



## UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

### HEARING

### CHINA'S REPRESSION AND INTERNMENT OF UYGHURS: U.S. POLICY RESPONSES

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Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
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The human rights emergency facing Uyghurs in China requires an urgent response. The mass internment of Uyghurs in camps across East Turkestan (officially named by the Chinese government as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) is occurring as the Chinese government promotes itself globally as a model of governance and trade through the Belt and Road Initiative.

Over a million, and possibly more, Uyghurs have been interned out of a population of 11 million.<sup>1</sup> Credible reports of deaths in custody, torture, and systemic political indoctrination must propel the United States into action on behalf of the Uyghurs. In the words of scholar Rian Thum, “mass murder and genocide do not look like impossible outcomes.”<sup>2</sup>

The scale of the rights violations against the Uyghur people have been covered by brave reporters from a number of agencies, including *Radio Free Asia*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*, among others. Academics, such as Adrian Zenz, have painstakingly uncovered the scale of the internment camp system. Extensive reports issued by Human Rights Watch and the Uyghur Human Rights Project document terrifying firsthand accounts of the camps and of the trauma inflicted on the Uyghur community.<sup>3</sup>

This testimony examines three analytical points emerging from these accounts. The first is an exploration of the motives behind China's internment campaign, including the threat it poses to democratic values. The second discusses the violation of Uyghur human rights in the context of China's counterterrorism policies and how Beijing has manipulated legitimate concerns over global security to justify its repression. The third point details China's export of repression targeting Uyghurs in the United States in a clear violation of

sovereignty. In closing, I offer recommendations to the committee regarding U.S. policy responses.

### **Mass Internment of Uyghurs – Chinese Government Motivations**

**Racial Discrimination:** In a May 17, 2018 article, Georgetown University professor James Millward told Associated Press reporters: “Cultural cleansing is Beijing’s attempt to find a final solution to the Xinjiang problem.”<sup>4</sup> The Chinese government has portrayed Uyghur ethnic distinctiveness as a threat to ordinary Chinese and the Uyghurs’ Islamic faith as a contagious disease.<sup>5</sup> Sinification through Chinese language and culture sessions and compulsory denunciations of Uyghur culture and belief in Islam in the internment camps are justified as necessary measures in reducing this threat and in finding Beijing’s final solution.

State-led racial discrimination and criminalization of Islam and any expression of Uyghur identity and culture have affected all Uyghurs in the Uyghur homeland and China, as well as Uyghur Americans and hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs who live outside their home region. Uyghurs are routinely denied rooms in hotels or subjected to extra security checks when in transit. In addition, Han Chinese who have rented out rooms to Uyghurs have been punished by the Chinese authorities. Although the Chinese state has played an enabling role in normalizing discrimination against Uyghurs in Chinese society, it has also exploited a sense of racial superiority amongst Han Chinese to encourage racial bias. As University of Washington Anthropologist Stevan Harrell notes: “As long as such an innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority remains, the actual program of the Communist project will be based on the unconscious assumption that Han ways are better, more modern ways.”<sup>6</sup>

Uyghurs outside the camps are forced to publicly demonstrate their adoption of majority-Han culture, as defined by the state. They have been required to perform contemporary Chinese dances, sing Communist “Red Songs,” wear pseudo-traditional Chinese robes, and celebrate Chinese New Year. They must attend mass rallies denouncing the “Three Evil Forces” and declaring loyalty to the Communist Party. They are required to attend.

**Territorial Consolidation:** Consolidation of borders has been an on-going project for the Chinese Communist Party since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. In full knowledge that its claim over the lands of Tibetans, Mongols, and Uyghurs is based on the empire building of previous Chinese administrations, Chinese officials have moved to assimilate non-Han regions through a rewrite of indigenous histories and the exercise of diplomatic pressure to accept China’s current borders as having been fixed for centuries. As Robert D. Kaplan wrote in a September 16, 2018 commentary for *the Wall Street Journal*: “The repression of the Turkic Uighur Muslim community in western China—including the reported internment of up to a million people in secret camps—is a

key part of Beijing's new imperial policy. Only by understanding the dynamics of Chinese empire can one grasp this brutal campaign."<sup>7</sup>

The People's Republic of China's policies of territorial consolidation have for decades included the encouragement of Han settlers into historically and ethnically distinct regions such as Tibet and the Uyghur homeland. China has successfully managed this demographic transformation and "March West" through the instigation of political and economic initiatives. These include Open up the Northwest (1992), Western Development (2000), the Xinjiang Work Forums of 2010 and 2014, the establishment of the Shanghai Five (1996) and later the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001). The build up of infrastructure, investment and settlers encouraged by these initiatives have done little to significantly alter economic opportunities for Uyghurs, as they remain outside the planning, implementation and monitoring processes while their region undergoes transformation.

