

James Cogan: The US pivot and the threat of war in Asia

By James Cogan
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We are publishing here the text of the speech given by James Cogan, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, to the International Online May Day Rally hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the World Socialist Web Site on Sunday, May 4.

At this May Day rally, the International Committee of the Fourth International is sounding the alarm. No less than Europe, Asia has been turned into a tinderbox that could ignite another catastrophic world war. With a staggering degree of recklessness, US imperialism, with the full support of Japan and Australia, is pursuing an agenda that threatens to provoke a military conflict with China.

In November 2011, the Obama administration announced the “pivot,” or rebalance, to Asia, which is above all targeted at China.

China’s complete integration into globalised capitalist production has transformed it into the world’s second largest economy and main low-cost manufacturing centre.

The United States, as part of its efforts to reverse its historic economic decline, is concentrating 60 percent of its air and naval power in Asia by 2020, to exert control over this vast source of cheap labour and market of 1.3 billion people.

Wall Street will no longer tolerate a regime in Beijing that still excludes foreign capital from major sectors of the Chinese economy. It is determined to block attempts by Chinese-based companies to secure contracts for strategic raw materials around the world and to compete for business and profits in other areas.

The American military is being positioned across Asia as part of its “AirSea Battle Plan.” The Obama administration has established new bases in Australia, Singapore and now the Philippines, in addition to

existing US bases in Japan, South Korea and across the Pacific.

If the US decides that Beijing poses a military threat, it will launch devastating missile and air strikes across China and impose a naval blockade of key sea lanes to starve it of energy supplies and strangle its economy.

The aims of the United States are embodied in the economic arrangements and rules it is seeking to impose across Asia in the form of the Trans Pacific Partnership. US imperialism wants nothing less than the total subordination of not only China, but the entire region, to the dictates of the financial and corporate oligarchy that rules America.

Every country has been drawn into the maelstrom of US diplomatic intrigues, economic bullying and preparations for war.

Across Asia, the ruling elites are casting off any pretence of independence and lining up with the US military encirclement of China. With US backing, the Philippines is now aggressively asserting sovereignty over territories that are also claimed by China.

The Australian bourgeoisie, whose economic and strategic interests are dependent upon the US maintaining its dominant global position, has enlisted as the military and political adjunct of the pivot. The central importance of Australia is underscored by Obama’s decision to announce it in Canberra in 2011. The Australian armed forces are fully integrated into the US AirSea Battle plan, and new US bases have been established in the north and west. Behind its back, the entire population has been placed on the front line of any war in Asia.

The media and political establishment is glorifying war and militarism and promoting nationalism to suppress anti-war sentiment and condition a new generation for war. It also seeks to divert growing

outrage over its massive assault on workers' living standards and democratic rights outwards, against an external enemy.

Japanese imperialism, propelled by decades of economic stagnation and its own immense internal social tensions, is throwing off the restraints that were imposed upon it after World War II. With the direct encouragement of Washington, the Japanese government of Shinzo Abe is using false claims of a Chinese threat to remilitarise the country, justify the expansion of military spending and promote nationalism and chauvinism.

The Asian region is now fraught with tensions, from the volatile situation on the Korean peninsula, to the military stand-off between the Philippines and China, to the Japanese-Chinese conflict over the Senkaku or Diaoyu Islands.

Last month, while in Japan, Obama gave an unconditional guarantee to the Abe government that the US would deploy American forces in any armed conflict with China over the Senkaku Islands.

Any incident, or deliberate provocation, could rapidly trigger all-out war, which would inevitably escalate into a nuclear confrontation with devastating consequences for the region and the world.

While Japan is currently allied with the US against China, the rivalries between them, which led to the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, lie just beneath the surface. A new generation of Japanese militarists has emerged with ambitions to see Tokyo, not Washington, dominating Asia. The US-Japan confrontation with China is only the prelude to the distinct possibility of open conflict between the two major imperialist powers in the region.

The only social force that can prevent the descent into World War III is the international working class. In Asia, we are speaking of vast new battalions of workers that have been created through the industrialisation of the region under the auspices of globalised production. Four hundred million in China alone; hundreds of millions on the Indian subcontinent; tens of millions in South Korea, and many more in Indonesia, Indo China and throughout South East Asia.

In every country, there is, throughout the working class, broad opposition to war and social inequality. But this opposition finds no outlet within the existing parties and political setup. The organisations that once

claimed to represent the working class openly serve as the agencies of imperialism and the capitalist elite.

In China, the Stalinist Communist Party, far from representing socialism, polices the exploitation of hundreds of millions of workers in the world's largest cheap-labour platform. It represents the interests of a tiny ultra-wealthy elite that has benefited from three decades of capitalist restoration. It regards the Chinese working class as a far greater enemy than American imperialism.

The situation is similar throughout the Asia-Pacific. Workers and young people have no political voice. The old Stalinist, trade union, social democratic and bourgeois nationalist leaderships promote the most reactionary nationalism and xenophobia with the aim of dividing and weakening the working class as they prepare for war.

Workers in China, Japan, the US, India, Australia, the Philippines and every part of the Asia-Pacific region must assert their independent class interests by unifying their struggles with their counterparts across the globe.

At this May Day rally, we appeal to workers and young people to join the ICFI in the fight to forge a new international anti-war movement on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The central task is to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and perspective. Today's rally points the way forward. We must build new sections of the ICFI throughout Asia and the Pacific based on the history, program and principles of the Fourth International and its perspective of world socialist revolution.

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