

## U.S. Tightens Visa Rules for Chinese Communist Party Members

New guidelines mean that China's 92 million party members will be limited to one-month, single-entry U.S. permits — if the State Department can figure out who they are.



By **Paul Mozur** and **Raymond Zhong**

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The Trump administration on Wednesday issued new rules to curtail travel to the United States by members of the Chinese Communist Party and their immediate families, a move certain to further exacerbate tensions between the two countries.

The new policy, which took immediate effect, limits the maximum duration of travel visas for party members and their families to one month, according to a State Department spokesman.

That means the Chinese recipient must use the visa to enter the United States within one month of it being issued. Based on standard procedure, U.S. border officials would determine at the point of entry how long the visitor can stay. The officials could still permit a multi-month visit.

A visa also does not guarantee entry into the United States; it only allows for consideration of entry by U.S. border officials.

Previously, party members, like other Chinese citizens, could obtain visitor visas for the United States that were valid for up to 10 years.

Travel visas for party members will also be limited to a single entry rather than multiple entries as was possible before, according to two people familiar with the changes.

The new measures do not affect party members' eligibility for other kinds of visas, such as immigration or employment. The State Department spokesman added that no current visas would be revoked as a result of the policy changes. The spokesman made his comments after The New York Times reported on the new limits.

The new visa rules add to the conflict, now years long, between the two countries on trade, technology and much else. Coming in the twilight of the Trump administration and aimed squarely at China's ruling elite, the visa restrictions and the likely Chinese response will be yet another challenge to President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr., who is inheriting a U.S.-China relationship that is in its worst state since the normalization of diplomatic ties in 1979.

While some might hope for a reset of relations from Mr. Biden, his views on China have hardened since he was vice president under President Barack Obama. Mr. Biden appears to be committed to leaving in place many of the tough measures taken by the Trump administration, including tariffs and restrictions on Chinese technology.

In a Tuesday interview, Mr. Biden said he would first consult with allies to craft a more comprehensive response to Chinese trade tactics. He has also said he would forcefully address China's human rights violations, including mass detentions in the western region of Xinjiang. Chinese officials have worried that Mr. Biden will be more effective than President Trump at leading a broad global pushback against China.

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In principle, the new visa policy could affect the travel of roughly 270 million people, according to U.S. government estimates based on a Communist Party membership of 92 million. In practice, it might be difficult to determine who, apart from high-level officials, belongs to the party. That could grant Mr. Biden flexibility in enforcing the new rules, though it would be hard to ignore travel to the United States by top Chinese officials and their family members.

According to the people familiar with the new rules for travel visas, American officials can make a determination about someone's Communist Party status based on their visa application and interview, as well as officials' local understanding of party membership. That could mean that the policy disproportionately hits China's top government and business leaders rather than the millions of lower-level members who join the party to get a leg up in areas as varied as business and the arts. China's top leader, Xi Jinping, has reasserted the primacy of the party in many aspects of daily life.

The State Department spokesman called the move part of “ongoing policy, regulatory, and law-enforcement action across the U.S. government to protect our nation from the C.C.P.’s malign influence.”

“For decades we allowed the C.C.P. free and unfettered access to U.S. institutions and businesses while these same privileges were never extended freely to U.S. citizens in China,” he added.



The new visa rules will be yet another challenge for the incoming administration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. Kriston Jae Bethel for The New York Times

The policy change is likely to prompt retaliation from Beijing, though travel between China and the United States has already been hugely limited by the coronavirus pandemic. In 2018, almost three million Chinese citizens traveled to the United States.

A spokeswoman for China’s Foreign Ministry, Hua Chunying, condemned the new rules during a news conference on Thursday. “We hope people in the United States will adopt a common rational view toward China and give up their hatred and abnormal mind-set toward the Communist Party,” Ms. Hua said, according to Bloomberg News.

The new rules could prove to be a first step in attempting to systematically track lower-level party members who visit the United States. People who attempt to conceal their party membership while applying for a visa could be exposing themselves to charges of visa fraud if later discovered.

Even so, the restrictions are more moderate than an outright ban on travel to the United States by party members, which Trump administration officials had discussed this summer.

The Trump administration has sought to push back against what it says are interference operations by the party in the United States. This year the Justice Department charged eight people with carrying out a harassment campaign on Beijing’s behalf aimed at Chinese political dissidents and fugitives. It also charged Chinese researchers studying in the United States with visa fraud, saying they misled the American government about their status as officers in China’s People’s Liberation Army.

Under Mr. Trump, the State Department has announced other visa restrictions on various categories of Chinese citizens. These include officials responsible for the mass internment and surveillance of Muslim ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region, people working in the United States for state-controlled Chinese news organizations and officials deemed to be responsible for the political crackdown in Hong Kong.

In May, American officials said the government was canceling the visas of graduate- or higher-level students in the United States who had ties to certain Chinese military institutions. Chinese students make up the largest group of international students in the country.

The United States and China agreed in 2014 to increase the longest duration of tourist and business visas issued to each other’s citizens to 10 years from one year. The arrangement was reached during a visit to Beijing by Mr. Obama, in an era of warmer relations between the two nations. In announcing the new visa policy at the time, the White House touted the benefits to the American tourism industry and to trade and other commercial ties with China.

Edward Wong contributed reporting from Washington.