

Republicans split with Trump on celebrating China

GOP lawmakers slammed Beijing on its 70th anniversary, as Trump offered his congratulations.



President Donald Trump has appeared reluctant to directly condemn Chinese President Xi Jinping for violent demonstrations — particularly as he tries to negotiate an end to a trade war that continues to spiral. | Susan Walsh/AP Photo

By **MARIANNE LEVINE**

10/01/2019 04:41 PM EDT

Updated: 10/01/2019 09:59 PM EDT

President Donald Trump congratulated the People’s Republic of China for its 70th anniversary Tuesday morning. Senate Republicans were in no mood to celebrate.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) compared China under President Xi Jinping to a “modern version of Maoist China” and criticized the government for violence against pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong and placing Uighurs — a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority group — in internment camps.

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Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) warned that “an authoritarian China is perhaps the single greatest threat to freedom around the world,” while Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) emphasized that the 70th anniversary of communist rule was no cause for celebration but “a day to remind ourselves of the horrors inflicted on the Chinese people over this time.”

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Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) said the American people stand with the “freedom-seekers in Hong Kong,” and Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) said the Chinese Communist Party has waged “economic warfare against Missourians through currency manipulation and tariffs targeting our farmers.”

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), a close Trump ally, said “it has been a ghoulish 70 years of Chinese Communist Party control.”

In the House, Republican Conference Chairwoman Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) and Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) lambasted the Chinese government's “appalling record of repression.”



Security personnel pose in front of Mao Zedong’s portrait on Tiananmen Gate for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing on Oct. 1, 2019. | Ng Han Guan/AP Photo

Those statements stood in stark contrast to the president's remarks on Twitter.

"Congratulations to President Xi and the Chinese people on the 70th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China!" Trump tweeted.

The disparate responses underscore the ever-growing gap between Trump's foreign policy perspective and the views of most members of his party. Senate Republicans have voiced alarm at the violent protests in China. Over the summer, McConnell wrote an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* warning Beijing would face consequences "if Hong Kong's autonomy is eroded."

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But while White House aides have encouraged the president to back the pro-democracy protesters, Trump has appeared reluctant to directly condemn Xi for the demonstrations — particularly as he tries to negotiate an end to a trade war that continues to spiral.

Last week, during his speech before the United Nations, Trump went the furthest he's gone in criticizing China for its response to the protests, saying his administration was "carefully monitoring the situation in Hong Kong."

"The world fully expects that the Chinese government will honor its binding treaty made with the British and registered with the United Nations in which China commits to protect Hong Kong's freedom, legal system and democratic ways of life," Trump said. "We are all counting on President Xi as a great leader."