China denounces US “lies” at the Munich Security Conference

By Peter Symonds
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In unusually blunt statements, top Chinese officials hit back during last weekend’s Munich Security Conference at Washington’s confrontational stance toward Beijing on a range of issues, including the Chinese tech giant Huawei and China’s response to the coronavirus.

Trump administration officials, supported to the hilt by top Democrats, took a particularly aggressive attitude at the conference, warning European powers that intelligence sharing could end if Huawei equipment were used in building 5G telecommunications networks.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo branded “Huawei and other Chinese state-backed tech companies” as “Trojan horses for Chinese intelligence.” In his speech, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper accused Beijing of carrying out a “nefarious strategy” through Huawei.

In a bid to intensify its pressure on its European allies, the US last week announced new charges of racketeering and theft of trade secrets against Huawei. These follow the arrest of the company’s chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, in Canada last year after the US filed charges of fraud and sanctions evasion, and sought her extradition.

Esper made clear that the US attack on China was across the board. He declared that under President Xi Jinping’s rule, “the Chinese Communist Party is heading even faster and further in the wrong direction—more internal repression, more predatory economic practices, more heavy-handedness, and most concerning for me, a more aggressive military posture.”

As asked about the speeches by Pompeo and Esper, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi did not mince words, branding the US allegations as “lies.” He said their remarks were part of “a common scenario” everywhere they went. “I don’t want to waste our time responding to each and every thing they’ve said. The thing I want to say is that all these accusations against China are lies and not based on facts.”

Wang pointed to the driving force behind the confrontation—the US drive to ensure its continued global domination by every available means. “The root cause of all these problems and issues is that the US does not want to see the rapid development and rejuvenation of China, still less would they want to accept the success of a socialist country, but that is not fair, China has the right to develop.”

China, with its burgeoning markets, stock exchanges, billionaires and deep social divide, is not a socialist country. In fact, Huawei, as Wang said in countering US criticism, is a privately-owned company: the world’s largest telecommunications equipment provider with nearly 200,000 employees.

Wang described the US attack on Huawei as “immoral” and asked: “Why can’t America accept that other countries’ companies can also display their talent in the economy, in technology? Perhaps deep down, it doesn’t hope to see other countries develop.” He accused the US of resorting to rumours to defame Huawei and declared there was no credible evidence that the company has a so-called back door that harms US security.

The US accusations against China and Huawei are utterly hypocritical. The revelations by the whistleblower Edward Snowden demonstrated that the US routinely spies electronically on the world’s population, including governments and government leaders, allies and rivals alike, as well as its own citizens.

The US intelligence establishment has long relied on
electronic “back doors” provided by American tech
corporations to gather intelligence. The use of Huawei
equipment not only threatens the economic position of
US companies, but could undermine US spying
operations.

China’s forthright push back against heavy US
criticism in Munich stems firstly from the relentless
campaign by Washington, not only in propaganda, but
through trade war measures and a huge military
build-up in Asia against Beijing. Secondly, the Chinese
regime is seeking support from the European powers.
Wang’s comments gained traction in Munich amid
deepening conflicts between the US and its erstwhile
European allies.

Britain has given the go-ahead for the inclusion of
Huawei components in non-core aspects of its 5G
rollout, while Germany and France have signaled they
will do the same. The European decisions are largely
driven by technical and economic factors, as Huawei is
a leader in 5G technology and produces at a lower cost.

Washington’s threats to end intelligence-sharing
arrangements with the European powers could end up
affecting US spying operations as much as those of its
European rivals. The New York Times noted:
“Germany and Britain are America’s closest
intelligence sharing partners, and both nations sit atop
critical points along fibre optic cables that are key to
intercepting communications from Russia to the
Middle East.”

The US has sought to exploit the coronavirus
outbreak in China to add to the barrage of criticism
against Beijing. Trump’s economic adviser Larry
Kudlow last week complained about the lack of
Chinese transparency over the disease. He declared that
Washington was disappointed that American health
experts had not been allowed into China, and
questioned Chinese statistics.

A considerable portion of Wang’s speech to the
Munich Security Conference was devoted to defending
China’s handling of the outbreak. He said the
coronavirus largely had been confined to the city of
Wuhan and Hubei Province, and the number of cases
outside China was a small percentage of the total.
Wang said this was the outcome of the rapid
development of a test for the virus, the dispatch of
20,000 health workers to the area and the building of
new health facilities.

Wang said: “In the spirit of openness and
transparency, we promptly notified the world about the
outbreak and shared the genetic sequence of the virus.
We have been working closely with WHO [World
Health Organisation], invited international experts to
join our ranks, and provided assistance and facilitation
to foreign nationals in China.”

In comments to Reuters, the Chinese foreign minister
effectively criticised the harsh travel restrictions
imposed by the US on any foreign nationals coming
from China. “Some countries have stepped up
measures, including quarantine measures, which are
reasonable and understandable, but for some countries
they have overreacted which has triggered unnecessary
panic,” he said.

If Washington expected European support on the
issue, its hopes were dashed. Conference chairman
Wolfgang Ischinger praised China’s response to the
epidemic and declared it was “not getting a very fair
deal… I think China deserves a little bit of compassion
and cooperation, and encouragement rather than only
criticism.”

China’s reaction to the US criticisms in Munich
underscores again the sharpening geo-political rivalries
and break-up of longstanding alliances being fueled by
worsening global economic conditions. Far from
responding to the lack of support from Europe against
China by moderating its confrontation, the US will
intensify its provocative campaign, not just against
Beijing, but any threat to its global position, including
from its European allies.

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