

Beijing opens news door for Taipei

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Sunday, 22 March 2020 06:50

China on Tuesday took steps to expel more than a dozen American journalists in retaliation for the White House imposing restrictions last month on Chinese state-controlled media in the US by classifying them as foreign missions, which came just weeks after Beijing expelled three *Wall Street Journal* reporters, allegedly over the headline of an opinion piece.

Some pundits have said the move reflects a new confidence within the Chinese leadership to not only shape domestic coverage, but also restrict critical foreign reporting.

What it really reflects is the fearful petulance of an emperor with no clothes, whose rule has been tarnished by the Chinese Communist Party's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan and the ensuing pandemic.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said those Americans working for the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, whose press credentials were up for renewal this year, had 10 days to turn in their press cards, and they would also not be allowed to work in Hong Kong or Macau.

In addition, China ordered the local offices of the three papers, along with those of *Time* magazine and Voice of America, to provide details about their staff, finances, real estate and operations.

Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang (耿爽) said that Beijing had to respond to the US restrictions on staffing of Chinese state media in the US.

In yet another example of Orwellian doublespeak, the ministry said the US' "unwarranted restrictions" had made it difficult for Chinese reporters to do their work and subjected them to "politically motivated oppression." As if China has not long been one of the most restrictive places for reporters, with travel limits, overt monitoring by police or local thugs, and retaliation

Beijing opens news door for Taipei

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Sunday, 22 March 2020 06:50

against those who speak to foreign journalists.

There have been worse tit-for-tat retaliations by China. On July 19, 1967, China withdrew the press credentials of British journalist Anthony Grey, a Reuters correspondent in Beijing and one of only four Western reporters in the city, and put him under house arrest — the same day a Xinhua reporter was sentenced to two years in prison for taking part in the Hong Kong riots. Red Guards stormed Grey's home on Aug. 18, killed his cat, smashed his belongings and confined him to a basement room, where he would spend the next 26 months.

It might be hard to remember, or fathom, in this day and age, that for almost three decades after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the bulk of foreign reporting on China was done from Hong Kong.

The lack of access to ministry news conferences in Beijing was not much of a handicap, because how much could be learned from spokespeople who do not answer questions and regularly disavow any knowledge of dissidents' abductions or arrests?

Meanwhile, Beijing's statement that those it expels would not be able to report from Hong Kong or Macau is yet another reminder of its contempt for the territory's Basic Law and the freedoms that the PRC guaranteed for a 50-year period in the treaty it signed with the UK.

There could be a silver lining for Taiwan in this latest flare-up of Chinese-US tensions. For at least the past two decades, foreign newspapers and other media used their China-based staff to report on developments in Taiwan, or parachuted reporters in to cover elections or natural disasters — reports that all too often included the stock phrases “renegade province” or “in a move sure to anger Beijing.”

Why not take this chance to view and cover China from the other side of the Taiwan Strait? Taiwan has a free press, freedom of speech and a well-functioning, technically literate government that believes in communication. After all, it was Taipei where Reporters Without Borders opened its first bureau in Asia three years ago.

Source: Taipei Times - Editorials 2020/03/22