

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 29, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to request more information from the U.S. Department of State (Department) on efforts to end the detainment of U.S. diplomats in COVID-19 quarantine camps in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and reestablish reciprocity in diplomatic relations more broadly. We ask that you preserve all documentation related to this request.¹

U.S. Embassy officials in Beijing recently confirmed that 16 U.S. diplomats and their family members—throughout the pandemic—have been involuntarily held in quarantine camps and subjected to strict confinement measures with no definitive release date.² Committee Republicans are concerned that U.S. diplomats could be or have been pressured to surrender intelligence while detained in PRC quarantine camps. We must ensure the protection of all Americans abroad—especially those who have access to classified information—and put an end to the undignified detainment of U.S. diplomats.

The confinement of U.S. diplomats in the PRC raises grave national security concerns. The PRC poses a geopolitical threat to the United States and should not be coercing U.S. diplomats into and surveilling them under draconian quarantine policies. According to *The*

¹ Officials within the Department have a legal responsibility to take appropriate measures to collect, retain, and preserve all documents, communications, and other records in accordance with federal law, including the Federal Records Act and related regulations, that are related to this inquiry. This includes electronic messages involving official business that are sent using both official and personal accounts or devices, including records created using text messages, phone-based message applications, or encryption software. Specifically, this preservation request should be construed as an instruction to preserve all documents, communications, and other information, including electronic information and metadata, that is or may be potentially responsive to a future congressional inquiry, request, investigation, or subpoena. For purposes of this request, “preserve” means securing and maintaining the integrity of all relevant documents, communications, and other information, including electronic information and metadata, by taking reasonable steps to prevent the partial or full destruction, alteration, testing, deletion, shredding, incineration, wiping, relocation, migration, theft, mutation, or negligent or reckless handling that could render the information incomplete or inaccessible. This includes preserving all compilations of documents that have already been gathered in response to requests, even if copies of individual documents may still exist elsewhere in the agency.

² Josh Rogin, *China's 'zero covid' policy has been a nightmare for U.S. diplomats*, THE WASH. POST (July 21, 2022).

*Washington Post*³ as well as internal correspondence whistleblowers have provided to Congress,⁴ the PRC engaged in a sustained campaign to deprive U.S. diplomats of their liberties under the guise of COVID-19 containment. For example, the PRC reportedly has improperly tested U.S. diplomats for conditions and diseases other than COVID-19, isolated families with young children in a fever clinic for lengthy periods and attempted to separate quarantined children from their parents.⁵

Unfortunately, these extreme containment measures are part of the PRC's attempt to undermine United States national security and undermine basic reciprocity in diplomatic relations. According to a report the Department provided to Congress, "[t]hrough a sustained harassment and intimidation campaign, the PRC government discourages its citizens from participating in routine public diplomacy programs and U.S. government funded exchanges."⁶ The PRC also controls (and substantially restricts) U.S. diplomatic access to local officials and researchers through its Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) program.⁷ Further, as has been documented comprehensively in recent years, the PRC state has directed or supported the theft of trillions of dollars of U.S. companies' intellectual property and troves of invaluable intelligence to narrow the technological capacity gap between itself and the U.S.⁸ Sometimes this "cool war"⁹ has deadly consequences. During the Obama Administration, for example, China reportedly executed over 30 American intelligence sources.¹⁰ Given that troubling reality, it is reasonable to wonder and worry about the threats posed by the PRC to U.S. diplomats while they are or were being involuntarily and unjustly quarantined, ostensibly under the guise of COVID-19 protocols.

To assist the Republicans on the Oversight Committee in conducting oversight of the Department's efforts to protect its personnel in China against counter-intelligence efforts, we request a staff-level briefing as soon as possible but no later than October 6, 2022.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to schedule the briefing or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad

³ Josh Rogin, *China's 'zero covid' policy has been a nightmare for U.S. diplomats*, THE WASH. POST (July 21, 2022).

⁴ Document on file with committee.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Report to Congress on People's Republic of China Access and Reciprocity House Report 117-84 and Senate Report 115-282 accompanying Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 (Div. K, P.L. 117-103) and the Joint Explanatory Statement (June 2022), on file with Committee.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Giuliana Viglione, *China is closing gap with United States on research spending*, NATURE (Jan. 15, 2020); Derek Scissors, *The Rising Risk of China's Intellectual-Property Theft*, NATIONAL REVIEW (July 15, 2021).

⁹ Noah Feldman, COOL WAR: THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL COMPETITION (2013).

¹⁰ Nicole Sganga, *Chinese hackers took trillions in intellectual property from about 30 multinational companies*, CBS NEWS (May 4, 2022); David Choi, *The CIA falsely believed it was 'invincible' in China—here's how its spies were reportedly discovered and killed in one of the biggest blows to the agency*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Aug. 16, 2018).

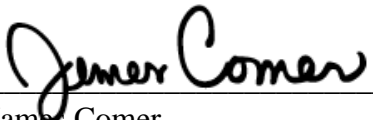
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authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Please also keep the Committee on Foreign Affairs (HFAC) courtesy copied on any correspondence. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Michael McCaul
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs

cc: The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Gregory Meeks, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs