

SFRC Testimony: Public Diplomacy for the New Cold War
David R. Stilwell, Former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific

BLUF: The US disestablished its very capable United States Information Agency (USIA) at the end of the Cold War, leaving State Department vaguely in charge of coordinating external messaging. As the sole superpower without a serious challenger for the last 30 years, US interests were supported by soft power and reputation. The rise of Xi Jinping's People's Republic of China (PRC) brings a challenge as serious as that of the Soviet Union 60 years ago, and a US agency in charge of external messaging is desperately needed for the US to compete effectively.

The Problem: The People's Republic of China has been at war with the US since 1950

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) strategy of Political Warfare reflects the Party's internal dialogue that has called the US an enemy since the Korean War. Using its concept of Political Warfare, the PRC is actively conducting Warfare in the Economic, Information, Legal, Public Opinion, Psychological, and Technical domains. The only Warfare not actively employed today is Military Warfare (armed conflict), as it brings the highest cost and risk. Despite the evidence, most Americans have been led to believe that the US-PRC relationship has been peaceful and cooperative. Yet, while successive US governments have been trying to cooperate, the CCP has been competing, doing particular damage to US Economic and Information interests, undermining America's global reputation and prosperity as Beijing seeks to "take the center of the global stage". A prime example of Information Warfare took place in 2019: after a severe weather event in our hemisphere, US agencies immediately set about the big job of repairing a small country's key infrastructure—getting ports, roads, water and power up and running again. For its part, Beijing sent in Huawei to get cell towers working, then handed out free Huawei handsets. As soon as a port would open, or water service was restored, the PRC systems would broadcast "brought to you by the Chinese people." One can imagine the message to American diplomats in that country: "What have you done for us lately? Look at how much China has done," thus undermining our reputation and influence.

Until a few years ago, US policy toward the People's Republic of China had been protracted patience in the hope that a steady supply of carrots would obviate the need for sticks. During my time as Defense Attaché in our embassy in Beijing a decade ago, I dutifully carried out the NSC strategy of Engage, Bind, Balance, even though it was obvious that the first two elements required the PRC to play along, and they were having none of it. All the time we've been trying to cooperate, Beijing has been competing, across multiple domains, none more so than the Information domain. This was made clear every time the People's Liberation Army's leaders rebuffed Secretary of Defense Austin's requests for a phone call during periods of escalating tensions. Rejecting requests for consultation is in itself an information operation, showing the US as weak and worried, and the PRC to be calmly in command. The US government Information machine needs to once again gird up to compete in this New Cold War environment.

The PRC has perfected the idea "Entropic Warfare" against democracies. Entropic Warfare does not pick winners or losers, nor does it favor political parties. It simply seeks to use disinformation, trolls, bots, etc to create chaos, anger, and division in other societies to weaken

them. This form of Information Warfare is active today and requires immediate action to prevent further damage to our democracy. US responses to Entropic Warfare and the many other forms of PRC Information Warfare require developing and employing Offensive and Defensive strategies, which are quite different.

US Responses in the Information Domain

In the Economic space, the previous administration began, and the current administration continues, a long-overdue policy to bring the economic/trade relationship with the PRC back into balance, enacting punitive measures to change behavior, and where the PRC won't change, to punish their economy and protect ours. In the same way, in the Information domain, we started down a similar Public Diplomacy path to call out PRC disinformation activities (like those described at the beginning of this paper), employing transparency tools against a regime that is not bound by facts and cynically changes its story to suit current circumstances (ATCH 1). But the process of reestablishing US Information dominance is in its infancy, and changing policies across administrations make the level of US competition inconsistent. The outbreak of the COVID pandemic three years ago saw Beijing exert enormous effort to whitewash its culpability for failing to contain a pandemic that has caused 7 million deaths worldwide. It quickly became obvious that Beijing was going to try to shift blame for the global catastrophe, and we realized that a new, more muscular and more active approach to Public Diplomacy was needed.

Bland, anodyne official statements from the US Government (USG) were clearly not going to work in the face of advanced PRC Information and Public Opinion Warfare (examples at ATCH 2). So, rather than talk ourselves out of "undiplomatic" messaging, we chose to go at PRC malfeasance directly, and we did it in creative ways at all levels. One particularly productive initiative was State Department messaging on Twitter to draw out PRC "Wolf Warriors" with the intent to get them to say something embarrassing. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Zhao Lijian accommodated us on 12 March 2020 (ATCH 3) when he accused the US of bringing COVID to Wuhan China. A recent statement by PRC Ambassador to France Yu Shaye denying the sovereignty of former Soviet Union states (Ukraine and the Baltics) is the most recent example of the damage Wolf Warriors have caused—a significant vulnerability for the PRC, and an opportunity for State Department and others to exploit.

During the last administration, initial steps at messaging coordination yielded positive results. Inside State Department, we established regular, informal coordination between the East Asia and Pacific Bureau and the R (public diplomacy) family, including the Global Engagement Center, to get away from bland public press releases and vague SPOX statements. Rather than dance around the question of culpability, Secretary Pompeo went directly at the most obvious source of the pandemic, saying "there is enormous evidence that the Pandemic originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology." Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Feith laid out the rationale and the evidence for this more direct approach in his testimony to the House Oversight Committee on 18 April 2023.

