

TO: David Cameron, UK Foreign Secretary
FROM: Shuyi Yu, British diplomat
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RE: Protecting the Rights of Uyghur Muslims

Summary

The Uyghur people in Xinjiang have faced oppression for numerous years. It is reported that since 2017, more than a million people have been detained in re-education camps (Maizland, 2022). Several foreign governments, including the United States, have described such actions by China as genocide. It is clear that human rights have been violated, which the UN has recognised.

In short, this memorandum seeks to pressure the CCP into releasing their control over Uyghur Muslims. I suggest the use of sanctions, mandatory supply chain reporting, and border control.

Background

The Uyghurs are a Muslim Turkic ethnic group that reside in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). It is home to over 11 million Uyghurs. The influx of Han Chinese in the 1950s led to ethnic tensions and economic disparities over several decades (*Uyghur History, Language, & Facts*, 2023). This led to violent incidents and protests. The Chinese authorities responded to this by arresting or shooting suspected Uyghur dissidents and separatists. Since then, greater control has been implemented through the use of security, cameras, checkpoints, and police patrols. According to BBC News (2022), China insists the Uyghurs are waging a violent campaign for an independent state.

The CCP also attempts to erase Muslim practices and beliefs by detaining them in camps and describes it as ‘‘transformation through education centres’’ (*China’s ‘transformation centres’*, 2023). China claims that these camps are voluntary and provide lessons to steer away from terrorism and extremism (BBC News, 2022).

Half a million Uyghurs per year are forced into manual labour in the cotton fields of Xinjiang. It is said that 20% of the world’s cotton supply is sourced from this forced labour (Sudworth, 2020). Companies such as Nike, H&M, and Adidas have experienced backlash, with calls to boycott their products (Brant, 2021). China was the UK’s largest importing partner in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2022). It is imperative that, as a nation, we are aware of the ‘genocide’ occurring in Xinjiang and introduce policies to ensure we do not support such acts. The Parliament wrote inquiries to 15 high-profile companies, including those in the fashion sector, in 2020 (House of Commons, 2021).

This is simply not enough. A call for the banning of Xinjiang imports is imperative, with new British policies to ensure we are not indirectly supporting forced labour.

Policy options

Mandatory Supply Chain Transparency Reporting

Companies that have become increasingly aware of the importance of transparency, such as Patagonia, publish detailed lists of their suppliers (Holland and Cornish, 2022). However,

without a policy for mandatory supply chain reporting, it is unclear as to the extent to which UK companies are involved in sourcing materials from Xinjiang's forced labour. Clothing brands such as Puma, Jack Wolfskin, and Tom Tailor have been contacted by The Guardian in response to findings of traces of Xinjiang cotton in their products. (Oltermann, 2022). It is said that Jack Wolfskin did not directly answer the question regarding the use of Xinjiang cotton but reassured that its cotton was certified. Tom Tailor did not reply to any queries. Trusting companies' word or making these inquiries is simply not enough. To establish a greater regulatory framework in the UK regarding Uyghurs, a policy for mandatory supplier reporting is fundamental.

However, an anonymous auditor that investigates Chinese subcontractors stated that it was practically impossible for western companies to thoroughly provide transparency on their supply chains, as Xi Jinping's CCP restricts access in China (Oltermann, 2022). This poses a problem for this policy, as its effectiveness may be limited.

Greater border control regarding imports

In 2015, the US provided their border protection agency with the power to issue 'Withhold Release Orders' if they deemed there was sufficient evidence to suggest forced labour was used in the production of a product (Holland and Cornish, 2022). I urge a similar policy in the UK to allow our border agencies to investigate allegations of forced labour. In turn, block imports where ties to forced labour are found. This may also encourage companies to conduct more thorough supply chain due diligence.

Conversely, gathering sufficient evidence to prove the use of forced labour is time-consuming and costly, with Canada's border agency stating it can take up to six months. Moreover, delaying imports may have a negative effect on consumers and trade with the UK. The Office for National Statistics (2023) states imports increased by 32.3% in 2022 in relation to 2021. On the other hand, the UK is in a trade deficit, and deterring imports may narrow this gap.

Further sanctions

In 2021, as part of the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, the UK imposed travel bans and asset freezes against four Chinese government officials and a Xinjiang security body. The US and Canada did the same (Possible, 2021). Perhaps a more extreme measure is necessary. The UK could partner with the US to impose similar sanctions as those placed in Russia. Since China relies heavily on exports, banning imports from China, such as machinery and transport equipment, which equated to £27.5bn in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2022), could have a greater impact. The UK could bolster the sanctions regime and encourage other countries to follow suit.

While banning imports, among other sanctions, would have a detrimental effect on China, our economy may also suffer the effects in the long term. With China as the UK's largest import partner in 2021 and 6th for exports (Office for National Statistics, 2022), imposing extreme sanctions may harm relationships with China in the future and impact trade. In the long run, this measure may not be viable.

Policy Recommendation

I recommend the implementation of further sanctions on China. To maximise the effect, other nations must be on board. Discussion and agreements with the US or Canada can be made to

ban all imports from China and possibly from the SWIFT system as we have seen with Russia. This is preferable to current and alternative policies as it showcases a more credible threat to China. Especially since the US is China's top trade partner, with imports from China totaling \$562.9 billion in 2022 (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2020). The intended outcome is the Uyghur people's liberty at the initiation of the UK and for our nation to be at the forefront of protecting human rights.

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