

To: The Rt Hon David Lammy, Foreign Secretary

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RE: Policy Recommendation for Addressing Human Rights Abuses Against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang

Date: 2nd November 2024

Summary

The FCDO suggests that the UK should support the targeted sanctions regime against Chinese individuals and organizations responsible for the persecution of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and it would also be in line with the UK's obligations under international human rights law and show the world that the country is ready to take action against systematic human rights abuses and support the victims. The approach, backed by diplomatic actions and cooperation with other countries, is to apply economic and political pressure on the Chinese authorities to change the situation for Uyghur Muslims. The strategy also helps to uphold the UK's moral standing and international credibility while not overcomplicating the overall UK-China relationship or risking critical economic partnerships and trade concerns that benefit both countries.

Background

The case of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang has become one of the most significant human rights abuses that received much attention in which over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities are detained in what is referred to as 're-education camps' where they are forced to work, monitored, and denied their freedom of religion (Zenz, 2018). Although the Chinese government justifies these actions as counter-terrorism measures, human rights organizations like Amnesty International regard these actions as state-sanctioned persecution and erasure of culture (Amnesty International, 2020). Such allegations as forced sterilizations, restrictions on religious freedom, and surveillance technologies only contributed to these concerns, proving that there is a systematic attempt to either assimilate or exterminate the Uyghur people (Economy, 2020). The UK has a tradition of advocating for human rights and it is right to support the rights of the Uyghur people under international law and the current approach has been to verbally condemn and use multilateral diplomacy, which has not helped to stop the abuses. Dealing with this problem in a more active manner would also show the UK's commitment to human rights on the international level and would also strengthen its position as a leader in the fight for human rights around the world and the failure to act may erode the UK's influence and may lead to other states participating in or turning a blind eye to such violations (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Analysis of Policy Options

1. **Continued Diplomatic Condemnation:** Diplomatic condemnation allows the UK to voice opposition without imposing significant economic or political costs. However, relying solely on verbal condemnation has minimal impact on China's policies regarding Xinjiang (Economy, 2020). Diplomatic statements may foster awareness but lack enforceable consequences, thereby failing to pressure the Chinese government to reform. As stipulated by Amnesty International (2020), without tangible repercussions, diplomatic condemnation remains largely symbolic and ineffective.
2. **Multilateral Sanctions through the United Nations (UN):** A multilateral approach through the UN would involve seeking a collective response with the support of

international partners. Multilateral sanctions provide a unified front, amplifying the pressure on China. However, China's veto power in the UN Security Council makes it challenging to secure effective multilateral action (UN Human Rights Council, 2022). The UN's limited capacity to enforce sanctions on permanent members of the Security Council underscores the need for alternative measures that do not rely on unanimous international support.

3. **Targeted Economic Sanctions:** Targeted sanctions against Chinese companies and officials involved in human rights abuses would directly address the issue by impacting specific individuals and organizations. This approach aligns with measures taken by other countries, such as the United States, which has imposed sanctions on Chinese entities responsible for the Xinjiang situation (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Targeted sanctions offer a middle ground, focusing on human rights violators while minimizing the broader economic impact on Sino-British trade.
4. **Support for International Human Rights Investigations:** Promoting an international investigation through organizations like the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) would bring increased scrutiny to human rights abuses in Xinjiang. An investigation would increase awareness around the world and may create a group of people who would condemn China's actions. However, China's participation in international institutions may prevent positive results (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Furthermore, investigative processes are time-consuming and do not offer the timely intervention needed to safeguard the Uyghur Muslims who are still suffering from these policies.

Policy Recommendation

The FCDO advises that the UK should engage in a selective sanction's regime against Chinese persons and companies implicated in the rights abuses in Xinjiang. In contrast to general sanctions that may harm other areas of the UK-China relations, targeted sanctions would only affect those individuals who are directly involved in abuses, making this option more reasonable. Targeted sanctions are preferable because they directly affect human rights violators, which is in line with the Magnitsky-style sanctions that the UK has applied in response to human rights abuses globally (Global human rights sanctions, 2021).

Human Rights Watch (2021) has noted that targeted sanctions can be effective in preventing future abuses because they make it clear that participation in human rights abuses will result in personal and financial repercussions. Moreover, the UK should do this in collaboration with other countries like the United States and the European Union to increase the effectiveness of the campaign and foster international support for human rights. Multilateral coordination would also reduce possible economic consequences because the responsibility would be shared among similar countries.

Besides sanctions, the UK should continue diplomatic pressure through bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, pointing out that better human rights in Xinjiang could lead to more constructive Sino-British relations. According to Amnesty International (2020), the use of sanctions alongside dialogue is a good strategy because it enables the UK to demonstrate its position on human rights issues while not completely closing the door on diplomacy. This combined approach would show that the UK is committed to the protection of human rights without compromising on the importance of diplomacy with China.

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