US beats the anti-China war drums in Alaska

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The Biden administration used its first top-level meeting with Chinese officials, held in Alaska, to dramatically raise the stakes in the escalating US conflict and confrontation with Beijing. Far from seeking to ease the dangerous tensions fuelled by the Trump administration's provocations and economic warfare against China, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan doubled down on Trump's aggressive, anti-China demagogy.

In an extraordinary breach with diplomatic protocol, during normally formal opening remarks before the media, Blinken bluntly warned that China had to abide by the "rules-based international order" or face "a far more violent and unstable world." In reality, US imperialism established the so-called post-World War II order, in which it sets the rules, and is prepared to use all means, including war, to prevent China from challenging its global hegemony.

Blinken regurgitated what has become standard US propaganda against China—"deep concerns with actions by China, including in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, cyber-attacks on the United States, and economic coercion toward our allies." While not ruling out possible collaboration, he emphasised that the US relationship "will be competitive where it should be… adversarial where it must be."

Sullivan rubbed salt into the wound by highlighting the Biden administration's strengthening of military alliances and strategic partnerships, in particular the holding of the first-ever leaders' summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, involving the US, Japan, India and Australia. Ever since the Quad was first mooted over a decade ago, it has been clearly aimed at consolidating an alliance to encircle China and prepare for war.

Like Blinken, Sullivan laid out an agenda for the talks that focused exclusively on US "concerns" with China—"from economic and military coercion to assaults on basic values." Accusations of Chinese coercion stand reality on its head, given that the Biden administration has reversed none of Trump's trade war measures against China and has continued US naval provocations close to the Chinese mainland in the South and East China Seas.

Just before the meeting, Blinken piled more US sanctions on 24 Chinese and Hong Kong officials over changes to Hong Kong's electoral system that were rubberstamped at China's annual National People's Congress this month. Washington has seized on the Chinese regime's autocratic methods in Hong Kong, as well as Xinjiang and Tibet, not out of any concern for democratic rights but as a means of vilifying Beijing, and potentially weakening and fracturing China. With staggering cynicism, the US has for decades routinely exploited "human rights" as the pretext for regime-change operations and wars.

The deliberately provocative remarks from US officials, designed to poison rather than mend relations, led to bitter exchanges with the Chinese representatives—Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi, China's top foreign policy official—in front of the media.

In response to what he called "some quite different opening remarks" from Blinken and Sullivan, Yang was also blunt. China, he insisted upheld "the United Nations-centered international system and the international order underpinned by international law, not what is advocated by a small number of countries of the so-called 'rules-based' international order." He pointedly noted that, unlike the US, Chinese did not believe "in invading through the use of force, or toppling other regimes through various means, or massacring the people of other countries."

Yang further challenged US claims to stand for human rights, pointing to the eruption of widespread

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protests over police killings, adding that the abuse of democratic rights in the US "did not just emerge over the past four years." He also rebutted US accusations of Chinese cyber espionage, saying "whether it's the ability to launch cyber-attacks or the technologies that could be deployed, the United States is the champion in this regard."

Yang declared: "The United States itself does not represent international public opinion, and neither does the Western world." The majority of the world's countries, he said, would not recognise the universal values as espoused by the US, or that "the rules made by a small number of people would serve as the basis for the international order."

Summing up China's position, Foreign Minister Wang emphasised that it would "not accept the unwarranted accusations from the US side. In the past several years, China's legitimate rights and interests have come under outright suppression, plunging the China-US relationship into a period of unprecedented difficulty." This has "taken its toll on world stability and development," he said, "and this situation must no longer continue."

Faced with an increasingly aggressive United States, first under Obama then Trump, Beijing has on the one hand sought to build up its military and develop its own alliances, while offering economic concessions in a bid to ease tensions with Washington. The remarks of Yang and Wang in Alaska indicate that Beijing has concluded that compromise is just as unlikely under Biden as Trump, underscoring the escalating dangers of war.

In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, US strategy has been based on preventing the emergence of any regional power that could challenge its global dominance. China's rapid economic growth, overtaking Japan in 2010 to become the world's second largest economy, increasingly turned Washington's focus to its containment and subordination. Obama's "pivot to Asia," formally announced in 2011, set out a comprehensive diplomatic, economic and military strategy to assure American supremacy over China—a confrontational policy that accelerated under Trump.

Just months after assuming office, Biden is setting course for war, ratchetting up the anti-China propaganda by accusing Beijing of "vaccine diplomacy" and the "genocide" of Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang province, as well as "economic coercion" of allies such as Australia—all of which is creating a toxic political climate of anti-Asian racism in the United States, leading to the killing of Asian Americans. Diplomatically, Biden is "revitalising" alliances, with the priority given to military allies in Asia by convening the Quad summit and organising a tour of Japan and South Korea by Blinken and US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin just before the Alaska meeting.

The most ominous warning of the imminence of war was given by the head of the US Indo-Pacific command, Admiral Philip Davidson. In congressional testimony this month, he called for a doubling of the Pentagon's budget for the region and predicted that the US could face war with China over Taiwan within five years. He also alluded to plans for the stationing of intermediate-range nuclear ballistic missiles close to the Chinese mainland, which were confirmed when Japan's Nikkei news service published extracts from the Pentagon's Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

The US-China talks began on Thursday, Alaskan time, and continued through Friday. Whether or not a final joint statement is patched together to paper over the tensions, the opening remarks must serve as a warning to workers and young people in the US, China and throughout the world of the advanced character of the US war drive. Outside of the political intervention of a unified anti-war movement of the international working class, the rapid slide toward a world war involving two nuclear-armed powers is irreversible.

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