

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement

Testimony offered by Robert L. Daly
June 20, 2012
Director, Maryland China Initiative
The University of Maryland

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the Ranking Member and the Subcommittee for convening this hearing on Media Reciprocity with the People's Republic of China. I began work on U.S.-China media relations in 1986, when I joined the United States Information Agency. At that time, because the Voice of America fell under the purview of USIA, I was privileged to work with VOA personnel in Washington and Beijing. I served as a producer at VOA's China Branch for several months in 1998 and have been a frequent guest on China Branch programs since that time. I have twice been engaged to evaluate the quality of VOA Mandarin programs. Since January of this year, I have appeared as a weekly commentator on VOA's Chinese-language current events television and radio program, *Pro and Con*. I follow the Chinese press on a daily basis.

The Proposal

I have been asked to comment today on H.R. 2899, The Chinese Media Reciprocity Act of 2011. I am sympathetic with what I take to be the impetus for this legislation. There is much that is galling in China's conduct of its public diplomacy and in the limitations it places on our journalists working in China.

The Chinese government has spent at least USD 6 billion to establish the state-run Xinhua News Agency's North American headquarters in Times Square and a China Central Television (CCTV) studio here in Washington. CCTV is building a 24-hour English-language station in order to present Chinese government views to a worldwide audience. Beijing's stated goal is "to seize the international discourse," which it believes is dominated, to China's detriment, by America and the West. In 2010, 650 Chinese were given visas to work as government journalists in the United States. In the same year, only two journalists working for the American Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) were given visas to work in China. China's broadcasters in the U.S. have access to as much American airtime as they can purchase, while BBG broadcasts to China are jammed and its webpages are blocked by the government firewall run by the same Xinhua agency that operates freely on Times Square. No American commercial news network is allowed to broadcast directly to Chinese viewers.

In its media and propaganda initiatives, as in other spheres, China takes advantage of opportunities in the United States that it will not grant to U.S. institutions in China. This unblinking disregard for reciprocity should be of concern to the Congress and should be the subject of regular representations by members of the legislative and executive branches who conduct our relations with China.

Still, the retaliatory approach that H.R. 2899 takes to these issues is counterproductive. Its enactment would exacerbate problems it seeks to correct and would cast doubt on America's commitment to the free flow of ideas.

The proposal we are considering today is that the U.S. expel all (all but two) Chinese journalists within 30 days of the bill's enactment. "**U.S. Expels China's Journalists**" will be the headline in China and around the world if this bill becomes law. This action would cast the United States not as the defender of reciprocity and press freedom, but as fearful, short-sighted, and cynical about values it has long exemplified.

False Parallels

Two false parallels underlie the retaliatory approach. The first is the implication that BBG reporters and Chinese journalists are "state-controlled media workers" in the same sense. Equating VOA reporters, whose standards of journalistic integrity are identical to those of American private-sector reporters, with Chinese journalists who are deployed and censored by the Communist Party of China, does VOA a disservice.

(We should recall that, while American commercial and government journalists observe the same standards, they have different missions. American commercial journalists in China write and produce stories on the PRC for American and audiences. BBG journalists are prohibited by law from publishing or broadcasting in America. They report on China, in Chinese and English, for Chinese and third-country listeners only. Chinese journalists in America, in contrast, have both missions: they report on the U.S. for Chinese audiences, in Chinese, and on U.S. and world affairs, in English, for U.S. and international publics.)

The second false parallel in the retaliatory approach is that it considers only the activities of Chinese and American journalists *employed by their respective states*, ignoring the work of the 200 or so Americans employed by commercial media in China. Because the label *government journalist* can be applied to *all* Chinese journalists in America, their numbers should be compared to those of *all* American journalists working in the PRC, and not just to the number dispatched by the BBG.

Ignoring the Broader Context

But even comparing the total number of government *and* commercial journalists accredited in each country misses the point. Our goal need not be numerical parity. That is not the goal of our media relations with any country. What we seek is an international regime in which all countries are free to send as many journalists to other nations as they desire and can afford. Beijing accredits only two VOA journalists, it is true, but even if an unlimited number were allowed to work in the PRC, VOA would only send six-to-ten reporters to China. Should we then punish China because its financial commitment to foreign reporting and propaganda is growing while ours contracts? If we did, could not other countries reasonably expel American media on the same principle?

If the proposed legislation aims only at reciprocity in numbers of government reporters, it is misguided in the ways I have described. If it aims more broadly at reciprocity in the

volume of information that Americans and Chinese receive about each others' countries, then its approach is anachronistic. In evoking an era when foreign correspondents were our primary source of news on other nations, it ignores the complexity of modern information networks. Americans learn about China from professional journalists stationed there, yes, but also from non-accredited stringers, writers, and travelers; from corporate reports and academic research; from analyses by NGOs, think tanks, and multilateral organizations; and from a growing body of translated and English-language material from China and third-countries. American and foreign bloggers and web sites that cover China round out a dynamic array of information sources whose output exceeds the assimilating capacity of any one reader or any one government. We have fewer BBG journalists in China than we would like, but we do not lack for information on China that would be provided by a few more VOA reporters stationed there.

Other Considerations

Even if we could solve the conceptual difficulties with the proposed legislation, there are three broader objections to the retaliatory approach that should be considered.

