

UK Labour Party and Guardian back anti-China provocations

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Anti-China hawks are increasingly setting the agenda of British-China relations, upsetting Prime Minister Boris Johnson's effort to balance between Washington and Beijing. In charting a collision course that threatens global war, they have the full support of the Biden Democratic Party administration in Washington and the Labour Party at home.

Last week, China announced sanctions against nine British individuals and four UK-organisations including Conservative Party MPs Iain Duncan Smith, Tom Tugendhat, Neil O'Brien and Tim Loughton, Labour peer Helena Kennedy, barrister Geoffrey Nice, as well as anti-China front groups such as China Research and the Conservative Human Rights Commission.

The move was in response to sanctions by the UK, European Union, US and Canada against Chinese officials co-ordinated in a deliberate effort to escalate geopolitical tensions.

Those sanctioned by Beijing are prominent in the campaign demanding punitive measures against China based on unsubstantiated claims that it is carrying out genocide against Uyghur Muslims. Their accusations have nothing to do with genuine concern as to the repressive apparatus of the Chinese police state, which is directed above all against the working class. Their politically-motivated propaganda comes straight from the handbook of "human rights" imperialism, which has led to more than 30 years of neo-colonial wars and invasions.

Nice, for example, headed the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for eight years, following the NATO-led war against the country utilising the criminal, ethnic-Albanian separatist militia, the Kosovo Liberation Army. He also helped shape the legal pretext, again based on unsubstantiated and exaggerated reports of human rights abuses, for

crippling sanctions and a bloody proxy-war against Syria's Bashar al-Assad.

Now similarly suspect accounts provided by CIA-funded organisations such as the World Uyghur Congress, are aimed at justifying economic and military aggression against what they regard as a strategic competitor to the interests of western imperialism that threatens an eruption of nuclear war.

Anti-Beijing provocations have been accelerated by the pandemic. The US, Europe and Britain have ruthlessly imposed a policy of herd immunity, leading to mass deaths and a renewed and even more deadly increase in COVID-19 infections. While western governments have handed over billions to the major corporations and super-rich, millions of workers face an onslaught on their jobs, working conditions and civil liberties.

The demonisation of China is part of diverting growing social tensions outwards. This is led by the Biden administration, which in its first three months in office has ramped up Washington's confrontation with China, as well as Russia.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken set the stage for the showdown using last month's Alaska summit to target Chinese Communist Party officials, freeze assets and impose travel restrictions. From there, Blinken went on to the NATO summit where he enlisted the support of Britain and EU to "revitalise" the Atlantic Alliance—specifically against Beijing and Moscow. Speaking alongside Blinken, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg chillingly argued there was now a "reduced... threshold for any use of nuclear weapons in a potential conflict," and hailed London's decision to increase its nuclear weapons stockpile by 40 percent.

Days later, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi

and vowed to strengthen an alliance that has seen India transformed into a frontline state in Washington's military offensive against China. Modi—a Hindu supremacist and leader of the communalist Bharatiya Janata Party—is notorious for introducing the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act and encouraging pogroms.

Then, days after US Pacific Fleet commander Adm. John Aquilino testified before his Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation that war with China over Taiwan is “much closer than most think”, US Ambassador to Palau, John Hennessey-Niland, undertook a provocative visit to Taiwan—the first by a US ambassador since 1979.

Nonetheless, the official line is that China is the aggressor. Former Tory Party leader Duncan Smith piously announced that he wore the sanctions as a “badge of honour”. “Those of us who live free lives under the rule of law must speak for those who have no voice”, he intoned. This is under conditions in which his government is imposing the most draconian assault on civil liberties in the UK since the Second World War with the new Police Bill and extended Coronavirus Act measures.

Duncan Smith is among that who have sought to incorporate an amendment from the House of Lords to the Trade Bill that would be used to escalate sanctions and other measures against China based on claims of genocide. In March, this campaign was defeated narrowly in parliament for the third time. The government argued that such an inclusion was unconstitutional as it is for the courts, not politicians, to determine allegations of genocide. But the Bill only won by 18 votes, as some 27 Tories joined with Labour to back the amendment.

Johnson's hesitation has less to do with constitutional principles, which his government is ripping up, than trying to square the UK's alliance with Washington with maintaining the City of London as a key financial hub for Beijing. As the *Financial Times* noted, this “Janus-faced approach” is hardly sustainable and one or another of these “goals is going to have to give.”

Just what Duncan Smith and his allies are agitating for is made clear by his complaint in the *Telegraph* that Britain's recent foreign and defence policy Integrated Review (IR), while “correctly” identifying “Russia as an immediate threat”, only refers to China as a

“competitor” when it is “a growing threat... to the free world itself.”

In fact, in addition to committing to hiking UK nuclear warheads to 260, the IR set out a series of military measures to be taken against China in concert with the Biden administration. But if US imperialism is unable to tolerate any threat to its hegemony, then the situation facing the UK is equally frantic.

Labour has set itself as the party most committed to a confrontation with Beijing. In parliament, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade Emily Thornberry urged MPs to “vote with their conscience” and pass the Lords amendment. Once again, Jeremy Corbyn and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, including John McDonnell, joined with the Tory hawks to place Labour unanimously behind this warmongering.

The *Guardian* functions as the house organ for these provocations. Following Owen Jones' proselytizing in its pages for the “left” to join the imperialist war bandwagon, its editorial on the sanctions complained that China “has grown into a huge international challenge.”

Turning reality on its head, it claimed that Beijing represents a threat to the “rules-based order created after 1945 and the security, sovereignty and democratic values of the western countries it now daily confronts,” and called on “Academics and politicians, universities and other institutions” to line-up behind Johnson and follow the lead “in backing targeted colleagues and bodies” associated with Beijing.



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