

TO: Wang Yi, PRC Foreign Minister
FROM: Marnie Preston, Chinese diplomat
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RE: Treatment of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Ethnic Autonomous Region

Summary

China's treatment of the Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups has caused international concern and condemnation of the PRC's actions. There are policy options that will improve international relations and end the oppression of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region (XUAR). The policies I recommend surround the PRC's adherence to international human rights standards and agreements in order to benefit the PRC's international relations, however the nationalist core of the CCP and the people of China may hold back the PRC from reaching these international standards and improving international relations.

Background

The Uyghur people of Xinjiang have been subjected to an array of human rights violations for years. In 2017, over 1,000,000 Uyghurs were arbitrarily detained in mass internment camps and over 80,000 were coerced into forced labour (Business, Energy and Industrial Committee, 2022). The PRC's actions against Uyghurs are considered crimes against humanity according to the 2022 UN OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This report has resulted in a joint statement of 51 countries including the US and the UK condemning the actions of the PRC, which is palpable evidence of deteriorating international relations (Kariuki, J. 2023) which need to be amended.

Policy Options

1. Improve PRC's commitment towards upholding human rights. PRC must follow the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has been ratified by the PRC and conduct external investigations into treatment of Uyghurs in XUAR.

By acknowledging global concern for the well-being of Uyghurs and in turn complying with the UDHR, the PRC can improve their currently damaged international image and encourage trust, cooperation and improved diplomatic relations with other nations. An external investigation into the PRC's activity in XUAR would increase China's transparency and once again improve international image and provide a basis for a diplomatic solution to political disputes over XUAR. Domestic backlash over an external investigation is expected by the CCP who may interpret an external investigation as a threat to their sovereignty. If there is too much internal pushback, an internal investigation could be carried out; however, its credibility must be guaranteed in order to positively impact international relations.

2. Be transparent about and resolve forced labour in XUAR supply Chains. PRC must encourage transparent supply chain audits within XUAR and engage with the International Labour Organisation to comply with internationally recognised Labour standards. Addressing and resolving forced labour within supply chains will result in improved labour conditions for Uyghurs. This policy will improve global reputation, allowing foreign investors to invest with confidence in the labour ethics in the PRC and help to maintain pre-existing trade relationships. In response to the situation in XUAR the US enforced the

Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act, resulting in \$1.7 billion worth of shipments from Xinjiang being detained (KHARON, 2023). Refusing to resolve forced labour could lead to further action being taken by the US, as they consider expanding restrictions on federal procurement law (Flacks, M. 2023). The UK has also stated “We recommend that the Department, (...) fully assess the options for introducing targeted sanctions against Chinese and international businesses implicated in human rights abuses and the exploitation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, 2021). Resolving the use of forced labour paired with transparent audits could result in the loosening or lifting of the US’s FLPA and discourage further sanctions on PRC exports. The nationalist people of China and CCP party members may scrutinise this policy, viewing this shift towards transparency as conceding to international pressure, however exports make up 20.68% of China’s GDP (Trading Economics, 2023), and deteriorating international relations could have a negative impact on China’s economy.

3. Stop the abuse of national security policy. The PRC must only invoke national security law during situations where “the interest of the whole nation is at stake,” (David, R. 2022). The Jailing and arbitrary detaining of human rights lawyers must end.

If the PRC stopped their abuse of national security policy they would demonstrate a new commitment to human rights issues, improving the PRC’s standing amongst countries which prioritise human rights in their foreign policy such as the UK (Ward, B. 2020). However, implementing this policy could result in pushback as the PRC has deemed the Uyghurs as separatists (Maizland, L. 2022) which falls under the national security issue of article 103 (David, R. 2022). Invoking change on CCP opinions on Uyghurs may be difficult but China must recognise their abuse of their own laws. Ceasing the arbitrary detaining and disbarment of human rights lawyers under national security legislation is a human rights violation and must end (Article 19, 2023). In doing so, the PRC will make a great leap towards being a pro human rights nation, once again aiding their global image. Achieving this policy option would require an upheaval of CCP perspective on national security which may require much time and persuasion as CCP members may view this as weakness against external pressure, but it is the only option in this case to improve international relations and standing in the global community.

Policy Recommendation

With each of these policy options I recognise there is a trade-off between advancing and improving the PRC’s position on human rights and the possibility of major internal conflicts. However, I believe that implementing these policy options is the best strategy the PRC must improve its global standing and international relations with the UK and beyond with regards to the XUAR. The UK and many other nations have denounced China’s actions, and some are implementing sanctions. The US, China’s biggest trading partner (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2018) has sanctioned parts of China’s exports due to the oppression of the Uyghur people. Trust and respect for China in liberal countries is waning, with the percentage of UK, US, Swedish and German citizens, amongst other nations that hold a negative view of China at all-time high, which is due to concerns over their human rights policies, claims Pew Research Center (2022). The PRC urgently needs to improve their global image to be able to improve foreign policies. Despite the evidence supporting this claim, Chinese nationalism threatens progress, external influence within the PRC is rarely received well, with the US’s sanctions seen as forms of “aggression” and “criticism” to Chinese nationalists (Wang, Z. 2022). Nationalism has been a key part of the CCP’s ideology since its inception (Doshi, R.,

2021), however a slightly less aggressive form of said nationalism will aid the PRC's much needed pursuit of improved foreign policy with the UK and the rest of the globe.

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