

# 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.<sup>i</sup>

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 community<sup>ii</sup>, independent researchers<sup>iii</sup> and representatives of allied governments<sup>iv</sup> 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<sup>v</sup> 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.<sup>vi</sup>

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.<sup>vii</sup> In one case, an editor resigned due to mounting self-censorship in the outlet's China coverage.<sup>viii</sup> Beijing has also sought to use relationships with American academic institutions and student groups to shape public discourse.<sup>ix</sup> 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.<sup>x</sup>

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.<sup>xi</sup>

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.<sup>xii</sup> 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.<sup>xiii</sup> 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.<sup>xiv</sup> 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.<sup>xv</sup>

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

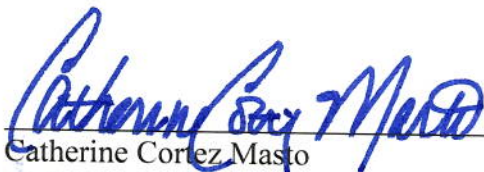
when other governments are seeking to undermine them. Indeed, without developing a clear strategy to counter these efforts, the independence of democratic societies may be at risk. That risk extends beyond the borders of our allies – for one of democracy’s greatest defenses against autocracy is the support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



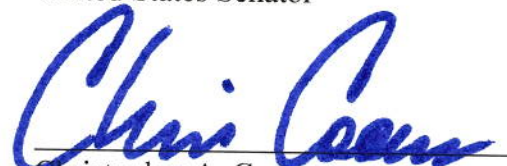
Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



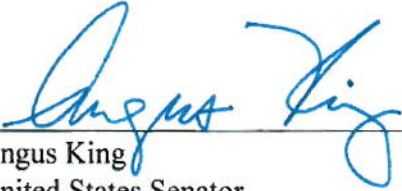
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Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



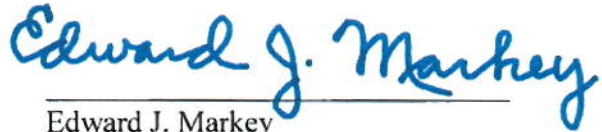
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Cory Gardner  
United States Senator



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Angus King  
United States Senator



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



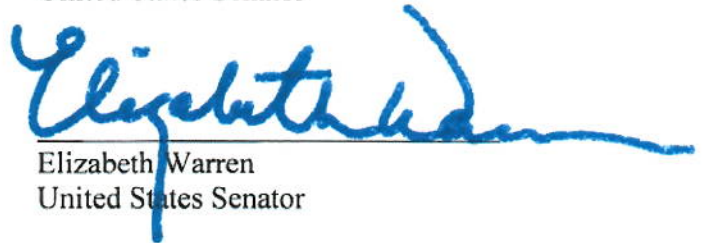
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Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



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Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

- <sup>i</sup> Juan Pablo Cardenal, Jacek Kucharczyk, Grigorij Meseznikov and Gabriela Pleshchova, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, December 2017. <https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/>
- <sup>ii</sup> Testimony of Chris Wary, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, *Worldwide Threats*, Hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 13, 2018.
- <sup>iii</sup> Select examples include: Harry Krejsa, *Under Pressure: The Growing Reach of Chinese Influence Campaigns in Democratic Societies*, Center for New American Security, April 27, 2018. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/under-pressure>; Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s political influence activities under Xi Jinping”, Paper presented at conference on “The erosion of democracy under China’s global influence,” supported by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and hosted in Arlington, VA, September 16-17, 2017. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>; Laura Rosenberger and John Garnaut, “The Interference Operations from Putin’s Kremlin and Xi’s Communist Party: Forging a Joint Response,” *Open Forum*, May 8, 2018. <http://www.theasanforum.org/the-interference-operations-from-putins-kremlin-and-xis-communist-party-forging-a-joint-response/>
- <sup>iv</sup> John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 9, 2018.
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- <sup>vi</sup> Laura Rosenberger and John Garnaut, “The Interference Operations from Putin’s Kremlin and Xi’s Communist Party: Forging a Joint Response,” *Open Forum*, May 8, 2018. <http://www.theasanforum.org/the-interference-operations-from-putins-kremlin-and-xis-communist-party-forging-a-joint-response/>; Juan Pablo Cardenal, Jacek Kucharczyk, Grigorij Meseznikov and Gabriela Pleshchova, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, December 2017. <https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/>
- <sup>vii</sup> *On alleged censorship at Bloomberg*: Edward Wong and Christine Haughney, “Bloomberg Suspends Reporter Whose Article on China Was Not Published,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/18/world/asia/reporter-on-unpublished-bloomberg-article-is-suspended.html>; *On alleged censorship and firings at Forbes.com*: Isaac Stone Fish, “Chinese ownership is raising questions about the editorial independence of a major U.S. magazine”, *Washington Post*, December 14, 2017. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/12/14/chinese-ownership-is-raising-questions-about-the-editorial-independence-of-a-major-u-s-magazine/?utm\\_term=.1b29087d8e86](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/12/14/chinese-ownership-is-raising-questions-about-the-editorial-independence-of-a-major-u-s-magazine/?utm_term=.1b29087d8e86); Tom Grundy, “Deleted Forbes article criticising Asia Society tycoon resurfaces online amid accusations of censorship,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 20, 2017. <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2017/07/20/deleted-forbes-article-criticising-asia-society-tycoon-resurfaces-elsewhere-amid-accusations-of-censorship/>
- <sup>viii</sup> James Fallows, “Another Bloomberg Editor Explains Why He Has Resigned, Over Its China Coverage,” *The Atlantic*, March 25, 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/03/another-bloomberg-editor-explains-why-he-has-resigned-over-its-china-coverage/359565/>
- <sup>ix</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm Reaches Into American Campuses,” *Foreign Policy*, March 7, 2018. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/07/chinas-long-arm-reaches-into-american-campuses-chinese-students-scholars-association-university-communist-party/>; Rachel Patterson, “Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Education,” National Association of Scholars, April 2017. [https://www.nas.org/images/documents/confucius\\_institutes/NAS\\_confuciusInstitutes.pdf](https://www.nas.org/images/documents/confucius_institutes/NAS_confuciusInstitutes.pdf); via Krejsa, *Under Pressure*.
- <sup>x</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil,” *Foreign Policy*, May 9, 2018. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/09/how-china-managed-to-play-censor-at-a-conference-on-u-s-soil/>
- <sup>xi</sup> Juan Pablo Cardenal, Jacek Kucharczyk, Grigorij Meseznikov and Gabriela Pleshchova, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*.
- <sup>xii</sup> John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia.”
- <sup>xiii</sup> “Power and Influence,” *Four Corners*, June 5, 2017. <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/power-and-influence-promo/8579844#transcript>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Martin Hala, “China’s gift to Europe is a new version of crony capitalism,” *The Guardian*, April 18, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/18/chinese-europe-czech-republic-crony-capitalism>; via Laura Rosenberger and John Garnaut, “The Interference Operations from Putin’s Kremlin and Xi’s Communist Party”.

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<sup>xv</sup> Anne Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China’s political influence activities under Xi Jinping,” online research publication. Christchurch, New Zealand: Department of Political Science and International Relations University of Canterbury, September 17, 2017. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/magicweaponsanne-mariebradyseptember162017.pdf>; Joshua Kurlantzick, “Australia, New Zealand Face China’s Influence,” Expert Brief, *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified December 13, 2017. <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/australia-new-zealand-face-chinas-influence>