In a 2004 monograph, demographer Stanley Toops outlined the state-directed campaign to encourage Han Chinese to move to the Uyghur Autonomous Region, which relied creating a perception of frontier regions of China as having available resources and development opportunities. In addition, state "inducements and incentives" figured heavily in the migration policy.<sup>8</sup> From 1990 to 2000, the number of Han Chinese grew to 7.5 million and by the 2010 census the figure had reached 8.8 million. From 1990 through 2012 (22 years in total), the number of Han Chinese increased by 4.3 million, while in the 37 years between 1953-90 the rise was 5.4 million. Since the beginning of Chinese Communist rule, the proportion of Uyghurs in the region has shrunk from 75 percent to 45 percent.

The redevelopment of Uyghur neighborhoods in the early 2010s, particularly in Kashgar, was a further physical manifestation of the state-managed alteration of Uyghur society. The demolition of traditional Uyghur architecture and replacement with buildings indistinguishable from eastern China represented not only a firm reminder to Uyghurs of Chinese colonization, but also eased the transition for settlers arriving from outside of the region. The mass internment campaign has taken this logic one step further. The disappearance of Uyghur homes has been followed by the disappearance of the people who once inhabited them.

**Global Influence:** Maintaining a firm grip on territories such as the Uyghur homeland is not only a state building enterprise, but also part of a bid to extend influence beyond borders. In a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in September 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping advanced the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), a trade proposal encompassing South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia, Europe and the Middle East that would augment the role of the Uyghur homeland as China's primary land gateway to Eurasia. According to a state policy document, the region would serve "as a core area on the Silk Road Economic Belt."<sup>9</sup> The SREB and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) form an ambitious Chinese goal to place China at the center of global trade routes.

Collectively known as the Belt and Road, the initiative will project external influence in an attempt to establish China as a bona fide super power by 2050.

However, the Chinese government's maintenance of power in the Uyghur homeland to ensure Belt and Road corridors remain open is founded on fear and a level of state intrusion that would not be tolerated in democratic societies. For example, the government has sent Communist Party officials to live in Uyghur homes as part of the so-called "Becoming Family" campaign, which appears to be a pretext for gathering information on Uyghur families. Furthermore, the pervasive technological surveillance in general society, such as DNA collection, iris scans, and ubiquitous CCTV cameras, has created an open-air prison for Uyghurs outside the internment facilities. The relevance of this invasion into the privacy of Uyghurs' lives and homes is that this is the ideal of governance China is attempting to export facilitated through the Belt and Road Initiative. The open challenge to democratic values the 'China model' presents should not be underestimated.

### **China's Misleading 'Counterterrorism' Campaign**

The 9/11 attacks on the United States marked a strategic shift in how China framed Uyghur dissent. Prior to September 11, 2001, Chinese authorities treated expressions of Uyghur opposition to repressive government policies as criminal acts of 'separatism' regardless of whether these were expressed peacefully or not. After 9/11, the same events were recast as 'terrorism.' The introduction of the term 'terrorism' into the Chinese government's discourse on Uyghurs was interpreted as a move to legitimize its repression of the Uyghur people. In regard to the support Chinese authorities' offered on the new 'terror' allegations scholar James Millward concludes, "careful scrutiny reveals problems with the evidence presented in both media and official sources."<sup>10</sup>

China has amended its legal framework to reflect this new discourse. Most recently, this has included the Counterterrorism Law on December 27, 2015 and the 2016 Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Implementing Measures of the Counterterrorism Law of the Peoples Republic of China. Although one of China's motivations in introducing counterterror legislation was to garner international support for repressive measures, "Western countries (and particularly the U.S.) are reluctant to cooperate with China on anti-terrorism because China's definition of terrorism is shockingly broad."<sup>11</sup> In addition, China's search for legitimacy for its counterterror measures within the international community was hampered by a lack of transparency and cooperation as noted by the U.S. State Department.<sup>12</sup>

Chinese officials have claimed the internment of Uyghurs is about combatting 'terrorism' or 'extremism' and bringing stability to a volatile region. These claims cannot be sustained given an examination of scale of the campaign and the types of individuals interned. For example, the confinement of Uyghur children already separated from their interned parents into 're-education centers' stretches any credible definition of

counterterrorism. As one former instructor at one of these facilities for children told the Financial Times: “If both parents are in jail, the child will be sent to a re-education centre for ‘special children.’ The child is forbidden to go to school with the *normal* [author’s italics] children because the parents have a political problem.”<sup>13</sup>

