

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 23, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to request any information the Department has gathered related to attempts by foreign actors to leverage the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to sow division, spread misinformation, or spur demonstrations among the American public and our allies. Moreover, we request that you provide Congress with information related to plans or actions the Department has made to counter disinformation campaigns waged by foreign actors during this time of heightened angst and uncertainty.

As you know, and have publicly commented on periodically, Russia continues to wage disinformation campaigns against the United States. Its allies and partners have interfered and continue to interfere in electoral processes to spread falsehoods and stoke mistrust in the U.S. and allied electorates. Correspondingly, in recent weeks experts have suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic's characteristics – most notably its global impact and novelty – have significantly altered the information landscape, making foreign efforts to spread disinformation in the United States more propitious.¹ Our country's closest allies are equally alert to this threat, as the European Union recently blamed Russia and China publicly for spreading misinformation about the virus throughout Europe.²

The unprecedented distress felt by the American people and people around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates a holistic government response built on science, evidence, and constant anamnesis. Therefore, we respectfully reiterate our interest in any information on initiatives by foreign actors that aim to use the COVID-19 pandemic to sow discord among the American public, as well as your converse efforts to counteract such initiatives. We also hope you will seek to inform the American people of such actions by making USG-verified instances of disinformation available to the public. Our constituents deserve to know fact from fiction.

¹ Garcia, C. (2020, April 17). Untangling the Disinformation Problem: Russia, China and the West. Retrieved June 14, 2020, from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/untangling-disinformation-problem-russia-china-and-west>

² Bodoni, S. (2020, June 10). China, Russia Are Spreading Virus Misinformation, EU Says. Retrieved June 15, 2020, from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-10/eu-points-finger-at-china-russia-for-covid-19-disinformation>

We thank you for your attention to this important matter and eagerly await your response.

CC:

Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security

John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence

Attorney General William Barr

Robert C. O'Brien, National Security Advisor

Matthew Pottinger, Deputy National Security Advisor

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations
Committee on Foreign Affairs



Ami Bera, M.D.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Asia, the
Pacific and Nonproliferation
Committee on Foreign Affairs



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Ted S. Yoho, DVM
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress