China denounces US “lies” at the Munich Security Conference

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In unusually blunt statements, top Chinese officials hit back during last weekend’s Munich Security Conference at Washington’s confrontational stance toward Beijing on a range of issues, including the Chinese tech giant Huawei and China’s response to the coronavirus.

Trump administration officials, supported to the hilt by top Democrats, took a particularly aggressive attitude at the conference, warning European powers that intelligence sharing could end if Huawei equipment were used in building 5G telecommunications networks.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo branded “Huawei and other Chinese state-backed tech companies” as “Trojan horses for Chinese intelligence.” In his speech, US Defence Secretary Mark Esper accused Beijing of carrying out a “nefarious strategy” through Huawei.

In a bid to intensify its pressure on its European allies, the US last week announced new charges of racketeering and theft of trade secrets against Huawei. These follow the arrest of the company’s chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, in Canada last year after the US filed charges of fraud and sanctions evasion, and sought her extradition.

Esper made clear that the US attack on China was across the board. He declared that under President Xi Jinping’s rule, “the Chinese Communist Party is heading even faster and further in the wrong direction—more internal repression, more predatory economic practices, more heavy-handedness, and most concerning for me, a more aggressive military posture.”

Asked about the speeches by Pompeo and Esper, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi did not mince words, branding the US allegations as “lies.” He said their remarks were part of “a common scenario” everywhere they went. “I don’t want to waste our time responding to each and every thing they’ve said. The thing I want to say is that all these accusations against China are lies and not based on facts.”

Wang pointed to the driving force behind the confrontation—the US drive to ensure its continued global domination by every available means. “The root cause of all these problems and issues is that the US does not want to see the rapid development and rejuvenation of China, still less would they want to accept the success of a socialist country, but that is not fair, China has the right to develop.”

China, with its burgeoning markets, stock exchanges, billionaires and deep social divide, is not a socialist country. In fact, Huawei, as Wang said in countering US criticism, is a privately-owned company: the world’s largest telecommunications equipment provider with nearly 200,000 employees.

Wang described the US attack on Huawei as “immoral” and asked: “Why can’t America accept that other countries’ companies can also display their talent in the economy, in technology? Perhaps deep down, it doesn’t hope to see other countries develop.” He accused the US of resorting to rumours to defame Huawei and declared there was no credible evidence that the company has a so-called back door that harms US security.

The US accusations against China and Huawei are utterly hypocritical. The revelations by the whistleblower Edward Snowden demonstrated that the US routinely spies electronically on the world’s population, including governments and government leaders, allies and rivals alike, as well as its own citizens.

The US intelligence establishment has long relied on electronic “back doors” provided by American tech

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corporations to gather intelligence. The use of Huawei equipment not only threatens the economic position of US companies, but could undermine US spying operations.

China's forthright push back against heavy US criticism in Munich stems firstly from the relentless campaign by Washington, not only in propaganda, but through trade war measures and a huge military build-up in Asia against Beijing. Secondly, the Chinese regime is seeking support from the European powers. Wang's comments gained traction in Munich amid deepening conflicts between the US and its erstwhile European allies.

Britain has given the go-ahead for the inclusion of Huawei components in non-core aspects of its 5G rollout, while Germany and France have signaled they will do the same. The European decisions are largely driven by technical and economic factors, as Huawei is a leader in 5G technology and produces at a lower cost.

Washington's threats to end intelligence-sharing arrangements with the European powers could end up affecting US spying operations as much as those of its European rivals. The *New York Times* noted: "Germany and Britain are America's closest intelligence sharing partners, and both nations sit atop critical points along fibre optic cables that are key to intercepting communications from Russia to the Middle East."

The US has sought to exploit the coronavirus outbreak in China to add to the barrage of criticism against Beijing. Trump's economic adviser Larry Kudlow last week complained about the lack of Chinese transparency over the disease. He declared that Washington was disappointed that American health experts had not been allowed into China, and questioned Chinese statistics.

A considerable portion of Wang's speech to the Munich Security Conference was devoted to defending China's handling of the outbreak. He said the coronavirus largely had been confined to the city of Wuhan and Hubei Province, and the number of cases outside China was a small percentage of the total. Wang said this was the outcome of the rapid development of a test for the virus, the dispatch of 20,000 health workers to the area and the building of new health facilities.

Wang said: "In the spirit of openness and transparency, we promptly notified the world about the outbreak and shared the genetic sequence of the virus. We have been working closely with WHO [World Health Organisation], invited international experts to join our ranks, and provided assistance and facilitation to foreign nationals in China."

In comments to Reuters, the Chinese foreign minister effectively criticised the harsh travel restrictions imposed by the US on any foreign nationals coming from China. "Some countries have stepped up measures, including quarantine measures, which are reasonable and understandable, but for some countries they have overreacted which has triggered unnecessary panic," he said.

If Washington expected European support on the issue, its hopes were dashed. Conference chairman Wolfgang Ischinger praised China's response to the epidemic and declared it was "not getting a very fair deal… I think China deserves a little bit of compassion and cooperation, and encouragement rather than only criticism."

China's reaction to the US criticisms in Munich underscores again the sharpening geo-political rivalries and break-up of longstanding alliances being fueled by worsening global economic conditions. Far from responding to the lack of support from Europe against China by moderating its confrontation, the US will intensify its provocative campaign, not just against Beijing, but any threat to its global position, including from its European allies.

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