



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Xinjiang detention camps, HC 800

Tuesday 13 April 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 April 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Royston Smith; Henry Smith; Graham Stringer, Andrew Rosindell.

Questions 193-230

Witnesses

[I](#): Rushan Abbas, Founder and Executive Director, Campaign for Uyghurs, Rayhan Asat, Attorney, Yale World Fellow, President at American Turkic International Lawyers Association, and Peter Irwin, Senior Program Officer for Advocacy and Communications, Uyghur Human Rights Project.

[II](#): Azeem Ibrahim, Research Professor at Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College and Director, Center for Global Policy, and Charles Parton OBE, Senior Associate Fellow, RUSI.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rushan Abbas, Rayhan Asat and Peter Irwin.

Q193 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are looking at the Xinjiang detention camps and the implications for the United Kingdom. We have a series of witnesses, and we are very lucky to have with us first Rushan Abbas, Rayhan Asat and Peter Irwin. Rushan, would you please introduce yourself?

Rushan Abbas: Thank you so much. My name is Rushan Abbas. I am a Uyghur American and a rights advocate, sister of a retired medical doctor detained by the Chinese Communist regime, and founder and executive director of Campaign for Uyghurs.

Chair: Thank you. Rayhan, if you would, please.

Rayhan Asat: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am Rayhan Asat, Uyghur human rights lawyer, president of the American Turkic International Lawyers Association and advocate for my brother, Ekpar Asat, a Uyghur entrepreneur forcibly disappeared by the Chinese Government since 2016.

Chair: Thank you. Peter?

Peter Irwin: My name is Peter Irwin. I am the senior programme officer at the Uyghur Human Rights Project. I worked previously at the World Uyghur Congress as UN representative and programme manager, and oversaw the work there. At UHRP, I am responsible for UN engagement, advocacy and supporting research. Thanks for having me.

Q194 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed to all three of you for joining us. If I may, I will start the questioning, which is all connected to what the UK Government should be doing to support those who are being persecuted. May I begin with you, Rushan? What should the UK Government be doing to help the Uyghurs and others ethnic minority groups that are facing state-sanctioned persecution?

Rushan Abbas: Thank you. Public acknowledgment and an official recognition that this is genocide would go a long way towards the pursuit of justice. In general, we must recognise these actions as the crimes that they are, which is active genocide—the intention is there. The Chinese Communist party is acting as a criminal organisation. By viewing the Chinese so-called Government as such, it should become much clearer how that should guide most of the decisions made by the UK Government. We have an obligation as citizens of humanity to support Uyghurs and defend them from the many actions of the evil men intent on their destruction. This is not just about saving the future of the Uyghurs; it is about the conscience of the world, so it is really important for the UK Government to act with accountable actions.

Chair: Thank you. Rayhan, do you have a view?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rayhan Asat: First, I want to extend my deepest condolences to all friends and allies in the UK on the passing of Prince Philip. I also want to say that I stand in solidarity with the BBC for the remarkable reporting that brought the truth and exposed all the atrocities that are happening. Unfortunately, they were evicted from China for that kind of reporting.

That said, I think we need to reconcile, and there has to be a reckoning within the UK that millions of innocent people are held up in those camps. I will give you a perfect example of why those are not re-education camps—we are coming to that understanding. My own brother is actually an alumnus of the State Department's most prestigious programme—such programmes turn out many world leaders, including UK politicians Margaret Thatcher, Theresa May, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, to name a few. Just imagine for a second, regardless of our political ideologies, what the UK's history would look like if we had not had those world leaders.

I think my brother's enforced disappearance speaks to the fact that these are not some sort of re-education camp for people who need to get an education to be better prepared for society. Sadly, their forced labour is being utilised in the global supply chain. While the current UK law, the Modern Slavery Act, was hailed at the time as landmark legislation that raised awareness within the UK of our supply chain and the trafficking of victims, it does not have teeth to begin with. The enforcement agencies do not have resources, data sharing or knowledge to really tackle this issue.