The first is that the proposed retaliation would almost certainly provoke a protracted, ugly, and largely pointless series of reciprocal expulsions. If we kick China's journalists out of the United States, China will almost certainly respond in kind. In the unlikely event that Beijing declined to expel our journalists, its restraint would allow it to seize the moral high ground while portraying the United States as fearful of scrutiny by Chinese media. The whole business would inhibit Washington and Beijing from working together on the far more important issues confronting them.

Second, we should bear in mind that Chinese journalists are the primary source of information on the United States for most Chinese readers and viewers. Many of their reports are comprehensive and fair (indeed, many are translations from American media). It is in our interest that the Chinese receive the information that these reporters provide, even though some of it is biased and inaccurate. Most Chinese journalists I know bridle under the constraints imposed by their government. Impressed by their experience in the U.S., many of these writers and editors push for greater scope and objectivity in Chinese reporting on world and domestic affairs. As advocates for expanded press freedom in China, they are more effective than American activists and more effective than they could be if they weren't allowed to work here. While Chinese media *are* censored by their government, and while that censorship can be absolute when Beijing feels threatened, Chinese media are more dynamic, free, and commercially attractive today than they were twenty or even ten years ago. This gradual progress has been achieved in part by Chinese journalists with experience working in the U.S. Expelling them would cut off one of our best channels for promoting press freedom in China.

Third, what is most worrisome about the retaliatory approach is its suggestion that we conduct our public diplomacy on China's terms, competing to see which nation is more willing to restrict media, rather than on the American model of promoting an unfettered exchange of ideas. If we trade the American paradigm for the Chinese approach, we abandon the openness that is the key source of our global influence. If, on the other hand,

we retain our confidence in the American model—if we continue to recognize that Chinese reporters in America do us scant harm and some good—then we can continue to inspire the Chinese people to push for greater freedom. That is what we have done successfully, although not to our complete satisfaction, for the past thirty years.

Recommendations

If retaliation is counterproductive, what can be done to address our legitimate concern for media reciprocity with China?

We should begin by recognizing that our media reciprocity issue with the PRC is not the number of journalists operating in each host country, but the access that they enjoy. China's state media are free to publish and broadcast in the U.S., even as the broadcasts and websites of VOA are jammed and blocked in China. More importantly, China blocks American commercial websites, including Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter. CCTV has free reign in the States, but China would not allow, say, CNN (which has Spanish and Arabic news channels) to operate an uncensored 24-hour Chinese-language station on Chinese territory. Chinese journalists in the United States enjoy full press freedom, while American journalists in China are subject to various forms of harassment, including surveillance, violence, and unjustified expulsion.

In light of these concerns:

1. We should give issues of reciprocity prominence on our China agenda. The President, Cabinet members, and members of Congress should regularly ask, in public fora and in private meetings with Chinese leaders, that VOA and American traditional and social media be given the same treatment in China that CCTV, Xinhua, and the *China Daily* enjoy in the United States. We should call China out on these issues, as we do on human rights and intellectual property violations. Most of the Chinese people have the same sense of fair play as we, and many will be ashamed of their government's inequitable policies if made aware of them. Representations of this kind would have the added benefit of reminding American readers and viewers that the *China Daily's* paid *Washington Post* supplement and CCTV's English-language channel are organs of the Communist Party of China.
2. We cannot prevail in a public diplomacy competition with China unless we train a large number of experts in a range of professions who are fluent in Chinese and knowledgeable about Chinese history and culture. Congress should therefore provide enhanced support for K-12 Chinese-language curricula, for 100,000 Strong, for national foreign language resource centers, and for university programs that develop American expertise on China.
3. Congress should provide enhanced support for VOA's Chinese-language programs, which have limited broadcast hours and stodgy production values, to make them more accessible and attractive.
4. Congress can provide enhanced support for State Department public diplomacy programs in China, which correct Chinese misperceptions of American policies and ensure that China's political, academic, media, and cultural elites receive accurate information on the United States.

5. Legislators and Executive branch officials can encourage American print and broadcast media to produce Chinese-language editions. A Chinese-language *Washington Post* or a *CNN Chinese* station would have great influence in China. Even if such publications and broadcasts were banned by the Chinese government, many Chinese would find ways to gain access to them. Even without direct access to a Mainland Chinese audience, the surreptitious Mainland audience, together with audiences in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and English-speaking countries, constitutes one of the most influential viewerships in the world.

The bad news is that none of these actions will solve the problems we are discussing today in the short-run. Demanding that China extend reciprocal treatment to all American media on American terms is tantamount to demanding that China grant its people full freedom of information. This Beijing will not do, for the simple reason that freedom of information *would* pose an existential threat to the Communist Party. Chinese and foreign advocates of press freedom must therefore be gradualists if they are to achieve anything.

The good news is that when we look at the course of China's evolution since 1979, we see that gradualism works. China's censored press has become freer, and its civic life richer, in part because of the depth and variety of interaction between China and the U.S. Sacrificing our openness because China is closed, as the retaliatory approach proposes, would radically narrow our most important channels of influence in China.

For these reasons, I recommend that Congress not pass The Chinese Media Reciprocity Act of 2011.

Thank you.