But State Department Public Diplomacy can't do this by itself, so we reached out to the Department of Defense to establish Information coordination mechanisms. Simple steps like mutual awareness created synergies in administration messaging; previous to that much of the

messaging was done independently, sometimes at cross purposes. The synergies were obvious and required little additional effort making the initiative self-sustaining. At the same time we established an informal China Sync coordination mechanism to share information across State Department on each others' China initiatives, China Sync quickly grew to include voluntary representation from the Pentagon and other agencies. There is a demand for this sort of coordination but there is no acknowledged coordination agency (US Information Agency) such as we had during the Cold War.

The SFRC and this subcommittee understand better than most the importance of telling America's story well and preventing our adversaries from telling it for us. But there is much work to be done. There needs to be Goldwater Nichols-like legislation for the Interagency (one aspect of what the National Defense Strategy calls "Integrated Deterrence") that forces messaging coordination and integration across government agencies--no two agencies are more important than State and Defense in this effort. Whereas we could once overpower any adversary with military force, the Information Age demands we take a more sophisticated and cooperative approach to using Information tools to coordinate with allies, incentivize potential partners, and to influence and deter adversaries.

Deterrence is all about messaging—wielding information as an instrument of national power to prevent an adversary from taking (in this case) military action. Since the end of the Cold War and the demise of the US Information Agency in 1999, we have taken a passive/reactive approach to employing the Information tool at the national level, assuming American Soft Power would be enough to encourage friends and deter adversaries. Information passivity at this point is dangerous: Deterrence happens before an attack; waiting until the attack occurs takes us down a much more dangerous and costly path, as was seen with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The study of deterrence theory has until now mostly been applied to US strategic forces; today it needs to be expanded across government agencies and the domains they represent. Deterrence does not reside exclusively in the Information domain, but Information is the tool that organizes and shapes the coordinated message for adversary consumption.

George Kennan, in his Policy Planning Staff Memorandum reminds us that political warfare measures (which rely heavily on the Information domain):

“...are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, and ‘white’ propaganda, to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”

Compared to what Kennan described, and the capabilities that were resident in the US Information Agency, the US Information machine has been sub-optimized for the last 30 years. We've been reluctant to acknowledge the threat from the PRC, while the CCP is very comfortable operating (unopposed) in the domains of Information Warfare, Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Influence Operations. With just a little effort, the US can blunt the CCP's attacks on Democracy (it has to undermine Democracy because it is always a better governance alternative to XJP's new authoritarianism; for proof just look at the numbers of people immigrating to the US vs the PRC). As long as democratic governments exist, they

will present an existential threat to authoritarian government. This is an area of exclusive advantage for the US, but we have yet to take advantage of it.

Going on the Offensive: Recommended USG Information Activities

The US response doesn't have to be complicated; for starters we should demand and enforce strict Reciprocity in the Information domain. The US should insist on reciprocal access to Chinese audiences and deny PRC Propaganda access to American audiences as much as the law will allow (including simply identifying the source of information as the CCP). As it stands, agents of the Chinese government have unfettered access to American media; they spew carefully crafted disinformation from Twitter (banned in the PRC), they manipulate cognitive processes through TikTok (also banned in the PRC), they're all over our traditional and social media, even spreading propaganda messages on Sunday morning talk shows. At the same time, the Chinese people are denied access to US messaging in the PRC. In 2020, then-Ambassador Cui Tiankai denied responsibility for COVID and criticized the American response to the pandemic in OpEds, on talk shows, and in a public speech at Harvard. In response, State Department Public Diplomacy set out to demonstrate the lack of reciprocal access to Americans who assumed our diplomats enjoyed the same privileges. We drafted an uncontroversial OpEd for our Ambassador to have placed in the PRC's version of the New York Times—People's Daily. The People's Daily editorial staff not only rejected the OpEd, they provided a rejection letter (ATCH 4). State Department Public Diplomacy released the OpEd and the rejection letter side-by-side to show the American people the CCP's lopsided approach to diplomacy—an excellent example of the ease of going on the offensive in the Information realm if we would just start. What follows are two recommendations for employing Information on the offense: Reciprocal Journalist access, and giving PRC citizens unfettered access to the worldwide web as a human right.

RECIPROCAL ACCESS FOR JOURNALISTS. Beijing routinely harasses and expels Western reporters (17 were expelled in the first half of 2020 alone); in September 2020 Washington Post correspondent Alice Su was physically assaulted and then expelled for her reporting on the CCP closing Mongolian schools and preventing Mongolian language education. (ATCH 5) To address this abuse and to force Beijing to issue more journalist visas to American reporters, we sought reciprocity in PRC journalist access. In March 2020 there were 160 PRC “journalists” with journalist visas (when asked why we hadn't seen any reports filed in China by these journalists, the PRC ambassador explained their job was to tell China's story to the American people—I pointed out that his explanation defined diplomats, not journalists), with only 32 American journalists remaining in the PRC at that time. To demonstrate our interest in balancing this relationship, we announced the removal of 60 of the 160 PRC journalists, with the intent of continuing to decrement PRC government personnel (“journalists” all work for the CCP or take direction from the Chinese government) until Beijing made access more reciprocal. (ATCH 6)

