

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20032

The Honorable Avril Haines
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
1500 Tysons McLean Drive
McLean, VA 22102

Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Mayorkas, Director Haines, and Mr. Sullivan:

We write to underscore the importance of improving our nation's response to countering malign foreign influence campaigns, and to ensure the Executive Branch has the necessary congressional support to implement measures to protect our national security and the integrity of our democracy. U.S. intelligence officials and independent researchers have warned of ongoing malign influence campaigns from Russia, China, and Iran and other foreign adversaries seeking to undermine the U.S., our allies, and partners. As we continue to confront the coronavirus pandemic, it is crucial that we effectively counter attempts to compromise institutions and trust in our government.

Specifically, we want to highlight our support for three congressionally authorized initiatives: the establishment of the Foreign Malign Influence Response Center (the Center) at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the establishment of a social media threat and analysis center (in the form of an Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC)), and the creation of a Foreign Malign Influence Coordinator. We are committed to ensuring that you have the resources necessary to implement these measures, which will improve the federal government's response in countering foreign influence campaigns. We were encouraged to hear during DNI Haines's nomination hearing that countering foreign interference, including the establishment of the Center, is a priority, and that President Biden has directed several Russia-related intelligence reviews and assessments. We hope that under your leadership we will see swift action on these initiatives.

Currently, multiple federal agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Security Agency/U.S. Cyber Command, are operating distinct task forces charged with combatting foreign influence operations. While there is some cross-agency collaboration, concern remains that there is insufficient coordination across the entire government, which constrains our ability to effectively counter and deter malign influence campaigns from foreign adversaries. This concern led us to support the inclusion of a provision in the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act [Public Law 116-92] that directs the ODNI to establish the Center.

The mission of the Center is to serve as the primary organization for analyzing and integrating all intelligence on foreign influence operations from Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and any other designated foreign country and to support efforts by other federal departments and agencies working to combat malign foreign influence operations. In addition to addressing the threat foreign adversaries pose to our elections, the Center is charged with coordinating a comprehensive response to all malign foreign influence campaigns, including efforts to undermine our critical infrastructure, economy, and military.


While cooperation between social media companies and the federal government has improved since the interference that occurred during the 2016 presidential election, we remain largely dependent on social media companies to detect and take down inauthentic accounts engaged in malign influence activities. We cannot and should not rely solely on the social media companies to protect our national security against malign foreign influence operations, especially without proper transparency regarding the actions of these companies. The compelling need to gain a better understanding of how foreign adversaries conduct malign influence campaigns within and across social media platforms led us to support the inclusion of a social media threat analysis center (ISAC) in the FY20 and FY21 National Defense Authorization Acts [Public Laws 116-92 and 116-283]. The ISAC would facilitate cooperation among social media companies along with trusted independent organizations and researchers for transparently and thoroughly analyzing threats related to foreign malign influence operations. Analyses from the ISAC would be shared with both government officials and the public in order to provide a better understanding of these threats and increase national resilience to them.

Additionally, foreign malign influence operations purposely seek to exploit the seams between U.S. government agencies that are responsible for a portion of the response to this threat. Part of successfully transitioning from individual agency efforts to a broader whole-of-government approach will require empowering a senior official with appropriate authority to ensure that agencies are effectively coordinating to deter and counter this threat. This concern led to the inclusion of a Foreign Malign Influence Coordinator position on the National Security Council staff in the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act [Public Law 115-232].


Given the threat to our democracy that malign foreign influence campaigns continue to pose and the role the Center, the ISAC, and a Foreign Malign Influence Coordinator would play in countering and deterring such threats against our democracy, we urge the Biden administration to implement these initiatives. As the administration looks to implement these initiatives, we request that you keep us updated with developments. We look forward to working together to strengthen our national security and protect our democratic institutions, including our elections.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.


Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator