

Issues of Consular Protection in China: Take the Stranded Students in Ethiopia Event as an Example

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Abstract: In today's complex and volatile international situation, the world is experiencing political multi-polarization, overall peace and local turbulence in the world, major country relations are adjusting, and the role of the United Nations is gradually increasing. At the right time, China has put forward the Belt and Road Initiative in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. With the rapid development and change of the international situation and the continuous innovation and development of world information technology, some new phenomena and problems have gradually emerged in the scope of China's consular protection work. It is necessary to sort out and analyze solutions. In this paper, based on the related research results, combined with author's own deep thinking and practical experience, through the stranded students in Ethiopia event study the overseas interests protection problem.

Keywords: consular protection, media, stranded students

1. Introduction

After the founding of New China, many domestic scholars have studied and analyzed the consular protection system and cases. In recent years, there have also been some specific studies on consular protection. However, with the rapidly changing international situation and the innovative development of information technology, new problems have gradually emerged in the field of consular protection of China, which need to be carefully reviewed and summarized. Especially since the outbreak of the covid-19 at the end of 2019, the international situation has become more unpredictable, and China's consular protection capability has been greatly challenged.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study includes a comprehensive case study to investigate the specific circumstances of the incident. This case analysis method helps to explore the selected case in depth to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and various factors involved. The following Outlines the key components of the methodology used in this study:

Case selection: Case selection is a key aspect of this study. In the context of covid-19, the authors chose the case of international students. The cases chosen are considered representative of

broader phenomena, enabling the extraction of insights that have the potential to extend beyond a particular instance.

Data collection: The data collection process is complicated because there are not many official reports, and the data is mainly collected through Internet searches. There are also some information including official notices, reports, etc., which can help to get a full picture of the case.

3. False Rumor

On March 30, 2020, a Chinese student sent a micro blog claiming to be staying in Ethiopia, while contacting the embassy did not get help [1]. It caused a heated discussion on social media, and some people even commented that Chinese students stranded in Ethiopia, even at the cost of more than 30 hours to transfer to Africa, and then were messed up by their own country [2]. But actually, that's not what happened.

During the Chinese Spring Festival in 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic continued to worsen. While the epidemic is getting worse abroad, China has become the safest place in the world. So there are more and more international students want to return to avoid risk.

Most of the new types of virus in China are imported, in order to prevent the second outbreak of the domestic epidemic, the National Civil Aviation Administration stipulated that since March 29, airlines can only fly a single point of a country, while only one flight a week. Then according to this "five one" regulation, China's air plan to fly to Ethiopia is only one flight to Shanghai every Sunday, and the other original routes are canceled [3].

At that time, March 2020 was the beginning of the global outbreak, and the domestic epidemic in China broke out in January and February, and was quickly contained in March. In the face of a sudden global epidemic, it is inevitable that the international and domestic situation became chaotic and the people get panic. The difficulties in cross-border shipping caused by the epidemic also had a major impact on state-to-state relations, especially consular operations.

Most of the students stranded in Ethiopia are due to the suspension of flights in the original city, they from the United States, Britain and other places to Ethiopia to prepare to return home, and on March 29, the Ethiopian flight originally planned to fly home was canceled, which led to the follow-up incident.

Students who were affected by the epidemic prevention policy were rage and began to publicize on micro blog to create public opinion. At the same time, with the help of some big Internet celebrities, the topic of "the Stranded Students in Ethiopia" successfully reached the hot search all the way. Many of the micro-blogs published by some overseas students have strong words, such as "who is not the child of their parents, who is not the son and daughter of the motherland [2]?" "We have various identities on the other side of the ocean, but we are all Chinese, we are sons and daughters of China", "there is no way to contact the local embassy", and even compared themselves to Buchan Liu, a naval commander in the late Qing Dynasty, "there is nothing else to ask for, carrying the future of the country, seeking the science of foreigners, and striving without regret [1]." Such remarks caused some netizens to criticize and besiege, and the two sides remained deadlocked, triggering a long and heated discussion.

