



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New Tibet access report confirms nothing's changed

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The State Department's new report on access to Tibet in 2019 for American diplomats, journalists and other citizens categorically confirms that Chinese authorities have done nothing to improve the situation since the first report issued in March 2019.

This new report says, "Access to the Tibetan population of the [People's Republic of China] did not improve in 2019 compared to 2018."

The report is the second the State Department has released under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which requires the department to deny entry to the US for the Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet, a historically independent country that China annexed in 1959.

The act also requires the State Department to provide an annual report on Americans' level of access to Tibet. Last year's report said the Chinese government "systematically" impeded that access in 2018.

Chinese entities

While the summary of the new report is given below, one significant aspect of the report to note is the identification of some of the Chinese government entities that have a role in the decision making on foreigners' access to Tibet.

The report mentions that request for travel permits to the Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet, went to "a foreign affairs leading committee, consisting of representatives at the prefectural, provincial, and central levels from the United Front Work Department, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Public Security, People's Liberation Army, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This committee reviewed the request and then instructed the TAR [Foreign Affairs Office] to provide the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu with a formal response."

This is important, as one implementation requirement of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act is that "the Secretary of State shall provide to the appropriate congressional committees a report identifying the individuals who have had visas denied or revoked pursuant to this section during the preceding year ..."

This submission can be confidential, as was the case when Secretary of State Pompeo made the announcement on July 7, 2020 of "visa restrictions on PRC government and Chinese Communist Party officials determined to be 'substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,' pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018."

We can assume that some of the officials with the new visa restrictions belong to the above mentioned Chinese governmental entities.

The report, however, does not include any reference to the state of access to the Tibetan areas in the provinces of Gansu and Qinghai.

Report findings

Among the findings in this report are:

- In 2019, the TAR continued to be the only area of China for which the PRC government required diplomats and other foreign officials to request permission to visit. Diplomats could not purchase air or train tickets to the TAR without official approval.
- The PRC government also last year denied five of 10 official requests from the US diplomatic mission in China to visit the TAR, including a request for the deputy chief of mission, the defense attaché, the Agricultural Trade Office, and two requests by the US citizen Services unit at the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu. The five trips approved for US diplomats and officials in 2019 included: one visit by the US ambassador; two visits by the US consul general in Chengdu; one consular visit; and a visit by US Consulate General Chengdu political/economic officers.
- When US diplomats received permission through the TAR Foreign Affairs Office to travel to the TAR, FAO and security personnel tightly chaperoned their trips.
- Travel to Tibetan areas in Sichuan province continued to be restrictive for US diplomats in 2019. Diplomats traveling in the Tibetan areas of Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) and Ngaba (Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures were routinely stopped and questioned by security officials. However, unlike 2017 and 2018, security officials did not physically detain diplomats.
- While travel to Tibetan areas in Sichuan province did not require a permit, diplomats were required to submit requests to the provincial FAO in order to conduct meetings with government, religious and community leaders. Of the four such requests the US Consulate General in Chengdu made for meetings in Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, only one was granted. Despite several attempts, no requests were granted for official meetings in Kardze TAP.

Discrimination against Tibetan Americans

The report says that according to US embassy and consulate contacts, as well as media reports, Tibetan Americans, when applying for Chinese visas at PRC embassies, continued to undergo a strict screening process different from that of other US citizens.

Tibetan Americans reported more frequent harassment by security officials in Tibetan areas than in other parts of China.

The US government received several reports of instances in which Chinese authorities denied entry into China of Tibetan Americans in 2019, despite these US citizens possessing valid Chinese visas and travel documents.



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