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## *The UK and US are Starting a New Cold War with Russia and China, So What are These Governments Trying to Hide?*



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The new Cold War launched by the West against China and Russia is escalating by the day. In a single week, the Kremlin has been unmasked trying to discover the secrets of Britain's pursuit of a vaccine against coronavirus and revelations are promised about covert Russian interference in British politics. Boris Johnson made a U-turn on Huawei, announcing that it is to be kicked out of participation in the 5G network because it poses

a threat to British security, though a curiously slow-burning one since they will only be evicted over seven years.

The US may put the widely-used Chinese video app TikTok on a blacklist that would prevent Americans from using it. The administration is considering using the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act in order to penalise TikTok as “an unusual and extraordinary threat” to US security. President Trump says he is considering banning the app in response to the way China handled the coronavirus epidemic.

This is a clue to the prime motive for Trump to ramp up the Cold War against China, which is his determination to win a second term in the White House by diverting voters’ attention from his catastrophic handling of the pandemic. “Don’t defend Trump – attack China,” is the advice of a leaked 57-page memo circulated among Republican Senatorial candidates in April. It suggested that Republican politicians should blame China for starting the epidemic by allowing the virus to escape from a laboratory in Wuhan, lying about it and hoarding medical equipment needed to treat the sick.

A striking feature of the US and British diplomatic offensive against China is how little criticism or even discussion it has provoked in any quarter in the US and Britain, even from those whose normal knee-jerk reaction is to denounce anything said or done by Trump or Johnson. This may be because these critics are genuinely horrified by undoubted Chinese oppression of the Uighurs, proposed imposition of dictatorial rule in Hong Kong, and assertions of military power in the South China Sea and on the Chinese-Indian frontier.

As during the original Cold War in the late 1940s and 1950s, critics can be conveniently dismissed as Communist sympathisers or dupes. Unsurprisingly, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden is responding to the confrontation with China by demanding that the US should take an even tougher stance towards Beijing, while the Democratic Party establishment are ever hopeful that their prolonged campaign to portray Trump as the creature of Vladimir Putin’s Russia will take fire and do him serious damage at the polls.

As with Trump’s claim that China is ultimately responsible for the lethal debacle of America’s handling of the coronavirus epidemic, I have always thought that Hillary Clinton’s claim that she lost the 2016 presidential election because of Russian interference was absurd. Every history of her disastrous campaign shows that she lost for

obvious self-inflicted reasons such as not campaigning enough in key northern states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan – states that Trump won by a whisker.

The explanation for Boris Johnson's U-turn over Huawei is simply explained by his inability to withstand American pressure as Britain leaves the EU and becomes even more dependent on the US. The kowtow to Washington over Huawei is the first of many such humiliations that come as an inevitable consequence of Brexit. Instead of getting back control of its destiny, Boris Johnson's Britain will be more like Little Red Riding Hood lost in the global forest and menaced by every passing wolf.

There may be enough Chinese and Russian misbehaviour to justify retaliation, but threat-inflation has the great advantage of diverting attention from the British government's incompetence in coping with the pandemic, a failure only excelled by the US and Brazil. Quite possibly Russian intelligence in the shape of cybergroup Cozy Bear has devoted great efforts to stealing secrets from western academia and pharmaceutical companies seeking to produce a vaccine against coronavirus. Less clear is why such information should be secret, unless these institutions and companies are planning to keep monopoly control over any vaccine produced, unlike the polio vaccine which the US made available to the world when first developed by American scientists at the height of the previous Cold War in the 1950s.

The heads and former heads of British intelligence agencies have been giving solemn interviews about how British security is threatened by Russian and Chinese machinations. The nature of this threat is never spelled out and intelligence chiefs can always claim that to do so would compromise confidential information that must not be disclosed.

I have always had doubts over the exalted claims about the excellence of British intelligence, which has become part of the British national myth. The saga of the breaking of the German Enigma codes in the Second World War has replaced the defeat of the Spanish Armada as a source of national pride and self-confidence.

Yet I have always wondered about those great British secrets that hostile foreign powers hunger to learn and must be protected at all costs.

British officials I encountered over the years during wars in the Middle East never seemed strikingly well-informed, but it was always possible that they were being singularly discreet or they were outside the loop of those privy to such vital information. Yet when the exhaustive Chilcott enquiry into British actions during the Iraq War was

finally published in 2016, it concluded that Britain was poorly informed about almost everything that was going on in Iraq before and after it joined the US-led invasion. On the Libyan war in 2011, a scathing report by the House of Commons select committee on foreign affairs concluded that Britain lacked “accurate intelligence” or much idea of what was happening.

Four years later, the British government launched a bombing campaign against Isis in Syria amid much angry debate in which all sides took it for granted that Britain was in a position to do more than military posturing. But nine months into the much-debated bombing, a report of the House of Commons defence committee chaired by Dr Julian Lewis revealed that only 65 air raids had taken place over nine months because the RAF did not know where Isis was hiding. Nor was the government able to identify the 70,000 armed anti-Assad fighters on whose behalf Britain was supposedly intervening. No wonder that Johnson was so dismayed by the election of the experienced and critical Lewis as the new chairman of the House of Commons intelligence and security committee, instead of Chris Grayling, his own notoriously blunder-prone nominee.

It is just possible to forget amid the threats and counter-threats of the new Cold War – and the intention is certainly that we should forget – that the world is failing to contain a pandemic that has killed half a million people. Never has global unity of effort been more necessary, whatever differences there may be, and its fragmentation more damaging. “How is it difficult for humans to unite and fight a common enemy that is killing people indiscriminately?” asked the director general of WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, wiping away tears of frustration earlier this month. “Can’t we understand that the divisions and the cracks between us are an advantage for the virus?”

He got his answer from the Cold War warriors the world over this week, and it was a resounding “no”.

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