

TO: David Cameron, UK Foreign Secretary
FROM: Yuhsuan Chen, British Diplomat
DATE: 8th November 2023

RE: Muslims in Xinjiang

Summary

This memo highlights the policy recommendations that the UK should enforce to hold the CCP accountable for their actions in detaining Uyghur Muslims. I am requesting for there to be stricter sanctions on Chinese surveillance companies, as well as bans on imported goods from Xinjiang that are tied to forced labour, and increased diplomacy.

Background

It is a well-known fact that the CCP have been detaining over 1 million Uyghur Muslims since 2017 (House of Commons, 2021). The Chinese government have tried to justify their actions of detaining the Muslims, claiming it as a “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” (Wang, 2023). This is far from what reality is; Uyghur Muslims are being contained in camps in which they are subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, as well as political and cultural indoctrination (Wang, 2023). They are being forced to leave their Uyghur identity and forcibly assimilate into the Han-dominant culture (Roberts, 2021).

As well as this, there is heavy surveillance outside of the camps. Hikvision, the world’s largest security camera company, supplies nearly a thousand facial recognition cameras to Xinjiang (Feng, 2018). A 2019 report by Human Rights Watch stated that the goal is apparently “to identify patterns and predict... the everyday life and resistance” of Xinjiang’s population (HRW, 2019). The mass surveillance, along with heavy restrictions on identity has made Uyghur Muslims subservient to Communist party rule, fearful of the consequences they would face if they were to follow their traditional religious practices (Wang, 2023).

Muslim Uyghurs are also forced to undertake labour. They are forced to work in cotton production. Xinjiang is currently responsible for over 85% of Chinese cotton output (Li, 2021). It is also suggested that some work across the country (Clark, 2020), and they are directly transferred to different provinces directly from detention camps (Xu et al, 2020). Chinese factories outside Xinjiang are sourcing Uyghur workers under the government’s labour transfer scheme (Hess, 2009). This means that Uyghur workers are also working for top multinational brands such as Adidas and Nike (Xu et al, 2020). Thus, in October 2022, the United Nations announced that the Chinese government’s abuses against Uyghur Muslims “constitute crimes against humanity” (OHCHR, 2022).

This is an important issue for the UK as it infringes upon human rights. The government is part of the United Nations Genocide Convention (United Nations, 2019), so they are fully obligated to implement any strategies to bring the abuses against Uyghur Muslims to an end and to ensure that the British government are not tied to forced labour in the region.

Analysis of Policy Options

It is important to analyse policies placed by other nations alongside the UK to set out my policy recommendations. To limit any associations with forced labour, the US government

have halted cotton and tomato imports from Xinjiang (Corbett, 2021). Moreover, the Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act 2022 requires firms to prove that their imported goods from Xinjiang were not produced using forced labour.

The use of Hikvision cameras has become an increasing threat as the surveillance cameras share the same camera technology as the ones used in the detention camps in Xinjiang (Broersma, 2022). In the UK, 67 MPs voted to ban the use of Hikvision cameras, as they have the same camera technology as the ones used in the detention camps in Xinjiang (Broersma, 2022). Hikvision cameras can no longer be installed in or on government buildings after cabinet minister Oliver Dowden announced they are “current and future possible security risks” (A&S Adria, 2022).

Similarly, in the US, the Biden administration is imposing hard-hitting sanctions on Hikvision (Sevastopulo, 2022). On 11th November 2021, Biden signed into law the Secure Equipment Act which means that the U.S. would no longer approve any equipment that is on the “Covered List,” and this included Hikvision (Brown & Class, 2021). Hikvision, along with other banned Chinese technology companies, are prohibited from receiving American investment and selling products to the US (Bateman, 2022). Furthermore, Hikvision will be unable to sell any new products once the FCC finalises the pending regulations required by the government (Bateman, 2022).

However, there are far-reaching consequences to this as more than 1000 cities use Hikvision cameras (Sevastopulo, 2022). As well as this, there is the issue that it could cost billions if governments slowly discard Hikvision surveillance equipment, says Eric Sayers, senior vice president at Beacon Global Strategies (Sevastopulo, 2020). We must consider the global ramifications and how we live in a globally connected world. It is therefore important to acknowledge that sanctions are only successful on a small scale, and when nations are united (Hufbauer et al, 2009).

Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of countries speaking up about China; countries now willing to speak out have increased from 23 to 39 as evidence has mounted on the mistreatment of Uyghur Muslims (Raab, 2021). Furthermore, in 2021, 50 independent UN experts spoke up as a collective in a joint statement calling on China to respect basic human rights (United Nations, 2022).

