

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

February 1, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As you prepare for your first trip to the People's Republic of China (PRC) as Secretary of State, I urge you to use the occasion of your visit to make headway on key issues of concern. The PRC continues to hold American citizens and other political prisoners hostage, using them as pawns to achieve their foreign policy goals. U.S. citizens including Kai Li, Mark Swidan, and David Lin have been held for years by the PRC while others are unable to leave the country due to exit bans. While U.S. officials may have recently raised these cases, I urge you to lend your singular voice as Secretary of State to push for their immediate and unconditional release. As you have said before, the United States has no higher priority than the safety and security of Americans around the world. Your visit provides a rare opportunity to make progress regarding the unjust detention of American citizens in the PRC and those subject to exit bans. I hope that you will give this issue the highest priority, as a precondition of your travel.

In your meeting with Foreign Minister Qin Gang, I encourage you to build upon President Biden's meeting with President Xi in Bali last year and raise specific issues critical to our bilateral relationship. Specifically, I urge you to raise with your counterpart Beijing's increasing disruption of the status quo with regard to Taiwan; the ongoing atrocities that the PRC government is perpetuating in Xinjiang; the debt crisis in highly indebted poor countries (HIPC); the PRC's aggressive economic coercion; and the need to reinvigorate communication channels on key issues between Washington and Beijing in an era of heightened tensions amidst great power competition.

Taiwan is one of the most dangerous potential flashpoints in Asia and for U.S. security and it is critical that the PRC hears from you personally and unequivocally on the U.S. commitment to Taiwan. The People's Liberation Army's provocative military exercises around the island following Speaker Pelosi's trip in August, and the higher tempo of operations since that time, point to intensifying PRC military pressure in and around Taiwan. President Xi escalated his rhetoric on reunification at the recent Chinese Communist Party's 20th Party Congress, promising to never "renounce the use of force" to achieve it. At the same time, Beijing is also shifting its strategic posture toward the United States through its vast and unprecedented nuclear buildup. A conflict over Taiwan would have dire global economic implications. That is why I worked to pass the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act last year as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, which was signed into law. This legislation emphasizes the importance of

supplying Taiwan with the capabilities they need in order to deter a conflict. I encourage you to underscore to your counterpart the U.S. commitment to the people of Taiwan and our resolve to assist them in maintaining a credible self-defense capability and to counter Beijing's attempts to alter the status quo through coercion and intimidation.

In Xinjiang, the People's Republic of China has committed a despicable campaign of genocide against the Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities. I applauded the State Department's recognition of genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, and I have led efforts in Congress to promote accountability for PRC officials responsible for atrocities and to ensure that no goods made with forced labor enter our markets. However, the PRC's abuses in Xinjiang continue – and their effort to intimidate and mistreat Uyghurs living abroad have intensified. Just this past August, the United Nation's High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report acknowledging that the PRC is perpetrating violations in the region that “ may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity” – an unprecedented condemnation from an independent international body. Due to Beijing's effective campaign to pressure members on the UN Human Rights Council to remain silent on the report, we must increase our international efforts to hold Beijing accountable. I urge you to underscore to your counterparts that the PRC must immediately cease activities constituting genocide in Xinjiang, and reiterate that the United States will not stand by as millions of Uyghur Muslims continue to be unjustly imprisoned, subjected to a mass surveillance state, and forced into labor camps by Beijing's autocratic regime.

On economic issues, many countries in the developing world are on the brink of financial ruin and humanitarian catastrophe due to the ongoing impact of COVID 19 – all while the PRC uses its economic leverage to exploit them into taking steps that would be beneficial to Beijing. Look no further than Sri Lanka, where previous governments have failed to take the prudent economic steps necessary to avoid a default on its sovereign debt, and where Beijing is uncompromising on debt restructuring negotiations – thereby inhibiting Colombo from obtaining much needed relief. Indeed other countries like Suriname, Zambia, Ghana, Djibouti, and Pakistan, all of which owe significant amounts of debt to China, are at risk of defaulting or have done so already. Further, Beijing is using its economic leverage around the world to punish and coerce countries that criticize or oppose its policies, as most recently exemplified by their retaliation against Lithuania. These tactics have undermined the principles of free markets, fair competition, international norms, and have damaged our partners and the global economy. I urge to you stress the importance of these economic issues on your trip, to reiterate United States support for the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatment and our values of sovereign debt transparency, and to tell Beijing in no uncertain terms that we will work with allies and partners to push back against their predatory economic practices.

Further, I urge you to present to PRC officials a list of political and religious prisoners, including the specific cases of Li, Swidan, Lin, and others such as Ayshe Turkel, Jimmy Lai, Cardinal Zen, and the Hong Kong 47 – all of whom Beijing could release immediately to provide a concrete step toward improving our bilateral relationship.

Finally, as you seek to responsibly manage our ongoing competition with China, I urge you to establish effective communication channels between Washington and Beijing on a few distinct

issues of concern, including: climate, fentanyl, and crisis communications. On climate, reports suggest the PRC has completed construction of at least 16 new coal-fired plants since President Xi's announcement in the fall of 2021 that Beijing will cease building new ones, with more plants reportedly under construction. Moreover, despite this announcement, the PRC continues to be the biggest producer of coal domestically and the largest financier of coal-fired powered plants abroad. I urge you to highlight the inconsistency between what the PRC has said on building coal-fired plants and their actions. On fentanyl, the PRC can and should be taking steps to curb the supply of fentanyl and precursor chemicals making their way to the United States. Beijing's failure to act has fueled the epidemic of opioid overdoses that claimed the lives of more than 80,000 Americans in 2021, as well as contributed to criminal violence in Mexico. On crisis communication channels, I understand that they are notoriously difficult to establish with the PRC but they are also critically important to de-escalating and avoiding potential conflict. Neither side should allow miscommunication or misunderstanding – such as over an unsafe or unprofessional military intercept – to lead to military conflict.

The United States must be clear-eyed and sober about Beijing's intentions and we must calibrate our policy and strategy accordingly, but it would be remiss not to engage the PRC government on these pressing issues. I look forward to hearing the results of your trip to Beijing, and reiterate my commitment to work with you on ensuring that the United States is positioned to meet the challenge that China poses to our interests and those of the free world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Chairman