



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

**Testimony by Richard Gere, Chair of the International Campaign for
Tibet Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs, & Global
Competitiveness
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Chairman Cornyn, Ranking Member Casey, Members of this Committee,

Thank you for your introduction and for inviting me to testify today. I think it's been thirty-five years since I first testified in Congress. First, on behalf of our Central American brothers and sisters and then of course, on Tibet and China for the last thirty years.

Tibet is the compass that orients me and navigates me through the world and through Washington and through life.

I have always had enormous respect and admiration for so many of the Senators I have met and worked with over these years, many of whom have wholeheartedly supported this cause in which I've been deeply involved, and which the American people certainly care do about, in particular, the well-being of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan

people and their extraordinary culture. I do thank you for that. And the American people thank you for that.

This is the first time I've testified since I last met with one of your greatest colleagues. Allow me for a moment, to pay homage to Senator John McCain. He was a good man and a good friend of His Holiness and of the Tibetan people. We spoke deeply of their plight. I respected him enormously and want to remember him for his principled leadership against authoritarianism, corruption, and short-sighted ignorance here and around the world. His was a life of bravery, integrity and dignity throughout...until the very end.

He was the best of us.

Like John McCain—and many of you—I hope that our government can deliver at its best, not only for the American people, but also for the millions all over the world who have looked to the United States—and its democracy—as a source of inspiration and refuge, while they live under oppression and violence. American leadership is at its best when it sets its view beyond the horizon, and looks with balanced confidence to the

challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We can help others *and* help ourselves. That's what we do. That's why we've been loved and admired. We *can* inspire again.

But the rise of China in the world today is not something far off. It is not beyond our horizon. It is right here in front of us, and affects our daily lives, our workplaces, our freedoms, our privacy, our health, our elections and will certainly shape the future of our world. China's 100-year marathon to world dominance is almost complete and certainly well-ahead of schedule.

So, when I received the invitation from Senators Cornyn and Casey, I was pleased to see that this issue is now taken seriously not only by committees that deal with foreign policy or human rights—which is where I have traditionally testified—but by the Finance Committee, and by others.

After looking at the work this committee has done over the last few years, reflecting strategically and profoundly, on what the Chinese government has been planning to do since 1949- that is to replace the U.S. on the world stage and advance its authoritarian model everywhere- I thought I would offer my experience and whatever contribution I can make to this

existentially important conversation.

The conversation about the future of our relationship with China, as well as our past missteps, is crucial not only for the United States—and frankly, we have been tragically naive for a very long time, under both Republican and Democratic administrations—but it is equally crucial for our democratic allies all over the world to understand this. It is crucial for India and Japan, for central Asian democracies like Mongolia or fragile democracies like Nepal and Bhutan, for all of Europe, for African countries, Australia and South America, where Chinese influence has been growing exponentially, while ours diminishes and recedes.

And please believe me that unless we join forces with our democratic friends and allies all over the world, unless we cherish and strengthen them, and their democratic visions, China's very patient and opportunistic strategy to divide and conquer will continue and most certainly prevail.

As you know, I have been involved in supporting Tibet, the people of Tibet and the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for peaceful coexistence with the Chinese Communist Party for almost forty years now. When it comes to

China, we Tibet supporters have been in for the long haul. We knew what was happening in Tibet would not stop there, and that China's authoritarian influence would expand well beyond Tibet, well beyond the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, well-beyond the people of Hong Kong, beyond its borders with Mongolia, Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar- the whole world.

We have no quarrel with the Chinese people. We wish them to enjoy the same development and quality-of-life improvements that we have here. Of course, they deserve that. What I fear is a model of development led by the Chinese Communist Party that denies their own people their basic freedoms and is predicated on control, dominance and violence. Chinese leaders have often quoted an old Chinese proverb in private, "Wai ru, nei fa"- *'On the outside, be benevolent. On the inside, be ruthless.'*

I recall vividly in the 1990s, when a strong bipartisan coalition of Members of Congress called on the White House many times—both Democrat and Republican administrations—to condition China's Most Favored Nation status for trade relations, on clear criteria and benchmarks that would protect the rule of law and human rights. But that coalition was defeated, frankly, by powerful interests with shortsighted financial goals and a naive

understanding of China's 100-year plan.

The conventional wisdom was then, and some important people still feel this way now, although they are clearly in the minority, that by opening our markets to China, this would *somehow* and by itself- thanks to the rise of a vast Chinese middle class- produce meaningful political and social reforms in China. As we know, the opposite has proven to be true, with more restrictions imposed, Communist Party control of religion, mass incarceration, crackdowns on all forms of dissent, and freethinking, including- and this is just the latest example - concealing critical information about the spread of the coronavirus. We have also had the unanimous proclamation of Xi Jinping as Chairman for life by the Chinese Communist Party...a new Emperor. We see the Chinese government increasingly using its economic policies to prey on weaker countries in every part of the world, through the dangerous Belt and Road Initiative, their long-term plan to control natural resources, supply chains, trade, ports and sea lanes.

