

Biden lectures Chinese leaders on ‘human rights’

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In a provocative move that will further strain already tense relations with China, US Vice President Joe Biden made a point of sharply criticising the Chinese government over “human rights” in a speech yesterday to American business leaders in Beijing.

Biden called on China to “open its politics and society as well as its economy,” so that people could “speak freely” and “challenge orthodoxy” and “newspapers can report the truth without fear of consequences.” He declared: “We have many disagreements, and some profound disagreements [with China], on some of those issues right now, in the treatment of US journalists.”

Biden said that he had raised the issue with top Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, after meeting with a group of US journalists in China. Sections of the American media have complained that China has refused to renew the visas of a number of journalists, including from the *New York Times*, Reuters, *Bloomberg* and the *Wall Street Journal*, following the publication of stories critical of Beijing.

Beijing blocked the *New York Times* and *Bloomberg* web sites in China after their exposure last year of the huge fortunes of top Chinese leaders. The *New York Times* found that former Premier Wen Jiabao’s family had amassed at least \$US2.7 billion, while *Bloomberg* exposed the hundreds of millions of dollars of assets owned by President Xi’s extended family members. The Chinese leadership is deeply concerned that the vast social gulf between the wealthy privileged ruling elite and the mass of the population can trigger social unrest.

There is no doubt that the Chinese leadership uses police state measures to keep a tight rein, not only on the foreign newspapers, but also on the Chinese media. However, Biden’s invocation of “human rights” is

utterly hypocritical, particularly in relation to freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The US is carrying out a witch-hunt against former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden for exposing the US government’s vast illegal electronic spying on the American population and people around the world, including in China. Washington and its allies such as Britain and Australia are not only determined to silence Snowden, but are increasingly threatening action against journalists and media that have published his leaked documents.

The relentless attack on democratic rights in the US is driven by similar processes to those in China—the deepening social divide between an ultra-rich financial aristocracy and the majority of the American people.

Biden’s remarks came after a tense four and a half hour meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday focussed China’s recently proclaimed air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea. Last week the US, along with Japan and South Korea, repeatedly flew warplanes into the zone ignoring Chinese demands to provide flight details and identification. Washington also reiterated its commitment to its military alliance with Japan in the event of a war with China, including over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

China’s declaration of the ADIZ was in response to mounting pressure from the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” which has encouraged Japan to take a more assertive role in Asia. Beijing’s inclusion of the disputed islets in its ADIZ was a rather reckless step calculated to advance its claims over the uninhabited rocky outcrops. The US has exploited the issue both to intensify pressure on China, and consolidate its military alliances with Japan and South Korea. The Biden-Xi meeting did nothing to resolve the tensions.

In this context, Biden's call for "human rights" in China is deliberately provocative. "Human rights" has been the political banner under which US imperialism has ruthlessly prosecuted its interests around the world, including waging wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. As the US has strengthened its military alliances and strategic partnerships as part of the "rebalance to Asia," it has sought to justify this menacing network as the partnership of Asian "democracies" such as Japan, Australia and India, in opposition to the "authoritarian" regimes of China and Russia.

In his speech to American businessmen, the US vice-president also exploited the issue of "human rights" to press for greater protection in China for corporate "rights" and for the implementation of the next round of pro-market restructuring outlined at the recent Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plenum.

Biden made clear that he welcomed the restoration of capitalism in China explaining that he first "met with Deng Xiaoping as a young senator." He emphasised that "China's economic growth is very much in the interests of the United States of America—very much in our interests." He said that he had spent much time talking with Xi on the CCP's recent third plenum, but insisted that the measures outlined had to be implemented.

Biden cited a long list of US economic demands that China had to address: to improve intellectual property protection for American companies; to resolve outstanding trade disputes; to expand cooperation on energy; to conclude a bilateral investment treaty; and much more.

Underpinning Biden's speech was the premise that China's continued economic expansion had to be within the international framework dominated by US imperialism since World War II. Chinese economic growth since 1979 "has never been inevitable," he declared. "The United States and our allies have guaranteed peace and security in this region for more than 60 years, providing the conditions for the remarkable economic progress in the region, particularly China," he said.

Biden continued: "Our relationship with China is complex, though. We have our differences and they are real." In a rather chilling remark, he did not rule out war, but declared instead that "there's nothing

inevitable about a conflict with China." In that context, he criticised China's "sudden" announcement of an ADIZ as causing "significant apprehension in the region."

Biden's threat was clear. Unless Beijing is prepared to accommodate to the dictates of US imperialism, including guaranteeing the rights of American capital in China, the US will mobilise its diplomatic and military resources to thwart the interests of its potential rival, including through the means of war.



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