

# United States Senate

June 19, 2020

The Honorable Matthew Pottinger  
Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Pottinger,

We are writing to follow up on our June 27, 2019 letter to President Trump, in which we expressed concern that the Administration was delaying targeted sanctions against Chinese officials involved in human rights abuses against the Uyghurs and other minority groups for fear of disrupting trade talks.<sup>1</sup>

New reports suggest a more direct explanation for the ongoing delay: President Trump may take no issue with China's human rights violations of historic scale. As the world increasingly condemns Chinese government atrocities against the Uyghurs, it is particularly devastating to learn from news reports that President Trump may have communicated to President Xi Jinping his approval of the use of concentration camps for ethnic and religious minorities.<sup>2</sup>

As signatories to the aforementioned letter — submitted to President Trump the day before he reportedly told President Xi at the G20 Osaka summit that China should proceed with building the concentration camps — we seek to understand the Trump administration's position regarding atrocities being committed against the Uyghurs and other minority groups within China, as well as your recollection of any similar comments the president may have made, including to Chinese government officials during his trip to China in November 2017.

As you know, the Chinese government has reportedly “detained more than one million Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in extrajudicial internment camps designed to erase religious and ethnic identities,” according to the State Department's 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights. Human Rights Watch and other organizations have documented the Chinese government's use of surveillance technology, artificial intelligence, and mobile apps to closely monitor minorities. Uyghur activists including Rushan Abbas, who testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy on April 9, 2019 about her family's imprisonment in Xinjiang, have called

---

<sup>1</sup> *Senator Markey Leads Colleagues in Highlighting Trump Administration Delays in Sanctioning Chinese Officials for Abuses Against Uyghurs* (Jun. 27, 2019), <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-markey-leads-colleagues-in-highlighting-trump-administration-delays-in-sanctioning-chinese-officials-for-abuses-against-uyghurs>.

<sup>2</sup> John Bolton, *The Scandal of Trump's China Policy*, Wall Street Journal (Jun. 17, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/john-bolton-the-scandal-of-trumps-china-policy-11592419564>.

for the United States to address these systematic abuses. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called the Chinese government's treatment of Uyghurs the "stain of the century."

The president referred our previous letter to the State Department, whose response did not explain the absence of targeted financial sanctions. We turn to you in your capacity as the top Asia adviser at the White House to clarify the position of the President of the United States on core human rights issues and to help Congress oversee the Administration's conduct with respect to a great power competitor.

Accordingly, we respectfully request written responses to the following questions regarding President Trump's approach to countering Beijing's human rights violations by July 10, 2020:

1. Do you have knowledge of communications of any kind between President Trump and Chinese government officials that have downplayed or endorsed, explicitly or implicitly, China's construction of internment camps for Uyghurs or other ethnic or religious minorities?
2. Do you have knowledge of any similar communications between U.S. government officials other than the president and Chinese government officials?
3. Why has the president not yet applied targeted financial sanctions against Chinese government officials who bear direct responsibility for gross human rights violations in Xinjiang, including Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and former Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Deputy Party Secretary Zhu Hailun?
4. Has President Trump indicated to the Chinese government a willingness to refrain from commenting on or acting against human rights violations, including on a June 18, 2019 call during which he reportedly promised President Xi that he would not speak out on China's response to pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong while trade talks continued?<sup>3</sup>
5. Are you aware of any instance in which a United States government official has suggested to a Chinese government official, explicitly or implicitly, that the policy of the United States with respect to human rights violations in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, or elsewhere is contingent on China's willingness to engage in actions that benefit the president personally, including through investigations of U.S. persons carried out by Chinese authorities?

The American people, including the families of Uyghurs and other Central Asian and Muslim minorities, deserve to understand the full extent of our president's possible complicity in human suffering and the flouting of universal values. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jim Sciutto, Gloria Borger, and Jeremy Diamond, *Trump promised Xi US silence on Hong Kong democracy protests as trade talks stalled*, CNN (Oct. 4, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/04/politics/trump-xi-hong-kong-protests/index.html>.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

---

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator