



AS IT IS

US Pressures China with Closing of Houston Consulate

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The United States has ordered China to close its consulate in Houston, Texas. The order is the latest step taken by the U.S. to increase pressure on China over trade, technology, human rights and security issues.

The U.S. State Department released a statement early Wednesday saying the diplomatic office was closed “in order to protect American **intellectual property** and American’s private information.”

Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters that China received the order Tuesday night. He said the order represented an “**escalation**” of recent actions against China. He accused the U.S. of targeting Chinese diplomats and threatening Chinese students. Wang warned that China would answer if United States policy did not change.

At the consulate in Houston on Tuesday night, reports of papers being burned caused firefighters to arrive but they were barred from entering. A local Houston television station showed video of smoke coming from an area inside the consulate. Houston police said workers there were burning documents in open containers in preparation for being ordered out. China has until Friday to close down the consulate.

The business group Greater Houston Partnership expressed regret at the announcement. It says the consulate, first opened in 1979, has been important in building trade, investment and cultural ties between the two countries.

The U.S. also has decided not to reopen its consulate in the city of Wuhan, which has been closed since late January. Wuhan was the center of the start of the new coronavirus outbreak in China. A U.S. official who did not have permission to discuss the issue told reporters that the move might ease China's answer to the closure of the Houston consulate.

More pressures from the U.S.

Relations between the world's two largest economies have steadily worsened in recent months.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has denounced China for its treatment of ethnic minorities. As a result, the U.S. Commerce Department placed restrictions on 11 Chinese companies over human rights abuses in the Xinjiang area.

As China established a new security law over Hong Kong, the U.S. said it would no longer treat Hong Kong as an **autonomous** territory from the mainland government. It said Hong Kong could face visa limits and economic measures similar to China.

Last week, the U.S. State Department rejected China's claims to most of the South China Sea. In a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the claims "are completely unlawful." Pompeo added the U.S. would consider protecting other countries in the area against China through legal means. And a State Department official suggested that economic measures could be placed on Chinese officials over the issue.

President Trump also blames China for mistakes in controlling the spread of the new coronavirus, which led to more than 600,000 deaths around the world.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Justice Department charged two Chinese citizens with stealing intellectual property and targeting companies developing a coronavirus vaccine. The Justice Department says the two researched computer networks of biotechnology companies that were developing vaccines, testing devices and antiviral drugs.

Federal officials said that the two were not being held by law enforcement officials and that it was unlikely they would be brought to an American court. The U.S. and its allies have also accused Russia of trying to steal Western research into coronavirus vaccines and treatments.

I'm Jonathan Evans.

Mario Ritter Jr. adapted it for VOA Learning English from VOA News and Associated Press reports. Hai Do was the editor.

Words in This Story

intellectual property *-n.* property such as ideas, inventions and processes that come from intellectual work

escalation *-n.* to increase or to become more tense or severe

autonomous *-adj.* having the power to govern itself