With the remaining imbalance in journalist access (100 Chinese, 32 American), we assessed that Beijing would likely respond in kind to expulsions. If we stuck with a tit-for-tat approach, there would still be some 60 PRC “journalists” remaining in the US after all Americans have been forced to leave China. A solution here was for the US to suspend all journalist visas, and then rebuild rosters on a one-for-one basis, with the PRC granting visas first. There are quantitative

and qualitative aspects to this approach. As it stands, Beijing issues visas to foreign journalists who toe the Party line, expelling or arresting those who criticize the Party. The best reporters are often expatriate native Chinese speakers, and the PRC routinely cancels or denies the visas. In rebuilding the rosters, Beijing would get no veto authority—once an American journalist visa is issued, the US would issue a PRC-selected journalist their visa. If the US journalist is harassed or expelled, the corresponding PRC journalist visa will be cancelled.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT. A second Information-on-the-offense approach reflects Kennan's quote earlier. The CCP recognizes the power of information and therefore tightly restricts its access by Chinese citizens, denying them a fundamental human right. The Chinese people have a right to know what's going on in their own country and in the wider world. If the Chinese government doesn't think enough of its citizens to give them access, then steps can be taken to provide that access anyway. The SpaceX decision to deploy Starlink in Ukraine is a positive example of how to defeat an Authoritarians' reflexive need to control information and keep its people in the dark. In a Chinese setting, Information access would have to be unattributable to the individual accessing it, since the CCP punishes those who tunnel under, through or over the Great Firewall. Starlink is just one option; there are other opportunities to allow Chinese citizens access to real information without setting them up for punishment. Some of these solutions involve international organizations like the International Telecommunication Union, which until January 2023 was led by PRC citizen and CCP member Zhao Houlin (2015-2022) who drove policies that protect authoritarian government and undermine free access to information, such as a rule that signals from space can only land in cooperating countries (denying PRC citizens access to Starlink).

...while Defending against PRC Information Warfare

This is where it gets tricky. There is only so much the US government can do to protect citizens from foreign propaganda and disinformation. The National Security Agency does its part to prevent hostile cyber attacks, but the US government is not well suited to referee what's Mal-, Mis- and Disinformation, versus unpopular opinions and points of disagreement. Filtering disinformation quickly runs into censorship, as was so clearly demonstrated with the Twitter Files. So as US government agencies do their part of protect Americans from external hostile forces, there's only so much we want them to do.

Defending against PRC (and others') Information Warfare starts in school (K-12). The surest way to discern the difference between fact and fiction, between foreign disinformation and domestic bots, or to understand when only one side of a complex issue is being presented, is to arm individual citizens with the tools to defend themselves while online. Training the next generation on Critical Thinking (or Thinking about Thinking—understanding cognition) has never been more important. It is primarily the responsibility of parents, then of our education institutions. The PRC has become quite adept at selling its twisted version of the truth on social media, oftentimes hiding behind non-PRC-looking persona to allay suspicion. The first rule of Critical Thinking is to cultivate a healthy skepticism of all information and then challenge assumptions. We don't want to raise a generation of cynics, but developing a healthy skepticism is the best defense against PRC Information Warfare as well as the other threats emanating from modern social media.

Developing Critical Thinking skills will go a long way in defeating PRC disinformation while at the same time preparing young Americans for the divisive on-line environment. In this vein, all Americans need to get serious about assessing the reliability of their sources of information. Traditional media in the US can no longer claim to be “the most trusted news source”—there is no Walter Cronkite who presents just the facts. . .there’s no money in that. In the age of instant on-line breaking news, there is no penalty for being wrong, but there’s money to be made by being sensational. The PRC plays off of this trend to steer public opinion in directions favorable to the CCP or creating division, friction and chaos among Americans. Meanwhile, the Great Firewall prevents the same public opinion warfare in China by blocking outside information and censoring domestic information.

Conclusion

We can’t out-do the PRC in this contest to control and manipulate information. The short-term benefits of controlling information are many but there is significant long-term downside to the CCP denying the Chinese people access to the outside world. ChatGPT was initially welcomed by the CCP as a way to speed up decision making and out-think free countries, but since ChatGPT has yet to be sensitized politically, it often gives answers that undermine CCP authority and legitimacy. The CCP will limit the information AI tools can access, then filter the answers it provides, and in the end it will create programs that tell the CCP what it wants to hear—negating the utility of Artificial Intelligence. This is the PRC conducting Information Warfare against itself. So while we prosecute other Offensive and Defensive Information Warfare tools, blocking access by nefarious PRC software (TikTok, Weixin—ATCH 7) we should heed Napoleon’s advice to “never interrupt your adversary in the commission of a mistake” and enjoy the show as the CCP struggles with the dilemma of needing to control information to protect its legitimacy, while accessing the wide world of information needed to compete effectively. The USSR faced a similar dilemma and failed to handle it properly.

ATCH 1

Courtesy Professor Mark Metcalf, University of Virginia

China – the victim In Chinese media – for foreigners



Original Headline: 18 Jan 20

“Stealth Edited” Headline

Orwell's 1984:
36 years too early

As Beijing sought to distance itself from responsibility for the pandemic, it began changing previous posts without acknowledging the change; this is the stuff of Orwell's 1984 where here Winston Smith's entire job is to change history to match current conditions. Other posts you won't find is a People's Daily article from January 2020 bragging that the CCP was sending PLA Biological Warfare expert Maj Gen Chen Wei to the Wuhan Institute of Virology to get things under control. Beijing later recognized this story was an admission of PLA involvement (later verified by the Trump administration in three declassified intelligence reports) and deleted it from the People's Daily website.

ATCH 2 PRC

ATCH 3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Zhao Lijian tries to blame the US for COVID

← **Tweet**

 **Lijian Zhao 赵立坚** 
@zlj517

2/2 CDC was caught on the spot. When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!