The Financial Times article also described how the Chinese authorities were administering forcible separations of Uyghur children from their extended families. In one case, two children aged seven and nine were sent to a re-education center even though their grandparents wanted to take care of them. The report also described how one county in Kashgar Prefecture had built 18 new ‘orphanages’ in 2017 alone.<sup>14</sup> In its recent report, Human Rights Watch detailed how Chinese authorities have forcibly taken children between the ages of five and 15 and placed them in ‘orphanages,’ while extended families were permitted to look after children under five years old.<sup>15</sup>

### **Exporting Repression Against Uyghurs Overseas**

The Chinese government has long sought to control the narrative of Chinese politics within Chinese communities overseas through tools including the education departments of their embassies and consulates, using them to disrupt events held by activists on college campuses and elsewhere. For dissident groups, monitoring and control can take more direct forms. The targets of this harassment include Uyghur and Tibetan rights activists, Chinese democrats, Taiwanese independence advocates and Falun Gong practitioners. Together the Chinese authorities refer to these targeted groups as the “Five Poisons.”

The Chinese government has also tried to influence and put pressure on foreign governments to label Uyghurs as ‘terrorists’ and to prevent their free movement, even after they have become citizens of other countries. As China builds closer security relationships with countries around the world, including in Central and South Asia and the Middle East, these countries have used their own security forces to attempt to shut down political activities among Uyghurs in their nations, or even detain and deport Uyghurs living legally in their territory.

The goal of the Chinese government’s harassment is to discourage and disrupt political activism among Uyghurs living abroad, replicating the system of control that exists in their homeland. Threatening retaliation against family members who remain within the borders of China is one of the Chinese government’s primary tools. This retaliation can include everything from their family members being prevented from leaving China by being denied passports, to putting their jobs and educations at risk, to being subjected to imprisonment or internment in a camp. These tactics undermine Uyghurs’ ability to enjoy their legal rights even after they leave China.

The families of U.S. citizens and Radio Free Asia (RFA) journalists, Gulchehra Hoja, Shohret Hoshur, Mamatjan Juma, Jilil Kashgary, Kurban Niyaz, and Eset Sulaiman, who have been at the forefront of exposing the extent and conditions of the internment camps,

have been targeted by the Chinese government in a bid to silence independent reporting. The journalists went public to describe how Chinese authorities have arbitrarily detained family members in internment camps.

In total, 24 of Gulchehra Hoja's relatives in Urumchi and Ghulja have been detained in internment camps, including her brother Kaisar Abduqeyum who was detained in October 2017 and has since disappeared. At least nine of Shohret Hoshur's relatives are in one of four camps located in Qorghas county. China has previously attempted to intimidate RFA journalist Shohret Hoshur. Three of Hoshur's brothers in Urumchi were detained in 2014 and 2015. The arrests came after Hoshur published a series of articles on the unrest in East Turkestan that exposed vulnerabilities in state narratives. Two of Mamatjan Juma's brothers are in internment camps, one in Kashgar and the other in Urumchi. Seven of Jilil Kashgary's family members are in internment camps. His nephew Nurmemet, who had studied in Egypt for two years, was detained in Ghulja. Both Kurban Niyaz, and Eset Sulaiman have lost touch with their families.

This kind of harassment and punishment had touched the lives of many Uyghur-American families. The family of human rights activist Rebiya Kadeer has frequently been harassed by the Chinese government since her arrest in East Turkestan in 1999. Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action in November 2017 describing how up to 30 of her relatives have been detained in internment camps. Amnesty wrote her relatives are at "high risk of torture and other ill-treatment."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the wife and daughter-in-law of Mr. Juret Nizamuddin have been in detention since their return to China from the U.S. His wife simply disappeared while his daughter-in-law was sentenced to eight years of imprisonment.

## **Recommendations**

It is time to act. UHRP urges the Congress to take these steps:

### ***Policy and Congressional Initiatives***

1. Pass a binding resolution endorsing an urgent U.S. policy response on the Uyghur crisis, including the steps below.
2. Press for an urgent Congressional fact-finding visit to the Uyghur region, and other cities where Uyghur detainees are being transported. Announce the request publicly. Urge every Member who visits China to request access to the Uyghur region, and specifically the detention centers.
3. Join the Senate in urging U.S. Ambassador to China Terry Branstad to personally lead efforts for the release of the relatives of Radio Free Asia reporters and all those held in extra-judicial detention. He should be asked to uphold the pledge made in his confirmation hearing "to represent American values to the leadership of China and the Chinese people at large; values that include upholding human rights for all."