To begin—I am sure we will get into more detail as we move through the hearing—I would recommend that the UK follow the US model and design specific legislation, like that in the United States, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. The UK could perhaps have similar legislation, an anti-modern-slavery Act for the Uyghurs specifically, naming the Act as such. Secondly, while there is discussion about the specific legislation, it is important for the UK to strengthen its anti-modern-slavery laws to ensure that our companies do not become complicit in the detention and mass atrocities.

Q195 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Peter, perhaps you could set out what the US has done and build on the point that Rayhan was making about what the UK Government should be doing.

Peter Irwin: Thanks. I think that actually aligns with some of the recommendations I will make, and I will keep it broad for now. I think that the UK should, of course, be denying forced-labour goods entry. That is along the lines of the US Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, and partially along the lines of customs and border protections—WROs, or withhold release orders—essentially to ban the import of goods, such as cotton and tomatoes in particular. That is one step that they've taken.

Secondly, export controls: the US has actually been quite good on this as well, essentially controlling the export of technology that could be used by Chinese technology companies to suppress or control Uyghurs.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thirdly—again, this is a broader ask on a recommendation for the UK Government—continue building alliances; I think that alliance building at multilateral institutions is incredibly important.

Fourthly, there is supporting Uyghurs abroad. The US has taken some steps with the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, which requires attention to threats to and intimidation of Uyghurs who are residing abroad.

More broadly, some of the questions that I get quite often are, “Does the genocide designation really work? Do sanctions really work? Does legislation really work?” The short answer, in isolation, is “No”, but as a collective—if you use these in concert—it is absolutely “Yes”. That has been critical, I think, for us from civil society, and from the Uyghur Human Rights Project’s perspective, if you’re not everywhere—if you’re not fighting in every arena—if you’re not working with multilateral institutions to support Uyghur refugees and asylum seekers abroad, and if you’re not working with UK-based companies, recognising what’s happening with Chinese companies and with investment firms, you have to be all over the place.

I am certainly happy to get into specifics, but another quick point that I want to make is that we need to dispense immediately with the idea that we can persuade or cajole the Chinese Government into acting in a way that we want them to act. I think that, in this case, they simply do not recognise that human rights violations or abuses are taking place at all, so how do you actually work with this? I think that must be taken into consideration.

Lastly, here’s a sort of framing question, which I think we need to wrestle with: as Rushan pointed out, we should recognise it as genocide, but what is the implication of that? What does it mean to work with, to trade with, to do business with and to have a normal bilateral relationship with a Government that is committing genocide? I am not sure whether we can quite answer that question, but if we can perhaps take steps to answer it, that would help a lot.

Q196 Chair: Thank you very much. You covered quite a lot of areas there in which overlaps are possible. I will touch on one area, where I would be very interested to hear what you think we can do.

Rayhan, perhaps I can start with you. What can the UK do to support the relatives of those being held in camps today, and what can the UK Government do to help provide information about missing relatives? Is there, indeed, anything that we can do, or is it, as Peter says, a regime that will not listen?

Rayhan Asat: For far too long in our engagement with China, we have allowed China to dictate diplomatic norms. There is an understanding that the Chinese Government don’t like us to raise human rights abuses in the public domain or public discourse. Often, we have opted for a private form of diplomacy, and that hasn’t worked, just like the idea that perhaps economic integration would lead to China becoming a more democratic country.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Therefore, it is important for the UK to protect its Uyghur British citizens and ask about their relatives—their current conditions, their whereabouts and what is happening to them. It is incredibly important to say their names in these parliamentary hearings to make sure the Chinese Government has been put on notice.

The second issue—I think we are bringing it up—is that we are often hearing that advocates and activists are being harassed in the countries where they reside, including the United Kingdom. There is an attempt to silence activists and advocates. That, I think, is considered transnational oppression.

In light of the horrific murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the United States rolled out a ban called the Khashoggi ban. While it is new, and we have yet to see how it will be implemented, there has to be a discussion in the United Kingdom on having a similar ban.

I think this is very effective, because, while the atrocities are happening in Xinjiang, there are many people in the central Government who do have a hand in issuing either directives or guidelines on how the mass atrocities should be carried out. The visa ban is extended not only to the perpetrators of these crimes, but to their relatives.

