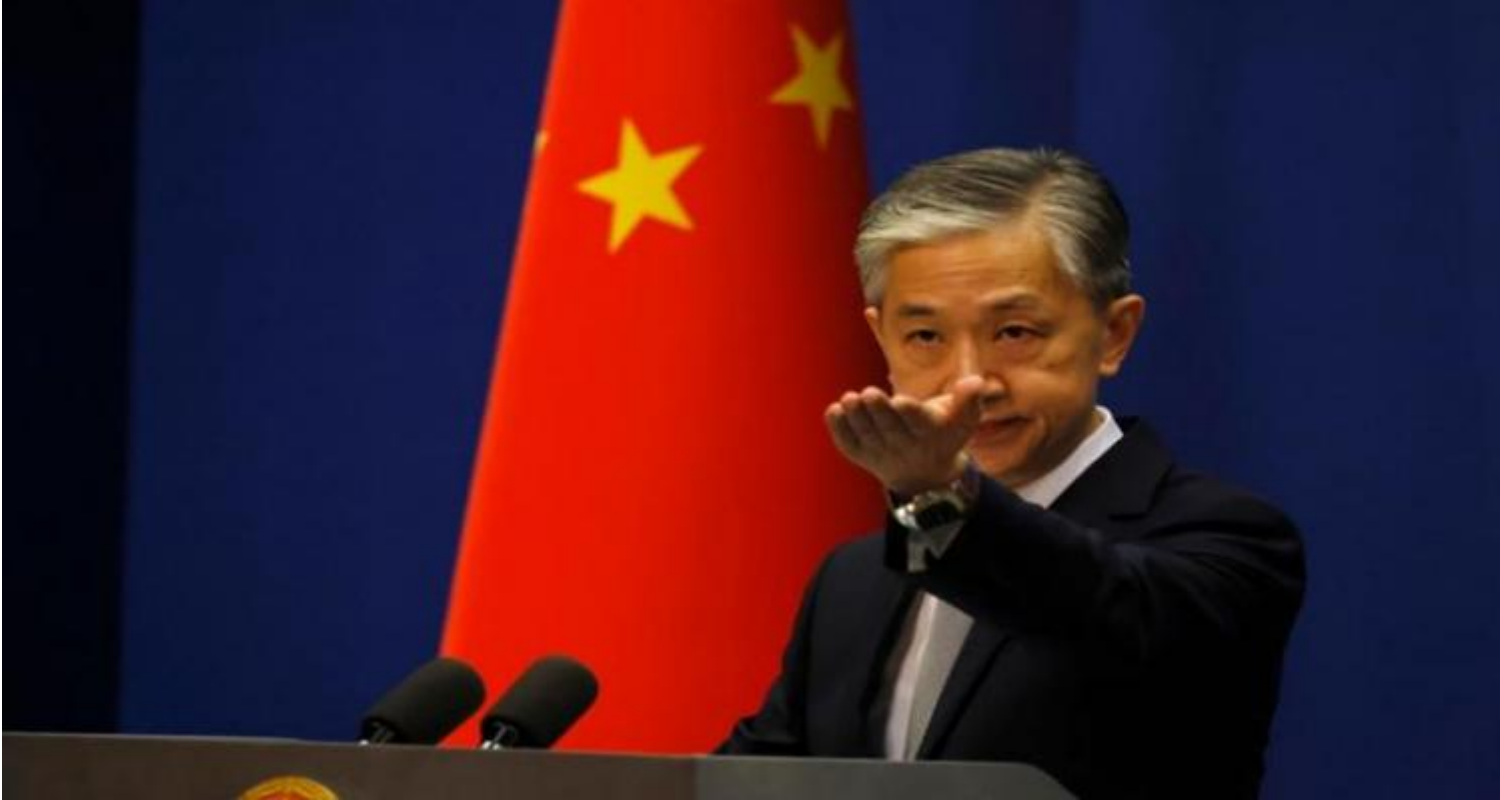


China orders closure of U.S. consulate in Chengdu



Beijing, July 24 (RHC)-- China has ordered the United States to close its consulate in the southwestern city of Chengdu, retaliating against Washington's move earlier this week to shut down the Chinese consulate in the Texas city of Houston.

The Chinese foreign ministry said on Friday that the Chengdu mission's closure was a "legitimate and necessary response to the unreasonable measures by the United States."

"The current situation in China-US relations is not what China desires to see," it said in a statement, adding that "the U.S. is responsible for all this."

The tit-for-tat moves come amid a dramatic escalation in tensions between the world's two biggest economies. Ties have deteriorated over a number of issues, ranging from the new coronavirus pandemic to Beijing's trade and business practices, and from its territorial claims in the South China Sea to its clampdown in Hong Kong and the far western region of Xinjiang.

Washington on Tuesday gave China 72 hours to close the consulate amid allegations of widespread spying - a dramatic escalation of tension between the world's two biggest economies. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin described the United States's allegations as "malicious slander" and said the "unreasonable" move had "severely harmed" relations.

"China must make a necessary response and safeguard its legitimate rights," he said, declining to specify any measures. "This is tearing down the friendly bridge between the people of China and the United States."

And hours before China's Friday order, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took fresh aim at Beijing, saying Washington and its allies must use "more creative and assertive ways" to press the Chinese Communist Party to change its ways.

Speaking at the Nixon Library in President Richard Nixon's birthplace in Yorba Linda, California, Pompeo said that the former U.S. leader's concern about what he had done by opening the world to China's Communist Party in the 1970s had been prophetic. "President Nixon once said he feared he had created a 'Frankenstein' by opening the world to the CCP," Pompeo said. "And here we are."

"The truth is that our policies - and those of other free nations - resurrected China's failing economy, only to see Beijing bite the international hands that were feeding it," he continued.

"The freedom-loving nations of the world must induce China to change ... in more creative and assertive ways, because Beijing's actions threaten our people and our prosperity."

Recalling remarks he made after meeting British leaders in London this week, Pompeo said "maybe it's time for a new grouping of like-minded nations, a new alliance of democracies," while adding: "If the free world doesn't change, Communist China will surely change us."

Pompeo said "securing our freedoms from the Chinese Communist Party is the mission of our time" and said the US was perfectly positioned to lead it.

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