环视频

3月11日，美国众议院监督委员会就新冠肺炎举行听证会

3.9M views 0:04 / 1:03

From **Global Times** 

8:37 AM · Mar 12, 2020

6,300 Retweets 4,290 Quotes 13.4K Likes 674 Bookmarks

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@zlj517 **Follow**

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ATCH 4: OpEd Wars

US-China relations: People's Daily defends decision not to run 'factually inaccurate' article by American ambassador

- 'We have told the US embassy that the op-ed in the name of Ambassador [Terry] Branstad ... is full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts,' Communist Party mouthpiece says
- Statement comes after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says newspaper's refusal to publish 'once again exposes the Chinese Communist Party's fear of free speech and serious intellectual debate'

Topic | US-China relations

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Kinling Lo

Published: 9:00pm, 10 Sep, 2020

Chinese state newspaper *People's Daily* has defended its decision not to publish an article submitted last month by the US ambassador to China on the grounds it was "full of loopholes". The mouthpiece of China's ruling Communist Party issued a statement on Thursday after Washington accused Beijing of being hypocritical for refusing to run the piece, titled "Resetting the Relationship Based on Reciprocity".

"We have told the US embassy that the op-ed in the name of Ambassador [Terry] Branstad we received this time is full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts," the newspaper said, without specifying the alleged inaccuracies.

It said the US embassy, which wanted the article to be published on September 4, insisted the piece be "published as submitted" and not be revised by the newspaper's editors.

"If the US wishes to publish in *People's Daily* ... substantial changes should be made," it said.

The paper also accused the United States of suppressing Chinese state media, including *People's Daily*, by effectively expelling Chinese journalists from America via its discriminatory visa system.

Despite its refusal to publish Branstad's article, *People's Daily* said it was open to manuscripts from "foreign friends", including the US ambassador, as long as they had a "fair attitude" towards China.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned the newspaper's decision to reject the piece.

"The *People's Daily's* response once again exposes the Chinese Communist Party's fear of free speech and serious intellectual debate – as well as Beijing's hypocrisy when it complains about lack of fair and reciprocal treatment in other countries," he said.

The United States' democratic system allowed Chinese government officials, including Beijing's ambassador to the US Cui Tiankai, to frequently have their views published by American media outlets, it said.

Meanwhile, China's foreign ministry said on Thursday that the article was rejected on the grounds it was defamatory to the Chinese government.

Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said the US embassy contacted *People's Daily* on August 26 and asked for Branstad's article to be published verbatim on September 4.

A day later, the US state department's top Asia official David Stilwell contacted the Chinese embassy in Washington to see if the piece would be published and was told the newspaper was "looking into it", Zhao said.

"Would you agree to publish a fact-twisting and defamatory article about your country without any revision?" he said.

"This move obviously has nothing to do with the freedom of press. It was designed to find fault [with China] and was a deliberate act of *peng ci*."

The Chinese phrase translates as "touching porcelain" but is used to refer to the practice of placing ostensibly expensive, fragile items (usually porcelain) in places where they can easily be broken, so as to scam the victim.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the aim of Brandstad's article was to help build "more positive relations" between the US and China.

While Zhao did not identify those parts of Branstad's article that caused offence, the text was released by the US embassy in Beijing.

"We are two different nations with different pasts." it said. "The United States continues to learn from its mistakes and push forward to forge a better future. We hope that China can do the same."

He said the two countries needed to “build a foundation for understanding and true reciprocity ... [which] must start with the Chinese government being willing to address our concerns about the imbalance in the relationship and allowing our two peoples to build relationships through unrestricted engagement and uncensored discussion.

“Only then will I enjoy the freedoms to engage the Chinese people that we guarantee Ambassador Cui in the United States, and only then will we have genuine reciprocity and a genuinely balanced relationship.”

Earlier this week, several US news organisations, including Bloomberg, CNN and *The Wall Street Journal*, said Beijing had held off on renewing the press credentials of some of their journalists working in China.

Meanwhile, Chinese journalists employed by non-American news outlets in the United States are facing similar problems getting the documents they need after the US issued a new policy that limits their work visas to 90 days.

Also this week, the US revoked more than 1,000 visas issued to Chinese nationals in a move to stop students and researchers believed to have links to the Chinese military from entering the country.

Earlier this year, Beijing revoked the press credentials of several American journalists working for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*.

The *People's Daily's* refusal to publish Branstad's article came after Chinese state newspaper China Daily in May ran an edited version of a piece written by all of the European Union member nations' ambassadors in Beijing.

The published version omitted an insinuation that China was the origin of the coronavirus.

People's Daily spokesperson strongly protests Pompeo's statement

(People's Daily) 15:52, September 10, 2020  Follow on Apple News



On September 9, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made public remarks, unreasonably accusing People's Daily of refusing to publish an article by the US Ambassador to China Terry Branstad, and maliciously attacking the Chinese media. The move by the US was malicious and provocative, and seriously deviated from the facts. The spokesperson of People's Daily expressed strong protest and firm opposition to this, and believed it was necessary to offer an accurate account of the facts.

On August 26, the US Embassy in China contacted People's Daily and requested that Ambassador Branstad's article be published before September 4, hoping to get a reply on August 27, and clearly stated in the letter that "The US embassy feels it is particularly important that it be printed in full, without edits of any kind."

People's Daily responded to the US embassy, and stated that the article sent by the US embassy in the name of Ambassador Branstad was full of loopholes and seriously inconsistent with the facts. It also did not meet the standards of People's Daily, a prestigious, serious and professional media, for selecting and publishing articles. If the US still hopes to publish it in People's Daily, it should make substantive revisions based on facts in the principle of equality and mutual respect.

On this basis, we are willing to maintain contact and communication with the US embassy.

Just like any other US media outlet, People's Daily has the right to decide whether or not to publish any submitted article and when to publish it, and is entitled to make necessary changes and edits to any article. It's also entitled to reject publishing an article with factual mistakes and filled with prejudice. This is in line with the professional practice of the journalistic industry, as well as international norms.

For a long time, People's Daily has held an active and open attitude to the submission of articles from international friends who are objective and impartial about China, including Ambassador Branstad. As early as April 15, 2013, Mr. Branstad, then governor of Iowa, published an op-ed titled The Unique Partnership with China on the third page of People's Daily, in which he expressed the hope to build a stronger economic partnership with China. With the proactive support of People's Daily, Ambassador Branstad published op-eds titled My First Year as US Ambassador and Our Global Response to Fight COVID-19 in Global Times, a publication affiliated with People's Daily, this year and last year. Former US ambassadors to China like Max Baucus and Jon Huntsman also published op-eds in People's Daily. Facts prove that we have always attached great importance to articles submitted by US ambassadors.

People's Daily is consistently committed to promoting better communication and understanding between the Chinese and American people. Recently, however, the United States has been escalating political suppression and persecution against Chinese press outlets in the United States with a Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice from having to register as “foreign agents”, to being designated as “foreign missions”; from denying visas to Chinese journalists to de facto expelling Chinese journalists from the United States; and recently, the United States adopted discriminatory visa restrictions that limit the visa validity period to no more than three months for all journalists of Chinese media, including those based at the United Nations Headquarters. Up to now, it is still unclear whether all Chinese journalists’ visas, which were due on August 6, will be renewed. This leaves multiple journalists with People's Daily in the United States and their family members, including young children, facing huge uncertainties, severely impacting the work and lives of Chinese journalists in the United States, and greatly restricting the freedom of reporting.

The US, on the one hand, claims that People's Daily and other Chinese media are the CPC’s “propaganda machines”, but demand that the “propaganda machines” do propaganda for the United States, which is illogical, overbearing and unreasonable. The US side also spreads rumors to confound the public, playing the guilty party blaming the victim by distorting facts.

People's Daily strongly opposes provocations made by the US, and is urging it to stop harming the safety and rights of Chinese journalists in the US, and attacking the Chinese press.

ATCH 5: Examples of US reporters being forced out of China for honest reporting

China Accelerates Its Crackdown on Foreign Journalists

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/09/china-accelerates-crackdown-on-foreign-journalists/>

By [HELEN RALEIGH](#)

September 30, 2020 6:30 AM

Where past Chinese leaders exploited foreign reporters to spread CCP propaganda, Xi Jinping's regime is ramping up its attacks on them.

THESE days, foreign journalists are facing unprecedented challenges in China.

A March report from the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) finds that in 2019, "82% of [foreign] reporters [in China] experienced interference or harassment or violence while reporting. . . . 43% said digital/physical surveillance affected reporting. And 70% reported interviews cancelled due to actions taken by Chinese authorities." The FCCC also finds that Chinese authorities continue to restrict foreign journalists' access to certain parts of China, including Xinjiang, where millions of Uighur Muslims languish in internment camps. The most striking finding of the report, however, is that not even a single foreign journalist said working conditions in China had improved from 2018 to 2019.

It seems that this state of affairs has only gotten worse in 2020. Just this week, the *Washington Post's* Anna Fifield published [a story](#) about the difficulties she'd faced as a foreign reporter in China. "Reporting in China increasingly feels like reporting in North Korea," she [tweeted](#). Beijing has expelled around 17 foreign journalists this year, including 15 Americans, and is threatening to expel more. Chinese authorities also continue to punish some foreign journalists by refusing to renew their visas.

The Washington Post's Beijing Bureau Chief leaves China

By [Linda Mottram](#)

Broadcast Wed 16 Sep 2020 at 2:30am

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/anna-fifield/12670970>

Foreign correspondents are the eyes and ears in far corners of the globe, for those of us who can't be in those places .. bringing us not just the big political and economic stories, or tales of conflict .. but also stories of people's lives, connecting us to them in ways the daily news often neglects.

That's how Anna Fifield has seen her role in many different postings, including in North Korea.

But now, she's closed the door for the last time on her posting for the last two years in China, as the Washington Post's Beijing Bureau Chief.

Anna's flying back home to New Zealand for a new role that she actively sought, but knowing that Xi Jinping's China is now a very hostile place for foreign reporters.

<https://twitter.com/annafifield/status/1301739815998599168?lang=ar-x-fm>

[@annafifield](#) Anna Fifield

Incredible and brave reporting from [@aliceysu](#) - who was grabbed by the throat and thrown in a police cell - about people in Inner Mongolia trying to resist new forced assimilation efforts from the Chinese government.



[latimes.com](#) China cracks down on Inner Mongolian minority fighting for its mother tongue.

Teachers and students have refused to comply with a new bilingual education program in Inner Mongolia. The state is cracking down in response.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-china-journalists-factbox/factbox-foreign-journalists-forced-to-leave-china-as-diplomatic-tensions-worsen-idUKKBN25Z0R2>

WORLD NEWS

SEPTEMBER 8, 2020 12:14 AM UPDATED 3 YEARS AGO

Factbox - Foreign journalists forced to leave China as diplomatic tensions worsen

By Reuters Staff

3 MIN READ

(Reuters) - Over the past year, numerous foreign reporters working for Western news organisations have been forced to leave China, mostly due to their work permits being revoked or not renewed.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China said on Monday a record 17 foreign journalists were expelled from the country in the first half of 2020.