These officials cannot just continue their lavish life in China, sending their children to the wonderful institutions in the UK and reaping the benefit of UK institutions, while trying to silence activists and advocates. I really hope there is a reckoning on transnational oppression to ensure that we have laws and procedures in place to prevent it.

Q197 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Do you have anything to add, Rushan?

Rushan Abbas: To add to what Rayhan said very eloquently, I would like to say, first, that it would be helpful to acknowledge that our relatives are basically hostages taken by the Chinese regime.

My sister, a retired medical doctor, was abducted by the Chinese regime in September 2018, just a few days after I spoke out publicly about my husband's entire family disappearing into the camps. That is more than two and half years ago. I have been harassed by the Chinese authorities as they tried to silence me by using my sister as collateral. Until this day, I have not been given any proof of life. I have no idea whether she is still alive.

The safest option for the UK to obtain information, with the permission of the family members, of course, would be for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to exchange and verify information about specific cases with global partners through London, rather than through the embassies inside China.

Parliamentarians should also work to spotlight the cases of victims of the Chinese regime and ask parliamentary questions about high-profile victims of enforced disappearance, to draw attention to their cases and to press the Government to take action to secure their release.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q198 **Chair:** Thank you. Peter, before I come to you, I should say that there are various different reports that we have seen about this. There has been fantastic coverage by John Sudworth of the BBC. His extremely courageous reporting has sadly seen him have to leave China for his family's safety.

What do you think the UK Government should be doing to call out abuses and identify or support relatives better? I have just seen another very impressive piece of reporting by Bloomberg News on the use of slave or pressed labour in silicone manufacturing. This is clearly not simply low-end goods, if you see what I mean. This is also happening in many other areas. What else do you think we should be doing?

Peter Irwin: In terms of threats and intimidation, my friends Rushan and Rayhan speak eloquently on those points, given their personal connection.

To take intimidation and threats first, as I mentioned, the US did pass the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, which requires relevant departments and agencies essentially to submit reports on identifying entities responsible for intimidation and harassment.

For example, the UK could do something similar, to produce reports to show who is actually doing the intimidation. Local and federal law enforcement agencies should be directed to thoroughly investigate these instances of attacks. The Uyghur population in the UK is relatively small, but it does exist. In a 2020 report, my organisation, the Uyghur Human Rights Project, documented Chinese police essentially reaching across borders to harass and threaten Uyghurs abroad, including in the UK, to silence them.

We also previously saw a report on these hostage-style, proof-of-life videos that are being propagated on platforms such as CGTN, for example. So, we were happy to see Ofcom blocking the licence of CGTN; that is a good first step. There needs to be consideration of where these hostage-style videos or other propaganda are being propagated on other networks.

At the moment, I think the UK is considering a version of the US Foreign Agents Registration Act. That would certainly help if there was attention paid to the Uyghur issue, or something that would consider that as an issue.

Lastly, here is something that we could speak about in more in detail. The UK could, of course, commit to providing asylum to all Uyghurs if there are cases of asylum in the UK. That would be protecting those who are claiming asylum and their refugee status.

Chair: Thank you. Chris, you wanted to come in.

Q199 **Chris Bryant:** Thanks very much for joining us today. We have talked a bit about what Britain might be able to do in respect of people in China. Is there much we can do about the harassment of Uyghurs living elsewhere, in other countries, other than our own?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Rayhan Asat: I want to commend a lot of great advocacy and support from the UK Government. We do have several MPs, such as Ms Ghani, and the Prime Minister has made strong statements condemning the mass atrocities and grave human rights abuses. That kind of reception must be continued.

To do that, we also need to call out the transnational oppression and harassment of Uyghur citizens abroad. We need to include that within the language and discourse, so that the Chinese Government will be deterred from continuing such cross-border acts that would be considered in violation of international norms.

Secondly, it is important to work with our allies on this issue, to address these grave concerns. We need to have some knowledge-sharing. The US-UK special relationship is a great starting point in engaging in dialogue, to ensure we tackle this issue together in a concerted effort to gain knowledge within the different systems. What about the European Union? Brexit or not, those are like-minded countries and we need to have that kind of dialogue.

