

US secretary of state hypocritically sanctions Chinese officials over Hong Kong human rights

Peter Symonds
9 December 2020

On Monday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo seized on the disqualification last month of four opposition members of Hong Kong's Legislative Council to sanction 14 members of the standing committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC). The standing committee had authorized the Hong Kong administration to disqualify legislators who promoted Hong Kong independence, refused to recognise Chinese sovereignty or called for foreign intervention. Opposition members of the Legislative Council resigned en masse in protest.

In his statement, Pompeo, who is notorious for his anti-China diatribes, again lashed out at "Beijing's unrelenting assault against Hong Kong's democratic processes [that] has gutted its Legislative Council, rendering the body a rubber stamp devoid of meaningful opposition." He attacked the actions of the NPC standing committee as having "effectively neutered the ability of the people of Hong Kong to choose their elected representatives."

Pompeo also condemned the NPC standing committee for passing a sweeping anti-democratic National Security Law in June that has been used to crack down on anti-Beijing protests that erupted last year over the attempts by the Hong Kong administration to enact a new extradition treaty. Last week, the Hong Kong courts sentenced three prominent protest leaders—Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow, Ivan Lam—to jail terms for their part in an unauthorized assembly last year.

Under the sanctions, the 14 members of the NPC standing committee and their immediate family members will be barred from entering the United States, their assets in the US will be blocked and

American citizens will be barred from any dealing with them. On the pretext of defending democracy in Hong Kong, the US State Department has already imposed similar sanctions on a number of individuals including its chief executive Carrie Lam, who holds the territory's top post.

Fearing that the protests in Hong Kong could encourage unrest on the Chinese mainland, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime has since resorted to increasingly anti-democratic methods to suppress opposition. However, for the Trump administration to portray itself as the defender of democratic rights in Hong Kong, or anywhere else for that matter, is the height of hypocrisy. Trump had no compunction about mobilizing federal paramilitary forces to brutally crack down on widespread protests in the US against police violence, and moreover has conspired to subvert the victory of Joe Biden in the presidential election last month.

Washington has a long record of selectively exploiting human rights issues to further its economic and strategic interests, while turning a blind eye to flagrant abuses of democratic rights by its allies and strategic partners. Pompeo's denunciations of China over a growing range of issues—from human rights in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet, to Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea and blaming Beijing for the coronavirus—are part of the escalating US-led economic and strategic confrontation with China over the past decade.

In a comment entitled "China Is National Security Threat No. 1" published in the Wall Street Journal last week, the US Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe made absolutely clear that Washington's

primary concern was not democratic rights, but the threat that China posed to the global dominance of US imperialism.

After declaring that “the People’s Republic of China poses the greatest threat to America today, and the greatest threat to democracy and freedom world-wide since World War II,” Ratcliffe accused China, on the basis of unsubstantiated assertions, of robbing US companies of intellectual property, stealing sensitive defence technology and developing its own “world-class capabilities in emerging technologies.”

In other words, the US fears that China will overtake it economically and technologically, including in the arena of military power. Declaring that China posed a “once-in-a-generation challenge,” Ratcliffe declared: “This generation will be judged by its response to China’s effort to reshape the world in its own image and replace America as the dominant superpower.” And he urged a warlike response, on a par with the US entry into World War II to defeat “the scourge of fascism” and Cold War measures aimed at “bringing down the Iron Curtain.”

Should Joe Biden assume the presidency next January, his administration will only escalate the US war drive against China. As the vice-president in the Obama administration, Biden was closely involved in its aggressive “pivot to Asia” that involved an across-the-board diplomatic, economic and strategic offensive aimed at undermining China. Its military “rebalance” has ensured that 60 percent of American naval and air assets were stationed in the Indo-Pacific region by 2020 and has strengthened US alliances, basing agreements and strategic alliances throughout the region.

During his election campaign, Biden sought to outflank Trump as a more aggressive and hardline defender of the interests of US imperialism. He branded Chinese President Xi Jinping as a “thug” and, in one of his election ads, declaring that “Trump rolled over for the Chinese—he took their word for it” over COVID-19. While Biden’s tactical approach to China may be different, he is just as determined to prevent it from challenging US global hegemony.

“Human rights” is the increasingly tawdry banner under which the US is prosecuting its aggressive confrontation with China. Last month, the Five Eyes top-level intelligence-sharing group—comprising the US, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand—took

the unusual step of weighing in alongside Washington in condemning the disqualification of Hong Kong legislators and posturing as defenders of democratic rights.

Hong Kong, which was a British colony up until its hand-over to China in 1997, has never been ruled democratically. Beijing simply took over the anti-democratic structures through which London administered its colony—the all-powerful British colonial governor was renamed as the chief executive and selected by a committee of Beijing appointees. The Legislative Council, with its limited powers, remained largely as it was—only partially chosen by direct elections. The US of course never cavilled against Britain for its undemocratic, colonial rule.

The political weakness of the protest movement that erupted last year is that it was dominated by organisations and parties that promoted the false hope that the US and Britain would defend democratic rights in Hong Kong. For Washington, the rights of people in Hong Kong, or for that matter throughout China, are simply a convenient pretext for its war drive. The real allies of working people in Hong Kong are workers in China and internationally, not US and British imperialism, which will quickly abandon their “democratic” bluster if it suits their interests.

Moreover, the orientation towards Washington and London plays directly into the hands of Beijing, which exploits claims of “foreign interference” to justify its anti-democratic methods. On Tuesday, China denounced the US sanctions on NPC standing committee members. Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying condemned “the American side’s rude and unreasonable, crazy and vile behaviour.” On the same day, the Hong Kong police arrested at least eight opposition leaders in a new sweep under the draconian National Security Law.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact