James “Spider” Marks
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President of The Marks Collaborative
Leesburg, Virginia
November 18, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of War
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Jamieson Greer
United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, Secretary Rollins, Secretary Lutnick, Ambassador Greer, and Secretary Burgum,

We have spent our careers as national security officials confronting ever-evolving threats to our nation’s security. Today, we write about national security threats that are less visible but no less serious: the People's Republic of China's deliberate campaign to inflict pain on the United States by manipulating the materials, infrastructure, and commodity supply chains on which our economy and military depend.

China's playbook is not new. Through a deliberate and methodical strategy, Beijing has established dominance over the critical minerals essential to American military power, and it has shown it is willing to use that dominance as a weapon. It has restricted exports of gallium and germanium, which are critical to semiconductors and defense electronics, and has imposed sweeping controls on rare earth elements and magnets, which are indispensable to precision munitions, fighter aircraft, and missile defense systems. These were not market accidents. They were

calculated signals that the Chinese Communist Party is prepared to throttle American defense production whenever it suits its strategic aims.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. PRC state-sponsored hackers have pre-positioned cyberthreats inside our water, energy, and transportation infrastructure. Chinese-linked entities have also purchased farmland adjacent to sensitive U.S. military installations. The pattern is unmistakable: identify an American vulnerability and exploit it.

The newest and most troubling example is China's manipulation of our food supply. Food security is national security, and a nation that cannot reliably feed itself cannot fully secure itself. China is using sulfur, a key input for fertilizer, as a weapon. The U.S. produces roughly two-thirds of our domestic requirements for sulfur and sulfuric acid. Yet American producers export nearly two million metric tons of elemental sulfur each year, approximately a quarter of domestic output.

Much of that sulfur is being purchased by Chinese state-backed enterprises, heavily subsidized by the Chinese Communist Party, outbidding American buyers. These enterprises convert American sulfur into phosphate fertilizer in China, then impose export restrictions that keep the finished product out of U.S. markets. The ongoing crisis in the Strait of Hormuz has already constrained supply, and China is exacerbating the problem.

The result is that American farmers and families pay twice: once when China bids up the price of fertilizer inputs, and again when China's refusal to export finished fertilizer drives up global prices. And just as with critical minerals, this dependency hands an adversary a chokepoint ripe for exploitation. Right now, American farmers and families are facing mounting food affordability challenges, which have been worsened due to China's exploitative trade practices on fertilizer.

We believe these vulnerabilities can and must be closed. The United States needs a deliberate, government-wide effort to identify and eliminate the dependencies China seeks to exploit, from critical minerals to infrastructure to agriculture. In the case of fertilizer, that effort should begin by developing a fertilizer supply chain security strategy that confronts the geopolitical risk and commodity manipulation that China is using against American farmers. U.S. refiners should be encouraged to supply domestic fertilizer producers rather than foreign state-subsidized buyers that distort market pricing, and American companies should not export fertilizer inputs to any counterparty that does not freely trade finished fertilizer products in return.

At the same time, the United States must accelerate the reshoring of fertilizer manufacturing to rebuild the domestic capacity we have allowed to erode. Finally, fertilizer and its critical inputs should be treated as the strategic national security assets they are and incorporated into defense supply chain planning. Some lawmakers have called for protections through the Defense Production Act, so that our nation can sustain food production through any crisis. With our background in national security, we recommend this action would be a prudent option to consider.

We strongly urge you to confront the Chinese Communist Party's manipulative actions against America's food and fertilizer supply to help protect American farmers and families from facing economic hardships. Our adversaries understand that a nation's dependencies are a source of leverage. We urge you to ensure that, for the United States, they do not become a source of weakness.

Very respectfully,

Maj. Gen. James "Spider" Marks, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Hon. Patrick Murphy, Former Under Secretary of the Army, Former U.S. Representative Pennsylvania

Lt. Gen. Robert Ashley, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Lt. Gen. Mike Groen, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)

Lt. Gen. David Julazadeh, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)

Maj. Gen. Mastin Robeson, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)

Maj. Gen. Robert Dees, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Rear Adm. Mark Heinrich, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

Capt. Bob “Shoebob” Carey, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

Cmdr. Chris Carney, U.S. Navy Reserve (Ret.), Former U.S. Representative Pennsylvania

Hon. Sergio de la Peña, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs

Col. Rob Maness, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)