

Trump escalates anti-China campaign

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US President Trump dramatically escalated his reckless anti-China campaign yesterday across the board, making clear that a dangerous confrontation between the two countries is all but inevitable.

In his press conference yesterday, Trump not only declared that his administration would completely revise Hong Kong's special status under US law with far-reaching implications for Hong Kong and China. He also launched into a tirade of accusations and lies—from false claims that Beijing's "cover-up" was responsible for the global COVID-19 pandemic, to his oft-repeated trade war demagoguery that China had "ripped off" the US economy for decades.

Trump's remarks followed the passage of national security legislation covering Hong Kong by the National People's Congress in China on Thursday that provoked fresh protests in Hong Kong. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo set the stage for Trump's announcement by formally declaring earlier this week that Hong Kong no longer had "a high degree of autonomy," paving the way for punitive measures.

The Chinese legislation is undoubtedly anti-democratic and will be used to intimidate and arrest critics and political opponents in Hong Kong under sweeping subversion, terrorist and foreign influence provisions. The US intervention, however, has nothing to do with defending the democratic rights of the Hong Kong people, but is part of the intensifying US campaign to undermine China which Washington regards as a threat to US global dominance.

Trump hailed Hong Kong as a "free society" and "a bastion of liberty," but the former British colony was handed back to China in 1997. Democratic rights in Hong Kong have always been limited. China took over the colonial forms of rule from the British—the unelected British colonial governor became the chief executive appointed by a pro-Beijing committee and the limited elections for the legislative council

remained in place.

Washington has a long history of selectively raising the banner of "human rights" as the pretext for pursuing wars of aggression in the Middle East and regime-change operations to install pro-US puppets. The gross hypocrisy of Trump's comments on Hong Kong's liberty is underscored by the massive police mobilisation to suppress demonstrations in Minneapolis and other American cities over the police killing of George Floyd. Trump effectively gave police a license to shoot protesters when he tweeted "When the looting starts, the shooting starts."

A 1992 law established that the US would continue to treat Hong Kong after it returned to Chinese rule in the same way as when it was a British colony. While he gave no details yesterday, Trump announced that he would take measures that "will affect the full range of agreements we have with Hong Kong" and would include "action to revoke Hong Kong's preferential treatment as a separate customs and travel territory from the rest of China."

Hong Kong's special status under US law as well, as its maintenance British commercial law under the framework of "one country, two systems," enabled it to retain its status as a major financial hub and base of operations for global corporations to conduct business in China. Trump's decision threatens to undermine the Hong Kong economy, hitting the working class hard.

Trump indicated that his administration would systematically strip Hong Kong of its special status in relation to trade and economic ties with the US and in regard to extradition and travel arrangements. This also threatens Hong Kong's special status for accessing so-called dual-use equipment that could have military applications.

Trump's announcements go far beyond the immediate issue of Hong Kong. He again accused China—without a shred of evidence—of being

responsible for the global coronavirus pandemic and its huge death toll. He reiterated his demands for “answers” from China on what he again provocatively called the “Wuhan virus,” in another bid to divert attention from his administration’s criminal negligence that has led to more than 100,000 deaths in the US.

Trump took the opportunity to again lambast the World Health Organisation (WHO), absurdly stating that China had “total control” over it. Having previously suspended US involvement, he then declared that the US would pull out of WHO completely, effective immediately, for failing to accede to his bullying demands for “reform.” His actions are a threat to any international organisation that fails to fall into line with US interests.

Trump lashed out at China, declaring it had “ripped off the United States like no one has ever done before” and “gutted” American industry—a clear warning that he will take further punitive trade war measures aimed at undermining the Chinese economy and corporations. In recent weeks, the White House has announced new sanctions aimed at crippling Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei by cutting off its access to vital high-end semi-conductor chips.

The US president also denounced China’s alleged industrial espionage and announced new measures to block the entry of Chinese students claimed to be security risks into the United States. The *New York Times* reported earlier in the week that US officials had decided to proceed with blocking or cancelling the visas—a move that could affect thousands of students.

While Trump did not dwell on the issue, his accusation that Beijing is “unlawfully claiming territory in the Pacific Ocean” and threatening freedom of navigation extends his aggressive anti-China campaign from the diplomatic and economic spheres into the military. Over recent months, the US Navy has stepped up its provocative “freedom of navigation” operations in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait—actions that have the potential to trigger clashes in these sensitive strategic areas for China.

When asked about Trump’s impending press conference, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian declared that the US should stop interfering in China’s internal affairs and in Hong Kong. He warned: “China will take all necessary measures to hit back if the US side is bent on harming China’s interests.”

Trump’s statements were not, however, limited to Hong Kong. His sweeping diatribe against China on all fronts can only lead to a rapid escalation of tensions between the two nuclear-armed powers, as Beijing seeks to defend its economic and strategic interests. As in the 1930s, Washington’s vilification of Beijing and its trade war measures have a logic of their own—the drive to a catastrophic military conflict that threatens the future of humanity.



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