

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 2, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation and the Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs are investigating recent breaches of unclassified email systems at the Department of State (Department).¹ According to recent reports, as part of a “suspected cyber-espionage campaign to access data in sensitive computer networks” by China, the breaches reportedly occurred at over two dozen organizations, including some U.S. government agencies.² The Department discovered this alleged intrusion by China on June 16, 2023, yet, you left later that evening for a trip to Beijing.³ We request a briefing on the discovery of, impact of, and response to the intrusion.

The breaches appear to have occurred due to a “flaw in a Microsoft cloud-computing environment.”⁴ In a post about the incident, Microsoft refers to the responsible entity as Storm-0558, a China-based threat actor that “primarily targets government agencies in Western Europe and focuses on espionage, data theft, and credential access.”⁵ The “apparent espionage campaign infiltrated victims’ email beginning on May 15 and operated in stealth for more than a month, until June 16, when Microsoft began its investigation.”⁶

We are also concerned that these attacks on federal agencies, which include at least the Department of Commerce and the Department of State, reflect a new level of skill and

¹ Dustin Volz and William Mauldin, *Chinese Hackers Breached Email of Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and State Department Officials*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (July 12, 2023).

² Dustin Volz, Robert McMillan, and Warren Strobel, *U.S. Government Emails Hacked in Suspected Chinese Espionage Campaign*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (July 12, 2023).

³ Julian Barnes and Edward Wong, *Chinese Hackers Targeted Commerce Secretary and Other U.S. Officials*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (July 12, 2013).

⁴ *Supra*, n. 1.

⁵ *Microsoft mitigates China-based threat actor Storm-0558 targeting of customer email*, MICROSOFT SECURITY RESPONSE CENTER BLOG (July 11, 2023).

⁶ *Supra*, n. 1.

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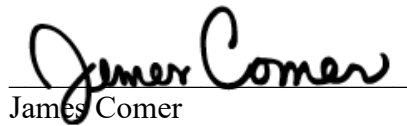
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sophistication from China’s hackers.⁷ China appears to be graduating from “smash and grab heists” that used to be “noisy” and “rudimentary” to a level described by security experts as “among the most technically sophisticated and stealthy ever discovered.”⁸ The incident even raises the possibility that Chinese hackers may be able to access high-level computer networks and remain undetected for months if not years.⁹ These concerns further underscore the warning provided in the National Cybersecurity Strategy issued earlier this year, which describes China as presenting “the broadest, most active, and most persistent threat to both government and private sector networks and is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so.”¹⁰

To help the Subcommittees understand the discovery of the intrusion, impact of the intrusion at the Department, how the Department responded, and what the Department is doing to ensure the continued security of its email and overall information systems, we request a staff briefing as soon as possible but no later than August 9, 2023.

To schedule the briefing or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability



Nancy Mace
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity,
Information Technology, and
Government Innovation



Glenn Grothman
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security,
the Border, and Foreign Affairs

⁷ Dustin Volz, Robert McMillan, and Josh Chin, *Microsoft Email Hack Shows Greater Sophistication, Skill of China’s Cyberspies*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (July 14, 2023).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ White house Office of the National Cyber Director, *National Cybersecurity Strategy*, 3 (March 2023).

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cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation

The Honorable Robert Garcia, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs