

Democrats back trade war with China

By Patrick Martin
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The trade war measures against China announced by President Donald Trump over the past two weeks have been more widely supported by congressional Democrats than by their Republican counterparts. Many of the Republicans come from rural states and districts hardest hit by tariffs on US agricultural exports imposed by China in retaliation for the much more sweeping tariffs ordered by Trump.

There has been considerable criticism of Trump's trade war measures by the Democrats, but it has been within a framework of endorsing the campaign against China, demonizing China as the main US rival, and calling on Trump to stop provoking trade conflicts with the European Union (EU), Canada and Mexico in order to recruit them as allies in the anti-China campaign.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer was the most explicit. "We should not be having a multifront war on tariffs," he said May 14. "I would focus everything on China. And get the Europeans, Canadians and Mexicans to be on our side and focus on China. Because they are the great danger." Schumer has repeatedly urged Trump to "stay tough" on China.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters May 13 that Trump's imposition of tariffs on China was "in recognition that something needed to be done." Referring to the ongoing trade talks with Beijing, she said, "I wish him success in the negotiation. But as I say, we have to use our leverage without antagonizing those who are on our side on this." That was a reference particularly to the EU.

Senator Gary Peters of Michigan, also a Democrat, told *The Hill* that Trump was "not going into this fight with allies. It isn't targeted. It's just kind of across-the-board tariffs." The former Merrill Lynch assistant vice president and Paine Webber vice president added, "I think the way he has done it has not been thoughtful at all."

Senator Doug Jones of Alabama echoed Schumer.

"What I've got a concern about is going it alone," he said. "At the same time we started this with China, we were also kicking our European allies in the shins and we were kicking Canada in their shins and we were kicking Mexico."

Virtually all the commentary by Democratic presidential candidates has been along similar lines. They support trade war with China, and only object to America's taking on the entire world as ill-thought-out and potentially damaging economically. According to one study, however, the China tariffs imposed by Trump will cost the typical US family of four nearly \$2,400 annually in higher prices on imported goods, and wipe out 2.2 million jobs.

Former Vice President Joe Biden made an initially critical response to Trump's imposition of tariffs, suggesting that the Chinese economy was not really a serious threat to US global domination. He was swiftly attacked both by Trump and by nearly all his opponents for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Campaigning in New Hampshire, Biden reiterated his concerns about the impact of the tariffs. "The American worker is getting killed by this," he said Monday on WMUR. "The American farmers are getting killed." But in a concession to the prevailing anti-Chinese campaign, he declared, "If they want to trade here, they're going to be under the same rules."

Former Texas Representative Beto O'Rourke issued a statement warning that any trade deal between Trump and China should be carefully scrutinized. "Holding China accountable should not come at the expense of American workers," he said. "That is why we must not settle for any deal that does not respect intellectual property, level the playing field in the Chinese market, nor end unfair trade practices." In effect, that means no deal that does not force a complete restructuring of the Chinese economy, as the most extreme trade hawks in the Trump administration are demanding.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, like Schumer, called for mobilizing US allies against China, rather than alienating with further tariffs. “It is in the interests of the United States to work to strengthen institutions like the WTO [World Trade Organization] and the UN rather than trying to go it alone,” his statement reads. “American concerns about China’s technology practices are shared in Europe and across the Asia-Pacific. We can place far more pressure on China to change its policies if we work together with the broader international community and the other developed economies.”

Sanders added a note of rabid anti-communism, declaring, “The Trump administration has also done nothing to pressure China over its abhorrent treatment of the Uighur and Tibetan peoples. Future trade negotiations should, for example, target American corporations that contribute surveillance technologies that enable China’s authoritarian practices.” The plight of the Uighur and Tibetan minorities has been used for decades as a pressure point by the CIA to threaten China with possible secession and disintegration.

Sanders concluded with a salute to Trump: “The Trump administration is correct to put pressure on China to reform its practices, and I hope that some good comes from current trade negotiations.”

Less prominent Democratic presidential candidates have added their own notes of anti-Chinese and anti-communist hysteria.

Representative Eric Swalwell of California cited his role as a member of the House Intelligence Committee: “I’ve seen first-hand the economic espionage that China commits and the adverse impact it has on American businesses. China has not been forthright in even admitting that intellectual property theft and technology transfer occurs. Nor is China transparent on its industrial subsidies. Curbing China’s dishonest practices must be part of any negotiations; as president, I would hold China accountable.”

Swalwell called for Justice Department criminal prosecution of Chinese companies, such as the current effort to extradite a top official of the Huawei electronics giant, detained in Vancouver by the Canadian government at the request of the Trump administration.

Representative Tim Ryan of Ohio, whose district includes the devastated steel city of Youngstown, Ohio,

chimed in, “For too long China has succeeded in hurting America’s manufacturing industry by engaging in illegal steel and aluminum dumping. That is why I support targeted tariffs against China’s steel and aluminum... I have long been a supporter of taking action against currency manipulation, and leading legislation that would impose countervailing duties to offset the impact of manipulation.”

Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, one of the Democratic candidates with the closest ties to Wall Street and global finance capital, denounced China in stridently anti-communist terms during a New Hampshire campaign swing. He called China a “totalitarian regime” that had to be confronted.

“The Chinese have been taking advantage of this country and other nations on Planet Earth,” he told an audience in Berlin, New Hampshire. “They do not fight fair. They steal our intellectual property. They force the transfer of technology . . . We need to take them on. We need to fight them.”

Former Democratic Representative John Delaney went even further, denouncing the Chinese as “pirates” and criticizing Trump for not recruiting more allies against Beijing. “They steal intellectual property, they created illegal islands, they engage in disinformation campaigns,” he said. “I don’t want to go to war with China, but we have to realize what we’re dealing with.”

Delaney’s comments are revealing. A war between the United States and China, the world’s two largest military powers, each nuclear-armed, would threaten the existence of humanity, and even all life on the planet.

Formulations like “I don’t want to go to war with China, but ...” only underscore the deadly logic of the conflicts between the major powers, propelled by the crisis of global capitalism, and the necessity for the working class to provide an alternative to the capitalist drift towards world war.

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