

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 8, 2018

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20220

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

The Honorable Dan Coats
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
1500 Tysons McLean Drive
McLean, VA 22102

The Honorable Mark Green
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Secretaries Pompeo, Mnuchin, Mattis, Administrator Green, and Directors Coats and Wray:

We write to you to express our deep concern about growing Chinese influence operations around the world, and the implications for U.S. institutions, alliances, and the international structures that support American prosperity. In the United States, these activities threaten the independence of our civil discourse and our institutions. Overseas, they put American influence with our allies and partners at risk. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) recently published a report calling China's manipulation of information and foreign institutions a campaign of "sharp power"; one that aims to strengthen the appeal of authoritarianism, while eroding the ability of democracies to fight back.ⁱ

While nations around the globe seek to influence public opinion and policy debates beyond their borders, the nature of Chinese efforts goes well beyond those legitimate activities. Indeed, we believe the nature and scope of China's influence operations suggest it is time the United States look at them holistically, and respond with a similarly unified strategy.

Public assessments from our intelligence communityⁱⁱ, independent researchersⁱⁱⁱ and representatives of allied governments^{iv} illustrate the tools China systematically employs in its influence activities. Organizations and individuals linked to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) use financial ties to political elites, propaganda filtered through local media outlets and academic institutions, highly managed cultural events, and even coercion of nationals of Chinese ancestry^v to manipulate democratic political environments to serve China's interests. The CCP's long-term objectives with these operations are to undermine liberal democracies, erode the strength of US

alliances, weaken the ability of democracies to work against China, supplant U.S. leadership in the world and shape the future of the international order.^{vi}

In the United States, China's influence operations have been subtle but are becoming increasingly apparent. In American news outlets, Beijing has used financial ties to suppress negative information about the CCP. In the past four years, multiple media outlets with direct or indirect financial ties to China allegedly decided not to publish stories on wealth and corruption in the CCP.^{vii} In one case, an editor resigned due to mounting self-censorship in the outlet's China coverage.^{viii} Beijing has also sought to use relationships with American academic institutions and student groups to shape public discourse.^{ix} In some cases, the vehicle for such influence has been through the leadership of Chinese educational and cultural centers on campuses, known as Confucius Institutes. While many Confucius Institutes offer services like language instruction, there is evidence some Institute leaders have sought to shape campus discussions of China, especially around Taiwan and Tibet. The intensity of the attempts at control was enough to cause multiple universities to close their Institutes.^x

Similar patterns have emerged elsewhere. In Peru and Argentina, China has worked closely with local media organizations to manage information put forward on Chinese politics. CCP-linked organizations have taken over cultural events that locals once led, changing the historical discussion and marginalizing locals of Taiwanese decent.^{xi}

In other parts of the world Chinese influence activities have been more brazen and visible. In Australia, journalists with Chinese-language media outlets reportedly experienced intimidation and even physical assault for publishing material critical of the CCP.^{xii} China has also sought to manipulate politics among neighboring democracies. In the most high-profile case, a CCP-linked donor allegedly persuaded Australian Senator Sam Dastyari to adopt the CCP's position on the South China Sea by threatening to withdraw a \$400,000 donation.^{xiii} China appears to have used a similar playbook in the Czech Republic – using a Chinese energy firm as a means for gaining favorable policy changes through financial ties with those close to the President.^{xiv} In New Zealand, Beijing has mobilized pro-CCP citizen organizations to publicly oppose Australian policies that run counter to China's interests, while monitoring and at times silencing citizen groups that differ with the CCP.^{xv}

We are concerned that while some of these efforts may seem innocuous when taken independently, collectively they represent an attempt to increase the appeal of autocracy and strengthen Chinese leverage over U.S. allies. We want to make clear that we believe our government should welcome transparent diplomacy from all nations. We recognized that the United States and many nations around the world engage in public relations and strategic communications efforts designed to improve the nation's public image, shape international policy debates, and promote economic opportunities. These efforts are fundamentally different from those that seek to suppress information, and undermine democratic institutions and internationally accepted human rights.

We firmly believe the United States must continue to support the free and transparent flow of information and the independence of democratic institutions from undue influence, particularly

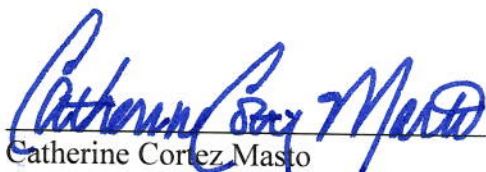
when other governments are seeking to undermine them. Indeed, without developing a clear strategy to counter these efforts, the independence of democratic societies may be at risk. That risk extends beyond the borders of our allies – for one of democracy’s greatest defenses against autocracy is the support of other likeminded nations.

With that in mind, we urge the Administration to adopt a comprehensive strategy to address these activities, in the United States and abroad. We respectfully request your response to the following questions:


1. What is the Administration’s view on the present threat posed by CCP influence operations, and what are its projections for the evolution and expansion of these operations?
2. Does the Administration have an interagency coordinated strategy to counter CCP influence operations? If so, what are the goals of this strategy and how it is it being executed?
3. Do your agencies require additional authorities or funding to respond to CCP influence operations?
4. How does the Administration assess the effectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy in countering CCP efforts to manipulate information in allied and partner democracies around the globe?
5. How is the Administration supporting U.S. companies and academic institutions to help them maintain their independence from CCP influence operations?
6. How is the Administration working with our allies and partners abroad to identify and expose CCP influence operations, especially attempts to use financial incentives to corrupt democratic processes and international institutions?

We look forward to the Administration’s prompt and thorough response to these questions. We believe that there are significant opportunities – and indeed a necessity -- for Executive and Congressional collaboration and partnership to address these challenges, and look forward to working alongside the administration to develop and execute appropriate U.S. policy in response to the CCP actions laid out in this letter.

Sincerely,



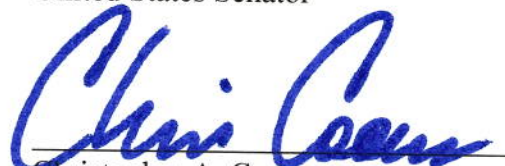
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



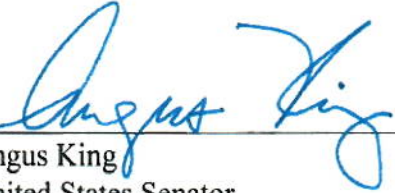
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Angus King
United States Senator



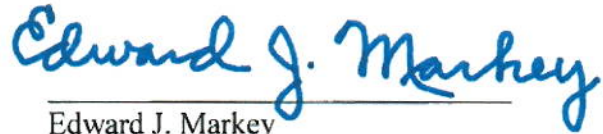
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



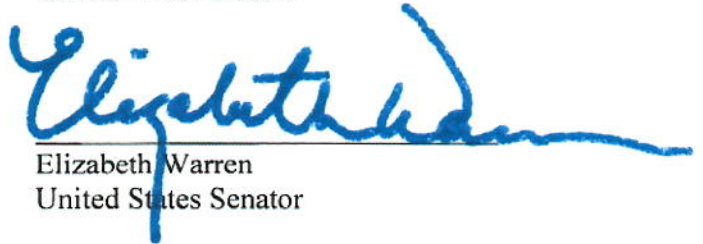
Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator