

May 12, 2022

The Honorable Francis Suarez
Mayor
City of Miami
3500 Pan American Drive
Miami, Florida 33133

Dear Mayor Suarez:

The U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) plays a critical role in sharing best practices on how to tackle challenges facing local communities across the country. One of the most overlooked challenges comes in the form of espionage and influence operations conducted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

No level of government can escape scrutiny from Beijing's sophisticated approach. As federal- and state-level leaders become more aware of the threat, the CCP continues to target mayors and other local officials who may one day move to higher office.

This outreach is often subtle. For example, just last week, Miami Beach City posted on social media that its deputy city manager gave CGTN America a tour of the city's climate resiliency efforts, while CGTN featured multiple interviews with Miami Beach City's leadership. CGTN America is a subsidiary of China Global Television Network, the international division of China Central Television, which is owned and controlled by the Propaganda Department of the CCP.

What seemed like a harmless publicity tour was actually much more. It was very likely the beginning of a long-term effort by China to build a relationship with Miami Beach City's leadership responsible for important operations in one of the nation's fastest growing cities.

While it should have been obvious that CGTN was a Chinese government actor, other relationships are less clear. For example, the U.S. Heartland China Association is formally an independent non-government organization based in the United States, but it routinely partners with organizations affiliated with the CCP's United Front Work Department, which is tasked with gathering intelligence on and influence leaders outside of China. In addition, the People's Republic of China's 2017 National Intelligence Law makes clear that "any [Chinese] organization or citizen shall support, assist and cooperate with the state intelligence work." A 2014 law makes clear Chinese companies and citizens "may not refuse."

In other words, even “non-governmental entities” in China are duty bound to the CCP -- an authoritarian regime that openly states its goal is to surpass America economically, culturally, and militarily.

America truly faces an unprecedented threat from the CCP. It has methodically undermined our economic strength by stealing our critical technology, manufacturing capacity, and jobs. It destroyed our social cohesion by luring away those jobs, and as a result hollowing out once-vibrant cities and communities. It used a corporate lust for quarterly profits to infiltrate every segment of American society, from government and business to academia and entertainment. And it continues to flood our cities with fentanyl. In short, Beijing employs sinister tactics to achieve its overall strategy of displacing our country on the world stage.

I urge you to raise the issue of espionage and influence operations at USCM’s Annual Meeting next month. In many ways, you and your colleagues are on the front lines in our nation’s competition with the Chinese Communist Party.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator