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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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24.03.2021

Europe sides with the US in imposing punitive sanctions against China

In a deliberate escalation of geo-political tensions, the European Union joined the US, as well as Britain and Canada, in imposing coordinated sanctions against Chinese officials on Monday for alleged human rights abuses against the Muslim Uyghur minority in China's Xinjiang province.

The intensifying demonisation of China follows the modus operandi of US imperialism and its allies over the past three decades as they have prepared for one criminal war after another in the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia.



Secretary of State Anthony Blinken (Creative Commons/Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs)

The sanctions follow a fractious meeting between top US and Chinese officials in Alaska. The talks commenced last Friday with provocative public US condemnations of China across a range of issues, including its treatment of the Uyghurs—claims that were rebutted by China. The two days of talks ended without agreement or a joint statement.

The US set the stage for the showdown in Alaska by imposing sanctions on Chinese officials over a new law tightening the electoral system in Hong Kong. Now it has targeted Wang Junzheng, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretary of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and Chen Mingguo, director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau, for “serious human rights abuses” against Uyghur Muslims. The US froze assets and imposed travel restrictions.

In a statement reeking of hypocrisy, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused China of continuing “to commit genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang” and called on Beijing to release “all those arbitrarily held in internment camps and detention facilities.”

While the CCP regime undoubtedly uses police-state measures in Xinjiang, as it does more broadly against the Chinese working class, Washington—which is guilty of war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere—is again selectively exploiting “human rights” to advance its imperialist interests.

Blinken’s accusation of Uyghur “genocide” by China—a designation only made by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the dying days of the Trump administration—is intentionally inflammatory. While the term conjures up images of mass killings, it rests on nothing more than grossly distorted and largely unsubstantiated claims that China’s birth control methods in Xinjiang constitute “genocide.”

The European Union has cynically jumped on board the US “human rights” wagon as a means of extracting concessions from the US as the Biden administration seeks to “revitalise” relations with Europe that soured under Trump. Significantly, the coordinated sanctions on China were announced immediately prior to Blinken landing in Brussels for talks with European officials.

The EU formally announced travel and asset sanctions against four Chinese officials, including two punished by the US. These are the first EU penalties against China since 1989 when the European authorities imposed an arms embargo following the Tiananmen Square massacre. The EU statement stopped short of accusing China of “genocide,” but alleged that Beijing was responsible for “arbitrary detentions and degrading treatment” of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, as well as systematic violations of their religious freedom.

The US also released a joint statement condemning China by Blinken and the foreign ministers of the so-called Five Eyes intelligence alliance, consisting of the US, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The UK and Canada have imposed their own sanctions on China, but Australia and New Zealand have yet to do so.

The joint statement declared: “The evidence, including from the Chinese government’s own documents, satellite imagery, and eyewitness testimony is overwhelming. China’s extensive program of repression includes severe restrictions on religious freedoms, the use of forced labor, mass detention in internment camps, forced sterilisations, and the concerted destruction of Uyghur heritage.”

The evidence, in fact, is far from overwhelming. Eyewitness accounts derive in the main from Uyghur exiles associated with CIA-funded organisations such as the World Uyghur Congress and the American Uyghur Association, while satellite photos and supposedly leaked Chinese documents provide no direct evidence and are inevitably interpreted through the jaundiced eyes of pro-US analysts. In the absence of independent evidence, no more faith should be placed in Western propaganda than claims by the Chinese government that no abuses are taking place.

The Chinese government immediately hit back, accusing the EU of “disregarding and distorting the facts” and “grossly interfering in China’s internal affairs.” Beijing imposed its own sanctions on 10 European politicians and individuals, as well as four entities. The latter included the right-wing, pro-US Alliance of Democracies Foundation established in 2017 by former NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Among the individuals sanctioned by China was Adrian Zenz, a right-wing German academic and self-described born-again Christian. While he claims that he was “led by

God” to research into Chinese minorities, Zenz has undoubtedly been driven by more earthly motives. He is well connected in anti-communist circles in Europe and the United States, including to the anti-communist Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. US and European allegations against China rely heavily on his tendentious “research.”

With the latest round of sanctions barely announced, the Biden administration hinted that more is to come. Yesterday, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki, after reiterating Washington’s “grave concerns” over China’s treatment of Uyghurs, stated: “We will be evaluating what the appropriate next steps are in close coordination with our allies around the world.”

Less than three months in office, the extraordinary rapidity with which the Biden administration is ramping up the US confrontation with China, as well as Russia, has even surprised some hardened US propagandists. David Sanger, chief Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*, entitled his comment yesterday: “That was fast: Blowups with China and Russia in Biden’s first 60 Days.”

Sanger declared that the US had entered “a new era of bitter superpower competition, marked by perhaps the worst relationship Washington has had with Russia since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and with China since it opened diplomatic relations with the United States.”

Sanger also pointed, at least indirectly, to the underlying driving force for the escalating US war drive against China—the fear in Washington that the Chinese economy will eclipse that of the US within a decade. The power of the Chinese, he wrote, “arises not from their relatively small nuclear arsenal or their expanding stockpile of conventional weapons. Instead, it arises from their expanding economic might.”

Sanger highlighted China’s growing expertise in hi-tech areas, such as 5G technology, that are critical to the US maintaining its global economic and strategic dominance. The speed with which the Biden administration is ratcheting up its anti-China propaganda, alongside the expansion of its military forces in Asia, flows from a sense in Washington that time is running against it.

US imperialism cannot tolerate any threat to its hegemony and is prepared to use all means, including military conflict, to subordinate China. Outside of the political intervention of the international working class on the basis of a unified socialist perspective, the world is rapidly descending into war between nuclear-armed powers.

World Socialist 23.03.2021