

Written Testimony of Anna Kwok

U.S. House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party
CCP Transnational Repression: The Party's Effort to Silence and Coerce Critics Overseas

December 13, 2023

Chairman Gallagher, Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on the CCP, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

As a Hong Konger experiencing transnational repression on American soil, I wish to visualize the concept of transnational repression and its ramifications through my personal experience:

I was born and raised in Hong Kong. Like many other Hong Kongers, my life changed completely in the year of 2019, when millions of Hong Kongers took to the streets to protest against the Hong Kong government. Not long after, people I worked with went to jail one by one. Eventually, I had to decide not returning home in exchange for my safety. Or so I thought.

Five months ago, in July 2023, I woke up to my colleagues knocking frantically on my door, announcing the news that I, along with seven other Hong Kongers overseas, had been issued a one-million-Hong-Kong-dollar bounty and an arrest warrant of “colluding with foreign forces.” Their evidence for my life-sentencing-crime consisted purely of my advocacy work on the Capitol Hill.

Since then, I have been walking around the United States with a bold target on my back. Naturally, I would have to watch my back as I walk on the streets and continue my advocacy work in the United States. Even though I was in the Land of the Free, I was not free; I was trapped in the constant mental pressure of being hunted. Of course, this was the CCP's goal: they wanted to cripple my advocacy initiatives against their regime.

Soon, my social media pages were filled with wanted posters as encouragements to catch me for the cash reward. These comments intensified in November, shortly after I announced a protest I was planning for the Biden-Xi bilateral talks during APEC. Hundreds of trolls with unidentifiable Twitter profiles flooded my page with horrifying threats and gender-based harassments. One comment says, “[c]an somebody drop her unconscious body at the Chinese consulate/ embassy? (laughing emoji).” The other says, “[b]e Careful. This could be your last protest. A million can do wonders.”



Following the cyber-harassment directed at me, people who initially planned to join our protest began to hesitate. Limitless “what-if” scenarios started sprouting in people’s minds: what if they got beaten? What if their family back home got harassed for their participation? What if they were kidnapped along with me by the overseas Chinese police? And what if the United States could not protect them? These are plausible scenarios that have either happened or are very close to happening.

The fears of these what-if scenarios took roots in people’s minds. Some decided to stop sharing relevant posts on social media to self-censor, some avoided being in the same photo or video with me at any given time, and some decided to drop out. Although the bounty and the online threats were directed at me, the impact, however, was experienced by the whole community. That is the second goal of transnational repression: to intimidate those who wishes to participate in the movement and thus, weakening the base of the movement.

Sadly, what happened during our APEC protests proved the fears right: when our coalition of Hong Kongers, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Chinese dissidents protested peacefully outside Xi’s event venues from November 14th to 17th, we were met with harassment, intimidation, stalking, and even violent assault from pro-Beijing protesters. For many protesters, they were baffled these blatant attempts took place under broad day light in the United States. According to Human Rights in China (HRIC), more than ten people were bloodied, and three were hospitalized with severe injuries. This is among dozens of recorded attempts of harassment, intimidation, stalking, and assault.

Throughout the four days of protests, we observed a pattern of careful coordination from the pro-Beijing protesters. On protest sites, there are often 5 types of people: the thugs who assault, the patriots who provoke, the friendly-looking community members who cover assault with flags, the students who smile at and speak to the cameras, and those I suspect to be Chinese national security agents who follow high-profile activists. These suspicious men were often with a Chinese military-style haircut, a strong build, an all-black attire, and curiously, an earpiece. A few of us from Hong Kong could tell right away these were no ordinary people, they looked like national security agents we would encounter in Hong Kong.

The clear division of labor with readily-available personnel begs the question: how can the Chinese government find such an extensive network in San Francisco? The answer is the decades of United Front work.

Before I further elaborate on the United Front, I must add the presence and involvement of the United Front work should not add to xenophobia in any form, but should add to the urgency of combating transnational repression here in America.

In the past decades, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party has been tasked with nurturing a strong United Front network here in the United States. The network consists of a wide range of CCP-friendly organizations – student groups, community organizations, professional networks. They are often directed by party members to host innocent networking and social events on an ordinary day. Some members of these organizations may even be unaware of the United Front nature of the groups. Through these harmless events, they accumulate and grow their membership and network for greater influence and more social capital. And on days like APEC, the networks are utilized with favors called in to welcome Xi the way the Party wanted. While conducting transnational repression is one of the goals of the United Front work, the United Front network essentially enabled transnational repression.

A few days ago, the world celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the Human Rights Day. As a Hong Konger-in-exile who is experiencing transnational repression here on American soil, the scene of human rights deteriorating around the world looks vividly clear to me. If the United States does not put a strong halt to the blatant transnational repression happening on American soil, we can expect a shocking frontline news one day that brings irreversible harm to one of us on this testifying panel. And by then, nobody will speak out in the United States against authoritarian regimes around the world anymore.

Therefore, I urge Congress to protect our communities from transnational repression from concrete and impactful actions. The issue of transnational repression is bipartisan and it is essential to stay that way.

First, the Congress should legislate to criminalize transnational repression with a holistic definition. Currently, the absence of a well-defined transnational repression offense in the legal system hinders the threat of transnational repression being recognized and handled. Second, educate law enforcement forces on the extent and methods of transnational repression. Third, grant people under transnational repression legal statuses so they can attain the support they need. Fourth, vet diplomats and personnel traveling to the United States on a diplomatic trip.

I sincerely wish Congress can act fast to combat transnational repression. Authoritarian regimes should not be allowed to undermine fundamental rights of people around the world, and of course, in the United States. Thank you.