

The Trump administration makes Taiwan latest front in anti-China campaign

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The Trump administration has taken another provocative step in its escalating anti-China campaign by openly siding with the re-elected Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen and pressing Taiwan's case at the annual World Health Organisation (WHO) ministerial assembly.

China, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province, has reacted angrily to steps that breach longstanding protocols associated with the so-called One China policy, under which countries, including the US, recognise Beijing as the government of all China, including Taiwan.

In a written statement yesterday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo congratulated Tsai Ing-wen on her inauguration for a second term and was effusive in his praise for her "courage and vision." He added that the US has "long considered Taiwan a force for good in the world." It is the first time that a US secretary of state has formally congratulated an incoming Taiwanese president.

In response, China's defence ministry issued a statement expressing "strong dissatisfaction" and "firm opposition" to Pompeo's remarks and reasserting that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China." The Chinese foreign ministry declared that Pompeo had seriously damaged the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait and warned that China would take necessary countermeasures.

As the Trump administration is well aware, Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan is regarded by Beijing as one of its most sensitive core concerns. It has sought to cultivate close economic relations with Taipei and is particularly hostile to the efforts of President Tsai Ing-wen, with the Trump administration's backing, to boost Taiwan's military forces.

Tsai belongs to the Democratic Progressive Party

(DPP), which, while stopping short of advocating a formal break from China, has pushed for greater political and diplomatic independence. The Chinese regime has in the past warned that it would react militarily to stop any formal declaration of independence.

Trump has deliberately cultivated closer diplomatic, economic and military relations with Taiwan. He signaled his attitude just prior to being inaugurated in 2017 when he declared that he did not regard the One China policy as sacrosanct, and took a congratulatory phone call at the time from Tsai. His administration has given the green light for several huge arms sales to Taiwan that significantly bolster its armed forces. US military strategists regard Taiwan, situated close to the Chinese mainland, as crucial in any US war with China.

The Trump administration further angered Beijing by backing Taiwan's push for observer status at the international WHO meeting this week. Taiwan is excluded from UN gatherings as it has no independent status under the One China policy recognized by the United Nations. China's ambassador to the UN, Chen Xu, branded US arguments for Taiwan's inclusion as "political hype" and its conduct as "not acceptable".

Pompeo's latest remarks are just one aspect of the Trump's administration's aggressive anti-China campaign that has centred on making Beijing the scapegoat for the global COVID-19 pandemic. Trump officials have accused China of a lack of transparency over the outbreak and given credence to extreme-right conspiracy theories that the virus was released from a Chinese virology laboratory in Wuhan.

These unsubstantiated claims are completely at odds with the actual record. Chinese authorities were grappling with cases of an atypical pneumonia and informed WHO and health bodies around the world as

they identified the virus involved, determined whether it was transmissible from human to human and posted its genetic code. By contrast, the Trump administration ignored the warnings, downplayed the dangers and only belatedly, weeks after the implications of the pandemic were evident, took limited action to contain its spread in the US.

Trump also suspended payments to WHO blaming it for supposedly covering up for China. Trump renewed his attack on WHO, and by implication on China, in a letter this week to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, riddled with factual errors and unsubstantiated allegations. He threatened to cut off all funding to WHO and to withdraw from the organization unless it carried out unspecified reforms demanded by the US.

To cite just two of the inaccuracies:

The editor-in-chief of the prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet*, Richard Horton, publicly corrected the claim in Trump's letter that the journal had published a report on the coronavirus in China in December 2019. In a tweet to the US president, he explained that the first two reports on COVID-19 were published on January 24, 2020 and were from Chinese scientists.

The Lancet has been highly critical of Trump's attacks on WHO, with Horton branding his decision to suspend funding to the international organization in the midst of the pandemic as "a crime against humanity". In a statement on Tuesday, *The Lancet* declared: "allegations levelled against WHO in President Trump's letter are serious and damaging to efforts to strengthen international cooperation to control this pandemic."

Secondly, Trump in his letter claimed that Taiwan had informed WHO by December 31 that the coronavirus was transmissible from human to human, but was ignored by the organization. WHO has repeatedly denied the accusation, and significantly, Taiwanese health authorities have made public the email sent on that date which makes no mention of human-to-human transmission.

The Trump administration, however, does not base itself on fact or scientific assessments, but rather uses the method of the Big Lie taken from the playbook of the German Nazi regime of the 1930s. Yesterday, Trump once again blasted China without a shred of evidence in a tweet declaring "it was the

'incompetence of China,' and nothing else, that did this mass Worldwide killing!"

Washington's scapegoating of China is not simply a matter of deflecting attention from its own criminal indifference and negligence in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, but is part of the escalating US trade war and military build-up against China that began under President Barack Obama and has accelerated under Trump. As the global pandemic again underscores its historic decline, US imperialism is determined to use all means, including military, to prevent its rivals, above all China, from undermining American global dominance.

Last week, the US Navy again sailed a warship through the narrow and highly sensitive Taiwan Strait between China and Taiwan—the guided missile destroyer, USS McCampbell. The Trump administration has stepped up provocative naval operations both in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. The latest transit was the sixth this year. Amidst extreme geo-political tensions, such exercises always carry the risk of an incident, whether accidental or deliberate, that triggers a broader military confrontation that quickly spirals out of control.



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