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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**H.R. 2899 “Chinese Media
Reciprocity Act of 2011”**

**Testimony before
Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and
Enforcement
United States House**

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**Nick Zahn
Asia Communications Fellow and Director of the
Washington Roundtable for the Asia Pacific Press
The Heritage Foundation**

My name is Nick Zahn. I am the Asia Communications Fellow and Director of the Washington Roundtable for the Asia Pacific Press at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify today.

The Washington Roundtable for Asia & Pacific Press at The Heritage Foundation is unique among this town's think tanks. My duty is to get to know the Asian media markets and press corps for purposes of promoting Heritage's work and ideas. This responsibility has given me a hands-on understanding of how these reporters – including China's – operate. In preparing my testimony, I have drawn from this daily interaction as well as some of Heritage's broader work on public diplomacy.

As I look at any comparison between the way U.S. and China handle one another's government/party sponsored press, two inequities jump out at me: Funding and visas.

Funding is the more difficult issue, as all China's major media outlets, including those operating overseas are state or party controlled. The U.S. cannot – and should not – emulate that model. Still, the comparison illustrates well what we are up against.

Varying reports indicate that China's overseas investment in state media is between six and seven billion dollars. Compare that with the U.S. government's single largest investment in public diplomacy, the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors who have requested 720 million dollars in fiscal year 2013.

But the difference in budgets is not the most disproportionate ratio. That would have to go to the sheer number of Chinese journalists allowed visas to work in the United States compared with the number that U.S. state sponsored press receive from China.

Similar to structural disparities in funding, the U.S. has no corresponding interest to the Chinese in limiting access to reporters. This is a principled difference between open and closed societies. Yet, there is enormous space to demand a semblance of reciprocity, and if this requires limiting or revoking journalist visas to encourage progress on their end, this is something the U.S. should do.

The current imbalance is simply unacceptable.

In 2011, the U.S. department of State approved 868 (I) visas for Chinese state journalists. The Chinese continued the abysmal precedent of allowing Voice of America only two press visas to work in the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹

That's 868 to 2.

As previously stated, the two visas belong to Voice of America. China's government has consistently rejected visa applications for Radio Free Asia staff since 1998, when three personnel

¹ Ted Lipien, "Chinese blind dissident Chen Guangcheng secretly listened to Voice of America Mandarin shortwave radio while in prison," *Blogger News Network*, May 19, 2012, at <http://www.bloggernews.net/128127> (June 18, 2012).

were denied travel by China into the PRC with President Bill Clinton. So in addition to the well known disrupting of VOA and RFA broadcast signals into China, the PRC has precluded RFA from staffing a bureau there.²

Though the PRC has a particular disdain for RFA, their interference is not solely directed at foreign government broadcasts. Even Anderson Cooper's "AC360" show broadcasting into China on CNN International was blocked by Chinese authorities on May 3rd when he reported on the highly sensitive topic of blind Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng.³

In this environment, shortwave signals have success at getting through unjammed, particularly in rural areas, and should remain a tool of BBG broadcasters. Cheng Guangcheng reported in a VOA interview that he secretly listened to VOA and RFA programming while imprisoned.⁴

Although the People's Republic of China persists in attempts to hinder U.S. messaging into that country, quite a different story is playing out here in the U.S., where China's print and broadcast presence is given unfettered access and has grown by leaps and bounds in the US over the last few years.

China Daily, China's English paper of record, launched China Daily USA in Washington, D.C. in 2009 becoming their first overseas branch. According to a December 19, 2011 China Daily press release, China Daily USA has opened nine printing points in the United States with peak circulation of over 170,000 copies per day. The newspaper has a global average daily circulation of more than 400,000 in 150 countries and regions.

Although there now are offices in Washington, DC, New York City, and San Francisco, content is driven by, and largely produced in, Beijing.

The target audience as described by the paper "include(s) corporate executives, law makers, US government officials, think tank leadership, university faculty, senior members of the American media, and diplomat corps in the US."⁵

China's state wire service, Xinhua News Agency, actually predates the founding of the PRC, having been established in 1931 as the Red China News Agency. It produces content in multiple languages, including English. In 2010, Xinhua added a brand new television arm, known as China Network Corporation, sending Chinese and English language news channels into nearly 60 countries in addition to the U.S.⁶

² Henry Chu, "China Shrugs Off Furor Over Journalists' Visas," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1998, at <http://articles.latimes.com/1998/jun/24/news/mn-63181> (June 18, 2012).