The departures come amid worsening diplomatic ties between China and the United States and its allies over issues ranging from trade to technology and democratic rights in Hong Kong, with Washington and Beijing engaging in a tit-for-tat over journalist credentials.

Below is a list of key events involving foreign journalists based in China:

AUGUST 2019

China did not renew journalist credentials for Chun Han Wong, a Singapore national who worked for the Wall Street Journal in Beijing.

Wong had written a story about the activities of one of Chinese President Xi Jinping's cousins in Australia.

FEBRUARY

China revoked the press credentials of three Wall Street Journal journalists after the newspaper declined to apologise for an opinion column calling China the "real sick man of Asia."

The journalists were U.S. citizens Josh Chin and Chao Deng and Australian citizen Philip Wen.

Beijing's move came after Washington said it would begin treating five Chinese state-run media entities with U.S. operations the same as it does foreign embassies.

MARCH

China withdrew the press credentials of about a dozen journalists at the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post.

The expulsions followed Washington's move to slash the number of journalists permitted to work in the United States at four Chinese state media outlets to 100, from 160 previously.

AUGUST

Australian citizen and Chinese state television anchor Cheng Lei was detained by Chinese authorities.

Cheng hosted a business show and was a high-profile anchor on English-language channel CGTN. Videos of her were removed from Chinese state media websites.

SEPT. 7

China did not renew the expiring press credentials of journalists at U.S. outlets including Bloomberg, CNN and the Wall Street Journal.

Instead, the journalists were issued letters allowing them to continue working in China with their expired press credentials for about two months.

The move came as Chinese journalists in the United States wait for their lapsed work visas to be renewed. The Chinese journalists have been allowed to stay in the United States during a 90-day grace period that expires in early November.

Among the journalists at U.S. outlets were the Wall Street Journal's Jeremy Page, who is British, American CNN reporter David Culver, and two non-American Bloomberg journalists.

SEPT. 8

Two Australian journalists in China were rushed home after they were questioned by authorities.

Australian Broadcasting Corp.'s Bill Birtles and the Australian Financial Review's Michael Smith had been banned from leaving China until they answered questions about Cheng Lei.

Reporting by Beijing bureau and Kirsty Needham in Sydney; Writing by Sam Holmes; Editing by Richard Pullin

ATCH 6

<https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-with-senior-state-department-officials-on-the-institution-of-a-personnel-cap-on-designated-prc-state-media-entities/index.html>

Briefing With Senior State Department Officials On the Institution of a Personnel Cap on Designated PRC State Media Entities

SPECIAL BRIEFING

OFFICE OF THE SPOKESPERSON PRESS CORRESPONDENTS' ROOM

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MARCH 2, 2020

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: So again, just to remind you guys, [Senior State Department Official One]. I cover China, Mongolia, and Taiwan issues.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: [Senior State Department Official Two].

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I've got about four minutes here of topline points which I'll just read off to you guys, if that's okay, and then we can do the Q&A.

For years, the Government of the PRC has imposed increasingly harsh surveillance, harassment, and intimidation against American and other foreign journalists in China. President Trump has made clear that Beijing's restrictions on foreign journalists are misguided. He's also made clear that the U.S. will establish long-overdue reciprocity in our relations with China.

Today, the U.S. Government will cap the number of PRC citizens permitted to work for the U.S. offices of PRC propaganda outlets that were designated as foreign missions of the PRC Government on February 18 under our Foreign Missions Act. Just to remind you guys, those five entities are Xinhua News Agency, China Global Television Network, China Radio International, China Daily Distribution Corporation, and Hai Tian Development, which is the People's Daily distributor here in the States.

Their designations as foreign missions recognizes the fact that these entities are indeed controlled by the PRC Government, and of course, the Foreign Missions Act authorizes the State Department to establish terms and conditions on the operations of foreign missions like these five entities.

Today's cap will limit the number of PRC citizens who may work for these organizations in the U.S. at any given time. These entities together currently employ about 160 PRC citizens. The cap will bring this number to 100. PRC citizens working for other media organizations in the United States are not affected by the cap – not affected by the cap.

The U.S. is taking this action in order to clearly communicate the severity of our concerns about the abusive, unfair, and non-reciprocal treatment of international press in China. We urge the PRC Government to immediately uphold its commitments to respect freedom of expression, including for members of the press.

This administration seeks reciprocity across the bilateral relationship with China, particularly in areas where we have long suffered from lack of a level playing field. We note that even after this cap is implemented, these five PRC state media groups, which are – to remind everyone – explicit propaganda organs of the Chinese Communist Party, these five alone will continue to employ more Chinese personnel here in the U.S. than there are foreign reporters at all U.S. media outlets in China. And of course, unlike U.S.-based media organizations, these PRC state entities are not, in fact, independent news organizations. As I said, they are explicit propaganda organs of the Chinese Communist Party.

That said, this decision to institute a personnel cap was not based on the content produced by these entities. This stands in stark contrast, unfortunately, to the actions of the PRC Government with respect to the international press in China.

Secretary Pompeo has made clear that mature, responsible countries understand the essential value of a free press. The U.S. Government has long welcomed foreign journalists, including from China, to report the news freely and without threat of reprisal here in our country. Journalists in the U.S., regardless of their nationality, had and will continue to enjoy the freedom of expression that is not

permitted in China. This cap merely limits the number of PRC citizens that may work for these designated state propaganda entities at any given time.

