

China's NGO Law: Countering Western Soft Power and Subversion

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China has recently taken an important step in more tightly regulating foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) inside the country. Despite condemnation from so called human rights groups in the West, China's move should be understood as a critical decision to assert sovereignty over its own political space. Naturally, the shrill cries of "repression" and "hostility toward civil society" from western NGOs have done little to shake the resolve of Beijing as the government has recognized the critical importance of cutting off all avenues for political and social destabilization.

The predictable argument, once again being made against China's [Overseas NGO Management Law](#), is that it is a restriction on freedom of association and expression, and a means of stifling the burgeoning civil society sector in China. The NGO advocates portray this proposed legislation as another example of the violation of human rights in China, and further evidence of Beijing's lack of commitment to them. They posit that China is moving to further entrench an authoritarian government by closing off the democratic space which has emerged in recent years.



However, amid all the hand-wringing about human rights and democracy, what is conveniently left out of the narrative is the simple fact that foreign NGOs, and domestic ones funded by foreign money, are, to a large extent, agents of foreign interests, and are quite used as soft power weapons for destabilization. And this is no mere conspiracy theory as the documented record of the role of NGOs in recent political unrest in China is voluminous. It would not be a stretch to say that Beijing has finally recognized, just as Russia has before it, that in order to maintain political stability and true sovereignty, it must be able to control the civil society space otherwise manipulated by the US and its allies.

'Soft Power' and the Destabilization of China

Joseph Nye famously defined 'soft power' as the ability of a country to persuade others and/or manipulate events without force or coercion in order to achieve politically desirable outcomes. And one of the main tools of modern soft power is civil society and the NGOs that dominate it. With financial backing from some of the most powerful individuals and institutions in the world, these NGOs use the cover of "democracy promotion" and human rights to further the agenda of their patrons. And China has been particularly victimized by precisely this sort of strategy.

Human Rights Watch, and the NGO complex at large, has [condemned](#) China's Overseas NGO Management Law because they quite rightly believe that it will severely hamper their efforts to act independently of Beijing. However, contrary to the irreproachable expression of innocence that such organizations masquerade behind, the reality is that they act as a de facto arm of western intelligence agencies and governments, and they have played a central role in the destabilization of China in recent years.

Undoubtedly the most highly publicized example of just such political meddling took place in 2014 with the much hyped "Occupy Central" movement in Hong Kong, also known as the Umbrella Movement. The Western media fed uninformed news consumers story after story about a "pro-democracy" movement seeking to give voice to, as White House spokesman Josh Earnest cynically [articulated](#), "...the aspirations of the Hong Kong people." But such vacuous rhetoric was only part of the story.

What the corporate media in the West failed to mention were the deeply rooted connections between the Occupy Central movement and key organs of US soft power. The oft touted leader of Occupy Central was a pro-Western academic named Benny Tai, a law professor at the University of Hong Kong. Though he presented himself as the leader of a grassroots mass movement, Mr. Tai has for years been partnered with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a nominal NGO which is actually directly funded by the US State Department via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In fact, the NDI has been one of the leading [advocates](#) (and financial backers presumably) of the Center for Comparative and Public Law at the University of Hong Kong, a program with which Benny Tai has been intimately connected, including as a [board member](#) since 2006. So, far from being merely an emerging leader, Tai was a carefully selected point person for a US-sponsored color revolution-style movement.

Two other high profile figures involved with Occupy Central were Audrey Eu, founder of the Civic Party in Hong Kong, and Martin Lee, founding chairman of the Democrat Party of Hong Kong. Both Eu and Lee have long-standing ties to the US government through the NED and NDI, with Eu having been a frequent contributor to NDI sponsored panels and programs, and Lee having the glorious distinction of having both been a recipient of awards from NED and NDI, as well as [meeting with US Vice President Joe Biden](#) in 2014 along with anti-Beijing advocate Anson Chan.

