Trump administration accelerates war drive against China

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The past two weeks since US Vice-President Mike Pence delivered his bellicose anti-China speech have confirmed that his remarks, carefully prepared in advance, signaled an escalation of the Trump administration's reckless confrontation with Beijing on all fronts—political, economic and military.

In his blistering xenophobic attack, Pence accused China of military provocations in the South China Sea, "economic aggression which has in turn emboldened its growing military," the theft of US intellectual property, and, without providing a shred of evidence, interference in American politics, including the upcoming mid-term elections, with the aim out undermining and removing Trump.

"As we speak, Beijing is employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States," Pence declared. The wild, unsubstantiated accusations are intended to justify the Trump administration's "whole-of-government" strategy aimed at undermining what it regards as a dangerous strategic competitor, at any cost.

Since Pence's speech, the anti-China drumbeat from top US officials has increased.

* In a press conference with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing on October 8, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo lashed out at China over trade and defended US steps to bolster ties with Taiwan, saying "we have a fundamental disagreement" and "great concerns about actions that China has taken."

* Testifying to a US Senate committee on October 10, FBI Director Christopher Wray told the hearing that China posed a greater danger to the United States than Russia. "China in many ways represents the broadest, most complicated, most long-term counterintelligence threat we face," he declared.

* In a radio interview on October 12, Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton signalled further aggressive measures against China across the board. After boasting that Beijing had "never seen an American president this tough before," he warned, "I think their behavior needs to be adjusted in the trade area, in the international, military and political areas, in a whole range of areas".

Bolton singled out Chinese actions in the South China Sea and indicated that the US and its allies, including Britain and Australia, were going to be engaged in freedom of navigation provocations to challenge Chinese maritime claims. He also provocatively suggested that the US could back "more exploitation of mineral resources in the South China Sea with or without Chinese cooperation." On October 16, the Pentagon flew two nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers close to Chinese-controlled islets in the South China Sea.

* Speaking prior to arriving in Vietnam on October 16, US Defence Secretary Mattis also hit out at China's alleged militarisation of the South China Sea and declared that Washington was highly concerned about China's "predatory" actions. He attacked what "we consider to be almost predatory, in some cases certainly predatory, economic behaviour" that was encouraging small countries to build up "massive debt" that they would have "difficulty repaying."

Similar accusations of countries being caught in a Chinese "debt trap" are increasingly being made in the US and international media. While China certainly uses aid and loans to further its interests, the US and other imperialist powers have for decades cynically exploited aid and loans—either directly or through agencies such as the IMF and World Bank—to compel smaller,

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economically backward countries to carry out their economic and strategic demands.

Mattis's declaration that China must have "respect for international rules and for all nations' sovereignty, whether they're large or small" is utterly hypocritical given US imperialism's long history of bullying, political coups and wars to achieve its ends.

As for the defense secretary's claim that the US is "not out to contain China," it is simply absurd. Beginning under Obama's "pivot to Asia" and accelerated under Trump, the US has sought to isolate and encircle China by strengthening ties and alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific especially with Japan, Australia and India. It has greatly expanded its military presence in the region and recklessly inflamed dangerous flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan and the South China Sea.

There is no doubt that the Chinese regime is prosecuting the interests of the thin layer of super-wealthy oligarchs who have enriched themselves through processes of capitalist restoration since 1978, at the expense of the Chinese working class. Nevertheless, Beijing is reacting to the very real threat posed by US trade war measures and the danger of war with the US, still the world's largest economy and by far the greatest military power.

The Trump administration's "National Security Strategy" released last December branded Russia and China as "revisionist powers" that threatened the international order dominated by the US, and declared that "great power competition" not "the war on terror" was now the US priority.

A day after Pence's speech, the Pentagon released a report surveying American reliance on foreign sources, particularly rivals such as China, for key strategic materials and items. It declared that China's economic strategies posed "significant threats to the US industrial base and thereby pose a growing risk to US national security" and called for "a solid defence industrial base, and resilient supply chains" to be "a national priority." In other words, the US had to have the secure industrial capacity for protracted total war with China.

As the Trump administration plunges the world towards a catastrophic conflict involving nuclear armed powers, the working class is the only social force capable of halting the threat of war through the struggle for an internationalist and socialist alternative. That was the perspective advanced by the Fourth International in 1938 on the eve of World War II: the unification of workers around the world to abolish the capitalist profit system and its reactionary division of the world into rival nation states that is the root cause of war.

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