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Hearing on “Stability in China: Lessons from Tiananmen and Implications for the United States”

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Dr. Larry M. Wortzel, Commissioner Carolyn Bartholomew, Members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify today. By your invitation, you honor the work Reporters Without Borders / Reporters Sans Frontieres has done since 1985 to defend journalists and freedom of information all over the world.

Reporters Without Borders is the largest press freedom organization in the world with almost 30 years of experience. Thanks to its unique global network of 150 local correspondents investigating in 130 countries, 12 national offices (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, USA) and a consultative status at the United Nations and UNESCO, Reporters Without Borders is able to have a global impact by gathering and providing on the ground intelligence, and defending and assisting news providers all around the world.

In China, Reporters Without Borders relies on a unique, large and diversified network of journalists, bloggers and cyber dissidents to monitor on a daily basis the freedom of information violations.

After Xi Jinping’s appointment as China’s president and Li Keqiang’s appointment as prime minister during the first annual session of the 12th National People’s Congress in Beijing in March 2013, **the new government reinforced censorship and repressive policies towards news and information providers, especially cyber-dissidents.**

These practices are flouting the Article 35 of the Constitution which says: “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.”

As we are approaching June 4 events in Tiananmen Square 25 years ago, the commemoration appears a duty of remembrance, a tribute to pay to the victims of repression, but this is also an opportunity to publicize what is probably one of the Beijing government’s greatest taboos. The consequences of the lack of information as a result of the censorship and disinformation about the Tiananmen Square massacre imposed by the government are still felt today. Thanks to the effectiveness of the blackout, the vast majority of young Chinese still know nothing about this episode.

Since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, it is important to highlight that the Chinese media landscape developed and diversified tremendously, especially online. However the role of the Chinese media didn't change for the authorities. Media are still considered as propaganda tools. Even so, the role of Chinese media is increasing every day to empower the Chinese people and to provide them new mobilization abilities. Some key scandals proved it very clearly in recent years: Sun Zhigang in 2003, Xiamen in 2007, Wukan in 2012. What is very interesting with the Wukan village case is that the Wukan habitants reported themselves on social networks to expose their land expropriation and to demand justice. Despite the news blackout offline and online, the villagers succeeded in making their voices heard and the authorities in negotiating.

Censorship of the media, reprisals against news providers

Very strict directives to the media

The Publicity Department (the former Propaganda Department) issues very precise directives every day to the Chinese media, including news websites, listing the stories and events that should not be covered, those that may be covered only by using the reports provided by the official news agency *Xinhua*, those that may be covered freely and those they are encouraged to cover.

As soon as a story gets the attention of the media, online or offline, or public opinion, the Department reminds them of the importance of political and social stability in China. It may ask them to withdraw an article from their website, or their front page, to suppress comments, to block all information about the case, or to post an article written by the Bureau.

On April 16, 2013, the day that the *New York Times* received a Pulitzer Prize for its investigative coverage of the financial assets secretly controlled by former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's family, China's media regulator issued a directive banning the media from using "any unauthorized news products provided by the foreign media or foreign websites" or any content provided by "news informants, freelancers, NGOs or commercial organisations" without "prior verification."

In December 2013, the government announced measures aimed at reinforcing its control of the national media, including the introduction of a national exam for journalism students, who could now find themselves obliged to study Marxist ideology in-depth at university. These measures have been accompanied by a verbal offensive against the media, which are accused of "endemic corruption," and constitute a response to the many revelations in the media and by citizen-journalists of corruption within the Chinese Communist Party.

Clearly the internet complicates the implementation of these precise directives and strict control of the information. Official media are able to publish more information online than offline, sometimes temporarily before the articles are removed but the information went out. Journalists working for official media are also following less strict lines on their personal Weibo accounts which sometimes are extremely popular, sometimes even more than the media Weibo account itself. Bloggers reporting on expropriation, corruption, environmental scandals or any injustice case do not receive the daily directives of the Publicity Department, by definition are not following them. Some Chinese bloggers enjoy as much visibility as established media.

