# US orders closure of China's Houston consulate, raising the danger of war

**Mike Head**
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Tuesday's order by the Trump administration for China to close its consulate in Houston within three days, without providing any details to justify its decision, is a dangerous and unprecedented escalation in the US conflict with China.

Coming amid a tense standoff between US and Chinese warships in the South China Sea, it is hard to see the move as anything besides a step toward war.

The White House and the US political establishment as a whole, facing a massive domestic crisis over its failure to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already cost nearly 150,000 American lives, is seeking to divert internal tensions outward to an external "enemy."

China's foreign ministry condemned the closure of its oldest consulate in the US, which has been in existence since the two countries normalised diplomatic ties in 1979. A spokesperson called it "an outrageous and unjustified move that will sabotage relations between the two countries."

The US government made no attempt to explain its totally unsubstantiated claims against Beijing. The State Department vaguely accused China of conducting "massive illegal spying and influence operations throughout the United States." Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus echoed the litany of wild allegations issued by Donald Trump this week, accusing China of "violating" US sovereignty, "intimidating" the American people, thieving "American jobs" by "unfair trade practices" and "other egregious behaviour."

Asked for specifics on why the consulate was being closed, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo responded only with sweeping assertions that China was stealing US intellectual property, which was "costing hundreds of thousands of jobs." Pompeo told reporters in Copenhagen, Denmark: "President Trump has said, 'Enough, we're not going to allow this to continue to happen'."

On Twitter, Republican Senator Marco Rubio, a long-time agitator against China, was even more vague and provocative. "China's consulate in #Houston is not a diplomatic facility. It is the central node of the Communist Party's vast network of spies & influence operations in the United States. Now that building must close & the spies have 72 hours to leave or face arrest. This needed to happen."

As with its earlier claims about China having "weaponized" COVID-19 by supposedly unleashing the virus on the world from a Wuhan lab, there is not a shred of evidence to support these incendiary allegations. Moreover, they are issued by the country that conducts the greatest spying and political interference operations in the world, from Iran to Venezuela and China.

The Houston charges are part of a welter of claims and actions against China in recent weeks. On the same day, the US was mounting another show of force in the South China Sea, conducting joint exercises between the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group and Japanese and Australian warships near islets claimed and occupied by China. This was the second such military display this week, after Pompeo, for the first time, formally branded virtually all of China's claims in the South China Sea as "illegal."

US officials also unsealed an indictment against two former engineering students in China, charging them with hacking to try to steal data on COVID-19 vaccine research, supposedly at the direction of the Chinese government, as well as for their "own profit."

On Tuesday as well, Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper both delivered speeches in London warning that the US is preparing its military forces across the Indo-Pacific region for potential confrontation with China and raising the pressure on other governments to join a coalition to counter the growing global influence of Beijing. "We hope we can build out a coalition that understands this threat," Pompeo declared. "It includes

every country," he said, standing alongside British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

Esper told the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies that the US military was modernising its "strength deterrence" across Asia and prioritising the deployment of forces and technologies to counter Chinese efforts to establish "a completely different regional order that puts China at the top."

Pompeo and Esper are touring Europe to demand that its governments line up with the US against China, having just succeeded in pressuring the British government to reverse its previous decision to permit Huawei, the largest telecommunications equipment maker in the world, to provide 5G technology in the UK.

Earlier this month, Trump signed a bill authorizing sanctions on China over its policies in Hong Kong. The US Treasury also sanctioned several high-ranking Chinese officials over Beijing's treatment of ethnic minorities in Tibet and China's northwestern Xinjiang region.

The White House has not the slightest concern for the democratic rights of people in China or anywhere else, as witnessed by the mobilization of para-military troops against protesters in Portland, Oregon and Trump's threats to do the same in other major cities. Instead, Washington is hypocritically seeking to exploit the issues of "human rights" and "spying" to confront China, which it now regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

The reaction of the capitalist regime in Beijing to the Houston closure has again been a mixture of appealing to Washington for a power-sharing compromise and issuing its own nationalist and militarist responses. On Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin appealed to the US to revoke the closure. At the same time, he threatened countermeasures against the "outrageous and unjustified" violation of international law and "unprecedented escalation" of recent US actions against China.

In the South China Sea, China's air force held live-fire drills and sent more fighter jets to its base on disputed Woody Island—actions that only underscore the danger of a military conflict that could potentially spiral into a nuclear confrontation. Sitting on top of its own social time bomb, Beijing is itself engaging in an arms race that can only end in disaster for humanity.

These dangers are not only driven by the crisis of the Trump administration and the looming presidential election. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the drive by the US, already taken to a new level under the Obama administration, to confront China on every front, including militarily, to subordinate it and prevent it from becoming a threat to the global ascendancy established by US imperialism in World War II.

Behind the allegations of theft of vaccine research, there is a reactionary global struggle between competing corporations and nations to be the first to patent a vaccine for the coronavirus. At stake are billions of dollars for corporate CEOs, investors and bankers, and an immense geopolitical advantage for the country that wins the vaccine sweepstakes.

The United States is most nakedly pursuing a nationalistic course, aimed at enriching American oligarchs and deploying the vaccine not as a means to save lives, but as a weapon against countries in the crosshairs of US imperialism. Washington will withhold the vaccine from countries deemed impediments to its drive for global hegemony and reward those that fall into line behind its plans for war and conquest with access to the lifesaving drug.

All sections of the US political establishment have lined up behind the Trump administration's anti-Chinese campaign, with his presumptive Democrat challenger Joe Biden attacking Trump for not being aggressive enough.

These developments highlight the enormous danger of war and the need to mobilize the international working class, including the Chinese and US working people, against this threat and the political regimes responsible for it, and for a unified global effort to fight the pandemic. This is only possible on the basis of a socialist program, directed at overturning the capitalist system and abolishing its outmoded division of the world into rival nation states.

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