



Written by [James Murphy](#) on October 19, 2020

China Threatens Detainment of American Citizens in Response to Arrested “Scholars”

The communist Chinese government is reportedly warning the U.S. State Department that it may begin holding American citizens in retaliation for the arrest of several Chinese scholars in the United States over the summer. The five scholars — who were said to be conducting research — are accused of visa fraud for not disclosing their active duty status with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

The scholars were ostensibly post-graduate researchers specializing in areas such as biomedicine and artificial intelligence. To varying degrees, all apparently hid their association with the PLA from the United States.



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According to [the Wall Street Journal](#), “The Chinese message ... has been blunt: The US should drop prosecutions of the Chinese scholars in American courts, or Americans in China might find themselves in violation of Chinese law.”

In the past, Chinese officials have used a tactic known as “hostage diplomacy,” where they deny foreign nationals permission to leave China due to some diplomatic dust-up unrelated to those who might be detained.

In September, a State Department [travel advisory](#) warned, “The PRC government arbitrarily enforces local laws, including by carrying out arbitrary and wrongful detentions and through the use of exit bans on US citizens and citizens of other countries without due process of law. The PRC government uses arbitrary detentions and exit bans.”

Among the reasons listed for such actions is “to gain bargaining leverage over foreign governments.”

“We are aware that the Chinese government has, in other instances, detained American, Canadian and other individuals without legal basis to retaliate against lawful prosecutions and to exert pressure on their governments, with a callous disregard of the individuals involved,” said John Demers, the assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.

“If China wants to be seen as one of the world’s leading nations, it should respect the rule of law and stop taking hostages,” Demers added.

Communist Chinese state media warned Saturday that the arrests of the Chinese scholars might not be good for the safety of U.S. nationals in China. Hu Xijin, editor of the Communist Party propaganda outlet *Global Times*, [tweeted](#): “Besides, the US has detained quite some Chinese scholars on spy charges, which is not good to safety of some US nationals in China. Does Washington need to be warned? It’s common sense. In my view, hegemony has turned some US elites stupid, or they’re



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pretending to be stupid.”

Unlike past presidents, Trump has been treating the Communist Chinese government like the global adversary it is, having initiated trade tariffs on some Chinese imports, issuing restrictions on Chinese corporations due to national security concerns, and taking a keen interest in China’s military actions in the South China Sea.

But the detainment of the Chinese scholars is, apparently, a major embarrassment to the Chinese government in way that those other actions were not.

“Historically, these dust-ups were resolved behind closed doors to contain diplomatic fall-out and allow China to save face,” said Craig Singleton, a fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and an expert on China.

“DOJ’s moves represent a full-on assault of one of China’s most revered institutions, the PLA,” Singleton said. “It’s a real game-changer that could carry significant risk for both sides.”

The Chinese threats began after one of the Chinese Army-connected scholars, a scientist named Tang Juan, took up residence in the Chinese consulate in San Francisco after being questioned by the FBI in June. Reportedly, Chinese officials threatened to detain an American in China if Tang was not allowed to leave the consulate and return to China.

The FBI arrested Tang in July when she left the consulate grounds. Thus far, the Chinese have not retaliated in that matter. Tang remains in the United States after pleading “not guilty” to visa fraud charges.

According to the Tang’s lawyer, Malcom Segal, the Chinese government is taking a hands-off approach. “The Chinese government has played no role whatsoever in the case itself or in her defense, nor do I ever expect them to do so.”

In addition to Tang, four other Chinese scholars are accused of hiding their connection to the PLA on their visa applications.

With the U.S. general election only a mere two weeks from now, perhaps the communists in China are foreshadowing a rocky future relationship should their preferred candidate, Democrat Joe Biden, not be victorious on November 3.



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