It does not take exceptional powers of deduction to see that, to varying degrees, Tai, Eu, Lee, and Chan each act as the public face of a US Government-sponsored initiative to destabilize the political situation in Hong Kong, one of China's most economically and politically important regions. Through the intermediary of the NGO, Washington is able to promote an anti-Beijing line under the auspices of "democracy promotion," just as it has done everywhere from Ukraine to Venezuela. Luckily for China, the movement was not supported by either the bulk of the working class in Hong Kong and China, or even by many of the middle class who saw it as little more than an inconvenience at best. However, it required swift government action to contain the public relations and media fiasco that could have resulted from the movement, a fact of which Beijing, no doubt, took note.

As a spokesperson for the National People's Congress [explained](#) in April, the NGO law is necessary for "safeguarding national security and maintaining social stability." Indeed, in late 2014, in the wake of the Occupy Central protests, Chinese President Xi Jinping traveled to Macau and [spoke](#) of the need to ensure that Macau walked on the "right path." In a thinly veiled reference to Hong Kong, Xi praised Macau for continuing to follow the "one country,

two systems” policy under which the special administrative regions of Macau and Hong Kong have greater autonomy but are still subject to Chinese law. Essentially, Xi made it quite clear that, despite the foreign NGO-manufactured movement in Hong Kong, Beijing remained firmly in control. And this is precisely the issue: control.

NGOs, Soft Power, and Terror in Xinjiang

The NGO ‘soft power’ weapon is not relegated solely to Hong Kong however. In fact, the western Chinese province of Xinjiang, one of the most volatile regions in the country, has seen active destabilization and subversion by soft power elements consistently over recent years. Home to the majority Muslim Uighur ethnic group, Xinjiang has been repeatedly attacked both with terrorism and vile propaganda that has sought to paint to China as the oppressor and enemy of Uighurs, and Muslims generally.

Xinjiang has been victim to a number of deadly terrorist attacks in recent years, including the heinous drive-by [bombings](#) that killed dozens and injured over 100 people in May 2014, the [mass stabbings and bombings](#) of November 2014, and the deadly [attack](#) by Uighur terrorists on a traffic checkpoint just last month which left 18 people dead. Were such attacks, which claimed the lives of scores of innocent Chinese citizens, to have been carried out against, say, Americans, the western media would be all but declaring holy jihad against the entire world. However, since they’ve happened in China, these are merely isolated incidents that are due to the “marginalization” and “oppression” of the Uighur people by the big bad Chinese authorities.

Such a sickeningly biased narrative is in no small part due to the NGO penetration of the Uighur community and a vast public relations network funded directly by the US Government. The same National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which has disbursed funds to the NDI and other organizations involved in the Hong Kong destabilization of “Occupy Central,” has been a primary funder of the Uighur NGO complex.

The following organizations have each received significant financial support from the NED through the years: World Uighur Congress, Uighur American Association, International Uighur Human rights and Democracy Foundation, and the International Uighur PEN Club, among others. These NGOs are quite often the sources cited by western media for comments on anything related to Xinjiang and are almost always quick to demonize Beijing for all problems in the region, including terrorism.

Perhaps the best example of just such propaganda and dishonesty came in the last few weeks as western media was flooded with stories making the spurious allegation that China had banned the observance of Ramadan in Xinjiang. Indeed, there were literally hundreds of articles condemning China for this “restriction of religious freedom,” portraying the Chinese government as repressive and a violator of human rights. Interestingly, the primary source for the claim was none other than the NED-funded [World Uighur Congress](#).

Moreover, in mid July, on the day of Eid al-Fitr (the final day of Ramadan), the [Wall Street Journal](#) ran a story covering the media pushback from China which has sought in recent weeks to publicize the fact that Xinjiang, and all of China, has celebrated openly for Ramadan. And, as one should come to expect, the anti-China source cited is, as usual, a representative of the World Uighur Congress. It seems that this organization, far from being merely a human rights advocate, is in fact a mouthpiece for US propaganda against China. And when the propaganda is challenged and discredited by China, well that just invites new

and more blistering propaganda.

