

Washington Escalates Phony “Human Rights” Campaign Against China

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On Monday, US Secretary of State John Kerry fired the latest shot in Washington’s campaign over the Chinese government’s “human rights” abuses. He called for the release of dissident and Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo, who has been imprisoned for five years, as well as others jailed “for peacefully exercising their universal right to freedom of expression.” He noted that a UN working group determined Liu’s detention to be “in contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Kerry’s remarks followed a speech last week by US national security advisor Susan Rice, entitled “Human Rights: Advancing American Interests and Values.” She singled out China for its “increasing restrictions on ... freedoms of expression, assembly and association.” Rice declared that officials were not held accountable for “corruption, environmental abuses, worker and consumer safety, or public health crises,” while “religious minorities—such as Tibetans and Uighurs—are denied their fundamental freedoms.” She said the imprisonment of political dissidents meant that “no one in China, including Americans doing business there, can feel secure.”

During his Asian tour last week, Vice President Joe Biden also pushed Washington’s “human rights” barrow. Addressing a US business audience in Beijing, he called on the Chinese government to allow people to “speak freely” and “challenge orthodoxy,” specifically criticising the “treatment of US journalists” whose visas were not renewed.

There is no doubt that the Chinese regime resorts to police-state measures to suppress criticism and opposition, particularly from the working class. However, the Obama administration’s statements have nothing to do with concern for democratic rights in China, especially for workers, whose exploitation generates enormous profits for US-based corporations.

Firstly, the criticisms are utterly hypocritical. Under the banner of the “war on terror,” President Barack Obama has done more than any previous US president to tear up basic democratic rights and legal norms. His administration has persecuted whistleblowers Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange and the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden for exposing the illegal activities of US imperialism at home and around the world. The UN’s top torture official found that Manning had been subjected to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment” in solitary confinement for nine months.

While criticising China, Rice defended the NSA’s massive and illegal spying, exposed by Snowden, saying it “saves lives.” In fact, the NSA spies on tens of millions of ordinary

Americans, and many more people around the world, for the same reason that China maintains its police-state surveillance. The Obama administration, which rules on behalf of an ultra-wealthy financial oligarchy, regards the entire population as its enemy.

Kerry calls for Liu Xiaobo's release but the Obama administration keeps open the Guantánamo prison camp, where hundreds of people have been tortured, and held without charge or trial. In her speech, Rice lamely repeated Obama's pledge—made in his first election campaign five years ago—to close Guantánamo.

Rice also defended the US use of drones to carry out summary executions in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere. "Over time," she stated, "continued progress against al Qaeda and associated terrorist groups should reduce the need for such actions." In fact, since 2008, Obama has dramatically escalated the use of drone strikes and is personally involved in selecting targets, including US citizens. This takes place without even the semblance of legal process: the administration has arrogated to itself the right to act as judge, jury and executioner for anyone, anywhere in the world.

The Obama administration's "human rights" campaign against China is completely bound up with its "pivot" to Asia—the diplomatic undermining and military encirclement of China to ensure US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific. The US has a long history of unfurling the banner of "human rights" to justify military aggression—including in Libya, Syria and Afghanistan—as well as diplomatic intrigues and coups. It is no accident that in his Beijing speech, Biden again underscored the US determination to "remain a Pacific power diplomatically, economically, and militarily."

The US "human rights" propaganda is also aimed at justifying an alliance of Asian "democracies," such as Japan and South Korea, and military preparations against "authoritarian" China. In fact, democratic rights are under attack in every country. The South Korean government is currently seeking the dissolution of the opposition United Progressive Party on the bogus charge of planning an "armed revolt" in support of North Korea. Tokyo has just enacted a new "state secrets" law with heavy prison terms for whistleblowers who release information, particularly any documents related to Japan's remilitarisation.

The US is also positioning itself to exploit the "human rights" banner as a pretext for intrigues and intervention inside China itself. Rice's feigned concern for the rights of Tibetans and Uighurs is a case in point. Washington has a long and sordid history of exploiting national minorities and religious differences as the means for undermining governments opposed to its interests. Throughout much of the 1950s and 1960s, the CIA backed the Dalai Lama and his band of Tibetan exiles in concerted effort to undermine Beijing's administration in Tibet.

The overarching purpose of Washington's phony "human rights" campaign is to provide a banner for the US military build-up in Asia and its accelerating preparations for war against China. Driven by crisis of the deepening crisis of global capitalism, which finds especially acute expression in the economic decay of the US, the Obama administration is seeking to use US military might to shore up its economic and strategic domination in Asia.

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