

US secretary of state lashes out against China at Quad meeting

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo once again hit out against Beijing, this time at the meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly referred to as the Quad, held in Tokyo on Tuesday. The US has been pushing for the transformation of the dialogue involving Japan, India and Australia into a formal military alliance as part of its escalating war drive against China.

In his public remarks, Pompeo hypocritically blamed China for the COVID-19 pandemic in a bid to deflect attention from the criminally negligent response of the Trump administration to the spread of the disease that has claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Americans. He declared that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had made the crisis “infinitely worse” as a result of its “cover-up” and accused the “authoritarian” regime of locking up those who raised the alarm.

Whatever the limitations of the Chinese government’s response to what for it was a new disease with unknown characteristics, they pale in comparison with Trump’s repeated dismissal of the dangers of the coronavirus and his administration’s failure to institute the necessary measures to contain its spread. Chinese health authorities promptly informed the World Health Organisation, which the White House has also sought to make a scapegoat, which relayed the warnings internationally, including to the US.

These accusations against China are just part of the barrage of lies and unsubstantiated accusations that Pompeo repeats in international forums as he seeks to line up allies and strategic partners against Beijing. He told the gathering of foreign ministers—Marise Payne, Toshiimitsu Motegi and Subrahmanyam Jaishankar from Australia, Japan and India respectively—that collaboration was more critical than ever to protect against “the CCP’s exploitation, corruption, and

coercion.”

The US secretary of state declared: “We’ve seen it in the south, in the East China Sea, the Mekong, the Himalayas, the Taiwan Straits. These are just a few examples.” In reality, it has been Washington that has deliberately inflamed dangerous flash-points in the Indo-Pacific: repeatedly sending US warships through the South China and East China Seas, as well as the Taiwan Strait, and encouraging the right-wing Indian government to take an aggressive stance in its border disputes with China.

The Trump administration’s anti-China campaign had its origins in the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” that confronted China across the Indo-Pacific region—diplomatically, economically and militarily. As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton transformed what had been longstanding, simmering maritime disputes in the South China Sea into an international hotspot and potential trigger for war. In the current presidential election campaign, both the Democrats and Republicans have ratcheted up their anti-China propaganda—reflecting the determination in Washington to prevent China from becoming a challenge to American global hegemony.

In his public statement, Pompeo made clear that the US regards the Quad as far more than just a forum to exchange views. “Our partnership isn’t multilateralism for the sake of it. All of us seek a free and open Indo-Pacific and our conversations aim to achieve that good outcome,” he said. His counterposing of the “democratic” countries of the Quad against authoritarian China rings all the more hollow as Trump has repeatedly threatened to ignore the vote in the US election if it goes against him. The governments in all four countries have been moving towards authoritarian forms of rule, with Australia for instance legislating

draconian “foreign interference” laws that could be used to suppress anti-war opposition.

While the foreign ministers of India, Australia and Japan were more circumspect in their public remarks, there is no doubt that behind closed doors all three lined up against China, with Pompeo pressuring them to go further. The US has been pushing Australia to commit its warships to the US naval provocations against China—so-called “freedom of navigation operations” intruding in waters in the South China Sea around Chinese controlled islets. Japan and Australia have both formally been American military allies since the end of World War II, while India effectively entered into a strategic partnership with the United States in 2010 that has been expanded to include a logistics and basing agreement.

The four countries have been stepping-up joint military exercises. India signalled in June that it was open to including Australia in trilateral Malabar military exercises that already include the US and Japan. The US navy held live-fire drills with Australian warships in the South China Sea in April and manoeuvres with Japanese naval forces in June. In July, the Pentagon mobilised three of its massive US aircraft carriers and associated battlegroups, sending two into the South China Sea for “high-end” war games aimed at preparing for “an all domain warfighting environment.” One of the aircraft carriers carried out drills with five Australian naval vessels and a Japanese warship.

China has responded to this week’s Quad talks by rejecting Pompeo’s remarks. A spokesman for the Chinese embassy in Washington told *Newsweek*: “We do not accept reckless smearing and groundless accusations against China.” He called for the resolution of differences “through dialogue and consultation,” and urged the US to “abandon the Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice, stop unprovoked accusations and attacks on China.”

While commentary in the US and Western media focuses on the danger of a new Cold War, the parallel to the confrontation between the Soviet Union and American imperialism is not accurate. The triumphalism that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has completely dissipated as the subsequent three decades ushered in, not a new era of “peace and prosperity,” but one of endless US wars of

aggression, continuing US economic crisis and deepening global decline.

Unlike the Soviet Union, China, which is wrought by its own sharpening economic and social tensions, represents, by its very existence as the world’s second largest economy, a threat to US dominance and the “rules-based order” of imperialism over which it presides. The Trump administration has engaged in an escalating economic war that is increasingly openly aimed at preventing China from developing high tech industries and ensuring that it remains a subordinate cheap labour platform for American corporations.

Far from a new decades-long Cold War between the world’s two largest economies, the American ruling class is recklessly preparing to take all measures, including open warfare, to prevent China from ever threatening US economic and strategic interests. The relentless US military build-up in the Indo-Pacific is setting the stage for the drive to a war between nuclear armed powers with terrible consequences for humanity.



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