

US imposes new sanctions on China over alleged Uyghur abuses

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As part of its escalating conflict with China, the Trump administration last week imposed another set of sanctions on Chinese officials and an organization over their alleged abuse of the rights of the Muslim Uyghur minority in the western province of Xinjiang. The allegations have centred on the mass detention of Uyghurs in re-education camps, as the Beijing regime attempts to stamp out Uyghur separatism.

Last Friday, the US Treasury imposed sanctions on the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp, as well as two officials connected with it—Peng Jiarui and Sun Jinlong. As a result, in a move designed to block access to the US financial system, American companies and citizens are banned from carrying out economic transactions with them.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin issued a thoroughly hypocritical statement declaring that the US would use “the full breadth of its financial powers to hold human rights abusers accountable in Xinjiang and across the world.” In reality, Washington’s highly selective “human rights” campaigns are aimed at furthering the interests of US imperialism and providing the pretext for aggression and war.

The latest sanctions are part of a far broader anti-China campaign involving trade war measures and a military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific, as well as denunciations of Beijing over human rights in Tibet and Hong Kong, and unsubstantiated accusations of spying and intellectual property theft.

Last week’s measures are just the latest in a series of sanctions levelled against Chinese officials and entities over Xinjiang.

* In October 2019, the Trump administration placed 28 Chinese companies and police departments on a black list banning American companies from selling them technology and other goods without a licence. A number of Chinese officials were also subjected to visa

restrictions.

* On July 9, the US imposed sanctions on four high-ranking officials, including Chen Quanguo, a member of the Chinese Communist Party’s 25-member Politburo and Xinjiang party secretary.

* On July 20, the Trump administration added 11 new Chinese companies to the list that restricts them from purchasing American products. These included Chinese suppliers for major American corporations such as Apple, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger.

The Beijing regime is based on the use of police state measures to suppress any opposition to its rule, in particular from the working class. Its response to unrest in Xinjiang, where the Uyghurs have been increasingly marginalized by Han Chinese from other areas of the country, has undoubtedly been repressive.

The hue and cry from Washington, however, has nothing to do with defending the basic democratic rights of Uyghurs, or, for that matter, the people of Hong Kong and Tibet. Rather, it is part of a strategy aimed at encouraging separatist sentiment and undermining China, which the US regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

The US has particularly focussed on Xinjiang, which not only has significant natural resources including oil, but is also adjacent to the energy-rich Central Asia republics with which Beijing has sought to establish close economic and political ties. Beijing’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative—a massive infrastructure project linking the Eurasian landmass—involves crucial road, rail and communication routes that pass through Xinjiang.

The US propaganda campaign denouncing Chinese detention camps in Xinjiang is based on inflated figures of a million plus Uyghur detainees that lack any serious documentation, along with lurid individual accounts fed to the media by Uyghur exile organisations. Likewise, Chinese counter claims that the camps are simply

vocational centres lack any credibility. In the absence of independent reporting, the extent of detentions remains unclear.

US condemnations of Uyghur detentions have now been supplemented by allegations of “genocide” against the Uyghurs, based on claims of enforced birth control and the sterilization of Uyghur women. Once again, the allegations are based on the sensational accounts of individuals and tendentious reports of the broader situation in Xinjiang.

The latest claims rest on another report produced by German anti-communist academic Adrian Zenz, who was also closely involved in the release last year of leaked CCP documents purporting to show the extent and purpose of the Xinjiang detention camps. Zenz is associated with a network of right-wing think tanks, including the European School of Culture and Theology in Germany and the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington.

Zenz’s latest document “Sterilisation, IUDs and mandatory birth control: The CCP’s campaign to suppress Uyghur birthrates in Xinjiang,” was published by a Washington-based think-tank, the Jamestown Foundation. His main contentions are that population growth in predominantly Uyghur areas is declining, that birth control violations have been punished by detention, and that a campaign is underway “to sterilize rural minority women with three or more children, as well as some with two children.”

The central flaw in Zenz’s research is that it is ripped out of the context of China’s birth control policies, including the one child policy that was introduced in the late 1970s by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and that generated widespread opposition. It was enforced with police state measures including forced abortions and sterilisations.

The policy was directed in particular against the working class, with exceptions made for rural families and, also significantly, for China’s minorities including the Uyghurs. There were also ways for individuals with money and/or influence to avoid the limit of one child per couple. Such was the opposition to the policy, including concerns in ruling circles about an ageing workforce, that the one-child limit was modified and finally dropped in 2016, when all couples were permitted to have two children.

Even if accurate, Zenz’s figures on slowing Uyghur population growth from 2010 as compared to the Han Chinese do not take into account the change in policy,

let alone other factors such as Uyghur emigration. Nor does his report bother to consider that the current two-child policy is enforced not only against Uyghurs but against the broader population, including Han Chinese.

None of this has stopped American media outlets, such as the *Washington Post* and *Foreign Policy*, from ramping up sensational stories about Uyghur “genocide.”

This dovetails with the decision of two Uyghur exile organisations based in the US—the East Turkistan Government in Exile and the East Turkistan National Awakening Movement—to file a case alleging genocide in the International Criminal Court last month against China.

The Uyghurs are one of the Turkic speaking groups that trace their origins to the Silk Road land routes from China through Central Asia to Europe. Uyghur separatist groups claim areas of Xinjiang as their homeland of East Turkistan.

These Uyghur organisations, which are led by wealthy and well-connected exiles, have close connections to the US state apparatus and its intelligence agencies. The CIA and its front organization, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), have long funded and promoted exile Uyghur organisations, including the World Uyghur Congress based in Europe and the American Uyghur Association, as a means of fostering separatist sentiment in Xinjiang.

The democratic rights of the Uyghur minority in China cannot be defended through US imperialism, which has flagrantly used “human rights” as a means of waging war and regime change. The fight for the democratic rights of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities in China is completely bound up with a political struggle of the Chinese working class as a whole against the oppressive regime in Beijing. Above all, that needs to be informed by the historical lessons derived by the Trotskyist movement from its protracted struggle against Stalinism, including its Chinese variant, Maoism.



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