

Trump administration restricts visas for Chinese students

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Last week, the Trump administration announced new visa restrictions for Chinese students entering the United States. Long-term visas will be invalid for students entering the country after one year and those who return home while on a visa will be forced to reapply for re-entry and be subjected to additional screening.

The change, which was confirmed by a senior department official during a Senate panel on June 11, will apply to Chinese nationals only, and specifically to students engaged in research in fields that are considered to have potential military import, including robotics, aviation, and high-tech manufacturing. It is being justified with reference to the need to prevent spying on sensitive military technologies by Beijing.

The announcement is the latest step in an escalating racist and hysterical anti-Chinese campaign in the US. It follows a series of recent statements by intelligence officials, in military strategy documents and in the media, arguing that more than 2 million Chinese nationals residing in the US—including more than 350,000 students at American colleges and schools—are a potential “fifth column” for the Chinese government.

This issue was the subject of testimony by FBI director Christopher Wray during a February 13 Senate committee hearing on national security threats. Wray was asked by Republican Senator Marco Rubio, a leading anti-China hawk, to comment on “the counterintelligence risk posed to U.S. national security” from “Chinese students, particularly those in advanced programs in sciences and mathematics.”

Wray replied by referring to Chinese nationals as “nontraditional collectors, especially in the academic setting, whether it’s professors, scientists, students,” whom the agency was monitoring in “almost every field office that the FBI has around the country.” He declared that this threat was “not just in major cities” but “small ones as well; it’s across basically every discipline.”

He added that these “collectors”—i.e., spies—were “exploiting the very open research and development environment that we have, which we all revere.” It was necessary, he said, to “view the China threat as not just the whole of government threat, but a whole of society threat on their end,” which would correspondingly require a “whole of society response by us.”

Wray’s testimony was followed five days later by an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* by security writer Josh Rogin, provocatively titled “Waking up to China’s infiltration of American colleges.”

On April 30, the *New York Times* published an article by Ana Swanson and Keith Bradsher that cited anonymous government officials signaling the administration’s impending visa restrictions. Swanson and Bradsher noted ominously that “In America, research institutes look particularly vulnerable to espionage.” They quoted former Bush administration national counterintelligence executive Michelle Van Cleave, who labeled the US a “spy’s paradise” and declared that Russian and Chinese agents come to the US with “detailed shopping lists.”

Rubio has since escalated his campaign for the closure of Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes, which promote the views of the Chinese government on university campuses. On May 4, he published a letter to the Wilson Center, a Washington-based think tank, demanding that it publicly disclose the fact that one of its speakers in a May 9 panel centering on Chinese political activities in foreign countries is connected to the Chinese government.

What is to explain the increasing vilification of anyone of Chinese origins by the American media and intelligence establishment? In the history of the United States, it recalls nothing so much as the official rationale of “national security” to justify the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. From 1942

onwards, some 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry were placed in concentration camps—“War Relocation Camps”—surrounded by machine guns. At the time, the *New York Times* provided a justification for these actions, declaring that “we are at war with their race.”

Facing a historic decline of its relative economic dominance, the American ruling class is again preparing for a major war, including with China, its largest economic rival. The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy, published in December 2017, declares that the US is once again in the era of “great power” competition against China and Russia, which it defines as “revisionist states” that “challenge American power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.” This document also makes reference to the threat posed by “nontraditional collectors” inside the US—the same phrase used by the FBI director to refer to Chinese students.

A month after the Pentagon strategy document’s publication, *Washington Post* commentator David Ignatius, who is highly connected in the US military/intelligence establishment, published a xenophobic tract titled “China’s fingerprints are everywhere.” Ignatius cited an unnamed US official claiming that the National Security Council’s interagency group was coordinating the study of Chinese activities that are “outside traditional espionage, in the gray area of covert influence operations.”

Ignatius concluded his article with a call for a campaign to demonize Chinese presence inside the United States, writing, “America certainly doesn’t want a new ‘Red Scare,’ but maybe a wake-up call.”

The growing military preparations against China have coincided with escalating trade war measures, including recent US economic sanctions that have crippled Chinese cellphone manufacturer ZTE.

The diplomatic and military buildup against China was initiated under President Obama. The Democratic president announced the “Pivot to Asia”—which includes shifting up to 60 percent of US naval and air forces to the Pacific by 2020—from the floor of the Australian parliament in Canberra in November 2011, with the support of the Australian Labor, Liberal/National and Green parties.

The Australian intelligence agencies, acting with their US counterparts, and media, have waged an increasingly hysterical and racist anti-Chinese witch-hunt, targeting political figures or academics who have previously accepted donations from “Chinese-linked” sources. This

has included the forced resignation of Labor Party Senator Sam Dastyari.

A central purpose for this campaign has been to overcome the anti-war sentiments in the Australian working class with anti-Chinese hysteria. In an article published in September 2016 in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, journalist Peter Hartcher denounced Chinese students as “rats” and “flies” and potential spies for Beijing.

Last February, Hartcher published a column citing senior Pentagon official Randy Schriver declaring that Australia had “woken up” the world to “look at Chinese activity within their own borders,” and declared that the US would be adopting similar measures as its Australian ally.

Last month, Australian Greens member and academic, Clive Hamilton, was invited to testify before the US Senate Congressional-Executive Commission on China, chaired by Senator Rubio. Hamilton is the author of a book, *Silent Invasion: China’s influence in Australia*, which declares that joining a US-led war against China is the only means of averting Australia being subjugated in a new Chinese empire. Hamilton told the US senators that China was engaged in “psychological warfare” against Australia, and that “the scale and nature of the threat is one lay people need to understand.”

Under conditions of a renewed eruption of the same contradictions of world capitalism which led to two world wars in the 20th century, the American ruling class is once again turning to the most reactionary traditions of that period to prepare for war and domestic political suppression. It is worth recalling the comments of the arch-reactionary Antonin Scalia, the late supreme court justice, who referred to the mass internment of Japanese Americans during World War II in a speech to Harvard students in February 2014. Scalia declared that “you are kidding yourself if you think the same thing will not happen again.”



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