The New York Times, China, and the specter of the “Yellow Peril”

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In a full-page editorial in its Sunday edition, the *New York Times* engaged in a vicious anti-Chinese rant, warning of a “dangerous and growing threat” by the “aggressive … Communist state.”

The editorial presented the United States in a twilight struggle against Chinese “cultural imperialism,” which was aiming to “stifle this nation’s core values.”

This hysterical language—calling China “dangerous,” “aggressive” and a “threat”—has all the hallmarks of the racist myth of the “yellow peril” used to justify the colonial subjugation of Asia by the European and American imperialist powers.

“China,” the *Times* wrote, “is seeking to control not just what is said in China but what is said about China, too.” It asserted that “America’s commitment to human rights, including the freedom of expression” faces “an especially stern test.”

The *Times* did not seek to explain what “commitment to human rights” is shown by US imperialism. Is it the “commitment to human rights” that led the US to rape, torture, or murder hundreds of thousands of people across Iraq, from the dungeons of Abu Ghraib, to Fallujah and Sadr City? Or to commit massacres all over the world, from My Lai in Vietnam to the Kunduz hospital attack in Afghanistan?

The Obama administration murdered American citizens with drone missiles. The Trump administration, expanding on the policies of the Democrats, separates thousands of immigrant families and presides over what the UN characterizes as child torture. The American government imprisons whistleblower Chelsea Manning and is seeking to inflict a life sentence, or worse, on WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange for exposing war crimes.

US imperialism claims the prerogative not just to “meddle” in the affairs of other countries, but to overthrow any elected government that it views as an obstacle to its interests. According to one study reported in the *Washington Post*, the US tried to change other nations’ governments 72 times between 1947 and 1989. Of those, “26 of the United States’ covert operations successfully brought a US-backed government to power.”

No country comes close to the United States in the vast resources it devotes to propaganda and placing politicians, academics, and journalists on the payroll of its intelligence agencies.

In his history of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The Mighty Wurlitzer*, Hugh Wilford noted:

> High-ranking officials in the American labor movement, it emerged, had worked clandestinely with the [CIA] to spread the principles of “free trade unionism” around the world. Anticommunist intellectuals, writers, and artists were the recipients of secret government largesse... University professors, journalists, aid workers, missionaries, civil rights activists… all had belonged to the CIA’s covert network of front operations.

And then there were the hundreds of journalists revealed to be on the CIA payroll. Wilford wrote:

> Arthur Hays Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*, was a good friend of [Central Intelligence Agency Director] Allen Dulles and signed a secrecy agreement with the Agency... Under the terms of this arrangement, the *Times* provided at least ten CIA officers with cover as reporters or clerical staff in its foreign bureaus, while genuine employees of the paper were

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encouraged to pass on information to the Agency.

The *New York Times* epitomizes the eradication of any distinction between news and state propaganda. In his recent memoir, whistleblower Edward Snowden recalls seeing stories that appeared in the CIA's internal news service show up, several days later, in the pages of the American newspapers, almost unchanged with additional references to "unnamed intelligence sources."

The threat to American democracy comes not from without, but from within. The *New York Times*, in its endless demands for censorship and conformity with the "values" of the state, is one of the principal instigators of that threat.

American companies, the *Times* declared on Sunday, must affirm the "American…consensus" against the "Chinese Communist Party's position." It accused Disney and Comcast of "appeasement," and of advocating "for the Chinese Communist Party's position, and against the American…consensus."

In particular, the *Times* took issue with a scene in the DreamWorks children's film, *Abominable*, that, it claimed, inaccurately portrays the borders of China. The *Times* asserted that this was a betrayal of "American values" and all but treasonous. The logic of this argument is that the United States should follow the lead of government censors in Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia, who have banned the film.

"Corporations," the *Times* declared, "are the creatures of a particular state, however much their executives prefer to think of their operations as multinational. American companies choose to operate under the laws of the United States and to reap the benefits of life in the United States—and they ought to be held accountable for upholding the values of the United States."

Such statements reveal the hostility of the *Times* to the democratic conceptions that are embodied in the American Constitution. The First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

That is, the government has no power to impose a set of religious, moral or political views on the people. There is not a universal set of "American values" that citizens, or companies, are obligated to uphold, or can be "held accountable" for opposing.

Times is making a fascistic argument. It was the Nazi regime in Germany that asserted that the "people" must conform to the ethnic and religious "values" dictated by the state, and brutally repressed all those who did not or could not because of their background.

The editorial's rhetoric about "human rights" and the "freedom of expression" is a smokescreen for the real agenda of the *New York Times* and the dominant sections of the American ruling class. US imperialism is preparing for a catastrophic war against China to prevent it challenging American global strategic and economic dominance.

"For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the United States finds itself in a contest…with a country in its own weight class," the *Times* stated. "China has taken a hard line, and it's time for the United States to respond in kind."

Ideologically, the conditions for war are being prepared with hysteria about foreign interference and infiltration, and accusations of treason against all those who oppose militarism. Last month, the *Washington Post* promoted a report by the Hoover Institution that declared that "it should no longer be acceptable that scholars, journalists, diplomats, and public officials from the People's Republic of China be afforded unfettered access to American society."

The *New York Times*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the Democrats, attacked Trump in its editorial for not being aggressive enough. The president, it declared, had "weakened the ability of American companies to stand up for American values" by "failing to firmly oppose China's demands."

However bitter the factional conflict in Washington, both the Democratic and Republican parties are committed to reversing the inexorable decline in American capitalism's global hegemony by means of confrontation and war against China.

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