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US adopts policy of regime-change in Beijing



In what marks another dangerous step towards a US clash with China, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last week made a keynote speech at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum entitled “Communist China and the Free World’s Future”.

By couching American foreign policy as a choice between a future dominated by “Communist China” or the “Free World,” Pompeo set the stage for greatly intensified US confrontation with China on all fronts—diplomatic, economic and military. One, moreover, implicitly aimed at regime-change in Beijing.

“If we want to have a free 21st century,” Pompeo declared, “the old paradigm of blind engagement with China” has to be replaced by a strategy to ensure “the free world must triumph over this new tyranny.”

The speech effectively overturns nearly half a century of US engagement with China, which, Pompeo notwithstanding, was never “blind”—that is unlimited or uncritical.

It began with Nixon's rapprochement and trip to Beijing in 1972. Its strategic purpose was to form a bloc against the Soviet Union, and not as Pompeo claimed, to transform China into a so-called "democracy."

Pompeo's resort to Cold War demagoguery is simply an absurdity. No one who is politically literate believes that China is "communist." The US-China détente established by Nixon and Mao opened the door for an accelerating process of capitalist restoration that transformed China into the world's largest cheap-labour platform for American and global corporations.

Moreover, to speak of the "free world" when the Trump administration is rapidly dispensing with democratic rights and using police state measures against protesters, is a grotesque lie. Nor is the situation different elsewhere among Washington's "free world" allies where far right and openly fascist parties are promoted and governments increasingly resort to autocratic forms of rule.

Pompeo is not just speaking for the Trump administration, but for the dominant section of the American ruling class, which when confronted with a profound economic, social and political crisis at home, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is seeking to project immense social tensions outwards against an external enemy.

An editorial on Monday in the *New York Times*, a mouthpiece for the Democrats, fully supports the Trump administration's aggressive policy towards China, arguing only that it has to be more effective and coherent. Entitled "China's Claims to the South China Sea Are Unlawful. Now What?", it denounces Chinese "aggression" and "bullying" in "one of the world's most critical waterways" and backs Pompeo's recent statement declaring Chinese territorial claims in the disputed waters to be "illegal."

Hypocrisy abounds. The editorial praises Pompeo's declaration for bringing the US into line with international law, but Washington has not ratified the very international law—the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea—it claims Beijing is in breach of. It was President Obama, whom the editorial hails, that transformed the South China Sea into a dangerous global flashpoint, by inciting China's neighbors to press their own South China Sea claims, and provocatively deploying American warships in Chinese-claimed territorial waters.

As for bullying and aggression, US imperialism has engaged in one criminal war after another in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa over the past quarter century, creating humanitarian disasters for the peoples of these regions. Obama's "Pivot to Asia",

continued and expanded by Trump, involved a huge military build-up throughout Asia targeting China, which responded by consolidating its control of islets in the South China Sea, adjacent to key Chinese naval bases.

The *New York Times* editorial tacitly endorses the Trump administration's aggressive policies towards China, including its cynical invocation of "human rights" over Hong Kong and the Uyghur population in China's Xinjiang province and unsubstantiated allegations of Chinese spying and intellectual property theft.

Significantly, like Pompeo, the editorial draws a distinction between the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and Washington's increasingly dangerous confrontation with China. It states: "China is a major trading partner with the United States and much of the rest of the world. It does not command an empire, and its economy is not likely to crumble under the weight of Western challenges the way Moscow's command economy did."

As a result, Pompeo concluded in his speech that there could be no return to a Cold War policy of "containment," or of "peaceful coexistence" as the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy termed the standoff. The rejection of "containment" is an ominous warning sign. In the debate in American ruling circles in the 1950s, the alternative to containment was the policy of "rollback"—that is, to use the economic and military might of US imperialism to aggressively undermine and ultimately destroy the Soviet Union.

While the *New York Times* does not explicitly draw the same conclusion as Pompeo, the implication is obvious: if China is not going to crumble like the Soviet Union, then more aggressive and forceful methods will have to be used. Like Joe Biden, the presumptive Democrat presidential candidate, the *Times* criticized Trump for failing to formulate a comprehensive strategy to bring down the Chinese regime.

While the debate over China is a key issue in the US presidential election, the underlying bipartisan agreement points to the more fundamental interests at stake for US imperialism. Amid its accelerating historic decline, the United States regards China as the chief threat to its efforts to retain global dominance, which it is determined to retain by any and all methods, including military.

Pompeo's speech as well as announcing a definitive shift in US policy towards China brought together all the lies and unsubstantiated accusations that the Trump administration is using to poison public opinion and create a war atmosphere. This includes the attempt to shift the blame onto Beijing for the catastrophic loss of life caused by Washington's criminally negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of Pompeo and Trumps' lies and charges are linked to Washington's strategic designs: the promotion of "human rights" in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang is aimed at fostering separatist movements to divide China, and the calls for "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea are meant to ensure the "freedom" of US aircraft carriers to prowl the Chinese coastline.

The US is preparing for a calamitous war with nuclear-armed China that has the potential to rapidly engulf the world. Workers and youth cannot stand by as the world slides towards catastrophe. The only social force capable of halting this war drive is the working class, which must be mobilized through the building of a unified, international anti-war movement based on socialist principles to overturn the capitalist system that is the source of war. That is the perspective for which the International Committee of the Fourth International fights.

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