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Before a Joint Shadow Hearing by the Ranking Members of the Select Committee on the
Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party and the
Congressional-Executive Commission on China

The Void in China Policy: Why Human Rights Must Be on Trump's Agenda with Xi at the White House"

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Ranking Member Khanna, Ranking Member McGovern, and Members of Congress:

I want to begin with a simple warning: while Washington has pulled back from human rights advocacy, repression in China has not paused. Last week, a Hong Kong court sentenced Chow Hang-tung to seven years and three months in prison for organizing vigils commemorating the Tiananmen Massacre. Eight members of the Zion Church in Beijing remain in custody following a nationwide crackdown last October. In July, activist Zhang Yi was arrested in Tibet after showing someone a photograph of the Dalai Lama. And Min Zin, a U.S. citizen and scholar of Burma, traveled to China at the invitation of a Chinese institution—only to be detained on bogus espionage charges.

Meanwhile, the U.S.-funded network that documented these abuses and helped the people targeted by them has been sharply reduced since the Trump administration took office 20 months ago. Freedom House, where I once worked, lost more than 80 percent of its programs. Congress preserved some funding for fiscal year 2026, but that did not undo the damage. There is now less monitoring of disappearances and harassment, less emergency support for human rights activists and lawyers, and less help for people fleeing persecution. Work tracking Beijing's transnational repression, censorship, propaganda, and overseas influence has also suffered.

I have seen the human cost firsthand. At Freedom House, my colleagues and I assisted a Chinese journalist who had fled to Thailand. We advised him, helped prepare his resettlement application, and guided him through the process step by step. He was deeply grateful. But we felt fortunate too: U.S. government funding allowed us to be paid to do work that could save a life. Then the funding ended abruptly. The program closed. His case was stranded. Today, he faces the possibility of being deported from Thailand to China.

The damage does not stop with individual programs. By pulling back from democracy and human rights work around the world, the Trump administration has also weakened the diplomatic pressure and international coordination that once helped push back against the CCP's abuses. That leaves Beijing with more room to promote a vision of human rights built around state control and government-to-government dialogue—one that sidelined civil society and weakens accountability. It also makes it easier for China to expand its political and media influence, avoid international scrutiny, and target critics far beyond its borders.

Washington's conduct at home also affects its credibility abroad. Sweeping immigration raids, pressure on universities and news organizations, investigations of prominent critics, and military deployments during domestic protests have prompted serious concerns about free expression, due process, and political retaliation. These controversies complicate U.S. efforts to challenge Beijing on those same principles.

Congress has several established tools at its disposal: oversight hearings into the termination of grants and their effects; appropriations for China-related democracy and human rights programs; and sustained diplomatic attention to political censorship, religious and ethnic persecution, and transnational repression.

Finally, let me be clear: my concern about the U.S. government's conduct comes from gratitude, not cynicism. This country has long supported the Chinese people's struggle for freedom. It has also given me the freedom to speak my mind—a freedom I never take for granted. American human rights policy has changed course before. The decisions made now will determine what role the United States plays in defending freedom and human dignity—and whether it can reverse the decline in its global standing and regain the credibility to lead.