports to China from all South America will be concentrated.

The Chancay Seaport will significantly reduce shipping time and costs, providing an incentive for expanded Chinese investments in Peru. With an initial investment of US\$1.2 billion, the Chinese have expressed interest in investing an additional US\$2.3 billion, bringing the total to US\$3.5 billion. The extra investment is contingent upon deals between Brazil and China.

China's goal goes beyond using the seaport to export goods to China. The overall project includes the Chancay Logistics and Industrial Complex, spanning a total area of 842.5 hectares. The initial investment for the complex was around US\$240 million. The opening of electric car assembly plants will position Peru as a key center for the production and distribution of EVs in South America. The latter stages (mainly industrial) are expected to generate approximately 20,000 direct jobs upon completion.

Peru is the world's third-largest copper exporter – after Chile and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – and China is overwhelmingly its main customer. In the first quarter of this year, Peru exported US\$6.62 billion worth of the strategic mineral, with US\$4.88 billion of the total going to China.

In 2023, China accounted for more than double the exports going to the US, US\$22.5 billion as opposed to US\$9.3 billion, with the gap only widening since. The 2023 figures also show China with a substantial lead over the US as a source of Peruvian imports, US\$13.8 billion vs. US\$11.1 billion.

On the eve of the US-Peru Pentagon meeting, Peruvian exports to China rose by 12.4 percent in March, the sharpest increase since October 2024, driven in large part by the Trump administration's tariffs regime.

Similarly in neighboring Bolivia, China accounted for US\$1.21 billion in exports, as opposed to just US\$279 million going to the US in 2023. The country has come into the crosshairs of US imperialist policy in the region in no small measure because it boasts the world's largest reserves of lithium, a key component for electric vehicles, high-tech products, and advanced weapons systems. Deals to initiate significant extraction and processing of the strategic mineral have been signed with Chinese and Russian firms, but are currently tied up in court as a result of what the government charges are politically motivated lawsuits.

For Brazil, Latin America's largest economy with a GDP of US\$2.18 trillion, exports to China totaled US\$94.41 billion in 2023, while exports to the US

amounted to just US\$38.15 billion. The difference in imports was not as extreme, with Brazil importing \$67.77 billion from China and \$54.33 billion from the US.

The struggle between the US and China for dominance in Latin America confronts the capitalist ruling class in Peru and throughout Latin America with an existential dilemma. On the one hand, reversing the economic integration of the Latin American and Chinese economies, which has grown steadily over the course of decades, would cut across profit interests that have developed in tandem with exports to China.

Moreover, any attempt to redirect supply chains to the US as part of a "Fortress Americas" strategy of unrestrained US domination of the Western Hemisphere in preparation for war with China would mean a violent dislocation of national economies leading to an eruption of class struggle

On the other hand, these same layers of the Latin American national bourgeoisie depend upon US imperialism as the cockpit of global counterrevolution in their confrontations with the powerful and growing workers struggles across the region.

Washington is forging close ties to far right regimes from that of Milei in Argentina, to those of Bukele in El Salvador and Noboa in Ecuador. Peru's President Boluarte has shown every indication of wishing to join this rogues' gallery, from her slavish appeals to President Trump to her government's recent announcement that it is looking to follow Trump's example in seeking an agreement with Bukele to send 'highly dangerous foreign inmates' to El Salvador's infamous CECOT mega-prison.

Undercutting the strategy of war and counterrevolution pursued by both US imperialism and its junior partners in the Latin American national bourgeoisie is the fact that the crisis of US capitalism and the reactionary policies pursued by the Trump administration are provoking an increasingly broad and determined struggle on the part of the US working class and broad masses of the population.

The most urgent question is the forging of a united struggle of workers throughout South, Central and North America based upon a common socialist and internationalist perspective for putting an end to the capitalist system.



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