

## **Reciprocity in U.S.-China Visa Policy**

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**By John Lenczowski**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member of the Minority, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to be able to present to you some thoughts about the legislation under consideration concerning U.S. and Chinese policies of issuing visas to visiting media representatives.

My concern with the principles underlying this issue dates back to the days of the Cold War. In the 1980's, I had official responsibilities on Soviet affairs both in the Department of State and later in the National Security Council. Among my responsibilities at that time was a portfolio in public diplomacy with special emphasis on international broadcasting.

As I understand it, the legislation under consideration was inspired by a concern that the Chinese government has severely restricted the granting of visas to correspondents from our international broadcasters such as the Voice of America. I am personally aware of China's denial of any visas to even a single VOA correspondent to be assigned to Shanghai, while only two VOA correspondents were granted visas to work out of Beijing. Meanwhile, this last year, the Department of State granted 868 visas to Chinese media representatives, of whom roughly 100 are stationed in Washington, D.C. and 500 are in New York.

I have not been able in the short time permitted me to secure an estimate of American correspondents in China. But the number cannot but pale in comparison to the number of Chinese media representatives we admit to our shores. I understand that the Washington Post has two correspondents in China. I would imagine that there are probably not more than a dozen organs of the American media with correspondents in China. American newspapers simply cannot afford to sustain many if any foreign correspondents: there has been a severe cutback in foreign correspondents by major media outlets over the last two decades.

I should note that the Chinese government is establishing a multi-floor office for its official Xinhua "news" agency in Times Square in New York. It broadcasts to the U.S. on an AM station based in Texas. It has just established a new official Chinese television propaganda station here in Washington which has 75 people involved just at the start. Meanwhile, the U.S. has no possibility of broadcasting in the AM band, but is constrained to broadcast in short-wave and satellite TV. The short-wave broadcasts are subject to systematic and massive Chinese jamming (although this jamming is not uniformly successful, as millions of Chinese do get reception during certain periods and in many places.)

The issue at hand here is a time-honored diplomatic principle: that of reciprocity. To give you some historical perspective on this, let me note some similarities between the policy problems during the Cold War and those of today.

At that time, there were numerous areas where the United States failed even to attempt to maintain a semblance of reciprocity with Moscow. One of them had to do with the utter lack of balance in official representation in each other's capitals.

For years, the Department of State had more KGB personnel working in the U.S. embassy in Moscow than it had American citizens. In contrast, the number of Americans working in the many Soviet embassy buildings here in Washington was exactly zero. What the FBI would have given to have a single janitor employed in one of those facilities!

- The KGB had official access to six out of the eight floors of our embassy in Moscow, and unofficial access to the two allegedly secure floors.
- It ran our motor pool and supplied drivers to embassy staff and visiting officials.
- It dispensed gasoline to the few embassy staffers who drove their own vehicles and thus knew exactly who was leaving the premises to meet with people on the outside.
- It ran the commissary and knew who bought too much alcohol.
- It ran the cafeteria and saw who was having lunch with whom.
- It conducted physical maintenance of the embassy facility and was able to implant listening devices according to its whims.
- Its officers made all the travel arrangements within the USSR for embassy staff members and visiting U.S. government officials like myself.
- It supplied attractive female secretaries to young, single, heterosexual male embassy officers.
- It bugged our typewriters.
- And it put invisible "spy dust" on the door knobs, so that it could track around the city anyone who touched them by following the invisible "dust" that fell from its subject's hands.

The State Department's main rationale for hiring all these KGB operatives? It was hard to find housing in Moscow for any more Americans. It was hard to hire Americans to do menial jobs in a faraway place. It was convenient having Soviets working nearby so that our embassy personnel could have a feel for what local citizens were thinking. And since "menial Americans" were deemed more likely to be compromised by the KGB, it was apparently better to have the actual KGB there instead – then we would know exactly with whom we were dealing. (I should note, that by this logic, everyone in the embassy should have been a KGB employee.)

In response to this amazing set of rationales, which were led by the helplessness in finding housing for Americans in Moscow, the Reagan Administration created the Office of Foreign Missions (OFM), which would enforce reciprocity on matters of diplomatic representation with other countries. Now the Soviets would have to go through OFM in order to secure housing in the Washington area. And if our embassy in Moscow was having difficulty in securing housing for new embassy staff members there, then the Soviets would encounter difficulties in doing the same here. All of a sudden, housing became mysteriously available for Americans in Moscow.

There were many other examples of official U.S. negligence when it came to enforcing even a modicum of reciprocity in relations with a country that was our sworn enemy, and which did

enormous amounts to harm our vital national interests. We signed official exchanges agreements with Moscow which preemptively made concessions to Moscow on every matter of sensitivity to the Kremlin. We permitted the Soviets to cheat on every arms control agreement we signed with it and never developed a compliance policy to accompany those agreements. Altogether our policy on so many of these matters was dictated by preservation of a diplomatic process with no concern about protecting the diplomatic substance. It was judged that so long as negotiations kept going, regardless of their substance or outcome, this was better than no negotiations. It was as if a stall in diplomatic process automatically meant nuclear war.

Today, we are witnessing a similar concern with diplomatic process over substance in our relations with China. The results amount to lopsided advantages to Beijing in almost every sphere.

The matter at hand today concerns representatives of official media. But it also extends to numbers of students studying in both countries, numbers of national centers involved in public diplomacy, numbers of intelligence collectors, and other categories.

When it comes to Chinese media representatives, the question arises as to who exactly these people are. The fact is that none of them are true professional journalists as we understand this term. Every one of them is an agent of the Chinese Party-State. What, then, is the percentage of those who even masquerade as “reporters”? It is a tiny percentage. Where indeed are all the articles that are supposed to be written by these “correspondents”? Where are the radio and television dispatches? The number is miniscule compared to that which one might expect to be generated by the almost 900 media representatives stationed here.

