

American Imperialism and China's May 4th Movement

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Six days after China celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Peoples' Liberation Army Navy with an impressive parade of its ships, including the now operational Liaoning aircraft carrier, the new type 055 destroyers and a new type of nuclear submarine, a parade in which Russia, Vietnam, and India took part, and on the same day as Russian naval ships arrived in Qingdao to begin the joint Russian-Chinese naval Joint Sea Exercise 2019, two American destroyers entered the Taiwan Straights that lie between the coast of China proper and its island province of Taiwan thereby provoking an already tense situation.

The series of Chinese and Russian naval exercises are designed to test the ability of the two nations to operate together to counter common security threats. Both Russia and China claim no other nation is identified as a threat but everyone knows the threat is the United States and its allies. And the threat is real. For not only have the Americans been continually harassing China in the South China Sea by sending naval vessels with hostile intent into Chinese territorial waters around the Spratly Islands under the claim of free right of passage, they are also doing the same against Russia. The Kerch incident in which the Ukrainian navy was used as a proxy by the US to test a Russian response to an incursion into Russian waters near Crimea is part of a pattern shown again in December 2018 when they sent a destroyer into Peter the Great Bay near Vladivostok, entering Russian territorial waters, and threatening the Russian naval base there under the same pretext.

American ships have stepped up their show of strength in the Taiwan Straights from once a year before October to almost every month since October and they vow to keep up the pressure against Russia in the Baltic, Black Sea and Pacific and against China all along its coasts. The Americans recently committed an amphibious marine unit to Australia which has the purpose of "patrolling," that is threatening to control, the Malacca Straights through which a large volume of Chinese shipping passes. The French have joined in the provocations by sending one of their war ships through the Strait on April 6, an action which China declared to be illegal. The Chinese, rightly convinced the US instigated the incident revoked France's invitation to the PLA Navy celebrations. Britain has also rattled its sabres by stating its intention to send its aircraft carrier and support ships to the region to support the American threat.

The harassment of China by the US and its allies continues in other spheres with Trump's trade war against China continuing, with the attempt to cut off Iranian oil supplies to China, and with the continued illegal detention by Canada of Huawei's Chief Financial Officer, Meng Wanzhou, seized by Canadian authorities last December on a bogus US extradition request. She next appears in a Vancouver court on May 8 to set a date for the extradition hearings to take place. In retaliation China has stepped up its response to Canada's action by blocking

not only imports of Canadian canola, which has caused several billion dollars in export losses to Canadian farmers this winter, but this week, in advance of the May 8th hearing, has blocked imports of Canadian soybeans, peas and other agricultural products. The ban on these Canadian products is clearly timed to send a signal ahead of the court appearance by Meng, and it will not be the end.

The Global Times of China reported on April 30th that,

“There are growing calls in China for the government to take tough measures against Canada”

Wang Jun, deputy director of the Department of Information at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges stated, “If we start imposing sanctions on each other, I think it will hurt Canada more than it will China.”

Mei Xinyu, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation said,

“I think Canadians have only themselves to blame. China wants to resolve disputes without causing any turbulence. But if forced, China will take action. I think Canadians have misjudged the whole thing. They thought they would do the US a favor by arresting Meng. But they have found themselves increasingly forced to the wall because China and the US are now resolving their disputes and further escalation would not be in Canada’s interest because China is capable of taking more action, especially after we resolve the trade tensions with the US.”

There are now calls for the Chinese government to prohibit Chinese students from attending Canadian universities and private schools that depend on Chinese students for revenue.

But the Canadian government and opposition parties, instead of trying to solve the issue, to do the right thing, by releasing Meng Wanzhou and apologizing, are pushing for more confrontation with China, stating that they will search for measures to counter China, though what the Trudeau government can do is not clear. The Canadian Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer has called for the Canadian government to take China before the World Trade Organisation and to withdraw from the Asian Infrastructure Investment bank. Other Canadian diplomats have called for cessation of all bilateral trade talks and for kicking out Chinese athletes training in Canada for the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. All of these would hurt Canada more than China and the suggestions reveal the complete moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the Canadian leadership.

The American pressure on China in the economic and military spheres, the French and British threats to add to it by sending their war ships to the South China Sea, the Canadian action in arresting Meng Wanzhou, these are all expressions of the neo-colonial mindset of the western leaders and what Chinese leaders referred to as “white racism.” Their actions signal that they still see China as a nation to be brought under their control and exploited instead of respected and treated as an equal.

But they forget that China threw off the colonial straight jacket with the May 4th Movement that began on May 4th 1919 in response to the Versailles negotiations after World War I at which the western leaders, led by US President Wilson, handed former German occupied

lands of China to Japan instead of restoring them to Chinese sovereignty. Chinese students and intellectuals rose up and protested this act of colonialism, called for resistance to all forms of colonialism and imperialism and to the sellout government that allowed it to happen. A series of general strikes followed. Out of this movement arose a tide of nationalism and cultural and political renewal that has made China the great nation it is today. The 4th of May Movement was the manifestation of the refusal of the Chinese people to ever again be controlled by foreigners. It gave birth to both the Chinese Communist Party that succeeded in throwing off the yoke of colonialism and capitalism, as well as the Kuomintang nationalists who, locked in the past, ended by selling themselves to the interests of the United States and whose counter-revolutionary remnants are contained in Taiwan.

But as the 100th anniversary of the May 4th Movement is being celebrated across China to encourage the young generation to connect their own destiny with the destiny of China and contribute their share to social development, the west seems to have forgotten that it took place or acts like it never took place. But the China of 2019 is not the China of 1919. American gunboats can no longer sail up the Yangtze and impose their will. China is a nuclear power, a world economic power. Yet the United States and Canada act as if they are living in the past, as if history has passed them by, as if they have learned nothing and forget everything, for the American and Canadian provocations leading up to the May 4th celebration must be seen as a slap in the face to the Chinese people, as a denial of their aspirations and achievements.

The act of sending American ships through the Taiwan Straights is seen by China, not as an “exercise in right of passage through international waters,” as the Americans claim, but as an act of colonialism and imperialism by which the American ships, acting as a floating wall of steel, declare Taiwan to be their protectorate. The illegal arrest of Meng Wanzhou by Canada is a throwback to the Canadian anti-Chinese racism of the 19th century. Both nations are on the wrong side of history. They are aging anachronisms in a multipolar world, bereft of ideas, or of a future except what they can steal from others. But they don’t seem to learn except the hard way and if they keep pushing, China will teach them a very hard lesson indeed.

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