³ Katherine Fung, "Anderson Cooper Censored In China: CNN Report On Chen Guangcheng Blocked (VIDEO)," *The Huffington Post*, May 3, 2012, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/anderson-cooper-censored-china-chen-guangcheng_n_1475424.html (June 18, 2012).

⁴ Ted Lipien, "Chinese blind dissident Chen Guangcheng secretly listened to Voice of America Mandarin shortwave radio while in prison," *Blogger News Network*, May 19, 2012, at <http://www.bloggernews.net/128127> (June 18, 2012).

⁵ China Daily USA, "About Us," at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2011-04/13/content_12319449.htm (June 18, 2012).

⁶ "Xinhua News Agency Launches Global English TV Service," *Xinhua*, April 30, 2010, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-04/30/c_13273606.htm (June 18, 2012).

“Xinhua has so far set up 162 overseas branches, and the number will increase to around 200 by 2020, according to the agency's development plan,” the company said.⁷

But the main event drawing attention to China broadcasting has been the sweeping revamp of China Central Television's CCTV America, the surrogate of China's multi-channel state broadcaster.

With a very expensive build-out on three floors of prime real-estate in the heart of Washington DC, the DC bureau of CCTV America has a world class studio and office space on par with the best network news facilities. And, although only a bureau, it is better equipped than many headquarters facilities of broadcasters in other parts of Asia.

While press reports around the February 2012 CCTV America launch cited a target staff of one hundred personnel with about half being Chinese, recent conversations with CCTV America staff indicate a number of already more than 150 employees in the DC Bureau, about a third of them Chinese. “In addition to Washington, the network is adding reporters in what it calls “key” cities across the continent, including Miami, Chicago, Houston, San Francisco and Toronto. It also will have correspondents in Latin America.”⁸ And interest in hiring continues as the network works past the initial goal of filling 4 hours of programming. Staff members indicate an intention of fulfilling the 24 hour news programming goal within a period of 4 or 5 years.

And these are often experienced personnel. “Many of the reporters, cameramen and technical staff are being lured away from other news organizations with the offer of high salaries and attractive perks.”⁹ A sampling of those organizations includes CNN, NBC, CBS, Fox News, BBC, Al Jazeera, and the Associated Press.

Communist Party propaganda chief Li Chang-summed up Beijing's evolving strategy to CCTV executives this way: “Whichever nation's communications capacity is strongest, it is that nation whose culture will spread far and wide...with the most power to influence the world.”¹⁰

This access, of course, is a much different story than the obstruction facing VOA and RFA in China.¹¹

It also appears that Chinese influence is gaining ground as Heritage Foundation colleague Helle Dale points out in a Heritage Foundation paper:

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that a growing number of Americans view China as the power most likely to rival the U.S. for global leadership. The number of those who believe that China will replace or already has replaced the United States as the dominant global power went up from 40 percent in 2009 to 47 percent in 2011. To

⁷ “Newly-named Xinhua TV company debuts in HK stock market,” *Xinhua*, February 8, 2012 at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-02/08/c_131398928.htm (June 18, 2012).

⁸ Paul Farhi, “In D.C., China builds a news hub to help polish its global image,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2012, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/china-building-news-hub-in-dc/2012/01/12/gIQAh2Ps3P_story.html (June 18, 2012).

⁹ Christopher Bodeen, “China's state TV making huge global expansion,” *Associated Press*, January 31, 2012, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/10068207> (June 18, 2012).

¹⁰ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), p. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

China's leaders in Beijing, this is no doubt seen as a sign that their concerted public diplomacy efforts are paying off.¹²

But while China's growth may have the appearance of a familiar Western news format, its foremost function is to serve the interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹³ As Hu Zhanfan, vice minister of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television observed, just before being appointed by the CCP Central Committee to the post of president of CCTV, news must "always reflect 'our party and country's political stance.'" He made this observation in the course of criticizing journalists who made the mistake of placing "truth above loyalty to the party."¹⁴

So although a Chinese media outlet like CCTV is now projecting the look and feel of CNN or the BBC, the coverage will be tilted in favor of CCP objectives by selection (or omission) of topics, and by the inclusion or exclusion of guests.