Censored “incidents” and “sensitive events”

The censors lost no time in putting their mark on 2013. The Publicity Department censored the New Year editorial that the reformist weekly *Nanfang Zhoumo* published on January 3, 2013. Headlined “The Chinese dream, the dream of constitutionalism,” the original version referred to hopes of change for the New Year and called for a constitutional government. It was purged of its critical content and was given a new, propagandistic introduction which, according to some sources, was written by Tuo Zen, the head of the Guangdong Publicity Department. None of the newspaper’s editors were told in advance that a new version was replacing the original one on its website.

The censorship has also affected China’s so-called “petitioners,” including those responsible for protests in recent months in Tiananmen Square. Five people were killed in late October in Tiananmen Square in what the authorities initially described as an “accident” and later as a terrorist attack by “Uyghur separatists.” At the time, screens were put up to prevent the burning car from being seen, pedestrian access was banned, and photos of the incident were removed from websites. The national television stations, *CCTV*, did not mention it, while other media referred to a “traffic incident.”

Coverage of an attack by people armed with knives on travellers at the railroad station in Kunming on March 1, 2014 was also censored. The State Council Information Office issued a directive to the media instructing them to strictly adhere to the official version provided by *Xinhua* or the information provided by local authorities. As a result of the censorship, many newspapers did not mention the attack at all, or provided only minimal coverage.

China, one of the world’s biggest prisons for journalists and netizens

A total of 30 journalists are currently imprisoned in China in connection with the gathering and dissemination of news and information. They include not only journalists who worked for dissident publications, such as **Lin Youping** of *Ziyou Bao* (Freedom Newspaper), who has been held since 1983, but also journalists with state media, such as *CCTV*’s **Li Min**, who has been held on a “corruption” charge since 2008, when he was arrested while investigating corruption in Shanxi province.

China is the world’s biggest prison for netizens, with a total of 74 currently held. They include 2010 Nobel peace laureate **Liu Xiaobo** and the citizen-journalist **Ilham Tohti**.

The authorities do not limit themselves to censoring what journalists report. They arrest them when they cover very sensitive subjects and bring such charges against them as defamation, disturbing public order, “picking quarrels and causing trouble” and “inciting separatism.”

Ilham Tohti, a Uyghur academic and editor of the *Uygurbiz.com* website, was arrested at his Beijing home by policemen from Beijing and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on January 15, 2014. Equipment was seized from his home and he was “placed under criminal detention” for “violating the law.” As a frequent critic of the government’s repressive policies in Xinjiang, he had long been under permanent surveillance by state security and he had reported an increase in harassment of the Uyghur population after the Tiananmen Square incident in October 2013.

Huang Qi, the editor of the *64Tianwang* website, and three citizen-journalists who report for the site – **Liu Xuehong**, **Xing Jian** and **Wang Jing** – were arrested in March 2014 for covering protests by “petitioners” in Tiananmen Square during the annual session of the National People's Congress. When a woman was arrested after trying to set fire to herself on March 5, Wang managed to post photos of the incident on *64Tianwang*. The next day, a man threw ink on Mao's big portrait in the square. He was quickly taken away but Liu managed to report the incident. Huang Qi is one of 100 information heroes highlighted this year on World Press Freedom Day by Reporters Without Borders.

Professional journalists have also been arrested. They include **Liu Hu**, another information hero of the Guangzhou-based *Modern Express* daily, who was arrested on August 24, 2013 and was officially charged with defamation on September 30 for accusing Ma Zhengqi, state administration deputy director for industry and commerce, of neglecting his duties by failing to investigate the privatization of two state state-owned companies that resulted in considerable losses for the state. His arrest reflected both the government's campaign against corruption and its campaign against rumor-mongering. Only the authorities are supposed to conduct the campaign against corruption. Members of the general public are not supposed to take part, and those that dare to level accusations against government officials are liable to be accused of spreading rumors or to face more serious charges.

China, “Enemy of the Internet”

China counts among those states that have created the world's most sophisticated Internet censorship and surveillance systems and, as a result, it was again included in the Reporters Without Borders list of “Enemies of the Internet” in 2014.