I've got a couple of numbers here for you guys. For each of the past five years – that's '15 through '19, 2015 through 2019 – the U.S. has issued more than 11,000 I-visas globally for foreign media reps and their immediate family members. In 2019 alone, we issued 425 I-visas to PRC citizens. Meanwhile, the total number of U.S. journalists working in China on behalf of both U.S.-based and other foreign-based media is only around a hundred total. It is our hope that this action will spur Beijing to adopt a more fair and reciprocal approach to U.S. and other foreign independent press in China.

ATCH: It's not just TikTok; WeChat is organizing Chinese speakers in the US

<https://thediplomat.com/2023/04/the-ccp-messes-with-texas-and-florida/>

TRANS-PACIFIC VIEW | POLITICS | EAST ASIA

The CCP Messes With Texas (and Florida)

Recent cases in Texas and Florida illustrate how the Chinese Communist Party is using WeChat and other means to try and shape public policy outcomes.

By **Seth Kaplan**

April 29, 2023



The Texas State Capitol in Austin, Texas, United States.

Credit: [Wikimedia Commons/ LoneStarMike](#)ADVERTISEMENT

Russian attempts to influence American politics have dominated headlines in recent years. But Chinese efforts have arguably been more effective – in large part because they have been overwhelmingly conducted in the Chinese language on WeChat, an app ubiquitously used by Chinese Americans. Recent cases in Texas and Florida illustrate how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is using the platform and other means to try and shape public policy outcomes.

Shortly after the Texas legislature convened for its annual session on January 10, Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst, a Republican, [introduced SB147](#), a bill that would ban governments, companies, and citizens of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea from purchasing land in Texas. This legislation was triggered by a former Chinese military officer's 2021 [purchase](#) of 140,000

acres of land near Laughlin Air Force Base near Del Rio, Texas. On January 15, Texas Governor Greg Abbot signaled his support for the bill.

Starting the next day, WeChat, whose content is thoroughly regulated by the CCP, became flooded with misinformation about the legislation. Starting on 1point3acres ([一亩三分地](#)), a large [WeChat public account](#) and online [forum](#) and [website](#) managed from Shandong, China, [narratives](#) emerged describing SB147 as a “new Chinese Exclusion Act,” while avoiding any mention of what triggered it.

In the days that followed, additional new anti-SB147 groups emerged on WeChat. As is characteristic of other CCP-sanctioned campaigns on the platform, these WeChat groups had a singular narrative slant. They forbid balanced discussions, [kicked out anyone](#) who disagreed, and promoted the most radical (and in this case [anti-American](#)) voices. Those who supported the bill were called “[Chinese traitors](#).” Some posts encouraged users to [sabotage](#) pro-SB147 accounts by labeling them as spam, [reporting](#) them to the FBI as spies, or even [assaulting](#) the users behind them.

In parallel, organizations such as the Asian Americans Leadership Council (AALC), whose leader, Ling Luo, has [years](#) of [contacts](#) with high ranking CCP officials and [boosters](#) and often appears in Chinese state [media](#), mobilized opposition to the bill.

These efforts rallied other groups unattached to the Chinese American community to devote publicity, organizing, and advocacy efforts to oppose the bill. The anti-SB147 effort has found [supporters](#) among Democratic Party politicians such as State Representative [Gene Wu](#) and U.S. Congresswoman [Judy Chu](#), advocacy groups such as the ACLU, and the liberal media, all of which are unlikely to be aware that they are aligned with the CCP on this issue.

As a result of the CCP’s efforts to galvanize Chinese speakers to oppose the bill and enlist the support of non-Chinese organizations toward the same end, protests against the bill broke out on [January 29](#) in Dallas and [February 11](#) in Houston. The mounting public pressure led Kolkhorst to [modify](#) the bill on March 1 to ensure it did not prevent dual citizens or legal

permanent residents from buying homes near military bases. While this compromise [alleviated](#) the legitimate concerns of some opponents, such as Democratic State Senator Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa (who is now a [co-sponsor](#)), it did little to assuage the CCP. Accounts on WeChat and certain Chinese American organizations with CCP ties such as the [AALC](#), the [Chinese American Legal Defense Alliance](#) (CALDA), and [United Chinese Americans](#) are [still calling](#) SB 147 the “[New Chinese Exclusion Act](#),” the “[Texas Chinese Exclusion Land Act](#),” or the “[Texas Discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Bill](#).”

More recently, when the first hearing on the bill was held in Austin on March 2, two pro-bill witnesses required a police [escort](#) to the hearing due to threats of violence coming from WeChat accounts. Simultaneously, the very same WeChat groups that are constantly flooded with [pro-CCP and anti-democracy propaganda](#) successfully mobilized over 100 opponents of the bill to attend the hearing as witnesses. Still, the bill has progressed to the point that it is now before the Texas State Senate for a vote.