4. Press for sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for severe human rights violations, including visa bans, freezing assets, and exclusion from international banking, under the provisions of the Global Magnitsky Act and other sanctions authority. Deterring an escalation of rights abuses requires that abusers pay a price for their crimes. Those most responsible should be held accountable, particularly Regional Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and United Front official Hu Lianhe, as well as Regional Deputy Party Secretaries Shohret Zakir, XPCC1 Party Committee Secretary Sun Jinlong, XPCC Commander Peng Jiarui, XPCC Regional United Front Department head Shawket Imin, and Xinjiang Politics and Law Commission head Zhu Hailun.
5. Adopt a Uyghur Policy Act that defines the United States government's support for the Uyghurs' civil and political rights, including their right to maintain their distinct cultural identity. U.S. policy on Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong is guided by specific, formal policies.<sup>17</sup> Given the current crisis, it is past time for the United States to follow a similar approach for the Uyghurs.
6. Press for expedited enforcement of the International Traffic in Arms Regulations and Export Administration Regulations to prevent private U.S. individuals and companies from providing security training, materiel, and surveillance equipment and technology to Chinese state security agencies and affiliated entities, particularly those that have a role in repressing ethnic and religious minorities in China.<sup>18</sup>
7. Request law-enforcement agencies to investigate threats and retaliation carried out against Uyghur U.S. citizens and against all Uyghurs on U.S. soil.
8. Publicly affirm U.S. policy not to extradite or deport Uyghurs living in the U.S. Urge other governments to join Germany and Sweden in publicly announcing a halt to all deportations of Uyghurs to China.
9. In line with recommendations in the CECC 2017 Annual Report, ensure that U.S. government-supported digital security training and capacity-building efforts include Uyghur human rights advocates in the U.S., Europe, Turkey, and Asia.
10. Increase funding to support Uyghur, Tibetan, and Mongol civil society groups working to advance human rights and environmental protection in their homelands, through U.S. foreign assistance funding and by encouraging additional support from both UN and non-governmental sources.
11. Appropriate funds for documentation and casework to address the plight of Uyghur refugees and asylum seekers in the region and throughout the world.
12. In the context of the U.S.-China Joint Liaison Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation, led on the China side by State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun, ensure that U.S. officials are fully briefed on the Uyghur situation and

empowered to vigorously pursue U.S. policy objectives regarding the treatment of Uyghurs, refoulement across international borders, and Chinese police entities' responsibility for violations of international law and China's Constitution and laws.

13. In the context of U.S.-China technical and legal collaboration on environmental protection, ensure that U.S. officials are fully briefed on the detentions of environmental rights defenders in the Uyghur Region, and empowered to vigorously pursue their release.
14. Investigate the relationship of U.S.-invested development projects with Chinese state entities implementing extra-legal "de-extremification" measures. U.S. companies with operations in the Uyghur region include Peabody International, Halliburton<sup>19</sup> and the NBA.<sup>20</sup> Urge other countries to pursue similar investigations.
15. Support Ambassador Nikki Haley and the U.S. United Nations delegation to:
  - a. Field a strong U.S. delegation at China's Universal Periodic Review in Geneva on November 6.
  - b. Organize a joint statement by liked-minded countries on the severe violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the Uyghur Region of China.
  - c. Raise the issue in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 2150 (2014), particularly the statement of Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations Wang Min, who noted that "Preventing genocide also required that Governments protected their civilians and that all parties abided by humanitarian law. For its part, the international community should acquire a deep understanding of the situation on the ground, as well as strengthen coordination efforts for protecting civilians."
  - d. Create a contact group of like-minded countries to coordinate action on the unprecedented scale of secret extra-judicial detentions and wide-scale separation of children from their parents within a targeted ethnic group.
  - e. Make a formal request for an investigation by H.E. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide.
16. Members of Congress should commend universities that waive tuition for Uyghur students who are stranded in the U.S., unable to return home, and unable to pay fees due to their parents' detention in China.

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<sup>19</sup> Uyghur Human Rights Project (2016). Without land, there is no life: Chinese state suppression of Uyghur environmental activism. Available at: <https://uhrp.org/press-release/without-land-there-no-life-chinese-state-suppression-uyghur-environmental-activism> [Accessed 19 Sep. 2018]

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