The students posted the help post on the morning of March 30, and the topic became a hot topic on micro blog during the day. Until the afternoon of the 30th World Wide Web public report proposed that on the morning of the 30th, all the international students have taken flights back to China. The original statement said: "The World Wide Web reporter contacted the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia, the embassy staff confirmed the above situation, and said that the current problem has been basically solved, this morning (30), more than 200 students stranded in Ethiopia have all taken flights home [4]."

After the topic became a hot search, the overseas students did not publish any content about the progress of the matter, until the evening, an Internet celebrity's micro blog said that the problem of overseas students had been successfully solved. This means that even after they have returned to China, the overseas students are still letting the incident fervent, allowing netizens to quarrel with each other, allowing the consular staff to be misunderstood and abused, without standing up to clarify the truth of the matter or thanking the consular staff for their hard work. And even some of the students after returning home, they expressed their gratitude to the charismatic bloggers, thanked the public opinion to put pressure on the country, and did not mention thanking the embassy.

On the 31st, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry explained the relevant situation at the regular press conference of the Foreign Ministry. "Our Party and the national government attach great importance to it and immediately asked all the staff of the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia to immediately go to the airport to provide basic help and consular protection for the stranded people [5]." At the same time, the Embassy has also contacted Ethiopian Airlines several times to coordinate the preparation of necessary guarantees for the stranded passengers and make proper arrangements. The public account of the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia tweeted on April 1st, "The Embassy in Ethiopia assists the Chinese students who are stranded in Ethiopia to return home safely," and wrote, "Upon learning of this situation, the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia immediately launched an emergency plan, arranged personnel to arrange passengers at the airport, and distributed masks and other epidemic prevention materials for three consecutive days. Comfort passengers and domestic relatives through 24-hour consular phone. Make every effort to do the work of Ethiopian Airlines and provide basic living security for Chinese passengers stranded in the region. At the same time, the Chinese embassy and consulates worked with domestic authorities and civil aviation authorities to adjust the flight schedule and quickly solve the problem by opening more temporary flights [6]." It can be seen that the Foreign Ministry has done its best to provide consular protection and provided relevant services and assistance to the affected Chinese citizens. Some of the accusations mentioned above are not consistent with the facts.

4. Reason Analysis

1. In the face of this dilemma, it is obvious that consular protection is not adequately prepared. It is necessary for the Foreign Ministry to readjust or develop consular protection plans according to the current situation.

Taking the stay of students in Ethiopian as an example, the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia does not have its own official micro blog account, and it is difficult to give a quick reply when international students ask for help on micro blog. In the public wechat account of the "Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia", it can be found that at 1:56 on March 31, 2020, the official issued an "urgent reminder to Chinese citizens who intend to return to China to carefully check the flight situation and carefully choose the Ethiopian transit" push, which gave the regulations of the State Civil Aviation Administration and the notice of flight cancellation [3]. This notice was issued only after the incident occurred, so it can be inferred that the embassy did not make an explanation to the public in advance before the incident occurred, which increased the possibility of problems.

2. International students expect too much from consular protection.

After the flight was canceled on the 29th, the embassy arranged for the students to board the plane and return home on the 30th, and the work efficiency was very rapid. And just because the embassy failed to solve the problem within their expected time, it caused a lot of dissatisfaction from the students.

During the pandemic, it is very difficult to bring back overseas citizens. First, there needs to be aircraft that meet the requirements and crew members that need to be isolated. Secondly, after

returning home, they need to be isolated, and it takes time to contact and apply for the hotel. Moreover, China has a large number of overseas citizens, and it is not possible to quickly dispatch a charter flight to bring them back for more than 200 people [7]. International students do not fully understand the epidemic situation, nor do they understand local or domestic policies, only defend their own interests from their own personal perspective.

It can be seen that in consular protection cases, citizens' expectations are often higher than the government's ability to work, so it is easy to appear contradictions.

3. After the hot search appeared, the official did not carry out correct public opinion guidance, but let public opinion ferment, resulting in a certain negative social impact, until the late time of March 30 to other media voice, March 31 at the press conference to clarify the facts. On April 1st, the official account of the Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia released the push of "The Embassy in Ethiopia assists Chinese students staying in Ethiopia to return home safely".

