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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

7 February 2019

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09.02.2019

US-backed campaign for UN inquiry into China's treatment of Uyghurs

As part of an escalating US-led “human rights” campaign against Beijing, four non-government organisations issued a joint appeal on Monday for the UN Human Rights Council to establish an inquiry into allegations of Chinese repression against the Muslim Uyghur minority in the western province of Xinjiang.

The joint statement contains the litany of accusations that are now routinely listed as fact in the US and international media: that “up to a million Turkic Muslims are being arbitrarily detained in ‘political education’ camps across Xinjiang;” that the detainees “are subjected to forced political indoctrination, renunciation of their faith, mistreatment, and in some cases torture;” and outside the camps, Uyghurs face “severe restrictions on the practice of religion, and freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and movement.”

The next session of the UN Human Rights Council which begins in late February, is due to consider a report from a review of human rights in China in November 2018, which included allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang.

The Chinese government has rejected the allegations and insists that its measures are necessary to counter extremists and terrorists associated with Uyghur separatist groups. After initially denying the existence of the detention camps, Beijing, in the face of the escalating propaganda campaign by the US and its allies, now claims that the camps are vocational centres designed to improve the job prospects and living standards of Uyghurs.

While the unsubstantiated allegations of repression in Xinjiang are likely to be inflated, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime is no doubt engaged in the extensive abuse of the basic democratic rights of the Uyghur minority. It has long maintained a vast police state apparatus directed above all against the working class.

The CCP has proven incapable of addressing the genuine grievances of the various ethnic and religious minorities in China. Its promotion of Chinese nationalism based on Han chauvinism is directly responsible for fostering separatist sentiment, whether in Xinjiang, Tibet, or among other minority groups.

However, the current “human rights” campaign being fanned by Washington and its allies is utterly hypocritical. The Bush administration seized on the 2001 terror attacks by mainly Saudi extremists to wage its bloody “war on terror” that included the invasion, occupation and devastation of Afghanistan and Iraq, military operations in Yemen, Libya and Syria, CIA detention and torture centres, and a vast build-up of anti-democratic measures in the name of countering terrorism. Indeed, President Bush, in return for China’s backing for US-led wars, largely turned a blind eye to China’s growing repression of Uyghur separatist groups.

The US routinely exploits “human rights” issues to further its own predatory economic and strategic interests. Washington has a long history of backing, and also installing, military dictatorships and autocratic regimes. It ignores or plays down repressive measures in allies such as Saudi Arabia while selectively latching onto human rights abuses to put pressure on chosen targets.

The barrage of propaganda on China’s repression of Uyghurs is part of the far broader and intensifying US confrontation with Beijing on all fronts, including trade war measures and a military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific to prepare for war with China. US imperialism is determined to prevent China, now the world’s second largest economy, from challenging its own global dominance.

Last month US Senators Marco Rubio and Bob Menendez reintroduced bipartisan legislation in Congress to pave the way for sanctions against China and Chinese officials involved in abuses in Xinjiang. The “Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act” would expand the activities of the US State Department, FBI and other intelligence agencies in building the case against Uyghur repression, and proposing US action against China, including targeting Chinese officials in Xinjiang.

The call for a UN fact-finding inquiry is designed to give legitimacy to this propaganda effort. Significantly among the four organizations releasing the joint statement on Monday

was the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which is based in Europe but has close connections with the US state apparatus. The WUC has received significant funding from the National Endowment for Democracy which functions as little more than a front for the CIA and US State Department.

The three other organisations include the Washington-based Human Rights Watch, which has close connections to the US political establishment, Amnesty International and the Geneva-based International Service for Human Rights.

The US has long exploited separatist groups in Tibet and Xinjiang to pressure and undermine the CCP regime in Beijing. In the 1950s and 1960s, the CIA funded, trained and armed Tibetan exiles to carry out guerrilla operations inside Tibet as part of the US strategy for destabilising the Chinese government. While the US rapprochement with China in the 1970s led to a winding back of such overt activities, Washington nevertheless maintained ties with Tibetan and Uyghur exile groups.

The focus of the campaign on Xinjiang, rather than Tibet, which for decades was a cause célèbre in US political and cultural circles, is significant. One of the chief targets of the Trump administration is China's Belt and Road Initiative—a massive infrastructure project involving transport and communication links, ports, and pipelines aimed at integrating China far more closely with Eurasia. Xinjiang in western China is the stepping off point for pipelines to the energy-rich Central Asian republics, as well as rail and road connections through to Europe.

Washington is deeply hostile to the Belt and Road Initiative, which would undermine its own influence and strategic position across the vast Eurasian landmass and potentially draw its European allies into closer ties with China. The transport links and pipelines also lessen China's dependence on shipping routes through the Malacca Strait for energy and raw materials imported from Africa and the Middle East. The Pentagon regards the Malacca Strait as one of the key naval “choke points” that it would use in the event of war with China to mount an economic blockade.

At a more fundamental level, the US, by encouraging and backing separatist groups, has the potential to weaken and even fracture China into a series of subservient nation states. Strategists in Washington are no doubt hoping for a repeat of the events that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Beijing regime is also acutely aware of that precedent and is determined to use all means, including police state repression, to counter the threat.