So, what are all these media representatives doing here? Those who have some semblance of journalistic responsibilities are Communist Party propagandists. Most are representatives or cooptees of the Chinese Communist Ministry of State Security (MSS). They are part of tsunami of Chinese intelligence collectors and operatives who have come here among the approximately one million visitors from China in the last year.

So what are these particular MSS officers doing here under media cover? Most of them are probably not conducting conventional espionage as most people understand the term – i.e., stealing military, intelligence, scientific, technological, and industrial secrets. Rather, they are serving as agents of influence, propagandists, and political counterintelligence officers.

The agents of influence and propagandists work in cooperation with a massive Chinese public diplomacy presence in America. This reaches not only the readers of the Washington Post and the New York Times, which publish Chinese propaganda supplements on a periodic basis. It includes the aforementioned AM station and the new Chinese television station in Washington. The Chinese propaganda presence extends to 81 U.S. colleges and universities, where Beijing has established “Confucius Institutes” – public diplomacy centers of the Chinese government involved in language teaching and cultural education, but also stifling criticism of Chinese government policies. It has also organized a similar number of “Confucius Classrooms” in American high schools. In contrast to the 81 Confucius Institutes, the U.S. hosts only five American centers in China.

What do political counterintelligence officers do? The Chinese ones here are in the business of penetrating various groups in the United States who either represent, or are concerned with, communities within China that pose a threat to the Chinese Communist Party and its rule throughout the territories it claims. Beijing calls these groups the “Five Poisons.” They include:

- The Uighurs who live in Xinjing province;
- The Tibetans;
- The Taiwanese;
- The practitioners of Falun Gong; and
- Pro-democracy groups.

Beijing’s “media representatives” here attempt to penetrate these groups here in the United States, counter their messages, and harass them to such an extent that they infringe on their civil rights within our own borders.

They try to influence the Chinese-American community many of whose members have lived here for over a century. They also try to influence the anti-communist media and the pro-Taiwan media.

These various efforts involve what we call “opportunities intelligence” collection: the identification of critics of the Beijing regime and analysis of what they believe, in an attempt to manipulate their perceptions, engage in strategic deception, and discredit their views. Here, Beijing uses the leverage of the visa weapon. If one writes for a pro-Taiwan publication – or for that of any of the other Five Poisons – one will surely be denied a visa to enter the Mainland. If your business advertises in one of these publications, then Chinese official “media representatives” will add your company to a blacklist of those to be denied business opportunities on the Mainland.

The United States has only episodically paid attention to foreign propaganda and its ability to distort both public, but more importantly, official perceptions of foreign reality. This situation continues as much as ever today, in spite of the fact that the architects of our constitutional order – George Washington in his Farewell Address, and the authors of the Federalist Papers – repeatedly warned their countrymen of the unique vulnerability of the republican government to what they called the “insidious wiles of foreign influence.” Chinese propaganda, like Soviet propaganda of the earlier era, is designed, among other things, to help create a false conventional wisdom by influencing not only our media, but also our academic community from which come our future intelligence analysts, military officers, and policy makers.

Here the Chinese play the visa game in a way that is particularly dangerous to our accurate perceptions of reality. If American scholars write academic books and articles that analyze the truth about such subjects as the Chinese military buildup, Chinese intelligence operations, the Laogai (the vast system of Chinese slave labor camps – equivalent to the Soviet Gulag Archipelago), Chinese propaganda operations, Chinese strategic doctrine, Chinese human rights violations, or crimes committed by the Chinese regime, those scholars are automatically denied visas to come to China. There are numerous examples of this. But a prominent one was the case

of sixteen scholars who contributed to a collective scholarly book on the Xinjiang province – most of whom were blocked from travelling to China.

Once denied a visa, American scholars can no longer do fieldwork. They find it much more difficult to maintain the same perceived credentials claimed by those who routinely travel to China. The consequence of this visa policy is academic self-censorship. And the fruit of this self-censorship is ever-greater lack of knowledge of subjects central to U.S. national security policy making and implementation.

We saw this same phenomenon during the Cold War. American academic Sovietologists and journalists who wrote things that Moscow did not like were denied visas – or in the case of journalists stationed in Moscow, they were often expelled from the country. The pressure on these journalists to censor themselves came from the central editorial offices of American media. If a second reporter from a given newspaper was expelled, that newspaper faced the possibility that its Moscow bureau would be shut down entirely. The self-censorship by American Sovietologists was such that one can hardly find a book amid the relatively thin authoritative literature on the Soviet military, the KGB, the Gulag, or Soviet human rights violations by a professor at an American university. The message to the graduate students of American Sovietologists? -- That these subjects are not really a matter of much concern.

Beijing exercises both overt and covert influence in a variety of other ways which I should not neglect to mention. It has been involved in contributing to the campaigns of American politicians. It uses business opportunities to influence the American business community and even to blackmail American politicians. When a member of Congress takes a strong stand against a major interest of the Beijing regime, he or she may face the threat of the withdrawal of business arrangements with a company in that representative's district.

Chinese businesses associated with the Party or the People's Liberation Army have routinely hired former U.S. cabinet secretaries either directly or indirectly. Then such figures serve as elder statesmen whose opinions are taken to represent exclusively the U.S. national interest when in fact there is a conflict of interest.

I regrettably am able only to scratch the surface of what is a major national security challenge. I only entreat this committee and the Congress at large to take this challenge seriously and to enforce greater reciprocity in the use of visas – so that Chinese influence operations can be minimized and vital U.S. national security interests can be protected.

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