"The Chinese Embassy in Ethiopia launched an emergency response plan in a timely manner, and for three days in a row, some people were dispatched to the airport to coordinate the resettlement of passengers and distribute masks and other epidemic prevention supplies to passengers in need," the post said. "We will make every effort to reassure passengers and their relatives through 24-hour consular calls, inform them of the situation in a timely manner, and do our best to the top management of Air Ethiopia." It can be seen that the embassy fully coordinated the incident and quickly and perfectly solved the problem. However, the post received only 2,000 views, far less than the 160 million views on the topic on micro blog, so it hardly received any positive response.

4. Since the 21st century, the rapid development of new media has exerted a huge impact on foreign affairs. In particular, consular protection, which takes contact with the masses as its main method, is more directly and obviously influenced by new media. The way of media communication makes information no longer limited to certain fixed places, which also make events ferment quickly, and information interaction becomes simpler and faster, resulting in huge social impact.

In recent years, China has paid more and more attention to consular protection, the government has gradually increased the publicity of consular protection, and the public has gradually strengthened the concept and awareness of law-abiding. At the same time, it has become the consensus of overseas citizens that they can turn to the embassy when they encounter difficulties abroad. However, even with the relevant awareness, many citizens do not fully understand consular protection, or even misunderstand the scope and specific content of consular protection work, and do not understand when they can seek help. Citizens sometimes have unrealistic expectations of embassies and consulates when they encounter problems, and anger at embassies and consulates and consular officials often occurs after their own demands are not met.

In the "Guide to Consular Protection and Assistance in China", the basic contents of consular protection are clearly listed, but the scope of dissemination is not widely. The book has not been published in the physical book, can not be found in the physical bookstore and online mall; the electronic version of the content received fewer than 300 views on the official website of the government office; the page views of micro blog on this topic are 0, and the comments of media posts on the popularity of related topics are in the single digits or even 0. Suffice to say that citizens generally know little about this content.

In fact, consular protection itself has great limitations, because consular protection is subject to many different factors. Consular protection work is subject to many legal constraints, such as international law, bilateral agreements, bilateral laws, etc. Moreover, the embassies and consulates of one country do not have the political basis to take coercive measures in the territory of other countries. In particular, embassies and consulates often have no control over whether things can be

resolved satisfactorily, and the outcome of the incident will not be changed by the will of the individual concerned.

At the same time, the content released by citizens to reflect their demands through new media will not be subject to strict censorship and supervision, and it is easy for people to exaggerate their personal sufferings online and spread some one-sided or even untrue information, resulting in widespread negative public opinion and negative opinions. Some people will even make overly emotional remarks, deliberately inciting Internet users to follow suit, trying to achieve certain goals, which will bring negative public opinion impact on diplomatic work, and sometimes even interfere with the normal work of embassies and consulates to a certain extent. Especially when the case is complex and sensitive, it may not only trigger a big debate among netizens at home and abroad, but also cause great adverse effects on the national feelings and national relations of the two sides, and even cause a chain impact on the international side.

5. The Way to Do Better

It is precisely because of the existing problems and deficiencies in consular protection in China that there is a contradiction between the actual consular protection that the government can provide and citizens' needs or expectations for consular protection. The Chinese government should start from the construction of consular protection capacity and legal construction, and accelerate the construction of preventive consular protection in order to solve this problem. On the one hand, they should strengthen public awareness. On the other hand, they should also continuously improve their work efficiency. Of course, citizens themselves should also raise their awareness and strengthen their understanding of consular protection. However, due to the large number of citizens and the complex level of education, it is difficult to analyze the ways to solve problems from the perspective of citizens. Therefore, this paper focuses on analyzing the ways to solve conflicts from the perspective of the government.

