

FBI's Wray sounds alarm over China, warns of 'severe counterintelligence threat'

FBI Director Christopher Wray warned Congress on Tuesday that China poses “a more severe counterintelligence threat” to the United States than any other country.

Wray, who testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee, discussed the threat when asked about whether the bureau was prepared to combat any potential influence by foreign powers.

NIKKI HALEY WARNS OF CHINA THREAT, CALLS BEIJING OUR 'FOREMOST NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERN'

“I would say that there is no country that poses a more severe counterintelligence threat to his country right now than China,” Wray said. “That is saying a lot and I don’t say it lightly.”

Wray added that Russia is “probably” next in line.

“China is fighting a generational fight here,” Wray explained. “And when I say China, I want to be clear, this is not about the Chinese people as a whole or the Chinese Americans in this country. What it is about, though, is a variety of ways the Chinese Communist Party is using government officials, private sector entities ... to steal their way up the economic ladder at our expense.”

Wray said, though, that the FBI has “probably about 1,000 plus investigations all across the country involving attempted theft of U.S. intellectual property, whether it’s economic espionage or counter-proliferation, almost all leading back to China.”

“The threat is deep and diverse and wide and vexing—whether, in terms of actors, techniques and targets used,” Wray said, explaining that the FBI has to contend with government officials as well as “nontraditional collectors,” including scientists, students, and businesses looking to steal American innovation. “We are working extremely hard with all of our partners to combat it.”

Wray called defense against Chinese influence a “high, high priority” for the bureau and the administration as a whole, but maintained that the Russians are also “absolutely intent on trying to interfere with our elections.”

“Our primary focus is malign foreign influence,” he said, noting that he feels the bureau is well-prepared in their efforts.

“We feel that we have significant resources devoted toward foreign influence,” Wray said, speaking to the president’s budget, and added that further congressional funding could be added.

Wray has been warning of the threat posed by China for months. In April, during a panel with the Council on Foreign Relations, Wray elaborated on specifics of China’s alleged “stealing innovation,” warning they have abilities to interfere through businesses, universities, and organizations. Wray said the FBI is even meeting with companies to provide “threat awareness briefings.”

REPUBLICANS LAUNCH MUELLER HEARING WAR ROOM, AIM TO TURNTABLES ON DEM ‘PHOTO OP’

“They’re doing it through Chinese intelligence services, through state-owned enterprises, through ostensibly private companies, through graduate students and researchers, through a variety of actors all working on behalf of China,” Wray said in April. “The kind of activity I’m talking about goes way beyond fair market competition. It’s illegal, it’s a threat to economic security, and by extension, it’s a threat to our national security.”

The intense focus on cyber and election security comes after the intelligence community and former Special Counsel Robert Mueller revealed evidence of Russia interfering in the 2016 presidential election.

Thirteen Russians and three Russian companies were indicted in Mueller’s probe, accused of a sophisticated plot to wage “information warfare” against the U.S.

Last year, the Trump administration imposed sanctions against the Kremlin meant to counter Russia’s destabilizing activities, including its interference in the 2016 election and its destructive cyber-attacks.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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