

# Human Rights Violations: America versus China

By [Eric Sommer](#)

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US media and political figures constantly attack China for alleged human rights violations, while conveniently turning a blind eye to human rights violations perpetrated by the United States in the name of its war on terror, for instance the use of torture at Abu Ghraib, the illegal detention of suspects at Guantanamo, the apprehension and extrajudicial transfer of individuals from one state to another, and the unauthorized surveillance of citizens are just some the US' well-documented human rights abuses.

And as important as rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of religion may be, these rights pale in significance beside the most fundamental of human rights, which is the right to live, with its corollary of security from actions or conditions which threaten life, such as military aggression, criminal acts, or similar threats that put people's lives at risk.

With this in mind let's compare China and the US, to see who is the real human rights violator.

US military forces have been responsible for thousands, possibly millions, of civilian deaths around the world in the past decade.

While there are no accurate figures for the civilian death toll in Iraq, household surveys have been conducted asking Iraqis to list the family members they have lost and the results then extrapolated to the total population to give a nationwide estimate. The prominent British medical journal, the Lancet, ran into a storm of controversy when it published an article by researchers from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore which extrapolated the results of a survey of a randomly chosen sample of 1,849 households to the total Iraqi population and estimated that there were 655,000 deaths between April 2003 and June 2006. Yet in 2007, the British polling firm Opinion Research Business surveyed 1,720 Iraqi adults and extrapolated a figure that was even higher - a "minimum of 733,158 to a maximum of 1,446,063" - Iraqi civilians killed.

The independent UK-based research group, the Iraq Body Count, which only counts civilian deaths where there is documentary evidence, such as cross-checked media reports, hospital, and morgue records - which is likely to be the minority seeing as so few bodies are recovered - has a minimum civilian death toll of 105,753.

Nor is there a single figure for the overall number of civilians killed by the 10-year war in Afghanistan, but according to the latest report from the United Nations, 12,793 have been killed in just the past six years.

And these figures do not include those that have been injured in the two wars, nor those

killed or injured by the US military in Pakistan and Libya.

It should be noted that none of these countries attacked -or have ever attacked - the US.

The US military, supported by the US government, defines its goal as “full spectrum” - that is global land, sea and air and indeed space - military dominance. In support of this goal, the US military is deployed in more than 150 countries and according to an official Pentagon accounting of US military bases, the Base Structure Report, Fiscal 2010 Baseline the US has at least 662 overseas bases in 38 foreign countries, although the figure is more because the list excludes bases in several nations integral to active operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Chinese government has emphasized that the Chinese military’s role is strictly defensive: protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity and peaceful economic development. China adheres to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and during the same period it has had no military conflicts with other countries. It also has no military bases in other countries.

Turning to civil liberties. The US’ rate of imprisonment is the highest in the world: about 760 out of every 100,000 US citizens are in jail. China, with a population very nearly four times as big, has a rate of imprisonment that is one-seventh that of the US, about 118 out of every 100,000 of its citizens are in jail.

In the US there is unofficial media censorship by the central government -which seeks control over news content relating to its military operations - and by the powerful corporate interests which control the mass media in the US. This control was evident both in the run-up to the Iraq War, in which the media willingly accepted the government’s claims that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and that the presence of such weapons justified a military invasion. It was also evident in the many false reports which included doctored pictures purporting to “show Chinese police brutality” during the Lhasa riots in 2008. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the Internet and smaller media outlets enable wider discussion.

In China the mass media is State owned, but again the Internet and smaller media outlets enable wider discussion.

Regarding religious freedom, the US provides the right to practice any religion and to attempt to convert others to your religion, and does not allow any crimes in the name of religion. China allows believers to practice their religion in recognized places of worship and does not allow any crimes in the name of religion, either.

While China needs to do more to convince the world that it has and will better protect human rights, the US-led West clearly needs to improve its own human rights record.

*The author is a Canadian independent researcher.*

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