

US to expand military deployments as war danger builds in Asia

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The National Defense Strategy released by the Trump administration last month defined China and Russia as the paramount “strategic competition” facing US imperialism. It labelled the two nuclear-armed states as “revisionist powers” that must be prevented from undermining American global dominance. The document declared that the US had to “prioritize preparedness for war.”

The American military has been doing precisely that in Asia for over six years, since the Obama administration announced its provocative “pivot” to the region in November 2011. It has prepared and positioned a vast array of surface ships, submarines, bombers, jet-fighters, infantry divisions and marine units to wage a region-wide war against China. New bases for US forces have been established in Australia and Singapore and re-established in the Philippines and Thailand. India, which has been groomed as a “strategic partner” against China, now provides access, maintenance and supply arrangements to the US military.

The US has some 50,000 personnel in Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan, including 18,000 marines, an aircraft carrier battlegroup and squadrons of Air Force jet fighters. It has some 29,500 personnel in South Korea, on the frontline of any conflict with North Korea. Guam hosts 7,000 military personnel, as well as B-52 and B2 strategic bombers capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

On February 9, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the next stage of the concentration of American power in Asia. The Pentagon is considering deploying to the region the three West Coast-based Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs), which have primarily been used in Iraq and the Middle East over the past decade or more.

MEUs consist of 2,200 marines, jet fighters and

helicopters aboard amphibious assault ships, accompanied by guided-missile cruisers and destroyers, support vessels and often an attack submarine. In a twenty-first century version of gunboat diplomacy, if deployed, they will roam up to seven months at a time throughout the region to “persuade Pacific nations to stand with the US” against China.

Pentagon officials told the *Journal* that the MEUs could “conduct patrols” and “training with allies” and could “respond if a conflict were to break out.” While left unstated, a potential role for amphibious forces would be to attack and seize the Chinese-held islets and reefs in the South China Sea, which the Chinese military has been developing into forward bases against the US Navy.

General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told journalists as he toured US facilities in the northern Australian city of Darwin last week: “We have enduring interests here, and we have an enduring commitment and we have an enduring presence here.” Pentagon officials foreshadowed that the number of marines sent from Okinawa to operate from Darwin for six months of the year will be significantly increased this March and over coming years.

In the short-term, the US military is preparing for the prospect of a massive onslaught against North Korea, followed by an invasion to overthrow its regime and drastically alter the balance of power in North East Asia. This would be to the direct strategic detriment of China and Russia, which border the economically destitute country of barely 25 million people.

The conduct over the weekend of US Vice President Michael Pence, during the opening days of the Winter Olympics in South Korea, was ominous.

The South Korean government went out of its way to welcome the participation of a North Korean team and extend diplomatic honours to Kim Yo-jong, the sister

of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and the isolated country's nominal head of state, Kim Yong-nam. Tentative steps were taken toward talks between the two Koreas on winding down the current state of tensions which, if it resulted in war, could lead to hundreds of thousands of casualties and the economic and social ruination of both sides of the peninsula.

Pence, in a calculated display of imperialist arrogance and contempt for both South and North Korea, made clear that the US had no interest in a peaceful settlement. He walked out of a state dinner, refusing to even speak with the North's leadership, then remained seated as the united team of the Koreas paraded as one in the Opening Ceremony.

These diplomatic affronts serve only one purpose: to send an unmistakable message that the Trump administration will only accept an outcome that turns North Korea into a client-state of the United States. Washington is demanding the complete capitulation of Kim Jong-un's regime. The alternative is activating plans, already in place, to implement Trump's threat to "totally destroy" North Korea with "fire and fury."

In chilling remarks, General Dunford told US marines in Darwin: "[A]t the end of the day, it is going to be a nasty war if we fight on the Korean Peninsula. And it's going to involve marines and soldiers taking ground, alongside, obviously, our allies and partners. If you are a marine, and frankly if you are anyone in uniform, if you wake up in the morning always believing that this is the last day that you will be at peace, you are going to be in the right place."

What else is North Korea supposed to conclude from such actions and statements except that the militaries of the US, South Korea, Japan, Australia and other American "allies and partners" are being primed for combat in the wake of the Winter Olympics?

The contradictions of capitalism have brought the world to the brink of what would likely be the most horrific and costly conflict since World War II. The American ruling class, beset with internal crises and incapable of dictating to the world as it once did, has concluded that the escalation of 25 years of militarist violence is the only way to prevent its intractable decline.

Even if China and Russia stood aside from a war on the Korean Peninsula, such a conflict would heighten

the danger of "great power" wars fought with nuclear weapons. The regimes in Beijing and Moscow, likewise representing crisis-stricken capitalist oligarchs, are actively preparing for an inevitable military confrontation with the United States. In the think-tanks and militaries of the European imperialist powers, calculations are also being made that conflict with Washington may ultimately be unavoidable.

In 1915, in the resolution he proposed to the anti-war conference in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald, Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin wrote:

"All the objective conditions of recent times have put the proletariat's revolutionary mass struggle on the order of the day. It is the duty of socialists, while making use of every means of the working class's legal struggle, to subordinate each and every one of those means to this immediate and most important task, develop the workers' revolutionary consciousness, rally them in the international revolutionary struggle, promote and encourage any revolutionary action, and do everything possible to turn the imperialist war between the peoples into a civil war of the oppressed classes against their oppressors, a war for the expropriation of the class of capitalists, for the conquest of political power by the proletariat, and the realisation of socialism."

Today, that perspective is fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International, which must be built as the leadership of the international working class.

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