Thirdly, one aspect of the shocking and appalling nature of the transnational oppression is taking place in countries that have a very close relationship with China. Their Uyghur citizens are being deported back to China, although at this point the world knows that these people will be sent to concentration camps. We need to put pressure on those countries that they cannot be deported, and when they are, there have to be costs for the countries doing that in violation of international laws and norms.

We cannot continue to disregard that this is happening in Egypt. We need to ensure that we prevent it together. If that requires international awareness raising, then we have to engage in that. There also has to be some sort of cost. We cannot just have business as usual and continue to do business with those countries. We need to engage in a style like that. The United Kingdom will not tolerate that kind of behaviour in violation of international norms and laws.

Q200 **Chris Bryant:** Do you think Arab countries have done enough in this? It seems surprising to us how little they have done.

Rayhan Asat: Absolutely not, but we know the answer. It is good to ask: what about this country? How much have we done as a leading democracy? That is also something we need to ask ourselves. In terms of Arab countries, I am not happy with the current situation, but we need to understand and acknowledge that there is so much dependence on China in their economies. The Belt and Road project is a wonderful example of that. How do we tackle this? That is a question that the UK Government should ask itself, together with like-minded countries.

Q201 **Chris Bryant:** Rushan, what is your take on that?

Rushan Abbas: To what Rayhan said very eloquently and described very well, I would add one point. Right now, the Chinese Government is not only getting away with this genocide, and the world is not only turning a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

blind eye to those genocidal actions, but the Chinese regime is being rewarded by Beijing being allowed to host the 2022 winter Olympics. The one thing the UK Government could do for Uyghur people is not to allow that to happen. A country that, on our watch, has glorified concentration camps and slavery, targeting one ethnicity because of their racial and religious differences, and enforced genocide does not respect the values of the prestigious Olympic games or offer humanity. But here we are again, now combating a lust for money above all.

Countries should go beyond paying lip service. We must address our own complicity while recognising that there are true evils on a level many of us have been privileged to avoid seeing or experiencing and which are wholly unchecked today in China. The UK should join in a call for a boycott of the 2022 Olympic games and should at least make it clear that the diplomatic boycott is the bare minimum. The International Olympic Committee should never have allowed Beijing to host the games. It is absolutely preposterous that the United Kingdom would even entertain the idea of normalising a genocidal regime hosting these games, having learnt nothing from the 1936 Berlin games. We cannot fail to learn from the history of mankind, especially the worst parts.

Rayhan Asat: If you will allow me, I want to add one point that was the conclusion of my remark about the Uyghurs being deported from the countries that have close relationships with China. I think it is really important that we as leading democracies also provide safeguards and a path to citizenship, and allow them to come to the UK and US. The US is leading the way in proposing legislation—a Uyghur victims protection Act—and that is something that the United Kingdom could emulate. I think you have done this in the case of the Hong Kongers, and we know that, at this point, the Xinjiang situation is far worse. I do not like comparing two different situations, but I think that is something where I really hope the UK, as a democracy and as a nation that has historically provided these kinds of protection to refugees, could lead the way.

Q202 **Chris Bryant:** Finally, Peter, are there any countries that you think have behaved particularly badly with regard to deportations?

Peter Irwin: Yes. Over the years, I and the UHRP have documented this pretty closely. In terms of the refoulement of Uyghurs, I would not pick on one country in particular. It has to do with a lot of the countries in China's periphery. Their neighbours have been very acquiescent, and they have been sending Uyghurs back for decades now. I would say in particular—contextually, China holds bilateral extradition territories with at least 32 countries. Turkey might be the 33rd; its Parliament has not ratified the agreement yet, but this is certainly a concern for Uyghurs in Turkey, at the rate at which I am sure Rayhan could speak about.

In terms of specific responses, I think the UK, for example, could increase quotas for the resettlement of refugees and streamline applications. UHRP is finding that in some countries Uyghurs have to wait years just to secure interviews, for example, and that has to do with asylum as well. Thirdly, I think Uyghurs could be designated in the UK. That is the suggestion from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

legislation in the US right now—the Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act—to adopt P2 status in the US, which is a special category to bring Uyghurs in. This cannot be done only through the UK. It sounds like a bit of a platitude, but it should be done through work with partners like Canada, the US, the UK, Australia. Of course, one country cannot take all of them. Having these kinds of designations is very, very important.