"A longtime CCTV program producer who asked to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the topic said virtually everything in the news report is decided based on political considerations. The issues are discussed at meetings, but the decision always lies with the top bosses while the journalists have no say in the outcome, she said."¹⁵

Nor are such decisions left to news editors. Across the spectrum of China's media – both at home and abroad - decisions made by the CCP about desired coverage or censorship of particularly sensitive subjects are issued as "guidance of public opinion," and are disseminated via the "Central Propaganda Department, or the State Council Information Office."¹⁶

As explained by Dave Bandurski of the China Media Project:

"Guidance of public opinion," or *yulun daoxiang* (舆论导向), is the Party's buzzword for media and cultural controls, enshrined in "propaganda work" in the aftermath of the crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen protests. Speaking to the central priority of public opinion controls as a means of maintaining social and political stability and the rule of the Party, the term remains at the very heart of Party media policy.¹⁷

In advance of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, this policy was raised to an even greater priority by the CCP in 2007 and then re-affirmed by President Hu Jintao.

The desire for maintaining social and political stability becomes a particular concern for the Party during sensitive events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when public opinion guidance was

¹² Richard Wike, "From Hyperpower to Declining Power: Changing Global Perceptions of the U.S. in the Post-Sept. 11 Era," Pew Research Center, Global Attitudes Project, September 7, 2011, <http://pewglobal.org/2011/09/07/from-hyperpower-to-declining-power/> (June 18, 2012).

¹³ Christopher Bodeen, "China's state TV making huge global expansion," *Associated Press*, January 31, 2012, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/10068207> (June 18, 2012).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "Latest Directives From the Ministry of Truth, February 17-24, 2011 (Updated)," *China Digital Times*, at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/02/latest-directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth-february-17-21-2011/> (June 18, 2012).

¹⁷ David Bandurski, "All in favor of culture, say 'Aye,'" China Media Project (CMP), October 26, 2011, at <http://cmp.hku.hk/2011/10/26/16743/> (June 18, 2012).

reviewed by Chinese president (and Party General Secretary) Hu Jintao.¹⁸ The guidance policy also became more important as China and the world watched North African countries unravel during the Arab Spring. Examples of leaked “guidance” during this period provide particularly good examples of what the party fears.

On February 24, 2011, Chinese authorities issued directives meant to head off public discussion of the “Jasmine Revolution,” including “Standards for Reporting on the Situation in the Middle East.”

“From the Central Propaganda Department: Media reports on the current changing situation in the Middle East must use standard copy sources. Reports cannot have the word “revolution” (*geming*; 革命). Regarding the reasons for the emergence of these mass protests, nothing can be reported regarding demands for democracy or increases in commodity prices. Reports also cannot draw connections between the political systems of Middle Eastern nations and the system in our country. In all media, when the names of the leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and other countries are given, the names of Chinese leaders cannot appear next to them.”¹⁹

And when activists in China called for pro-democracy protests in late February 2011, authorities moved security forces to quickly quash protestors in about a dozen major cities in China.

Just as authorities expect Chinese press to abide by Central Propaganda Bureau “guidance,” actions on the part of authorities in China indicate an expectation that foreign press must abide by them as well.

