

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2020

The Honorable John Ratcliffe  
Director of National Intelligence  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20511

Dear Director Ratcliffe,

We are writing to request a briefing on how foreign adversaries are exploiting current mass protests in the United States to deepen the racial divide and incite civil unrest in an effort to undermine and embarrass the United States. We would like to know whether the intelligence community has seen evidence of social media disinformation campaigns and foreign actors fomenting extremist ideologies or amplifying the message of extremist groups suspected of infiltrating the protests to incite violence. We would also like to hear the intelligence community's assessment on what such exploitation portends for the upcoming election.

The media has reported on evidence of potential involvement by a network of outside actors seeking to destabilize peaceful protests against police brutality and George Floyd's murder. For example, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said that state authorities were hit with complex cyberattacks as law enforcement sought to diffuse protests in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The governor said that "a very sophisticated denial of service attack on all state computers was executed," adding that "that's not somebody sitting in their basement."

Additionally, state media for China, Iran, and North Korea have each prominently focused on racial tensions in the United States, suggesting an attempt to use discord in the United States to draw attention from critiques of other countries' treatment of minorities or dissidents. We would like to know if the intelligence community has seen evidence of concerted efforts by these actors to interfere through disinformation campaigns similar to the ones they have conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our country is currently extremely vulnerable to malign activity and we need to be more vigilant than ever about adversaries exploiting legitimate national issues to sow further discord and foment violence. We thank you in advance for your efforts to monitor and address foreign interference, which poses a serious threat to our democratic institutions and national security.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Todd Young  
United States Senator