The UK should offer protection from Uyghurs in third countries who are threatened. In some cases, this needs to be done quietly. We should recognise that some Governments cannot openly defy the Chinese Government, or are not in a position to do so. There was a case in Thailand, for example, where Uyghurs were able to get to Turkey to safety back in 2015, then maybe about a week after about 109 Uyghurs were forcibly sent to China, so I think that needs to be taken into consideration. Protection of Uyghurs abroad is very important.

I would say there are hotspots though: central Asia, Turkey in particular because of the extradition treaty that might be ratified, and south-east Asia. At the moment, there are about 50 Uyghurs stranded in Thailand. I have been working on the Uyghur issue for about seven years. Right from when I began working, they were detained trying to cross the border to flee. That was back in 2014 or 2015, so you will recognise how bad the situation was then. There are certainly some steps they could take.

One consideration is that, perhaps to a limited extent, the UK Government now recognises the European convention on human rights, but it is worth noting that the European Court of Human Rights found in 2020 that Bulgaria would have been in violation of article 1 and 2 of the convention if they had sent back Uyghurs who were claiming asylum in Bulgaria, for example, having crossed the border from Turkey.

Those are a few suggestions.

Rushan Abbas: Can I just add two quick points here about what the UK could do? The UK Parliament should demand the closure of the CCP-funded institutes, like the Confucius institutes, and the UK Parliament should require transparency on the sister city relationships with Chinese cities. Those are used by the Chinese state to push the Belt and Road initiative, and that is one of the key reasons for the Uyghur genocide, as was explained earlier.

Q203 **Chair:** So you would end the twinning between London and Beijing, for example?

Rushan Abbas: Yes, absolutely.

Q204 **Graham Stringer:** I want to follow up on Chris's question. Is there a database of countries that have deported people and a list of the people who have been deported? Does such information exist?

Peter Irwin: There is. UHRP has not published a report on this yet, but we do have a database that is in the final stages of development. A few years ago, back in 2015, I developed a cursory database in one of my



reports, based on publicly available information. A new database is in development at the moment. Hopefully in the next month or so, it will be made public, or we will at least have the numbers.

Q205 **Graham Stringer:** Is it more or less complete?

Peter Irwin: It depends how you define complete. In every situation with regards to Uyghurs, as you might know, it is very difficult to obtain information. It is essentially impossible for activists or any advocates to access the region at all, for obvious reasons. It is as complete as we can make it, but there are upper level estimates in terms of how many Uyghurs have been sent back, for example, given our current awareness.

Q206 **Graham Stringer:** Rushan and Rayhan, you have campaigned and have come under a certain amount of pressure from the Chinese Government yourselves. Do you have any direct evidence that that has worsened the situation for the people you are campaigning on behalf of? One can speculate that that might happen, but do you know that it has made the situation of people who are interned in concentration camps worse?

Rushan Abbas: Many people are afraid of speaking out because they are afraid that their family members are going to be persecuted if they do. As we know, many people waited for years to come forward and speak out. The people living in free countries, like the United States, Canada, the UK or in Europe, are being harassed by Chinese embassies and officials. These types of activities should be treated as espionage, because they are basically blackmailing the Uyghur people living abroad. They are running a smear campaign against us. They are attacking us and trying to dehumanise us and strip away our credit.

For example, in my case, my sister was taken in September 2018. In December 2019, the Chinese regime said on the China Global Television Network that I was stealing other people's photos and claiming that they were my missing relatives. They were attacking me like that. This is an ongoing attack. Chinese officials and state media use the platforms we have on social media, or in the media, to attack and discredit us. Not only are our family members suffering, being taken to the concentration camps because we spoke out, but we are being attacked from the right and the left, all over in this free country—in this free world, we speak out and we get punished.

Graham Stringer: Rayhan?

Rayhan Asat: Mr Stringer, I sit before you as an attorney, a sister and an advocate, and it is an incredibly sad situation for me to speak against a country that I once loved, promoting its image globally. Like many others—politicians and leading democracies—I believe that China is progressing and potentially could be a democratic country. I myself have organised a China-Turkey conference, and I was a speaker at a China-Canada conference. I come to this current crisis with a profile as someone who has helped the Chinese Government's image in a different timeline.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

My brother, as I mentioned earlier to show his character and calibre, is someone who devoted his life to philanthropy and built his entrepreneurship based on those values. I come from a family who, in the eyes of the Chinese Government, were considered to be model citizens, taking pride in the Chinese opening their economy to the world and now promoting diversity as well, but things have changed. That is something it is very difficult for me to wrestle with as well.

It took me four years to speak out, and it comes from a deep sense of fear that my family might face some form of retaliation. So far, I still maintain a deep connection with my family—I mean, I talk to them—but I cannot talk to them about my brother. We do not even acknowledge the current state of my brother's life, which is something that we really need to pay attention to. This is an evolving crisis, and oftentimes the media have paid attention to the concentration camps, but I got to learn from Senator Chris Coons here in Washington, DC, that my brother was sentenced in 2020—I learned about it in January—on trumped-up charges of inciting ethnic hatred and ethnic discrimination.

Using the term “inciting ethnic hatred” against a minority that has been historically systematically oppressed did not resonate with anyone. Congresswoman Norton of my district of Washington, DC, asked the Chinese Government the same question: how could my brother incite discrimination when he is the oppressed? The Chinese embassy here confirmed—I have it in an email confirming the exact language—that, after verifying with the relevant authorities, he did commit incitement of ethnic hatred and ethnic discrimination.

Perhaps that label just did not resonate with the international community, however, and it did not work to describe me. The Chinese Government on Friday, in their press release—they cannot say anything about me, because I promoted China's image before and I have contributed to Chinese society, as have my entire family—said, “She lied. The crime is inciting secession.” That is the kind of effort that we are seeing, and it is something that we need to pay attention to.

The Chinese Government claim that people are being graduated from the camps, but we need to ask questions: where do they graduate too? One answer is forced labour factories, another prisons. Just because the Chinese Government calls them prisons does not make them prisons—they are still prison camps, which have doubled since 2016.

Q207 Graham Stringer: You have answered a lot of the questions that I was going to ask. May I ask a simple one? If there is one thing that another country has done effectively and well in support of the imprisoned Uighurs, what is that one thing that the United Kingdom could follow the example of and do right away?

Rayhan Asat: I will just give a very simple answer. The US State Department, in both public and private forums, has raised my brother's case at the highest level, including the State Department spokesperson. My brother's case should be a British case. We are talking about the Great



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Britain of Gordon Brown and Margaret Thatcher. After the hearing, our MPs should tweet out: “Are these the re-education camps?” Here we have a man who devoted his life to peace building; yet the Chinese Government must have re-educated him. That is the kind of discussion, because when the politicians set an example, then the public discourse will begin.

Q208 **Graham Stringer:** I understand about your brother and individual cases, but beyond highlighting individual cases, can I ask Peter whether there is a particular policy that has been effectively adopted by another country that we could copy?

Peter Irwin: Some steps have been taken. It is hard to identify one in particular. As you are doing right now, speaking to civil society and other experts to understand the situation is the first step towards a legal designation of what is happening, whether it be genocide or crimes against humanity. That is very important, not only symbolically but for what you can do afterwards.

Secondly, and as a corollary, I do not think that any country has addressed forced labour adequately yet, but the US Government have attempted, not in legislation yet but through WROs—withhold release orders—to address the issue of forced labour. Forced labour and genocide in my opinion are inextricably linked, because the labourers are coming from these camps, for example. The purpose of forced labour is not economic only; it serves an assimilatory purpose, essentially.

I would say yes to a designation—calling on the Government to call it genocide. We believe it is genocide, but I think if you take the time to study the issue you will come out on that side of it, to call it genocide. Secondly, I think the US has done a reasonably good—perhaps not adequate—job of addressing forced labour.

