

US steps up offensive against China with more “hacking charges”

Mike Head

21 December 2018

Further escalating its economic and strategic offensive to block China from ever challenging its post-World War II hegemony, the US government yesterday unveiled its fifth set of economic espionage charges against Chinese individuals since September.

As part of an internationally-coordinated operation, the US Justice Department on Thursday published indictments of two Chinese men who had allegedly accessed confidential commercial data from US government agencies and corporate computers in 12 countries for more than a decade.

The announcement represents a major intensification of the US ruling class’s confrontation against China, amid a constant build-up of unsubstantiated allegations against Beijing by both the Republican and Democrat wings of Washington’s political establishment.

Via salacious allegations of “hacking” on a “vast scale,” every effort is being made by the ruling elite and its media mouthpieces to whip up anti-China hysteria.

The indictment’s release was clearly politically timed. It was accompanied by a global campaign by the US and its allies, accusing the Chinese government of an illegal cyber theft operation to damage their economies and supplant the US as the world’s “leading superpower.”

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen immediately issued a statement accusing China of directing “a very real threat to the economic competitiveness of companies in the United States and around the globe.”

Within hours, US allies around the world put out matching statements, joined by declarations of confected alarm by their own cyber-warfare and hacking agencies.

The *Washington Post* called it “an unprecedented mass effort to call out China for its alleged malign acts.” The coordination “represents a growing consensus that Beijing is flouting international norms in its bid to become the world’s predominant economic and technological power.”

The Australian government, the closest ally of the US in the Indo-Pacific region, was in the forefront. Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne and Home Affairs Minister Peter

Dutton explicitly accused the Chinese government and its Ministry of State Security (MSS) of being responsible for “a global campaign of cyber-enabled commercial intellectual property theft.”

Geoffrey Berman, the US attorney for the Southern District of New York, called the Chinese cyber campaign “shocking and outrageous.” Such pronouncements, quickly emblazoned in media headlines around the world, destroy any possibility of anything resembling a fair trial if the two men, named as Zhu Hua and Zhang Shilong, are ever detained by US agencies and brought before a court.

The charges themselves are vaguely defined. Federal prosecutors in Manhattan accused the men of conspiracy to commit computer intrusions, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. Zhu and Zhang acted “in association with” the MSS, as part of a hacking squad supposedly named “APT10” or “Stone Panda,” the indictment said.

FBI Director Christopher Wray called a news conference to issue another inflammatory statement against China. Pointing to the real motivations behind the indictments, he declared: “China’s goal, simply put, is to replace the US as the world’s leading superpower, and they’re using illegal methods to get there.”

Coming from the head of the US internal intelligence agency, this further indicates the kinds of discussions and planning underway within the highest echelons of the US political and military-intelligence apparatus to prepare the country, ideologically and militarily, for war against China.

Washington is determined to block President Xi Jinping’s “Made in China 2025” program that aims to ensure China is globally competitive in hi-tech sectors such as robotics and chip manufacture, as well as Beijing’s massive infrastructure plans, known as the Belt and Road Initiative, to link China with Europe across Eurasia.

The US ruling class regards these Chinese ambitions as existential threats because, if successful, they would undermine the strategic position of US imperialism globally, and the economic dominance of key American corporations.

Yesterday’s announcement seemed timed to fuel tensions

between Washington and Beijing, after the unprecedented December 1 arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei, in Canada at the request of the US.

Last weekend, US Vice President Mike Pence again accused China of “intellectual property theft.” These provocations came just weeks after the US and Chinese administrations agreed to talks aimed at resolving the tariff and trade war launched by US President Donald Trump.

The Trump administration is demanding structural changes to China’s state-led economic model, greater Chinese purchases of American farm and industrial products and a halt to “coercive” joint-venture licensing terms. These demands would severely undermine the “Made in China 2025” program.

Since September, US authorities have brought forward five sets of espionage allegations. In late October, the Justice Department unsealed charges against 10 alleged Chinese spies accused of conspiring to steal sensitive commercial secrets from US and European companies.

Earlier in October, the US government disclosed another unprecedented operation, designed to produce a show trial in America. It revealed that a Chinese citizen, accused of being an intelligence official, had been arrested in Belgium and extradited on charges of conspiring to commit “economic espionage” and steal trade secrets.

The extradition was announced days after the Pentagon released a 146-page document, titled “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States,” which made clear Washington is preparing for a total war effort against both China and Russia.

Trump, Pence and Wray then all declared China to be the greatest threat to America’s economic and military security. Trump accused China of interfering in the US mid-term elections in a bid to remove him from office. In a speech, Pence said Beijing was directing “its bureaucrats and businesses to obtain American intellectual property—the foundation of our economic leadership—by any means necessary.”

Whatever the truth of the spying allegations against Chinese citizens—and that cannot be assumed—any such operations would hardly compare with the massive global intrigue, hacking, regime-change and military operations directed by the US agencies, including the National Security Agency (NSA) and its “Five Eyes” partners.

These have been exposed thoroughly by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Leaked documents published by WikiLeaks revealed that the CIA has developed “more than a thousand hacking systems, trojans, viruses and other ‘weaponized’

malware,” allowing it to seize control of devices, including Apple iPhones, Google’s Android operating system, devices running Microsoft Windows, smart TVs and possibly the control of cars and trucks.

In an attempt to broaden its offensive against China, the US government said that along with the US and its Five Eyes partners, such as Britain, Canada and Australia, the countries targeted by the alleged Chinese plot included France, Germany, Japan, Sweden and Switzerland.

Chinese hackers allegedly penetrated managed services providers (MSPs) that provide cybersecurity and information technology services to government agencies and major firms. Finance, telecommunications, consumer electronics and medical companies were among those said to be targeted, along with military and US National Aeronautics and Space Administration laboratories.

Sections of the Chinese regime responded belligerently to the accusations. An editorial in the state-owned *Global Times* branded them “hysterical” and a warning sign of a “comprehensive” US attack on China.

The editorial asked: “Assuming China is so powerful that it has stolen technological information for over a decade that is supposedly worth over a trillion in intellectual property, as the US has indicated, then how is it that China still lags behind the US in so many fields, from chips to electric vehicles, and even aviation engines?”

The *Global Times* declared that “instead of adhering to a low-profile strategy, China must face these provocations and do more to safeguard national interests.”

The promotion of Chinese economic and militarist nationalism by a mouthpiece of the Beijing regime is just as reactionary as the nationalist xenophobia being stoked by the ruling elite of American imperialism and its allies. The answer to the evermore open danger of war is a unified struggle by the international working class to end the outmoded capitalist profit system and nation-state divisions and establish a socialist society.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact