

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2024

The Honorable Frank Kendall
Secretary of the Air Force
U.S. Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has identified the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the greatest strategic threat to the United States. However, DOD continues to rely on the PRC for components in critical weapons platforms that are being produced to deter conflict. It is unacceptable that a wide swath of defense programs, as well as defense-critical sectors of the U.S. economy, are dependent on PRC suppliers. This is a serious national security risk.

In addition to identifying the PRC as a pacing threat, DOD has also recognized that the PRC seeks to defeat the United States without engaging in armed conflict. Allowing China access and leverage over DOD supply chains empowers Beijing to do just that. The reliance on the PRC for components is a well-established challenge to new programs and legacy programs alike which will take great effort to mitigate. For example, in 2016 the U.S. Air Force identified avionics in 50 weapons systems, including the F-35, with embedded PRC-related hardware vulnerabilities. Several other DOD programs have faced similar challenges; DOD is still reliant, for example, on PRC optics suppliers for optical sighting and ranging equipment.

According to Govini's 2024 National Security Scorecard, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) is still reliant on 130 PRC suppliers across fifteen critical technology areas essential for U.S. national security. While the scorecard shows that the Departments of the Army and Navy both decreased their reliance on PRC suppliers over the past year, DAF was reported to have increased its usage of PRC suppliers by 68.8 percent. It is unacceptable for any organization in DOD to be increasing their reliance on PRC supply chains for critical capabilities and platforms.

Asked about the Govini scorecard, DAF told *Forbes* on August 23 that identifying PRC activities and supplies is a "whole-of-DAF" effort and that these are serious and merited concerns. We agree with that sentiment. However, DAF's increased reliance on PRC suppliers over the last year do not match the concerns expressed.

Increasing dependence on PRC suppliers is clearly the wrong direction especially when both the Army and the Navy are moving to reduce their exposure. We therefore request the following information by October 7, 2024:

1. Which DAF-related supply chains have become more dependent on PRC suppliers in the past year, what caused the increased dependency, and which if any programs are now more reliant on PRC suppliers today than a year ago?
2. What is the DAF's strategy to address its supply chain vulnerabilities, and how has the DOD National Defense Industrial Strategy informed its approach?
3. What are the roadblocks – informational, financial, statutory, or otherwise – that have hindered DAF's strategy from being maximally effective?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to hearing your reply.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Robert J. Wittman in blue ink, written in a cursive style.

Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Elise Stefanik in blue ink, written in a cursive style.

Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress