

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

June 16, 2020

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Wray:

The Subcommittee on National Security requests a classified briefing to address how foreign adversaries, including the Russian Federation, China, North Korea, and Iran, may have sought to exploit the recent demonstrations protesting racial inequality in the U.S. criminal justice system to sow division and undermine our democracy. Unfortunately, despite the requests of Committee staff, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has to date refused to provide such a briefing.

According to the Department of Justice Special Counsel Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, the Russian Federation interfered in “sweeping and systematic fashion” with the likely overarching goal of “undermining the integrity of elections and American confidence in democracy.” As early as 2014, Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) operatives used fictitious personas to design and operate social media accounts and group pages to foment division on U.S. political and social issues. As the report found:

IRA Facebook groups active during the 2016 campaign covered a range of political issues and included purported conservative groups (with names such as “Being Patriotic,” “Stop All Immigrants,” “Secured Borders,” and “Tea Party News”), purported Black social justice groups (“Black Matters,” “Blacktivist,” and “Don’t Shoot Us”), LGBTQ groups (“LGBT United”), and religious groups (“United Muslims of America”).¹

¹ Department of Justice, *Special Counsel Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (Mar. 2019) (online at www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf). See also Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Background to “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”*: *The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution* (Jan. 6, 2017) (online at www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf); Select Senate Committee on Intelligence, *Report in Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volume 1: Russian Efforts Against Election Infrastructure* (2019) (online at www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume1.pdf).

The past several months have exposed deep cultural divisions within American society. In a matter of months, coronavirus has killed more than 100,000 people, and tens of millions of Americans have lost their jobs. The past few weeks have also laid bare the racism that persists throughout American society with the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmad Aubrey. These dual crises have disproportionately affected African Americans and communities of color. However, instead of unifying the American people, President Trump has used incendiary rhetoric that exacerbates tensions between those protesting racial injustice and law enforcement officials.

I am deeply concerned that foreign adversaries may exploit this critical moment in American history to exacerbate social and cultural differences across the American political spectrum and ultimately threaten our national security.

Since the murder of George Floyd, multiple foreign actors reportedly have sought to exploit the ensuing protests around the country. For example, Chinese and Russian-backed media outlets and Twitter users have increasingly piggybacked onto social media hashtags to push divisive messages and criticize the United States' handling of the protests. As of June 1, 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry officials, Russian-backed news outlets, and others with ties to Russia and China have tweeted more than 1,200 times about U.S. protests using hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter and #Minneapolis.²

During a June 4, 2020, press conference, Attorney General Barr confirmed that:

I believe that we have evidence that some of the foreign hackers and groups that are associated with foreign governments are focusing in on this particular situation we have here and trying to exacerbate it in every way they can.³

As the United States responds to the coronavirus pandemic and the underlying faults of our criminal justice system, we must come together as a nation to affirm that our struggle to form a more perfect union is ours as Americans, and ours alone. Foreign adversaries cannot, and must not, be allowed to interfere, influence, or undermine the integrity of our democracy.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that you provide to Members of the Subcommittee on National Security a classified briefing by June 26, 2020, on foreign disinformation and influence activities related to the recent demonstrations protesting racial discrimination.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.

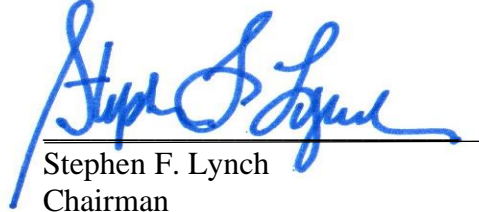
² *Russia and China Target U.S. Protests on Social Media*, Politico (Jun. 1, 2020) (online at www.politico.com/news/2020/06/01/russia-and-china-target-us-protests-on-social-media-294315).

³ *US Accuses Foreign, Online Actors of Inflaming Tensions*, Voice of America (Jun. 4, 2020) (online at www.voanews.com/usa/nation-turmoil-george-floyd-protests/us-accuses-foreign-online-actors-inflaming-tensions).

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Page 3

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen F. Lynch", is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security