



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

June 15, 2023

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

The Honorable Jake Sullivan
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Secretary Blinken and National Security Advisor Sullivan:

As Members of Congress concerned about the dire human rights situation in the People's Republic of China (PRC), we write to ask some questions about your puzzling and unfortunate decision to send U.S. officials to Beijing on the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Was this a date proposed by the PRC to which you acceded or was the date proposed by our government in order to get access to the PRC? This is particularly relevant because we know that you share the core value and fundamental belief that we are better than allowing America's prestige to be used by an adversary for obvious propaganda purposes and to distract from the infamy of what China's rulers did that day in 1989.

As the world knows, on June 4, 1989, the Chinese Communist Party brutally murdered thousands of peaceful protesters who were demanding democracy, freedom of speech, press freedoms, an end to corruption, and better economic conditions. Since then, June 4th has been observed around the free world as a day to remember the victims and their dream of a democratic China.

It is, therefore, inconceivable that Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and White House National Security Council's senior director for China and Taiwan affairs, Sarah Beran would land in Beijing on this date—allowing the CCP to suggest the U.S. really doesn't care about its brazen massacre of Chinese citizens or the three decades of the CCP's efforts to erase this date from the history books. It also sends the signal that the current U.S. administration does not stand with those in China bravely working for human rights and political reforms. It is particularly unfortunate that Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink was sent to Beijing on this visit as he serves as a Commissioner of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), a dual-branch entity created to monitor Chinese compliance with international human rights standards and maintain a database of victims of human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China.

Despite White House declarations that this was not a “misstep” – coupled with the cavalier and offensive dismissal of concerns “about the date on the calendar” by National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby – the result has clearly been a decisive propaganda victory for the CCP granted by the Biden Administration. Since the significance of this date is well-known, particularly in Beijing, we can only conclude that the schedule was set intentionally, and we want to know why.

Furthermore, this unfortunately timed visit reinforced the concern that when it comes to the PRC, the Biden Administration follows, not leads. Recent reporting by Reuters that the Administration has delayed sanctions over the ongoing genocide against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang in an effort to pave the way for further engagement ignores the critical importance human rights must have in our relations with the PRC.¹ This pattern contradicts the Administration’s claims to place human rights at the center of foreign policy efforts, instead furthering a pattern of letting the PRC off the hook.

In light of this, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions by June 20, 2023:

- 1) Who suggested June 4 as a meeting date?
 - a. Did the State Department attempt to find alternative dates?
 - b. Did the PRC set beginning a visit on June 4 as a precondition for any engagements or suggest that it would significantly improve the likelihood of scheduling meetings?
- 2) Which U.S. officials had final decision-making authority on beginning the visit on June 4?
- 3) What assurances, if any, were made to the PRC that no public events would be undertaken to commemorate the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre after officials arrived in Beijing on June 4?
- 4) What factors led to determining that the visit was so urgent that it could not be moved to the following week?
- 5) What human rights issues did the delegation raise, and at what level, particularly did the delegation raise specific cases of unjust detention of American citizens, such as Henry Cai, David Lin, or Mark Swidan or present a list of cases of political prisoners, such as Gao Zhisheng, Ding Jiaxi, Gulshan Abbas, Ekpar Asat, Jimmy Lai, or Wang Yi—among so many others? Did the delegation raise issues of atrocities and forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, or raise issues of the PRC’s erosion of Hong Kong’s rights and rule of law?
- 6) How did your agencies assess the impact of beginning the visit on June 4 on longstanding U.S. commitments to human rights in China?
- 7) Did officials raise the Tiananmen Square Massacre in their comments or discussions and if so, what tangible action was requested? Did officials express their concern for the inability of Chinese citizens to publicly discuss, commemorate or remember this tragic date?

¹ Michael Martina, *Why the US delayed China sanctions after shooting down a spy balloon*, Reuters, May 11, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/why-us-delayed-china-sanctions-after-shooting-down-spy-balloon-2023-05-11/>

- 8) What accountability will there be for this debacle – for example, will Assistant Secretary Kritenbrink be replaced as a CECC Commissioner?

Given the significance of the Tiananmen Square Massacre and the CCP's suppression of facts surrounding it, the propaganda value of using American diplomats to obfuscate its anniversary, and the failure to demand justice for those brutally murdered by the Chinese Communist Party, we would appreciate your timely attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darrell E. Issa'.

DARRELL E. ISSA
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Smith'.

CHRIS SMITH
Member of Congress