

US secretary of state sets out case for conflict with China

By Peter Symonds
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In a speech on Thursday full of lies, hypocrisy and anti-communist demagoguery, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo officially overturned decades of American policy toward China, setting the stage for a further escalation of Washington's confrontation with Beijing.

The choice of venue itself—President Richard Nixon's home and library—underscored Pompeo's message. It was Nixon, along with his then-National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, who engineered a rapprochement with China. Nixon flew to Beijing in 1972 and met Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Mao Zedong in a visit that paved the way for full diplomatic relations in 1979.

Pompeo declared that “if we want to have a free 21st century, and not the Chinese century of which Xi Jinping dreams, the old paradigm of blind engagement with China” had to be replaced by a strategy whereby “the free world must triumph over this new tyranny.” He continued, “We must induce China to change in more creative and assertive ways, because Beijing's actions threaten our people and our prosperity.”

Pompeo invoked the Cold War bogeyman of “Communist China,” declaring that it was ruled by a “Marxist-Leninist regime” and that “General Secretary Xi Jinping is a true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology.”

Such bombast bears no relation to reality—the 1972 rapprochement paved the way for wholesale capitalist restoration in China and its transformation into the world's largest cheap labour platform. The fear in Washington is not of Chinese communism, but of a burgeoning Chinese capitalism threatening the global ambitions and interests of US imperialism.

The Cold War propaganda of the “free world” against communism was always a threadbare disguise for anti-democratic US interventions and aggression, including the neo-colonial war in Vietnam. But Pompeo and President Donald Trump have taken hypocrisy to a whole new level in blasting Beijing over “human rights” in Hong Kong and the treatment of Muslim Uyghurs in the province of Xinjiang, while sending federal storm troopers into American cities,

such as Portland, to teargas peaceful protesters and arbitrarily seize and drag away individuals.

Pompeo's litany of condemnations of Beijing speaks far more to the historic decline of American capitalism and the immense crisis of the Trump administration than to supposed Chinese malevolence.

Trump's lie that China covered up the dangers of COVID-19 is aimed at diverting attention from the disastrous and criminal character of his administration's response to the pandemic, which is generating widespread opposition at home.

Unsubstantiated allegations of Chinese spying and “intellectual property theft” ignore the US National Security Agency's global spying on an industrial scale, while underscoring the decline of American hi-tech predominance. The Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei is not so much “a national security threat” but a danger to its US corporate rivals.

Likewise, the outsourcing of American manufacturing was not a Chinese plot, but was driven by the declining profitability of US businesses. Trump's protectionist trade war measures are not to protect American jobs but, are part of far-reaching US preparations for war.

While the ramping up of the anti-China campaign is partly directed against presumptive Democratic presidential candidate Joseph Biden, under conditions of declining support for Trump, it has a far broader objective significance.

Pompeo declared there would be no return to the Cold War policy of “containment” because China posed “a complex new challenge that we've never faced before.” While “the USSR was closed off from the free world,” he declared, “Communist China is already within our borders”—a reference to the complex economic entanglement of China and the US.

Pompeo's remark recalls the debate in American ruling circles in the early 1950s, which came to a head during the Korean War. The alternative to containment was “rollback,” i.e., a strategy of overturning the Stalinist regimes in the

Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China through all available means, including war.

US President Harry Truman overruled and fired his commander in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur, who demanded the use of nuclear weapons against China—a move that threatened all-out world war.

By ruling out a return to containment, Pompeo is implicitly declaring not the start of a protracted new Cold War, but a policy aimed at regime change in Beijing. “We can’t face this challenge alone,” he stated. “The United Nations, NATO, the G7 countries, the G20, our combined economic, diplomatic, and military power is surely enough to meet this challenge if we direct it clearly and with great courage.”

Pompeo indicated that the US would not tolerate any deviation from Washington’s line by its strategic partners. He made a thinly-veiled criticism of Germany for failing to stand up “with respect to Hong Kong because they fear Beijing will restrict access to China’s market.” He continued, “This is the kind of timidity that will lead to historic failure, and we can’t repeat it.”

Whereas Nixon’s visit to Beijing led to diplomatic relations with China, the Trump administration is in the process of destroying those ties. Pompeo boasted that the US had just closed the Chinese consulate in Houston, on the unsubstantiated claim that it was “a hub of spying and intellectual property theft.” This drew applause from his right-wing audience, which included handpicked Chinese dissidents.

Now, after arresting a Chinese scientist allegedly hiding in Beijing’s San Francisco consulate, the Justice Department is accusing China of using its diplomatic posts to run “an espionage network” to steal US corporate intellectual property.

Just before his inauguration, Trump called into question the basis of diplomatic relations with China—the so-called One-China policy that recognises Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. Scrapping this policy would end diplomatic relations with China—a threat that Trump has never retracted and now is moving toward by other means. Severing diplomatic relations is an advanced stage on the road to war.

In the lead-up to Pompeo’s speech, the Pentagon staged large-scale and provocative war games in the South China Sea—on the doorstep of the Chinese mainland and sensitive Chinese naval bases on Hainan Island. Two US aircraft carriers and their strike groups carried out “high-end” rehearsals for war, which were followed by further military exercises in the neighbouring Philippine Sea with Australian and Japanese warships.

The accusation by Trump and his henchmen that Biden,

and by implication President Barack Obama, were soft on Beijing is belied by the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against China. Obama not only confronted China diplomatically and economically throughout Asia, but initiated a massive US military build-up, committing 60 percent of US warships and warplanes to the region by 2020.

The entire political establishment in Washington—Democrats and Republicans alike—are committed to this dangerous war drive. A key element of Biden’s election strategy is to attack Trump from the right for failing to take a tough enough stand against Beijing.

Pompeo was speaking not just for himself. He referred to a coordinated series of similar anti-China speeches delivered recently by National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien, FBI Director Chris Wray and Attorney General William Barr. On Fox News this week, Trump’s fascist former adviser Steve Bannon described them as “the four horsemen of the Apocalypse”—Trump’s “war council”—whose mission was to “confront first and then take down the Chinese Communist Party.” Bannon was only summing up more bluntly what Pompeo had outlined in his speech.

The degree of recklessness in the American ruling class recalls the phrase: “Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.” Confronted with the accelerating economic, social and political crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration is lashing out at China in a desperate attempt to divert immense social tensions outward against an external enemy and “take down” a potential rival.

Workers and youth in the United States and around the world cannot allow the world’s population to be plunged into a catastrophic war. It is necessary to build a unified international anti-war movement of the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective to put an end to global capitalism and its bankrupt system of rival nation states, which is the root cause of war. That is the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world.

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