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By Peter Symonds
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Responding to US provocations, Chinese officials appeal for “peaceful coexistence”

In a keynote speech on July 24, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo effectively overturned nearly 50 years of US engagement with China and set course for an aggressive confrontation with Beijing. He denounced the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in McCarthyite terms and called for the victory of “the free world” over “tyranny.” In rejecting the policy of “containment,” Pompeo in essence dismissed the notion of a new “cold war” in favour of a hot one—that is, the slide towards military conflict.



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (Credit: Chinese foreign ministry)

Pompeo’s demagogic speech has clearly prompted deep concerns in the Chinese leadership. There have been significant responses by Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a lengthy interview with the state-owned Xinhua news agency on August 6 and by former

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi in a long essay published in the *Global Times* on August 7. In the CCP hierarchy, Yang is formally the top foreign policy official.

Both officials appeal for an end to US-China tensions, as well as dialogue, continued engagement between the two countries and “peaceful coexistence,” while pointing to the dangers of a deepening confrontation. “Peaceful coexistence” was itself a Cold War term used by the Soviet Union which collaborated with US imperialism to contain tensions, defuse wars and conflicts, and stave off another world war.

Wang warned that relations between the countries were facing “the gravest challenge since the establishment of diplomatic ties” in the 1970s. He said that the “root cause” lay with “some American politicians who are biased against and hostile to China” and smeared China with fabrications in what amounted to a new McCarthyism. “Ultimately, they want to drag China and the US into renewed conflict and confrontation and plunge the world into chaos and division again,” he declared.

Wang called on the US to “stop acting with arrogance and prejudice” and to enter into a constructive dialogue. He declared that China was ready to restart talks with the US “at any level, in any area and at any time. All issues can be put on the table for discussion.” The conciliatory message was not so much directed to the Trump administration, but to the Democrats, and more broadly to US allies in Europe and Asia, in an attempt to wind down rapidly escalating tensions.

However, Chinese pleas to Washington are likely to fall on deaf ears. The root cause of the reckless US anti-China campaign does not lie with particular politicians but is the response of the American ruling class to its historic decline, now accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that the US confrontation with China was initiated by the Obama administration, and that Democrat presidential candidate Joe Biden is attacking Trump for being soft on Beijing signifies that the dominant sections of the American ruling class regard China as the chief threat to US global dominance.

Moreover, Pompeo is conducting a concerted campaign, above all in Europe, to line up US allies in the war drive against China. Last week he made the third of three forays into European forums in two months, addressing the Czech parliament in a speech that focused on China, which he characterised as a greater threat than Russia and denounced for its “campaigns of coercion and control.” Directly appealing to anti-communism, Pompeo called on the assembled politicians to back Washington’s punitive campaign of sanctions and economic penalties against Beijing.

In his Xinhua interview, China's Foreign Minister Wang, while appealing for dialogue, nevertheless made clear that Beijing would not compromise on what it regarded as "core issues"—including Chinese sovereignty in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the US is again winding up its cynical "human rights" campaigns.

Wang also pointed to the utter hypocrisy of the Trump administration's unsubstantiated allegations of spying, including by Chinese tech giants such as Huawei. Ridiculing US calls for a coalition of "clean countries" that exclude Chinese technology, he pointed to the revelations of whistleblower Edward Snowden about US spying on an industrial scale. In stark contrast to China, he said, "the US is behind such scandals as PRISM and ECHELON. It conducts wire-tapping and mass surveillance around the globe, and these wrongful acts are already an open secret."

In his lengthy essay, China's top foreign affairs official Yang Jiechi also pointed to the accelerating global crisis, writing that the "once-in-a-century major shift in the world landscape is picking up speed. Instability and uncertainties in the international situation are growing markedly."

Yang reviewed at length the development of US-China relations since US President Richard Nixon's landmark visit to China in 1972 that established a de facto alliance against the Soviet Union. He emphasised the benefits to the US that had flowed from the relationship, economically, as the CCP leadership turned to capitalist restoration and opened up to foreign investment, and, on the world stage, advancing US interests, such as by pressuring North Korea.

At the same time, Yang repeated the somewhat muted criticisms of "some US politicians" who "out of arrogance and ignorance, have acted in violation of the UN Charter and basic norms governing international relations, and have willfully and blatantly interfered in the internal affairs of other countries." He declared that the attempts to drive a wedge between the CCP and the Chinese people were "doomed to fail"—reflecting no doubt a sensitivity in the Chinese leadership to the mounting social tensions at home.

The responses by China's top two foreign affairs officials signify a somewhat more conciliatory tone from Beijing. While President Xi Jinping has not responded to Washington's anti-China campaign with the same degree of vitriol as Trump officials, he has nevertheless reacted to US punitive measures in kind. In the US this has led to denunciations of Chinese "aggression" and "expansionism."

Within Chinese ruling circles, Xi has come under fire for failing to defuse tensions with Washington and take action to end the trade war between the two countries. In the lead-up to an annual seaside retreat of top Chinese leaders and “party elders” at Beidaihe, some press reports speculated that Xi would come under pressure even though he has removed the limits on his term of office and his supporters dominate leading party bodies. The “secretive” two-week retreat has just concluded. As usual, no official statements or comments were issued.

Nevertheless, perhaps to mollify Xi’s internal critics, the Chinese response to Pompeo’s speech and continued punitive measures against Chinese companies has been rather low-key. Xu Qinduo, a commentator for the state-run China Radio International, was cited in the *New York Times* as saying: “There’s a reflection that we should not let nationalism or hotheadedness somehow kidnap our foreign policy. Tough rhetoric should not replace rational diplomacy.”

The *New York Times* last week noted that other prominent Chinese officials had also repeated the call for dialogue, including Cui Tiankai, the ambassador to the US. The senior Chinese diplomat had accused American politicians of telling lies to smear China, but also called for steps to prevent relations from “spiraling out of control” over the next several months.

The CCP leadership has no progressive answer to US war drive—appeals to US imperialism that will quickly prove futile, go hand in hand with an arms race with Washington that can only end in disaster for humanity. Far from being socialist or communist, the CCP represents the interests of a tiny ultra-rich layer and is incapable of making any appeal to the working class, either at home or internationally. Facing a mounting social crisis domestically, the regime uses police state measures to suppress any opposition.

At the same time, the Trump administration continues its anti-China provocations virtually on a daily basis. Last week, the State Department announced that it was classifying the US headquarters of Confucius Institutes—Chinese government educational and cultural organisations—as a “foreign mission,” thus requiring it to declare its property and personnel. Already a number of Chinese media organisations in the US have been branded as “foreign missions,” limiting their operations.

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