The point I'd like to make is that those rule of law reforms, those environmental, human rights, and workers' rights reforms that we advocated for in China in the 1990s would have also protected the larger

economic interests of the United States and our allies if they had been made part of those deals. Instead, China won and gave up nothing in return.

Let me give you an example. The United States has largely opened its doors to Chinese products and investment, but also to various forms of Chinese cultural influence, including their state media. We've even allowed State-sponsored Confucius Institutes to gain a foothold in our universities. As I speak, the Chinese company Huawei has already spent a huge amount of money on lobbying here in the United States so that it can enter the American market, with the economic and security dangers that you are all aware of. But as you know, China does not reciprocate. It limits access to its markets in key sectors, and does not allow any American media to broadcast within China. This lack of reciprocity, fueled by an Orwellian system of state censorship- far beyond what Orwell imagined- limits both the freedom of access to information by the Chinese people, and the right of American and other foreign media companies to engage one of the largest media markets in the world. Surveillance and managed information are the Party imperative.

China has repeatedly insisted that major U.S. tech companies accept strict censorship to be allowed access. How can we continue to accept this as normal? How is this sustainable? How is it in our interest or ultimately, in the interest of a growing Chinese middle class completely dominated and controlled by the Chinese Communist Party?

Another example is freedom of movement. Americans have a strong interest and appreciation for the Tibetan people, their unique Buddhist culture and their beautiful, fragile land; it is the roof of our world. It is the Third Pole. It is the greatest source of the world's fresh water.

But here's what happens in Tibet: the Chinese government highly restricts access to Tibet. Especially for American citizens. This includes diplomats, journalists, politicians- like no other areas of China, while Chinese citizens face no such limitations when they visit the United States. Journalist friends have told me it is easier for them to get into North Korea than Tibet.

This complete lack of reciprocity in U.S.-China relations, one that is not limited to economic issues, as the current administration has rightly pointed out, but one that extends to key civil liberties and human rights, and unfairly

targets legitimate U.S. interests.

Congress recently took action and passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act with strong bipartisan support, a bill that requires the State Department to target Chinese officials who are responsible for blocking Americans from having access to Tibet. This is a good systematic response, these are smart sanctions, and we hope the State Department will implement it soon as required by law.

As an actor, I know you are interested in hearing more about my experience in the entertainment industry and the growing Chinese influence there. While I cannot say that my speaking out for human rights in China has directly affected my career- I may well be an unusual case (we'll speak of that later)- there is no doubt that the combination of Chinese government censorship coupled with the desire of American studios to have access to China's market- soon to be the largest movie market in the world- and vast Chinese financing possibilities, can lead to self-censorship and to not engaging social issues that great American films and American studio once addressed. Imagine Martin Scorsese's Kundun or my own film, Red Corner being made today. It simply would not happen.

I urge the United States, along with its true friends and allies, to continue to engage with China while standing strongly on the fundamental issues of reciprocity, basic human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to bring your attention to two bills that are before the Senate right now and ask for your serious consideration and support. The first bill- sponsored by Senators Cardin, Casey, Cornyn, Rubio and Wyden among others- passed the House with overwhelming support in January. It is the Tibetan Policy and Support Act and overall strengthens U.S. policy on Tibet, while addressing in particular one key issue: the selection of the next Dalai Lama which, cannot be allowed to be controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, but only by Tibetan Buddhists. I am sure you all support this basic principle, and the fact that we even have to pass legislation about this, speaks volume about the approach of the Chinese government toward Tibet and its people. And its lack of respect for religion in general.

I want to thank those who have already signed on and for those who have

not yet, I am asking you to cosponsor this bill and raise it with Senate leadership for a swift passage.

The second bill is the Mongolia Third Neighbor Trade Act, which would grant a democratic and independent Mongolia better access to the U.S. market for cashmere products manufactured in Mongolia and would not displace one American job. Today, our nation imports its cashmere almost exclusively from China- although it's mostly Mongolian. This will greatly diversify the Mongolian economy, deepen trade ties between our two countries, create countless jobs for Mongolian women and reinforce its democratic institutions. The bill is a concrete way to strengthen democracy, workers' rights and free market capitalism in the region at a most critical time in the Indo-Pacific.

I applaud Senators Cardin and Sullivan for authoring this bill, as well as Ranking Member Wyden and Majority Whip Thune for being cosponsors.

Entirely surrounded by Russia and China, this legislation is the strongest tool Washington has to help Mongolia remain an independent democracy. I

ask this Committee and the full Senate to support this bill as soon as possible.

Thank you each for your attention and the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.