

Washington increases pressure on Beijing over Chinese media

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The Trump administration stepped up its punitive measures against Chinese media in the US after Beijing expelled three *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) reporters last month. It has placed a limit on the number of Chinese citizens eligible to work at five of Beijing's news outlets. The State Department announced on March 2 that the five agencies will be required to reduce the total number of Chinese nationals from 160 to 100 by March 13.

The five media outlets include China's official news agency, Xinhua, China Radio International, China Global Television Network, China Daily Distribution Corporation and Hai Tian Development USA, which print and distribute the newspapers *China Daily* and *People's Daily* respectively.

In response to the latest restrictions, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying suggested Beijing will take further measures. She posted on Twitter, "Reciprocity? 29 US media agencies in China VS 9 Chinese ones in the US. Multiple-entry to China VS Single-entry to the US. 21 Chinese journalists denied visas since last year. Now the US kicked off the game, let's play."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo justified the decision saying, "For years, the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has imposed increasingly harsh surveillance, harassment, and intimidation against American and other foreign journalists operating in China. President Trump has made clear that Beijing's restrictions on foreign journalists are misguided. The US government has long welcomed foreign journalists, including PRC journalists, to work freely and without threat of reprisal."

Beijing announced on February 19 that it would expel three journalists after accusing the WSJ of denigrating China's efforts to deal with the Covid-19 coronavirus

outbreak. None of the three journalists had been involved in writing an opinion piece published February 3 that provided the impetus for the expulsions, but all had been involved in criticizing the treatment of Uighurs in China's Xinjiang Province.

The day before Beijing's decision, Washington had designated the five media outlets currently at the center of the conflict as foreign diplomatic missions. As a result, they are required to declare all of their property holdings and seek approval for acquisition of new property. Their employees are forced to register with the State Department and all five agencies are subject to greater monitoring by the US government.

Washington is no defender of a free press. Trump and his allies have regularly accused the media of being the "enemy of the people" while encouraging violence against journalists. Trump even praised the 2017 assault of *Guardian* reporter Ben Jacobs by then-candidate Republican Greg Gianforte, who slammed Jacobs to the ground. The reporter was covering Gianforte's campaign for the US House of Representatives. Gianforte subsequently won the election but was also convicted of assault.

So volatile has the situation become for reporters covering the US presidential election that the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is issuing "safety kits" to journalists covering the election for the first time in the CPJ's forty-year history. The kits offer "basic safety information on physical, digital and psychological safety resources and tools."

The Trump administration's most vicious attack on freedom of the press is the persecution of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, the goal of which is to intimidate journalists and whistleblowers into remaining silent about Washington's crimes. This began under President Barack Obama and the

Democrats, which support the punitive measures against Assange and Manning no less than the Republicans.

Washington is demanding Assange's extradition from the United Kingdom, where the Australian journalist is being subjected to psychological torture in Belmarsh prison. Assange, along with whistleblower Manning, exposed US war crimes and other offenses and now could face the death penalty if sent to the US. Manning has been vindictively held behind bars for refusing to give false testimony in Assange's case.

Washington's decision last week to further restrict Chinese media in the US is a continuation of its anti-China policy that has been prosecuted by both the Republicans and the Democrats. As with the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," the Trump government is increasingly moving the US onto a war footing with China, applying military and economic pressure to Beijing in an attempt to force the Stalinist regime to bow to US demands.

However, such an agenda finds no mass support among American workers and youth after nearly 30 years of unending war. Therefore, Washington is using empty phrases about free press and democracy in order to justify its war preparations. Publications like the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* have contributed to this by demonizing China in support of so-called "human rights." They have even claimed that Chinese censorship contributed to the Covid-19 outbreak, stating that it never would have happened in the supposedly free and democratic West.

In a January 29 article in the *New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof, an ardent supporter of neocolonial campaigns waged in the name of "human rights," denounced Chinese President Xi Jinping, in a comment headlined as "Coronavirus spreads, the world pays for China's dictatorship."

Criticizing Beijing's initial cover-up of the novel coronavirus outbreak, Kristof wrote, "One reason for the early cover-up is that Xi's China has systematically gutted institutions like journalism, social media, nongovernmental organizations, the legal profession and others that might provide accountability."

The claims that the US's "free press" would have somehow stopped the crisis is belied by the fact the US media has engaged in countless cover-ups leading to complete disasters including the Iraq War and

destruction of broad regions in the Middle East and North Africa. The US media is now aiding Washington in deflecting fears and anger over the virus onto China as it becomes increasingly clear that the US ruling class is not only totally unprepared but is entirely indifferent to the fate of broad masses of people.



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