Policy Recommendation

I propose the UK enforce similar sanctions to the US, placing restrictions on Chinese surveillance firms and gradually stopping imports from them. It is already concerning enough that Hikvision surveillance cameras are used by 73% of local councils, 35% of police forces and 63% of schools in the UK (Broersma, 2022; A&S Adria, 2022). It is also important to impose trade sanctions so we can limit the exportation of forced labour-produced goods from Xinjiang. This will serve as a warning to businesses and manufacturers operating in Xinjiang (Polaschek, 2021) that if they do not change their ways, their businesses may crumble. They must learn the consequences of attempting to trade goods linked with forced labour. As well as this, I recommend further collaboration with other nations to discuss the mistreatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, as well as organising frequent panels of UN experts dedicated to this cause. It is also vital to have consistent communication among allies and as a collective, to speak up about the atrocities that China are committing.

Sources

A&S Adria (2022). *UK government ban for Chinese Hikvision CCTV cameras – a&s Adria Magazine*. [online] Available at: <https://www.asadria.com/en/uk-government-ban-for-chinese-hikvision-cctv-cameras/#:~:text=Security%20cameras%20made%20by%20Chinese> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2023].

Bateman, J. (2022). *U.S. Sanctions on Hikvision Would Dangerously Escalate China Tech Tensions*. [online] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/06/u.s.-sanctions-on-hikvision-would-dangerously-escalate-china-tech-tensions-pub-87089> [Accessed 15. Nov].

Broersma, M. (2022). *Parliamentarians Call For Ban On Chinese Surveillance Firms*. [online] Silicon UK. Available at: <https://www.silicon.co.uk/e-regulation/surveillance/parliament-hikvision-dahua-ban-465207> [Accessed 14 Nov.]

Brown, M.L. and Class, E. (2021). *Biden Signs Secure Equipment Act, Requires FCC to Ban Covered Chinese Communications Equipment from Obtaining Equipment Authorizations*. [online] www.wiley.law. Available at: <https://www.wiley.law/alert-Biden-Signs-Secure-Equipment-Act-Requires-FCC-to-Ban-Covered-Chinese-Communications-Equipment-from-Obtaining-Equipment-Authorizations>.

Clark, E. (2020). Xinjiang's Cotton Ban Debated in House Hearing. *WWD*, pp.23–23
CORBETT, H., 2021, Jan 14. US to halt cotton, tomato imports from China's Xinjiang. *DPA International (English)*

Corbett, H. (2021). *US to halt cotton, tomato imports from China's*. [online] www.proquest.com. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2477325248?parentSessionId=74QCIhlpQSC5t4g6q7AZ06PUERRmPEJyFLE2f66T9eY%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=12253> [Accessed 14 Nov]

FENG, E. (2018). China steps up surveillance on Xinjiang Muslims. *FT.com*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/c610c88a-8a57-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543> [Accessed 14. Nov]

Hufbauer, G., Schott, J. and Elliot, K. (2009) "Economic sanctions reconsidered, 3rd edition," Peterson Institute for International Economics, 87(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/978-0-88132-412-9>.

Human Rights Watch (2018). *China: Events of 2018*. [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/china#:~:text=%E2%80%9Cpreventive%20measures.%E2%80%9D-> [Accessed 13 Nov]

OHCHR (2022). *OHCHR | OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China*. [online] OHCHR. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ohchr-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region>.

Polaschek, R. (2021) “Responses to the Uyghur crisis and the implications for business and human rights legislation,” *Business and Human Rights Journal*, 6(3), pp. 567–575. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/bhj.2021.44>.

Raab, D. (2021) *Human rights violations in Xinjiang and the government's response: Foreign secretary's statement*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-on-the-situation-in-xinjiang-and-the-governments-response> [Accessed: Nov 14]

Roberts, S.R. (2021). *The war on the Uyghurs : China's campaign against Xinjiang's Muslims*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Smith Finley, J. (2021). Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang. *Journal of genocide research*, 23(3), pp.348–370.

SEVASTOPULO, D., 2022. US moves towards imposing sanctions on Chinese tech group Hikvision. *FT.com*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/7bc70335-138e-4f56-afe1-ae4383eefb2b> [Accessed 14 Nov]

United Nations (2019). *United Nations Office on genocide prevention and the responsibility to protect*. [online] un.org. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml>. [Accessed 14. Nov]

United Nations (2020). China must address grave human rights concerns and enable credible international investigation: UN experts <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/china-must-address-grave-human-rights-concerns-and-enable-credible#:~:text=They%20renewed%20the%20calls%20made,force%20against%20protesters%20including%20in> [Accessed 14. Nov]

Wang, M. (2023). *How Governments and Civil Society Can Help China's Uyghurs*. [online] Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/04/how-governments-and-civil-society-can-help-chinas-uyghurs>.

Xu, V.X., Cave, D., Leibold, J., Munro, K., and Ruser, N. (2020). ‘Uyghurs for sale: ‘Re-education’, forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang’, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 26, pp. 3-41.