As the professional press association representing foreign journalists working in China, The Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China, has catalogued numerous incidences of press being obstructed and abused by Chinese authorities. Examples range from German press being harassed in Lhasa while trying to do a story on Mount Everest climbers to journalists of Japan’s Kyodo News agency reporting being beaten and their property destroyed in connection with the anniversary of Tiananmen Square.²⁰

As a Jasmine Revolution protest march got under way on Sunday Feb. 27, 2011, two VOA correspondents in Beijing, Stephanie Ho and Ming Zhang, went to the downtown Beijing event site to investigate. Both were detained, manhandled, seriously threatened and humiliated by uniformed and plainclothes Chinese police. Ho was pushed and shoved into a small store and then hustled away in a police van.²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Directive from the “Ministry of Truth” as translated and posted on China Digital Times.net may be viewed at: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/02/latest-directives-from-the-ministry-of-truth-february-17-21-2011/>

²⁰ “German Journalist Reprimanded for Tibet Reporting Trip,” *Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China*, April 1, 2010, at <http://www.fccchina.org/2010/04/01/german-journalist-reprimanded-for-tibet-reporting-trip/> (June 18, 2012) and “Beijing Authorities Beat Kyodo Journalists,” *Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China*, September 19, 2009, at <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/19/beijing-authorities-beat-kyodo-journalists/> (June 18, 2012).

²¹ The February 27, 2011 CBS story “Internet sparks protests in 23 Chinese cities” about Ho’s detention can be viewed at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7357924n&tag=mncol;lst;2>; She was able to keep her videotape: Heavy Police Presence Thwarts Call for Protests in China may viewed at <http://www.voanews.com/content/chinese-police-deter-anti-government-protests-117006338/135688.html>

According to sources at VOA, Zhang was grabbed and dragged to a side street. All his pictures and audio recordings were deleted; the police also threatening him, saying: “So you are from the Voice of America. We heard VOA has been disbanded. Why are you still here in China? I was polite to you today, but now that I know you, I won’t be so nice next time.”

Although this was the first time he was detained in Beijing, Zhang had been detained eight times outside of Beijing since arriving at the VOA bureau in China in June 2007.

A little more than a year later, state interference of media in China and the lack of press freedom there was brought into focus on May 7, 2012 with news of the expulsion from China of Melissa Chan, an American reporting for Al Jazeera in China. Her offense? The Chinese government claims that Chan violated rules and regulations but as yet has not identified exactly what those were. More likely, the government did not approve of her work exposing China’s “black jails;” extrajudicial prisons in China.²²

The fact that Al Jazeera, Chan’s employer, is not an outlet native to the US should in no way diminish US concern over her expulsion. The message is clear to all. As opposed to the standard upheld in the U.S., open and objective reporting in China is unacceptable to authorities there and restrictions are at risk of tightening still further.

If the U.S. wishes to be taken seriously as an advocate for liberty, it must actively support the development of an open and objective press corps that works to hold governments accountable. The United States should have acted definitively in response to the expulsion of Melisa Chan, an American. In retaliation, the U.S. should have revoked the visa of a Chinese journalist, ideally one whose work has prominence back in China, or a commensurate group of journalists.

In the United States, Chinese state media are welcomed and treated as equal members of the press, receiving unhindered, equal access to all forms of events; from Occupy Wall Street protests to the White House briefing room, to Heritage Foundation public events, where I have gotten to know many of them. The State Department even has a Foreign Press Center designed to ensure overseas press receive access to such things as special briefings with top U.S. government officials and tours around the country to newsworthy locations. Again, accredited Chinese state press are allowed equal access.

It has long been hoped that the example of our openness would be reciprocated in China. That has not come to pass. And how can we hope for it to be so when their own press corps are expected to subordinate truth to the interests of the Communist Party?

Further, there should be parity between the numbers of China’s state sponsored media allowed US visas and Chinese visas granted to their US government employed counterparts. The mandate of VOA and RFA is to broadcast local and domestic news to countries where a free press does not exist. The U.S. government should support the US BBG’s efforts to fulfill that mandate.

and <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/Chinese-Police-Deter-Anti-Government-Protests-117006338.html>

²² Rosanna Xia, “Journalist expelled from China reflects on experience,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 14, 2012 at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-melissa-chan-20120514,0,5342851.story> (June 18, 2012).

The United States and the PRC are in a contest of ideas. We believe in the idea that governments exist to protect the rights of the people. Opposing that idea is the notion of a government striving to protect itself from the people.

If the disparity between the courses our two countries are taking is not addressed, if the United States does not adjust and use all means of diplomacy at its disposal to counter the current trend in the imbalance of state funded press between the U.S. and China, over time the prestige of the United States will be made to suffer and our influence as a force for good will be diminished.

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