The tools that China has created to filter and monitor the Internet are known collectively as the Great Firewall of China. Begun in 2003, the system allows China to filter access to foreign sites. As well as using classic data routing methods to block access to IP addresses or domain names, the Great Firewall makes considerable use of Deep Packet Inspection to detect and block keywords such as “human rights,” “Tiananmen” or “Liu Xiaobo.” Surveillance methods are incorporated into social networks, chat services and VoIP. Privately-owned companies such as SINA, Baidu, Tencent, Weibo are required by the authorities to monitor their networks and prevent the circulation of banned content. The role played by these companies is key to the internet censorship and surveillance.

Nonetheless, the rapid growth of the participative Internet and its impact on social and political debate are complicating the censors' job more and more. The regime's increased monitoring and crackdown on netizens and their online tools are symptomatic of its nervousness – especially since the Arab Spring – about the way the Internet and social networks can function as an echo chamber that amplifies dissent. Every day, the State Office for Internet Information and the State Council Information Office send the media directives that may concern any subject liable to represent a danger for the authorities.

The recent creation of the New Leading Small Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization on

Internet controls headed by Xi Jinping himself demonstrates that the control of information is a political priority. This is a very concerning signal for the future and the directions taken by the new Chinese leadership.

Xinjiang and Tibet -- black holes for news and information

Xinjiang

Beijing has established an efficient system of prior censorship using publication committees and local propaganda bureaus in each town and city of the region. These agencies report to the central authorities, who filter each item of information transmitted by the subordinate offices.

Uyghur-language newspapers are made up almost entirely of direct translations of Chinese content that is reviewed in minute detail by the publication bureaus to ensure that no content unacceptable to Beijing sees the light of day.

Only a handful of independent Uyghur-language newspapers, produced in neighboring countries and smuggled over the border, manage to circulate in the region. But censorship blocks any Uyghur website unfavorable to the Communist Party. In a recent development, proxy servers are used to access sites that “mirror” foreign-based sites, even though this tactic carries more risk than in the rest of the country.

The Chinese Internet operates under permanent official supervision. But in Xinjiang the web faces additional technical obstacles, which Beijing uses in order to diminish dissemination of information.

The download rate in Xinjiang is the country’s slowest. According to the techinasia.com site, the download rate is more than twice as slow in the province as in big coastal cities such as Shanghai and Beijing - less than 1.5 mbps, versus 4 mbps.

Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook are censored, as in the rest of mainland China. The use of proxy servers to bypass censorship carries a higher risk than elsewhere in the country.

The government regularly resorts to jamming telecommunications. During the deadly violence that broke on 26 June, all communications lines in the Turpan prefecture were temporarily cut.

“This is clear evidence of the levels of curtailment implemented by the Chinese authorities on the ability of Uyghurs to freely discuss and also know about the human rights situation facing their people,” said Dolkun Isa, secretary-general of the World Uyghur Congress. “But it also goes further by shielding the international community from knowing the full extent of what is happening on the ground, which is extremely concerning.”

Tibet

The authorities no longer wait for further protests in order to tighten Internet censorship. They regularly order the closure of Tibetan websites and block access to others based abroad, such as

Tibet Post International.

The Chinese-language business site, *TibetCul*, has been closed down several times since 2011. *MyBudala*, affiliated to *TibetCul*, and the Tibetan-language sites *DobumNet* and *Sangdhor* have also been censored by the authorities.

At the end of 2013, the Chinese authorities stepped up their persecution of independent Tibetan news providers, arresting three writers who were frequent information sources for external observers on the pretext that they carried out “political activities aimed at destroying social stability and dividing the Chinese homeland.”

Kalsang Choedhar, a monk from Palyul monastery, was arrested in the market in Sog, in eastern Tibet, on 12 October for circulating information over a period of two weeks about a crackdown by the Chinese authorities in Driru county.

Choedhar’s mobile phone was confiscated and he is currently being held incommunicado in an unknown location. Hundreds of Tibetan monks from Palyul monastery demonstrated outside Palyul county government offices and a police station to demand Choedhar’s release.

Tsultrim Gyaltsen, a 27-year-old Tibetan writer who uses the pen-name of “Shokdril,” was arrested in Khardrong, in Driru province, on 11 October, and a 25-year-old associate known only as **Yulgal** was arrested the next day. Both are accused of “political activities aimed at destroying social stability and dividing the Chinese homeland.” Their current place of detention and physical condition are not known.