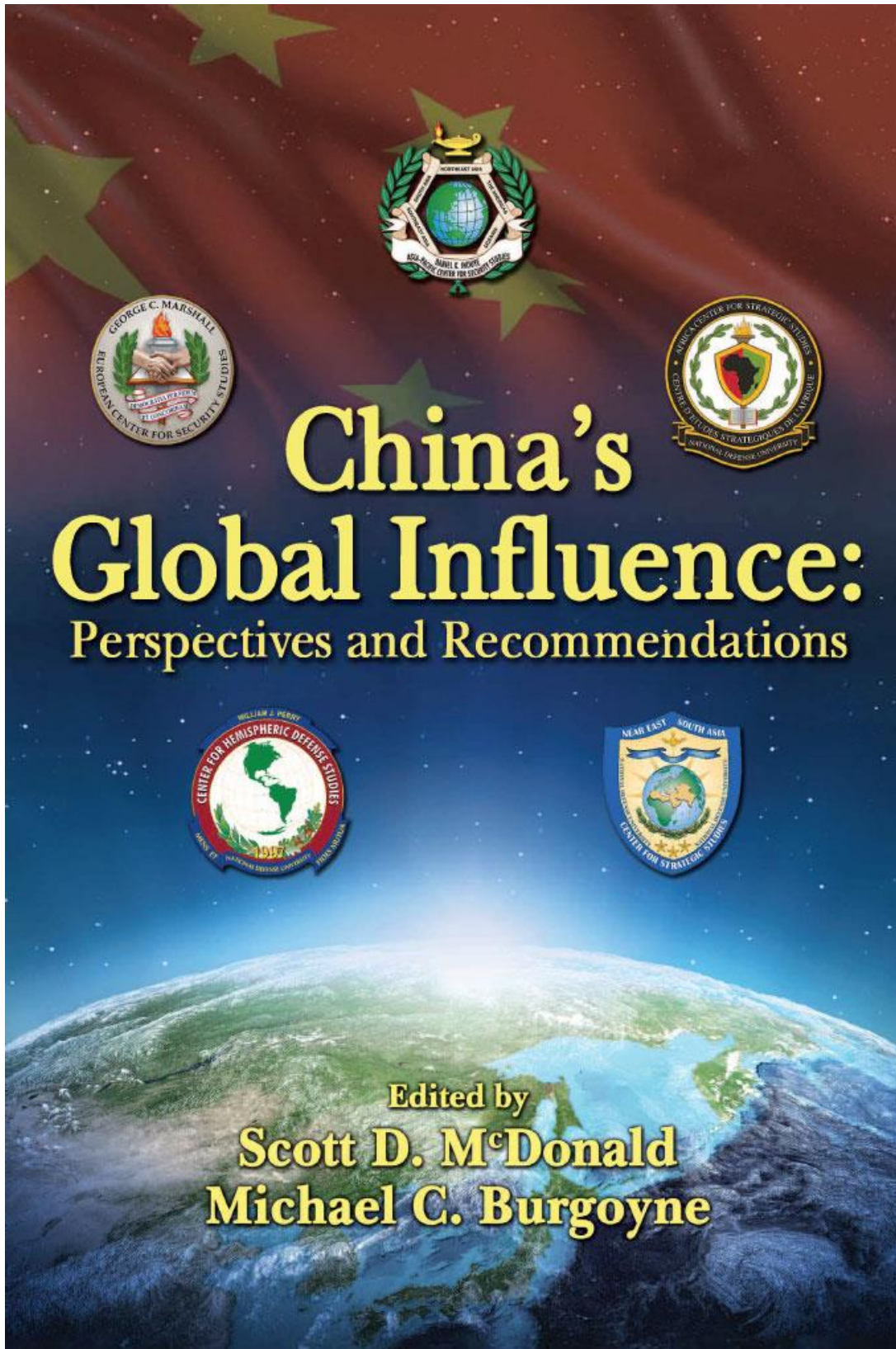
A similar dynamic is also occurring in Florida, which is taking up legislation similar to Texas’ SB147. On April 11, Florida’s Senate [unanimously passed](#) SB264, which prevents China and six other “countries of concern” from buying or holding interest in land near strategic sites in the state. The next day, [a slew of WeChat groups](#) with names such as “anti-SB264” or “anti new Chinese Exclusion Act” have emerged to [oppose the bill](#). These groups [exaggerate](#) the bill’s impact, [claiming](#) that “anyone with a Chinese last name will be discriminated against when buying a home,” even though [the bill does not preclude](#) any U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident from buying land. [Some posts](#) even [claimed](#) that “those who sold homes to Chinese would be thrown into prison.”

The first WeChat-organized [Zoom meeting](#) to discuss the bill brought together 300 people on April 13 and the first WeChat-organized protests were held in Tallahassee on [April 19](#). Meanwhile, WeChat group administrators continue to [mobilize](#) a wide range of actors to petition, lobby, protest, speak to the media, and attend state hearings to work against the bill. Many of these WeChat groups are organized by [Zuo Qian](#), [secretary](#) of American Chinese United

Association (ACUA) and head of [North American Economic Herald](#) (NAEH), both of which have [close ties](#) with the CCP.

Lawmakers in both states need to resist the pressure ginned up by the CCP and pass these bills before their legislative sessions close for the year (on May 29 for Texas and May 5 for Florida). The same goes for other states, which are entertaining a series of China-focused bills on issues such as banning state governments from entering into technology contracts with Chinese companies.

More broadly, state legislators across the country – indeed, all Americans – must be aware that the CCP is operating in the shadows to derail common sense security measures that run against its interests.



SUMMARY:

From 30 January to 1 February 2019 the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies hosted a Department of Defense Regional Center collaboration titled “China’s Global Reach: A Security Assessment.” The goal of the workshop was to leverage expertise and unique perspectives from all five Department of Defense Regional Centers to examine the actions and intentions of the People’s Republic of China. To understand how these global activities impact the United States, this analysis was conducted within the context of the PRC’s perspective of its own foreign policy and in an environment defined by strategic competition, as referenced in the [2017 National Security Strategy](#) and [2018 National Defense Strategy](#). The workshop leveraged the insights gained from a broad range of experts to formulate policy recommendations for defending state interests in the face of growing PRC assertiveness. The scholarship, insights, and recommendations of the participants are collected in this volume for the benefit of policy-makers, practitioners, and scholars.

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