

To: James Cleverly, UK Foreign Secretary  
From: 11027360 British Diplomat  
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RE: Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang

Summary:

There is increasing evidence that the cotton fields of Xinjiang, China are using forced labour of Ughur Muslims from 're-education centres' (Xu *et al*, 2020). It is believed to be the largest-scale detention of religious minorities since World War Two (Lehr and Bechrakis, 2019). To address this problem, the UK government should introduce sanctions and restrictions on companies importing cotton from Xinjiang or using forced Uyghur labour. This is an opportunity to impose strict inspections on labour conditions in the global supply chain and apply pressure on the Chinese government to put an end to forced labour.

Background:

Xinjiang lies in the north-west of China and is home to around 12 million Uyghur Muslims. Uyghurs in this region have faced discrimination at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as their attempt to secure control over the population (Stern, 2021). This oppression has escalated to "crimes against humanity and genocide" since 2014 with reports from NGOs, such as Amnesty International, of a mass detainment of Uyghurs in 're-education centres' (Stern, 2021, p1). An estimated one million Uyghurs have been arbitrarily detained against their will, where they have been subject to various forms of torture, such as forced cultural assimilation and political indoctrination (Amnesty International, 2021). The detainees are unable to leave or communicate with family outside the re-education centres. The Chinese government state that this crackdown in Xinjiang is necessary to prevent terrorism and the re-education centre root out Islamist extremism (BBC, 2022). This re-education has the aim of strengthening loyalty to the Communist party.

There is increasing concern that the Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang 're-education centres' are involved in forced labour. Xinjiang produces around a fifth of the world's cotton and there are concerns that much of this cotton is picked by forced labour. There is evidence that new cotton factories have been built within the grounds of the re-education centres (BBC, 2022). This is part of the Chinese government's efforts to eliminate the Ughur culture by re-educating them through a different style of work (Lehr and Bechrakis, 2019). The situation in Xinjiang involves the use of "compelled labour as part of a concerted effort [from the Chinese government] to eliminate a culture and religion" (Lehr and Bechrakis, 2019, p2). The UK government are morally obligated to enact a new policy to address this issue to uphold human rights standards across the global stage.

Policy options:

China has attracted international condemnation for its use of forced labour and 're-education' camps in Xinjiang in the past decade. In March of 2021, the European Union sanctioned China over the human rights abuses of Uyghurs. This criticism stemmed from western and northern European countries that place liberalism and human rights at the heart of their political agenda. There is evidence to suggest that this frustrated China and therefore, Beijing responded with an escalated set of sanctions against European politicians. Western European criticism of the Chinese government proved to escalate the

situation rather than address the issue. China formed new trade relationships with Eastern European countries, such as the '16+1' mechanism in 2013. This sanction, in the form of direct condemnation of China, did not improve the treatment of Uyghurs but it did increase international awareness of the human rights abuses.

The UK parliament approached this issue in 2022. Rishi Sunak declared that the apparent "Golden-era of UK-China relations is over" (The Times, 2022). Referring to the mistreatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Sunak claimed that as China has moved towards even "greater authoritarianism" under Xi Jinping, it now presents a "systematic challenge" to the UK (BBC, 2022). China's acts against human rights go against the UK's liberal stance. In his bid for No 10 in July 2022, Sunak pledged to a policy to kick the CCP out of UK universities, including closing all Confucius Institutes in the UK in an attempt to intimidate China. However, China have continued to deny all allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. China's foreign ministry spokesperson told the BBC in 2022 that the documents were an example of 'anti-China voices' trying to degrade China. This policy has not enacted change for the Uyghurs but it does send a message to the international community that human rights abuses will not be tolerated.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act of 2022 requires firms importing goods from Xinjiang into the USA to provide evidence that they are not produced using forced labour. This policy addresses the compelled labour that Uyghurs face and attempts to stop companies supporting the industry. However, this policy has not ended the use of forced labour in Xinjiang. Further, many Chinese argue that the USA should not be criticising Chinese slave labour given their history in slavery.

#### Policy Recommendation:

In a democracy, the purpose of politics is to protect individual rights. There is an opportunity for the UK to implement a new policy to approach this issue. The UK government should impose sanctions and restrictions on companies who import cotton from Xinjiang that are found guilty of using Uyghur workers in their factories. This should include inspections determining how labour is deployed. If the company is found to be using forced labour, the UK government should apply pressure to introduce proper labour practices. Defined by the UN international convention, genocide is the intent to destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group (Kunz, 1949). It is vital that through this process the rights of the Uyghurs are prioritised and their genocide is ceased.

Forced labour in Xinjiang is connected to Western supply chains. According to the International Labour Organisation, forced labour includes work that takes place under threat of a penalty and where the person has not offered their service voluntarily (Hughes, 2005). The forced coercion of Uyghur Muslims in the global supply chain violates this international law. For example, evidence suggests that Uyghurs work in the factories of global brands such as Nike and Apple (Xu *et al*, 2020). There is a connection of forced labour in Xinjiang and the UK market, creating both a moral imperative for action and an opportunity to apply pressure on the Chinese government (Lehr and Bechrakis, 2019). The coerced labour force in Xinjiang produces over 80% of China's cotton. A report in 2020 revealed that 16% of the UK's textile imports were from China. The aim of this policy would be for China to stop using forced labour in its markets, protecting Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and preventing these abuses from re-occurring in the future.

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