The Geopolitical Footprints

All of this demonization has taken on a clear geopolitical and strategic significance as Turkey has stepped into the fray condemning China for its alleged “persecution” of Uighur Muslims, whom Ankara sees as Turks from its neo-Ottoman revanchist perspective. The Turkish Foreign ministry said in a [statement](#) that “Our people have been saddened over the news that Uighur Turks have been banned from fasting or carrying out other religious duties in the Xinjiang region...Our deep concern over these reports have been conveyed to China’s ambassador in Ankara.”

China responded to what it deemed to be inappropriate comments from Turkey’s Foreign Ministry, especially in light of Turkey’s absurd characterization of the Uighurs (who are Chinese citizens) as “Turks.” China’s Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Chunying [stated](#), “China has already demanded that Turkey clarify these reports and we have expressed concern about the statement from the Turkish foreign ministry...You should know that all the people of Xinjiang enjoy the freedom of religious belief accorded to them by the Chinese constitution.”

While the Chinese government, as it almost always does, used decidedly muted language to express its displeasure, the implications of the statement were not lost on keen political observers with some understanding of the China-Turkey relationship. Although the two countries have many aligned interests, as evidenced by Turkey’s repeatedly expressed [desire to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization \(SCO\)](#), the little known fact is that Turkey is one of the major facilitators of terrorism in China.

Though it received almost no fanfare from international media, in January 2015 Chinese authorities [arrested at least ten Turkish suspects](#) alleged to have organized and facilitated the illegal border crossings of a number of Uighur extremists. It has further been revealed that these extremists were planning to travel to Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to train and fight with fellow jihadis.

The story is still further evidence of a well-funded, well-organized international terror network operated and/or facilitated by Turkish intelligence. According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the ten Turkish citizens were arrested in Shanghai on November 17, 2014 for facilitating illegal immigration. While the formal charges against them range from forging documents to actually aiding illegal migration, it is the larger question of international terrorism that lurks beneath the surface. Because of course, as the evidence seems to indicate, these Uighur immigrants were not merely traveling to see loved ones in another country. On the contrary, they were likely part of a previously documented trend of Uighur extremists traveling to the Middle East to train and fight with the Islamic State or other terror groups.

It is these same extremist networks that carried out the aforementioned deadly bombing in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang. In fact, precisely this trend was exposed two months earlier in September 2014 when [Reuters](#) reported that Beijing formally accused militant Uighurs from Xinjiang of having traveled to Islamic State-controlled territory to receive training. Further corroborating these accusations, the Jakarta Post of Indonesia [reported](#) that four Chinese Uighur jihadists had been arrested in Indonesia after having travelled from Xinjiang through Malaysia. Other, similar reports have also surfaced in recent months, painting a picture of a

concerted campaign to help Uighur extremists travel throughout Asia, communicating and collaborating with transnational terror groups such as the Islamic State.

So, Uighur terrorists with forged documents provided by sources inside Turkey are implicated as being part of the same terror networks that carried out a series of deadly attacks on Chinese citizens and police. No wonder China is not exactly bending over backwards to dry Erdogan's and the Turkish government's crocodile tears. And yet, despite the terror war, the US-funded Uighur NGOs continue to portray China as responsible for the terrorism.

The destabilization of China takes many forms. From a manufactured protest movement in Hong Kong sponsored by NGOs connected to the US government, to a fabricated propaganda war peddled by other NGOs sponsored by the US government, to a terror war fomented by a NATO member, China is a nation under assault by soft and hard power. That Beijing is finally taking steps to curb the pernicious influence of such NGOs, and the forces they represent, is not only a positive step, it's an absolutely necessary one. The national security and national sovereignty of the People's Republic of China requires nothing less.

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