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Asia - China

Foreign media targeted

New York Times hounded by Chinese censorship, expulsion and spying

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Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns the Chinese government's readiness to violate the confidentiality of sources, which has jeopardized the safety of *New York Times* journalists and their sources in China.

The newspaper has been subjected to growing harassment in recent months. An article about outgoing Premier Wen Jiabao's fortune was censored. The authorities refused to issue or renew visas and accreditation for its journalists. And now it turns out that it has been the target of cyber-attacks for months.

"If hackers working for the government were ordered to spy on such a prominent newspaper as the *New York Times*, it means that the authorities are trying to identify its sources in order to step up their persecution of dissidents," Reporters Without Borders said.

"It also means that, in addition to the recent censorship of international news stories and the growing difficulties for foreign journalists to get visas for the China, the government is deploying major resources in a bid to gag the international media. If such methods are used against the *New York Times*, its bodes ill for the harassment and surveillance that Chinese newspapers can expect."

Reporters Without Borders added: "We hail the responsibility with which the *New York Times* has acted and we urge other media to do the same for the sake of their sources and contributors."

The *New York Times* reported on 30 January that [it had been the target of attacks from hackers in China](#) for the past four months.

The first intrusions took place on 13 September, when the newspaper was preparing the report about the fortune amassed by Prime Minister Wen's family. The *New York Times* allowed the hackers to keep probing for four months in order to identify every digital back door.

According to experts hired by the newspaper, the techniques used by the hackers are similar to those used by the Chinese military. They got into its computer systems via the email accounts of journalists based in China and other foreign countries, including Shanghai bureau chief **David Barboza**, who wrote the Wen exposé, and South Asia bureau chief **Jim Yardley**, who is based in India.

Malware that the experts recognized as being of Chinese origin was then installed in the system that gave the hackers access to all of the network's computers. The experts also found evidence that the passwords of 53 employees were stolen. Chinese defence minister Liang Guanglie has denied that the Chinese authorities were in any way involved.

This is not the first time that a major foreign news organization has been the target of such a cyber-attack. The news agency *Bloomberg* received attacks that infected several of its computers last June when it revealed that relatives of then Vice-President Xi Jinping had amassed a fortune.

The *New York Times* said: "The mounting number of attacks that have been traced back to China suggest that hackers there are behind a far-reaching spying campaign aimed at an expanding set of targets including corporations, government agencies, activist groups, and media organizations inside the United States."

The attacks on western journalists have apparently been increasing since 2008.

Visa difficulties Chris Buckley, a 45-year-old Australian journalist working for the *New York Times*, [was meanwhile forced to leave China](#) on 31 December after the authorities failed to renew his visa in time.

Based in China since 2000, he joined the *New York Times* last September after working for *Reuters*. After waiting in vain for a response to his repeated requests for renewal of his accreditation, Buckley and his family were forced to move to Hong Kong.

The *New York Times* has also been waiting since March 2012 for the Chinese authorities to issue accreditation to **Philip Pan**, who has been appointed as its Beijing bureau chief.

Tenacious censorship

The *New York Times* had already been subject to close monitoring by the Chinese government for years but it intensified after the revelations about the Wen family's fortune. The report was censored in China by the authorities, who also blocked searches for "Wen Jiabao" or "New York Times" on the Chinese micro-blogging website Sina Weibo.

The *Wall Street Journal* announced on 31 January that its computers had also been the target of cyber-attacks from China with the aim of monitoring its media coverage of China, while *CNN* reported that its international service's computer network was blocked for several minutes after a report about the *New York Times* hacking.

Finally, Twitter reported on 2 February that 250,000 of its accounts had been accessed in attacks similar to those on the *New York Times*. Again, it was suggested that China was to blame.

China is ranked 173rd out of 179 countries in the 2013 [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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