

US threatens to “disconnect” Australia if it strays from conflict with China

Mike Head
26 May 2020

Amid an escalating propaganda barrage by the corporate media and political establishment against China, accusing it of trying to “bully” Australia over trade issues, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a blunt threat on Sunday.

The US would “simply disconnect” Australia from its telecommunications, military and intelligence networks if any Australian government made an agreement with China deemed to endanger US “national security,” he declared.

Pompeo delivered Washington’s warning in an interview on the Murdoch media’s Sky News channel, thus making explicit and public the kind of threats that are usually made behind closed doors.

Asked about a vague 2018 “memorandum of understanding” signed by the Victorian state government to participate in China’s global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure project, Pompeo said he was not aware of the specific details of the agreement. Nevertheless, he delivered a sweeping ultimatum.

“Every nation has its own sovereign right to make decisions for itself, and I suppose Victoria has some rights... but every citizen of Australia should know that every one of those Belt and Road projects needs to be looked at incredibly closely,” he told Sky News.

Pompeo declared: “We will not take any risks to our telecommunications infrastructure, any risk to the national security elements of what we need to do with our Five Eyes partners.” This was a reference to the US-led global surveillance network that includes the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

While Pompeo alleged that BRI projects could do unspecified “harm” in the region, his real preoccupation is with protecting the massive and expanding spying operations conducted by the US and

its partners, as exposed by Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Pompeo’s intervention is part of an intensifying campaign by the Trump administration, with bipartisan backing from the US Democrats, to confront China economically and militarily, including by seeking to blame China for the worsening worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

This offensive is driven partly by the White House’s desperate efforts to divert from its criminal responsibility for ignoring public health warnings, leading to the US becoming the worst-infected country on earth, with its death toll reaching 100,000. But its roots lie deeper, in the drive by successive US governments, taken to a new level by the Obama administration, to prevent China from challenging the global economic and military dominance of the US.

Pompeo is not just the Trump administration’s foreign policy chief. He also speaks on behalf of the US military-intelligence apparatus, having been a US army officer and later the director of the CIA in 2017–18.

In what some media outlets misleadingly called “damage control” to walk back from Pompeo’s too-public threat, the US ambassador to Australia, Arthur Culvahouse Jr, published a clarification that was equally menacing.

“We have every confidence that Australia, as a close ally and Five Eyes partner, would take every measure necessary to ensure the security of its telecommunications networks,” Culvahouse said. This was a not-too-subtle warning not to deviate from the commitment to the US military alliance that has been maintained by every Australian government since World War II.

Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison also weighed in, saying the Labor Party government in

Victoria should never have signed the memorandum of understanding with China. Morrison accused the state government of undermining “the national interest” and federal “foreign policy.”

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews was branded “Comrade Dan” on “the Silk Road” by the Murdoch media. He quickly backed away from any suggestion of weakening the US alliance, to which the Labor Party has unconditionally committed for seven decades. Andrews declined to comment on Pompeo’s threat and his spokeswoman said: “Victoria has not, and will not in the future, agree to telecommunications projects under the BRI.”

Pompeo’s broadside was his second Australia-related intervention in three days. Last Thursday, during a wide-ranging attack on China, delivered at the State Department in Washington, he declared that the US “stands with Australia” against China’s alleged bullying.

“The Chinese Communist Party chose to threaten Australia with economic retribution for the simple act of asking for an independent inquiry into the origins of the virus. It’s not right,” Pompeo said.

This turns reality on its head. China co-sponsored last week’s World Health Assembly vote for an inquiry into the pandemic, to be organised by the World Health Organisation. The resolution was very different from the anti-China and anti-WHO call issued by the Australian government. Moreover, the Morrison government was obviously acting as the spearhead for an “American call,” as Pompeo has now admitted.

Elements within Australia’s ruling class, especially those most heavily reliant on Chinese markets, have voiced alarm at the nakedness of Canberra’s frontman role for the US and its discredited “Wuhan lab” accusations against Beijing. But the dominant financial elite and its parliamentary servants are closely tied to the US, on which they depend for investment and military backing.

Pompeo’s comments come as President Donald Trump continually ramps up his demonisation of China, last week accusing Beijing of “mass worldwide killings” via the coronavirus.

At last week’s State Department event, Pompeo pointed to the calculations behind such inflammatory allegations. He declared a further hostile shift in US policy, saying the US had wrongly assumed that as

China grew economically it would become more like the “free nations,” that is the corporate-controlled Western powers.

Pentagon strategists already declared in January 2018 that the post-2001 “war on terror” had been replaced as the primary focus of US military interventions by “great power conflict,” especially against China and Russia. American imperialism is hell-bent on militarily re-asserting its hegemony over the Indo-Pacific region and the entire planet.

This is putting the US and its closest allies, notably Australia, on course for a potentially cataclysmic nuclear war with China. But workers in Australia, the US and China would be the first casualties. To halt the drive to war, they must reject all efforts to divide them along racial, ethnic and national lines. They have a common interest in unifying their struggles against the capitalist profit system, which is lurching toward another world war, and for socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact