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The danger of war in Asia

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Even as the specter of war in Europe is raised by Washington’s provocative confrontation with Moscow in Ukraine, President Obama is touring American allies in Asia, stoking up regional flashpoints, consolidating the US military encirclement of China and preparing for conflict in the Pacific.

The centerpiece of Obama’s trip is his state visit to Japan this week, where he reaffirmed his determination “to renew American leadership in the Asia-Pacific.” Obama’s statement was aimed at scotching suggestions that the US “pivot to Asia”—a diplomatic offensive and military build-up aimed at the subordination of China—was stalled.

Obama’s “pivot” over the past five years has transformed the Indo-Pacific into a tinderbox of geo-political rivalries and tensions, encouraging allies like Japan and the Philippines to aggressively prosecute their territorial disputes with China in the East China and South China Seas. At a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Obama added further fuel to the fire by affirming that the US “commitment to Japan’s security is absolute” including over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Obama's willingness to join Japan in a war against China over the small, uninhabited rocky outcrops in the East China Sea only underscores the utter recklessness of US foreign policy. What was a little known dispute just five years ago has been transformed into a dangerous flashpoint for military conflict. By declaring Washington's "absolute" military backing for Japan, Obama has given the go-ahead for Abe to further escalate the dispute with China.

In Ukraine the US is collaborating with openly fascist organizations. In Japan, Obama is teamed up with the most right-wing government since World War II. In just over a year, Abe has boosted military spending for the first time in a decade, is seeking to end constitutional restrictions on the Japanese armed forces and has established a US-style national security council. He refuses to even acknowledge China's claim to the disputed islands.

Abe is deliberately reviving the foul traditions of Japanese militarism that was responsible for such atrocities as the 1937 Nanjing massacre during which Imperial troops butchered hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians and soldiers. His visit last December to the notorious Yasukuni Shrine to Japan's war dead that enshrines 14 Class A war criminals gave the green light for a campaign to whitewash the crimes of Japanese imperialism. In the same month, Abe appointed four right-wing figures to the board of Japan's public broadcaster NHK, including author Naoki Hyakuta who declared in February that the Rape of Nanjing "never happened."

The Obama administration is directly responsible for this revival of Japanese militarism. The White House pressured Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama to resign in June 2010 when his plans to forge closer ties with China and remove US military bases from Okinawa conflicted with preparations for the "pivot." As the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands flared, the US inflamed tensions by publicly backing Japan if war broke out with China. Abe and his right-wing Liberal Democratic Party exploited the climate of fear to win the 2012 national election.

In this week's joint press conference, Obama was effusive in his praise for Abe's "exceptional commitment to our alliance" and gave his stamp of approval for Japan's remilitarization. He hailed "our deepening security cooperation" and "progress towards realigning our forces in the region," adding that the US forces in Japan "will include our most advanced military capabilities."

Obama's provocations in Ukraine against Russia and his "pivot to Asia" aimed at China are two fronts of a broader strategy aimed at subordinating the Eurasian landmass to US imperialism. In 1997, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski highlighted the central importance of Eurasia for maintaining American global hegemony. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, he declared: "With Eurasia now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, it no longer suffices to fashion one policy for Europe and another for Asia. What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and historical legacy."

The chief obstacles to US ambitions in Eurasia are China and the Russian Federation, which as far as Obama is concerned, have already frustrated US plans in the Middle East, particularly for military intervention in Syria. The US intrigues in Ukraine, which have deliberately provoked a confrontation with Russia, demonstrate that Obama is willing to risk war with a nuclear-armed adversary. Obama has already gambled on conflict with China when he ordered nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to challenge Beijing's declaration of an air defense identification zone last November. Washington's aim is not simply the containment of Russia and China, but their complete subordination to the interests of US imperialism, if need be through their dismemberment and break-up.

The international working class confronts great dangers. One hundred years after the outbreak of World War I, capitalism is wracked by the same fundamental contradictions that twice plunged the world into barbarism in the 20th century. The drive to war by US imperialism and its allies is accompanied by a deepening class war against the democratic and social rights of the working class at home. The promotion of militarism and war in the US, Japan and Europe is a deliberate attempt to turn the immense internal social tensions outward against an external enemy.

Without a political struggle to mobilize the international working class to abolish the outmoded profit system, the slide to war is inevitable. The International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* are holding an International May Day Online Rally on May 4 to initiate the fight to build an antiwar movement across the globe. We urge workers and youth from every country to join in this common forum and discussion on the international revolutionary socialist perspective that must animate this struggle.