

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

Countering China's Global Transnational Repression Campaign

Tuesday, September 12, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.

1100 Longworth House Office Building & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Cochair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Thank you very much, Chairman Smith. Transnational repression is central to the Chinese Communist Party's strategy of silencing critics of Chinese policy around the world. It affects so many of the Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans, human rights advocates, journalists, and others this Commission works with on a daily basis. This hearing gives us a chance to give a platform to some of the victims and experts from across the globe who have been most engaged in trying to identify ways we can address this vexing challenge.
- We know from past testimony that it isn't easy, as the Chinese Communist Party's sophisticated tactics seem to know no bounds and bring the power of a ruthless state against individual dissidents, members of the Chinese diaspora, and, insidiously, their family members in China. That's why it's so critical that we redouble the efforts to wrap our minds around the dimensions of this threat, to raise awareness globally, to identify ways to build common cause with those who have been targeted – religious groups, activists, journalists, politicians – as well as governments sick and tired of the brazen violation of sovereignty that transnational repression represents.
- Last year I chaired another hearing on this topic to hear about what the Biden Administration is doing about it, and I am proud that one of the officials at the forefront of that work, Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, is now one of our commissioners. The State Department is dedicated and is continuing to apply significant time and attention to develop a more comprehensive strategy to counter, deter, and mitigate these threats. We have also seen the Department of Justice make important strides in pursuing criminal charges against groups and individuals accused of engaging in transnational repression.
- But despite these efforts, this Commission's reporting shows how far we have to go. We continue to track a disturbing number of cases of transnational repression both here in the United States and abroad, with the knowledge that countless others are taking place and likely not being reported on. I imagine that for every case we hear there's another ten we don't know about. We have seen egregious harassment campaigns, even against legislators in the world including the Honorable Michael Chong who is here, a member of the Canadian House of Commons. We have seen relentless targeting of young activists who have spoken out bravely against the increasingly repressive conditions in Hong Kong. And we have seen the unrelenting pressure that continues to be directed at Uyghurs around the world.

- We know this is, as Freedom House calls it, “the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive” campaign of transnational repression in the world. It relies on surveillance technology, spyware, threats to individuals through phone calls or face-to-face intimidation, and even harassment of family members and friends still in China. As Safeguard Defenders revealed in an eye-opening report earlier this year, the PRC is also responsible for establishing at least 102 “overseas service stations” in at least 53 countries, breaching national sovereignty and coercing Chinese diaspora members to return to the PRC for criminal investigations.
- All of this requires that the United States and as many other governments as possible – and we do need international cooperation to make this effective - make it a priority to address this, difficult as it will be. That’s why earlier this year I introduced the Transnational Repression Policy Act, joined on a bipartisan basis by my colleagues Senator Rubio, Senator Cardin, and Senator Hagerty in the Senate, to hold foreign governments and individuals accountable when they stalk, intimidate, or assault people across borders. I appreciate Chairman Smith’s work to lead the House companion to this legislation. If enacted, the Transnational Repression Policy Act would mandate additional U.S. government reporting on the issue, require training for U.S. diplomatic and law enforcement personnel, bolster intelligence community efforts to track and share information on these incidents, and develop a more effective tip line for victims and witnesses. I’m working to get this bill passed, I think it’s essential that we do, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today who are bringing their experience, their story to bear on this very important issue.