

US exploits Hong Kong protests for anti-China campaign

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The Trump administration has seized on protests that have erupted in Hong Kong against China's proposed national security law to add another front to its escalating propaganda war to vilify the Beijing regime. Once again, US imperialism is cynically using the banner of "human rights" to advance its economic and strategic interests and to undermine its rivals.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned the legislation, which will outlaw activities regarded by Beijing as "treason, secession, sedition or subversion" in Hong Kong, declaring it would be the "death knell" for the territory's autonomy. He warned, "Hong Kong could lose its special status under US law if Beijing did not respect the territory's democratic institutions and civil liberties."

Under legislation signed late last year by President Donald Trump, Pompeo must certify that Hong Kong retains a "high degree" of autonomy in order for it to retain special commercial and trade rights with the US. White House National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien threatened to use the US legislation to impose sanctions on China if it passed the national security law.

The US legislation was adopted last year amid protracted mass protests in Hong Kong against attempts to introduce an extradition law that could have opened the door for critics of the Chinese regime to be arrested and tried in China.

Last Sunday, thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong after it was announced at the start of China's current annual National People's Congress that it would consider a new national security law that would cover Hong Kong. Passage of the law would effectively sideline the Hong Kong legislature, which was compelled to withdraw similar legislation in 2003 after it provoked mass protests.

Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng attempted to downplay the significance of the new law, saying it would target only "a small group of people." However, its broad character could be applied to protesters who took part in the mass anti-extradition law demonstrations last year.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi declared that the legislation had to be passed "without the slightest delay" to create greater stability in Hong Kong. The chief fear in Beijing is that a protest movement in Hong Kong over democratic rights could trigger an eruption of opposition throughout China by workers and youth who are being hit hard by the country's rapidly slowing economy.

However, the right-wing parties and groupings that have come to dominate the protests in Hong Kong are not orientated to building a unified movement based on the Chinese working class to fight for fundamental democratic and social rights. Rather, the leaders of the latest protests are advancing a reactionary perspective grounded on Hong Kong parochialism and appeals to the imperialist powers to intervene.

According to media reports, many of those taking part in Sunday's protest chanted the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times." This was coined by Edward Leung, a leader of Hong Kong Indigenous, known for its xenophobic attitudes to Chinese mainlanders. Others chanted, "Hong Kong independence, the only way out" and displayed pro-independence flags.

Protest leaders turned last year's movement in a pro-imperialist direction in response to significant strikes by workers in Hong Kong in support of basic democratic rights that threatened to raise broader social issues, and similar action by workers across China. Demonstrators began waving the US flag and singing

“Stars and Stripes,” appealing for Washington to intervene.

An Australian Broadcasting Corporation video showed a protest this week inside a mall with an appeal for the US to send its military to aid Hong Kong. American flags have been displayed in the protests. Such an orientation plays straight into the hands of Beijing, which exploits such displays to drive a wedge between working people in China and Hong Kong.

The US is no more concerned about “human rights” in Hong Kong than it has been anywhere else in the world. This false banner has been exploited as the pretext for regime-change operations and military interventions in the Middle East, Central Asia and elsewhere, even as Washington turns a blind eye to flagrant abuse of democratic rights by allies such as Saudi Arabia.

The Trump administration has dramatically ramped up its condemnations of China in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a campaign of unsubstantiated allegations and bald-faced lies that Beijing is responsible for the global health crisis and massive death toll.

This propaganda is not only aimed at diverting attention from Trump’s criminal neglect and indifference in response to the coronavirus, which are responsible for 100,000 deaths in the US. It is also part of the intensification of US preparations for economic war and military conflict against China, which Washington regards as the chief obstacle to its ambitions for global dominance.

The Trump administration’s intervention into Hong Kong politics is a further step toward the repudiation of the longstanding One China policy initiated by US President Richard Nixon in 1972, which recognised Beijing, not Taipei, as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. Hong Kong, while recognised to have a special autonomous status after its handover by Britain in 1997, is nevertheless part of China.

Under Trump, the US has increasingly abandoned the protocols established under the One China Policy and strengthened political and military ties with Taiwan. It has developed close relations with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, whose Democratic Progressive Party advocates greater independence from Beijing. Significantly, she has intervened to support the Hong Kong protests, vowing to “proactively improve and

forge ahead with relevant support work, and provide Hong Kong’s people with necessary assistance.”

Washington’s encouragement of separatist sentiment, including among ethnic minorities in China such as the Uyghurs, is not based on any concern for democratic rights. Rather, it is aimed at undermining and ultimately fracturing its rival. These transparent aims are generating increasingly open opposition in Beijing, which has responded to Washington’s threats of sanctions over Hong Kong with warnings of economic retaliation.

The deepening crisis of global capitalism exposed and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic is greatly exacerbating geo-political tensions and the danger of war between nuclear-armed powers as the Trump administration adopts a deliberately confrontational and provocative approach to China.



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