

# US Secretary of War again targets China at Shangri-La Dialogue

Peter Symonds  
1 June 2026

In a speech last Saturday replete with hypocrisy and falsity, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth told the annual strategic-military Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore that there was “rightful alarm regarding China’s historic military buildup and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond.”

Once again Hegseth demanded all strategic allies and partners throughout the Indo-Pacific dramatically boost military spending and act in concert with United States to prepare for war against China under the pretext of maintaining regional peace and stability.

The absurdity of Hegseth’s remarks would not have been lost on the defence ministers, top military officers and strategic officials gathered at Asia’s top security conference—even those that side with US imperialism.

Hegseth repeatedly declared that the massive US build-up in Asia was simply necessary to prevent the rise of China as a regional hegemon. The US, he declared, was, in the words of former President Theodore Roosevelt, delivering leadership “confident enough to speak and walk softly while carrying a big stick.” He went on: “We are the power working to sustain equilibrium, not too disruptive, plain and simple.”

In reality, far from being a force for stability and peace, the US is on a global military rampage in open violation of international law and without any mandate from the UN or the US Congress. Right from the outset, however, the US secretary of war boasted that the Trump administration was prosecuting American national interests through the military kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, the murderous sinking of fishing vessels in Latin American waters and the unprovoked US-Israeli war on Iran.

While declaring that no country should become a hegemon in the Indo-Pacific, Hegseth brazenly

declared the US was reestablishing its hegemonic domination of the Americas under the rubric of the Monroe Doctrine and “aggressively defending our homeland and our hemisphere.” That has translated not only into the Maduro kidnapping but a crippling blockade of Cuba and establishing control over the Panama Canal, as well as pressing for the annexation of Canada and Greenland.

Addressing the assembled political and military leaders, Hegseth insisted that all allies and partners had to step up as the military strength required was “not a burden America can or should carry alone.” He declared: “You don’t have a strong alliance unless everyone has skin in the game. No freeloading.” He added point blank: “We demand 3.5 percent [of GDP spending on defence] from our allies and partners.”

Hegseth’s remarks inadvertently point to the historic decline of the United States that underpins the real reasons for the accelerating US war drive against China over the past decade and half. US imperialism regards the rapid economic rise and growing technological sophistication of China as the chief threat to US global domination and is determined to eliminate that danger through its remaining military might.

The Trump administration’s military actions have a strategic logic—the consolidation of US control over, and exclusion of China from, the Western Hemisphere and the domination of energy reserves and global crossroads of the Middle East in preparation for war against China. It is no accident that Venezuela and Iran, both heavily sanctioned by the US, have been the chief suppliers of discounted oil to China. The war against Iran, as well as the ongoing US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, are integral to an unfolding world war that will envelop China sooner rather than later.

If Hegseth’s speech was less bellicose than at last

year's Shangri-La Dialogue, it is only because the Trump administration has been compelled to take a temporary step back in its economic war on China after Beijing countered by imposing strict limits on exports of critical minerals needed for a vast array of technologies—including for military purposes. China has a virtual global monopoly over the production of most rare earths and other critical minerals.

Last year Hegseth denounced “aggression by Communist China” and warned of imminent war with China over Taiwan. In this year's speech, Hegseth ludicrously claimed: “Under President Trump's leadership, relations between the United States and China are better than they've been in many years. President Trump and this administration seek a stable peace, fair trade and respectful relations with China.”

The words may have softened with the immediate need to establish alternative sources of critical minerals and to resolve the debacle of the Iran war, but China remains the prime military target. Hegseth bragged that the US wields “the most powerful and capable military in the history of the world.” He explicitly referred to US war strategy centring on control “along the First Island Chain,” running from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines—both to hem in the Chinese military and to provide a springboard for attacks on the Chinese mainland.

China's defence minister did not attend last year's Shangri-La Dialogue nor this year's, given the domination of the US and its allies. The Chinese delegation was headed by Major General Meng Xiangqing, a professor at the People's Liberation Army National Defence University. He reserved his critical remarks for Japan's rapid remilitarisation and plans to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS alliance with Britain and the US. He also warned that any move by Taiwan to declare independence was “incompatible” with peace across the Taiwan Strait.

However, on the US, Meng's comments were muted. Referring to Trump's recent meeting with Xi in Beijing, he said: “We also hope that China and the United States will move towards each other... promote the development of military-to-military relations along a healthy, stable and sustainable path.”

Beijing has no progressive response to Washington's criminal aggression or drive to war against China.

While constantly seeking a new deal with US imperialism, it is engaged in an arms race that can only spiral into a global conflict that spells disaster for humanity. The only means for halting the further descent into world war is the building of an international anti-war movement of workers in the US, China and around the world, fighting for a socialist perspective to put an end to capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**