

China lodges protests with U.S. over expelling diplomats



Beijing, December 16 (RHC)-- Beijing says it has lodged a “stern protest” with the United States over the expelling of two Chinese officials accused of breaching security at a sensitive military base in Virginia, calling the expulsions a “mistake.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang was reacting to a report by The New York Times on Sunday that Washington had covertly moved to expel two officials from the Chinese embassy earlier this year after they drove onto a military base. One of the two Chinese officials is believed to be an intelligence officer operating under diplomatic cover, the report said.

Speaking at a regular briefing in Beijing on Monday, Geng said “the U.S. accusations against Chinese personnel severely disregard reality.” He said: “We strongly urge the U.S. to correct its mistake, cancel the relevant decision and protect Chinese personnel’s proper rights according to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations,” said Geng, referring to the diplomatic immunity granted to embassy officials.

The news report said the diplomats, accompanied by their wives, drove up to the checkpoint at the entrance to the sensitive installation near Norfolk, Virginia that includes special operations forces. The guard saw that they didn’t have permission to enter and directed them to go through the gates, turn around and exit.

The United States secretly expelled two Chinese embassy officials in September after they drove onto a sensitive military base in Virginia, according to a report. The Chinese officials, however, continued onto the base, evading military personnel pursuing them until they were forced to stop by fire trucks blocking their path, according to the report, which added that the Chinese officials had failed to understand the guard's instructions and got lost.

Weeks after the incident, the State Department placed restrictions on the activities of Chinese diplomats, in what it said was a response to years-old Chinese regulations limiting the movements of U.S. diplomats.

In turn, China announced measures against U.S. diplomats in the country earlier this month, which it said were "reciprocal," ordering them to notify the Foreign Ministry before meeting with local officials.

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