1. Strengthen consular protection capacities.

The basic reason for the problem of consular protection in general is that the consular protection capacity is not enough to meet the current situation of social development [8]. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to continuously strengthen the consular protection team and strengthen the staffing of consular protection. Under the condition of sufficient human resources, only by ensuring the source of funds can the government provide sufficient financial guarantee for the consular protection work. At the same time, the pressure on the economic aspects of consular protection can also be alleviated by clarifying the principles of assistance and sharing the costs of consular protection operations.

2. Broaden the sources of funding. Economic security is the prerequisite for the smooth development of consular work. At present, China's Ministry of Finance has set up a "special fund for consular protection" in the central government, but only the establishment of special funds is not enough, according to the development of the current international situation, to increase the allocation of funds year by year, scientific distribution, rational use of funds to ensure the smooth completion of the consular protection work [9].

3. Promote the rule of law.

The rule of law is also an important aspect of consular protection. China needs to speed up the progress of consular protection legislation. Only by establishing specific legal provisions can the country provide the most basic legal basis and evidence support for consular protection work. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen judicial contacts with other countries, cooperate with consular agencies of other countries, and understand international conventions so as to make full use of their favorable provisions to safeguard China's legitimate and lawful rights and interests overseas [10].

4. Strengthen preventive consular protection

Establish the basic concept of prevention. The most efficient way of consular protection is to prevent in advance, strengthen the concept of treating at the source, and insist on making advance deployment [11]. Strengthen the concept of prevention first, fundamentally reverse the phenomenon of post-event treatment, and fundamentally reduce the probability of overseas security incidents as much as possible, while reducing the workload of consular protection.

Increasing publicity on consular protection. In terms of publicity, the first thing is to innovate the education model for the public, expand the channels of consular protection publicity, and ensure that the information dissemination can be fully covered. Secondly, the carrier of publicity should be more rich and diversified. In addition to traditional media such as TV, newspapers and magazines, new media such as QQ, wechat and micro blog can be used to disseminate information more quickly. Moreover, the forms of publicity should be more diversified and vivid. For example, articles, documentaries, lectures and other means can be used to enhance the interest of publicity and education, so as to achieve the effect of moistening the public. Some temporary publicity in daily life is also necessary, for example, the basic materials of consular protection assistance can be issued through practical channels such as airlines and exit customs, which can generally include the telephone number of local embassies and consulates for help, and provide information about personal injury, property loss, and documents processing. So as to carry out effective safety education for outbound citizens.

At the same time, strengthen education for citizens and enterprises to abide by laws and regulations. The implication is to enhance the civil consciousness and legal quality of citizens and enterprises. Companies and citizens need to be law-abiding when they act overseas, so as to reduce the probability of security incidents at the source [12]. Therefore, the government needs to popularize civilized and law-abiding safety common sense to the masses, and pay attention to the ideological work of overseas citizens and enterprises abroad.

5. Strengthen the capacity of the media to respond and guide public opinion.

Consular protection is not only a task of the government, but most importantly is directly related to the vital interests of overseas Chinese people. According to the degree of completion of the consular protection work, it will also affect the public's evaluation of the diplomatic work to a large extent. Therefore, this requires consular staff to consciously improve their sensitivity in their work, master certain public relations capabilities and handling skills, and improve the level of dealing with the media.

6. Conclusions

With the continuous development of China's Belt and Road, the number of Chinese citizens going abroad has increased significantly, and Chinese enterprises have also continued to go abroad. Of course, the probability of overseas rights and interests of Chinese people being infringed has also risen. In recent years, the practice of consular protection in China has also been greatly developed, and great and rapid progress has been made in various fields. However, compared with western developed countries, China's consular protection work started relatively late, and there are still some obvious problems, such as insufficient capacity and investment, and imperfect laws and regulations. At the same time, the rapid development of new media has also brought impacts and challenges to the consular protection work. In order to further improve China's consular protection work, the government must address the deficiencies in several aspects, focusing on strengthening the construction of consular protection capacity, accelerating the legalization of consular protection work, raising the awareness of preventive work, and focusing on cultivating the media and public relations capabilities of consular staff. In order to make China's consular protection work adapt to

the development and needs of the current era, keep up with the international pace, embark on the road of standardization and legalization, and truly serve the people.

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