

From “Corgi killers” to a “kidnapped” tennis player: Anti-China agitation escalates

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Over the past few days, the US and Western media and governments have mounted another extraordinary campaign designed to demonise the Chinese government, this time over the alleged silencing and even “disappearing” of a well-known international tennis player.

Last week, the media was full of highly-inflated coverage of the killing of a pet Corgi by epidemic prevention workers in the Chinese city of Shangrao—part of a concerted drive to demand the “reopening” of China and an end to the Beijing government’s efforts to suppress outbreaks of COVID-19.

This week, the leading organs of the corporate media, such as the *New York Times* and the London-based *Financial Times*, have accused the Chinese government of suppressing and threatening tennis star Peng Shuai, a two-time world Grand Slam doubles winner, since she posted on Weibo on November 2 an unclear complaint against a former Chinese vice-premier, Zhang Gaoli.

This affair has become a toxic combination of the methods of the #MeToo movement—the use of unsubstantiated sexual misconduct allegations to target high-profile men—and the escalating aggression by the US toward China, which it regards as an existential threat to its the post-World War hegemony.

Reportedly, Peng’s post accused Zhang, now 75, of once coercing her into sex during an on-off “romantic” relationship spanning several years. The post was soon deleted, with the Western media accusing Chinese “censors” of being responsible for the deletion.

Peng’s post reportedly described a conflicted relationship that alternated between playing chess and tennis with Zhang, or feeling ignored by him and ridiculed by his wife.

The WSWS has no way of knowing the truth of

Peng’s complaint. But it seems to involve a more complex personal relationship between two very public figures. There is no evidence of sexual assault.

In her post, Peng, now 35, said she had no proof of her allegation and she’d had an intermittent relationship with Zhang, with his wife’s knowledge, for more than 10 years. “Romantic attraction is such a complicated thing,” she wrote, according to media reports.

Despite Peng holding a 30-minute video call with International Olympic Committee (IOC) officials last Sunday to assure them of her safety and wellbeing, the witch hunt has only deepened. The IOC itself has been accused of complicity in “Chinese propaganda.” Demands are being intensified to boycott the Beijing Winter Olympics in February or shift the event to another country.

In Peng’s video conversation with IOC president Thomas Bach, she “thanked the IOC for its concern about her wellbeing,” the organisation said in a statement. “She explained that she is safe and well, living at her home in Beijing, but would like to have her privacy respected at this time.”

Earlier, the *Global Times*, a government media outlet, posted videos of Peng eating out at a Beijing restaurant and participating in the opening ceremony of a junior tennis event, after which she autographed tennis balls.

The response of the media and others pursuing this campaign makes it clear that nothing will satisfy them. Whatever Peng now says or does, the vilification of the Chinese government will only go to ever-greater depths. In the *Financial Times*, writer Tom Mitchell suggested—again without any evidence—that women across China were being abused by party officials.

“It is hard to see how anything short of letting Peng leave China — for example, to train in the US and rejoin

the women's tour—will satisfy her global supporters,” Mitchell wrote. “Any reassurances Peng gives while in China cannot be taken at face value. But if she is allowed to travel overseas, what more might she have to say?...

“How many other party cadres have used their power to harass and abuse women in a country where victims cannot speak freely and the media cannot report freely? How many more of China's 700m women might be inspired by Peng's example to speak openly of similar experiences?”

The *New York Times* went further, publishing an editorial board statement declaring Peng's unsubstantiated claims to be true and urging the cancellation of the Beijing Winter games. “Like so many victims of China's repressive system, Ms. Peng has done nothing other than to seek redress for a wrong,” it stated. “Yet the very straightforwardness of her plight inevitably leads to fundamental questions about China's fitness to host a global sporting event that purports to follow an Olympic ideal of building a better world through sport.”

The *Times* endorsed US President Joe Biden's mooting of a boycott of the Winter Olympics and his administration's “deep concern” and demand for “independent, verifiable proof” of Peng's whereabouts. Similar calls have been issued by the French and UK governments, with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson apparently seeking to orchestrate a boycott by the “Five Eyes” strategic partners—the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

According to the *Times*, the Peng affair epitomises “China's playbook” when confronted with criticism: “Deny, lie, play dumb, hope it goes away and, when all else fails, strike back ferociously.” The *Times* could be speaking about itself. This is the newspaper notorious for promoting criminal lies—including the “weapons of mass destruction” concoction that was used to justify the US-led invasion of Iraq.

The professed concern over the fate of Peng was magnified by US-backed “human rights” groups and media outlets in US-aligned countries, such as Australia. Human Rights Watch senior China researcher Yaqiu Wang told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: “The IOC is now actively playing a role in the Chinese government's enforced disappearance, coercion and propaganda machinery.”

The newspaper's political and international editor Peter Hartcher wrote: “It seems the IOC has been co-opted into the regime's management of her kidnapping.” Hartcher said the case for a Winter Olympics boycott was now “irresistible.”

The utter dishonesty and hypocrisy of these statements is truly staggering. Over the same period these pro-government media mouthpieces have sought to cover up whistleblower accounts of a US massacre of civilians in Syria, barely mentioned the resurging COVID-19 pandemic caused by their profit-driven “reopening” drive and endorsed the judicial exoneration of a fascistic gunman, Kyle Rittenhouse, in the US.

At the same time, the endless efforts of these outlets to blame China for the global pandemic, via fabricated claims that the virus was released from a Wuhan lab, have been dealt a further blow by a new analysis published in the journal *Science* concluding that the virus likely jumped from animals to humans at the Huanan wet market in Wuhan.

The broader driving force of the anti-China drumbeat is that Washington has brought the threat of war between the two countries to historically unprecedented levels after a decade of military threats and economic sanctions. In particular, by publicly declaring that the US is committed to militarily defending Taiwan against mainland China, Biden has brought the underlying geo-strategic conflict to the brink of open conflict.

While the police-state character of the Chinese regime is well-established, and documented by the WSWs, its repression is above all directed against the Chinese working class, which has been ruthlessly exploited as cheap labour by Chinese and global corporations for the past three decades. The ruling classes in Western capitals have not the slightest concern for the workers who have generated superprofits for them, but are seeking to mobilise upper-middle class layers, who are easily stirred into a frenzy by #MeToo and animal rights issues, behind the concerted US-led offensive against China.



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