Gyaltsen’s computer, mobile phone, books and other personal effects were confiscated by Chinese security officials who went to his home at 1 a.m., witnesses said.

A former monk, Gyaltsen has written two books about Tibet and used to edit a Tibetan-language magazine called *The New Generation*. Yulgal is a former Security Bureau officer who resigned because of the “political” nature of his work.

There has been no news of three Tibetan monks – **Sungrab Gyatso**, **Yeshi Sangpo** and **Draksang** – since their arrest in early December 2012 in Gonghe for disseminating information about a demonstration.

Foreign media targeted by the authorities

The Communist Party also seeks to control coverage by the foreign media, which play a vital role in informing the international community, as well as the people of China, who suffer from the increased censorship of the local media. The attacks against foreign journalists is increasing.

Arrests and assaults

Mark Stone, a reporter with British 24-hour TV news channel *Sky News*, and his cameraman were arrested while doing a live report from Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on March 15, 2013. He had obtained permission to do a report from there, but the police accused him of not visibly displaying his accreditation and not having his passport on him.

Stone said the police intervened when he referred to the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations in the square, which were crushed with considerable loss of life. Stone and his cameraman were taken to a police station before being released.

A crew from German TV station *ARD* consisting of reporter **Christine Adelhardt**, two other German employees and two Chinese employees were pursued and attacked on February 27, 2013 by two men in a car who broke the windscreen of their vehicle with a baseball bat.

Two Hong Kong journalists, **Tam wing-man** and **Wong Kim-fai**, were beaten outside the home of **Liu Xia**, the wife of jailed Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, as they were filming an attempt by a campaigner to visit her on March 8 2013. The attackers, who did not say who they were, tried to stop them from filming and seize their equipment.

In January this year, journalists covering the trial of cyber-dissident **Xu Zhiyong** were barred from the courtroom and were even prevented from filming outside when Xu's trial opened. *BBC*, *Sky News* and *CNN* crews outside were all pushed away violently by uniformed and plainclothes policemen.

CNN reporter **David McKenzie** reported that he was manhandled and detained by police, who broke his crew's equipment.

Two other journalists, **Mark Stone** and **Martin Patience**, were also manhandled by police during coverage of the trial.

In June 2013, **Cyril Payen**, a senior journalist with the French television news station *France 24*, was subjected to harassment and threats by Chinese diplomatic personnel after his documentary "Seven Days in Tibet" was screened. He managed to enter Tibet secretly in May 2013 and record personal accounts of the repression suffered by the Tibetan minority.

In addition, members of the Foreign Correspondent's Club of China (FCCC) have been regular targets of cyber attacks, as many American media outlets revealed as well, like *the New York Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *the Washington Post* and *Voice of America*.

Denials of accreditation and visas

The authorities are increasingly resorting to the granting or withholding of visas as a means of putting pressure on journalists who work for foreign news organizations. In November 2013, **Paul Mooney**, a journalist best known for writing about human rights in China, was unable to take up a post for Reuters in Beijing because the Chinese authorities refused him a visa for undisclosed reasons.

Visas' applications by *New York Times* journalists are still blocked over the publication by the newspaper of an investigation into the fortunes accumulated by party leaders. The head of the paper's Beijing bureau, **Philip Pan**, is still waiting for his visa after 22 months, while reporter

Chris Buckley had to wait for 17 months for his.

The *Times* journalist **Austin Ramzy** was forced to leave the country in January this year after working in China for six years, when the authorities rejected an application for a visa that he had made in June 2013. Consequently the *New York Times* has been unable to obtain accreditation for its journalists since 2012.

The Chinese authorities also have another means of applying pressure when a journalist needs a visa quickly in order to travel to cover an event abroad.

Chinese media controls impact all US companies doing business in China. Risks assessment is impossible without a free flow of information especially on corruption, pollution or even health issues. This lack of information has a clear economic impact.

Because the Chinese press and internet censorship affects directly American journalists, companies but also the right of all American citizens to be informed, the US Congress should:

- monitor carefully the compliance of China with WTO rules
- support the development of new media headed to Chinese citizens such as radios, TV and news websites

Thank you very much for your attention.