

Joe Biden and Xi Jinping meet at APEC summit in Peru amid nationwide strikes and deployment of US troops

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14 November 2024

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit hosted this week by the dictatorial regime of Dina Boluarte in Peru is overshadowed by the confrontation between US imperialism and the growing economic influence of China, which has become the main economic partner of Peru and South America as a whole.

President Joe Biden is attending what will be his last major international summit and will hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday. The presence of Biden can already be characterized as militarist fist clenching, including reported plans to complain to Xi about North Korean troops joining Russian forces fighting the US-NATO proxy regime in Ukraine.

Biden's visit is being accompanied by 600 elite American troops, including snipers, two Black Hawk helicopters carrying heavy artillery, and two 747 aerial refueling aircraft. The US soldiers and Marines will join 13,000 Peruvian police and troops being deployed to patrol the summit.

The main target of this unusual show of force by the Pentagon is China, which has overtaken US imperialism's economic position in what Washington long regarded contemptuously as its "own backyard."

The highpoint of the economic forum has been the inauguration of the Chancay mega seaport owned and operated by Chinese Company Cosco Shipping, with the presence of Chinese President Xi Jinping and dozens of other heads of state.

The \$1.3 billion port will alter the geopolitical landscape of South America as the most important addition in the region to Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative."

It will soon expand to accommodate ships carrying up to 24,000 TEU containers, unique in the region, and will

cut shipping times to China by about 12 days. It provides an export route for Bolivia's strategic lithium, the largest reserves in the world, while Brazilian exports to Asia can save up to 20 days via the new route.

Currently, 30 percent of Peruvian exports are directed to China, over double that sent to the United States, and 77 percent of its key export, copper, goes to China. China is also the main source of foreign investments, accounting for about a quarter of accumulated foreign direct investments in the country, including in several of the largest copper mines.

The thinly veiled message delivered by US troop presence is the same as that sent with the yearly war games under the scenario of securing the Panama Canal, whose main ports on both ends are operated by China: US troops are ready to battle for control of key infrastructure and resources in Latin America.

Earlier this month, Gen. Laura Richardson, the outgoing commander of United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), claimed without any evidence to the *Financial Times* that the Chinese navy hopes to use the Chancay port for military purposes.

"It could be used as a dual-use facility, it's a deepwater port," she said. "[The navy] could use it, absolutely. ... This is a playbook that we've seen play out in other places, not just in Latin America."

Richardson tellingly suggested that investments in "strategic ... locations or sea lines of communication for global commerce" could only be interpreted in military terms.

In April, Richardson visited Ushuaia, Argentina's southernmost city, where China had proposed constructing a port to supply Antarctica. But, as the *Financial Times* notes, "[A]fter significant lobbying from Washington, Buenos Aires chose to proceed with a US-

led facility instead and halted Chinese plans for a multi-use port 200 kilometers up the coast at Río Grande.”

The mobilization of US troops in Peru is also aimed at protecting Biden from the country’s population. The summit has been accompanied by national protests and a 72-hour general strike starting Wednesday led by transportation and construction workers. Thousands of demonstrators have confronted riot police in Lima’s streets and there have been widespread roadblocks, whose repression has already resulted in numerous injuries.

One demonstrator in Lima on Wednesday told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the US government should “Let the South American countries and all the countries be free and sovereign over their lands, over their countries, not stick their noses in and cause so much damage. Palestine for example, they are murdering them, they are trying to invade them. Forget all that! ... Let us be free. Let us be happy, let us live in peace.”

The transportation unions are carrying out their fourth strike in two months to protest the murder of bus drivers, passengers, construction workers, small entrepreneurs and trade union leaders at the hands of extortion gangs and their hired killers. The Peruvian Congress, controlled by the far right, has refused the demand to repeal Law 32108, which the population opposes, since it shields corrupt congress members and politicians associated with the extortionist mafias. Instead, it has sought to ram through “urban terrorism” legislation that would criminalize protests and strikes.

The protests are socially heterogeneous but are growing in scope and demands, with groups demanding justice for nearly 50 Peruvians killed in protests against Boluarte’s elevation to power in a December 2022 parliamentary coup that toppled and jailed the country’s elected President Pedro Castillo. Meanwhile, the corrupt union bureaucracies are struggling to keep a lid on mass opposition as they seek to secure a seat at the table in securing deals with foreign capitalists at the expense of the working class and poor.

The Boluarte government has declared that the protests amount to “treason against the homeland” for threatening their push to attract foreign capital by offering the exploitation of cheap labor and natural resources under a brutal police state regime.

The Peruvian government provides one of the starkest manifestations of the collapse of bourgeois governability in Latin America under the pressure of unprecedented social inequality and the mounting trade and military conflicts between the largest economies in the world. The

approval rating of Boluarte hovers around 5 percent while 96 percent of Peruvians want to “throw them all out,” including President Boluarte and her cabinet and all members of Congress, and are demanding early elections.

On December 7, 2022, the far-right Congress, the Biden administration, the military and police worked closely to impeach and arrest the bourgeois nationalist president Pedro Castillo. US Ambassador Lisa Kenna, a CIA veteran, secured the support of the military leadership the day before.

Although this parliamentary coup provoked mass unrest, the Peruvian ruling class supported it, along with the military’s massacre of protesters with live ammunition, in a bid to end the long streak of impeachments, corruption scandals, and mass protests against both inequality and the criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following five years during which six presidents were ousted, the political crisis was interfering with competing for foreign investments and mining operations in the second top producer of copper in the world.

Boluarte, who is facing charges of “genocide” and “aggravated homicide,” summed up the character of her regime in a ceremony called to thank the military ahead of the APEC summit. “The support of our soldiers and police will be vital to ensure security and order at this event, reflecting the capacity and leadership of our country before the world,” she declared before thousands of troops.

Peru and all of South America have been made players in the expanding geopolitical chess game. Two alternatives stand before the working class across the Americas and internationally: an emerging third world war and a turn to dictatorship and fascism or a world socialist revolution to direct the increasingly globally interconnected economy to meeting social needs.



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