

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

The Threat of Transnational Repression from China and the U.S. Response

Wednesday, June 15, 2022 – 10:00am

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Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today’s hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on “The Threat of Transnational Repression from China and the U.S. Response” will come to order.
- In recent years, this Commission has devoted increased attention to the Chinese Communist Party and government’s human rights violations in the United States and globally. We’ve expanded our reporting, brought in additional expertise, and held a range of hearings on the toolkit employed for these abuses. That toolkit includes economic coercion, technology-enhanced authoritarianism, and other ways to stifle criticism, avoid accountability, and undermine international human rights norms.
- In this hearing, we will examine a part of that tool set that targets individuals and communities at a very personal level: transnational repression. In addition to the egregious human rights abuses they commit within Chinese borders, Chinese authorities increasingly reach in to other countries to silence dissidents, conduct surveillance, and force the repatriation of critics. This long arm of authoritarianism across borders is not just a violation of human rights, it is a violation of countries’ national sovereignty.
- These tactics, targeting Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners, human rights advocates, journalists, and others, add up to what Freedom House calls “the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive” campaign of transnational repression in the world. By Freedom House’s conservative count, between 2014 and 2021 there were 214 cases of “direct, physical attack” originating from China across dozens of countries, including right here in the United States of America.
- International manhunts like Operation Fox Hunt and Operation Sky Net go well beyond supposed corruption suspects to include critics and others deemed sensitive. This leaves many Uyghurs and others in a precarious position, especially as other governments at times cooperate with the Chinese government against the rights of migrants.
- We have also seen the Chinese government exploit international organizations toward these repressive ends. The abuse of INTERPOL mechanisms such as “Red Notices” can trigger detentions and even rendition of the targets of transnational repression. At the United

Nations, authoritarian governments seek to erode norms of universal human rights, and Chinese pressure can deny representatives of civil society or diaspora communities the opportunity to access UN forums.

- Even when Chinese authorities don't reach their targets physically, they surveil and coerce them in other ways, such as by deploying spyware, threatening them in video calls, or harassing their family members who still live in China.
- In response to these disturbing trends, the Biden Administration has sought to elevate the issue of transnational repression both within the United States Government and in interactions with countries around the globe, whether they be likeminded countries seeking to address this menace or perpetrators of transnational repression or countries on whose soil this behavior occurs.
- In today's hearing, we will hear from two administration officials at the forefront of those efforts. We wanted to hear from multiple parts of the U.S. Government because addressing transnational repression will truly require a whole-of-government approach. To raise awareness globally and prevent these tactics from becoming pervasive in the international system, we need diplomacy. To protect those targeted, we need humanitarian and homeland responses. To pursue accountability for those responsible, we need law enforcement. The Departments of State, Homeland Security, Justice, Treasury, Commerce, and others all have a role to play. This hearing will allow us to hear from two of those agencies on the steps the Administration is taking to counter transnational repression from China, how they coordinate across the interagency and with other governments and international organizations, and where we have opportunity to do more.
- Certain aspects of the U.S. response will be most appropriate for members of this Commission to explore in a closed session. That is especially true for certain law enforcement matters, and we are working with the Department of Justice to arrange such an opportunity in the coming weeks.
- For today's hearing, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on what their departments are doing, in coordination with partners in government, civil society, the private sector, and international community, to address transnational repression from China. The scope and complexity of this threat requires not only a whole-of-government approach but vigilance, coordination, and decisive action across the Administration and Congress. I hope today's hearing helps us take a step in developing urgency around this issue and charting a path forward for addressing it.