One UN body that has been absolutely silent, and it is a bit shameful, is the ILO—the International Labour Organisation—which is the body that is mandated to respond to cases of forced labour, for example: widespread systematic cases where there is evidence of it. No country has been addressing the ILO.

I will bring up one thing that the UK Government can do. It is a bit of a murky body, and it is difficult to work through—it works with other UN agencies—but the UK Government could file a complaint over non-compliance over a couple of ILO conventions: 111, which is related to employment discrimination, or convention 122, relating to freely chosen labour. I say those two conventions because China is not a ratifying party to the convention on forced labour. It is about looking closely into a designation of forced labour, working with UK businesses to ensure that they are not importing goods or sourcing from the region.

The ILO is absolutely essential on this. If the UN body is not saying something on it, states take the cue: “Well, there’s not much that we should be doing because the International Labour Organisation hasn’t said a word about it.” I think that the UK can absolutely play a role in that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Also, because the ILO is a tripartite organisation—it is states, employers and trade unions—supporting those trade unions and employers to make statements or what they call representations to the ILO is important too.

Q209 **Graham Stringer:** That is really helpful. A very simple question: should UK companies assume, or presume, that any products using Xinjiang cotton are the direct result of using forced labour?

Peter Irwin: Yes.

Graham Stringer: Thank you.

Q210 **Chair:** The response asks questions about how we co-ordinate. You have touched on the ILO, which I know Royston wanted to ask about, but before we get to that, may I ask which countries have done well in their response to Xinjiang?

Peter Irwin: You can probably look at the letter that was sent in June 2019, as well as statements at the UN Human Rights Council, for example. I would look at the statements in support of that letter. I think there is evidence that those countries have done well. It is a bit of a difficult question. The US has taken a lot of steps. I think that there are more steps to be taken. No Government have really done well, being quite frank. A lot of Governments have not spoken out at all. It seems like it is not necessarily a particularly effective means of pressuring the Chinese Government or ending the situations.

The fact that so many Governments have been silent is something to look at and puzzle on. Until Governments are actually speaking out, and if Governments continue to treat China as a normal member of the international community, you are not going to get any change. As long as the Chinese Government is committing genocide that Governments and countries recognise—you can call it genocide, call it crimes against humanity or call it whatever you want—states and Governments need to be vocal about this and to say that we are not going to take this and that, if you continue down this path, we are not going to maintain the same kind of relationship. Again, I can go into more specifics about what maybe the UK can do.

Q211 **Chair:** To follow up, today is the first day of Ramadan. I have friends—Ramadan Kareem—and I hope that those of you who are able to celebrate with families are doing so where you are. Perhaps particularly today, on the first day of Ramadan, it is worth asking why you think that so many Islamic states are not speaking out.

Peter Irwin: The answer is pretty simple: it is about economic relationships. They do not want to damage them, so not only are they not speaking out. The OIC, for example, has actually made statements and resolutions supporting the Chinese Government's actions in the Uyghur region, specifically in terms of counter-terrorism and extremism. But the simple answer is that it is the economic relationships that they do not want to damage with the Chinese Government, especially at a time when they have their own publics to deal with. They have economic crises, there



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is Covid and things are not looking good for them. I have no sympathy for them, but I think that is mainly the reason.

Q212 Royston Smith: Peter has covered the ILO issue, but I want to ask a bit more about other multilateral organisations, which I think are not entirely fit for purpose. I just want you to say it. If we have UN treaty bodies and parts of the UN that could act in concert—we know that they cannot, because two members of the permanent five are probably not going to allow any of these things. What is the issue there? When we look at Arab states not condemning China, we know why. Then we have the multilateral organisations, which should do so, but they are not. We know why. Where does that leave us? You can understand why individual countries do not want to unilaterally break all ties or cut off diplomatic relations—whatever it is—but the multilateral organisations are not really fit for purpose. What are your views on that?

Rushan Abbas: We need to continue the alliance-building approach that would be necessary if we can encourage countries to continue to build on our approach of working with countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, those in Europe and the other democratic, shared-values countries. As we mentioned, a lot of the Muslim-majority countries are not speaking out because of the money, the diplomacy, the power of the Belt and Road initiative and the trade threats. They are using that—the Chinese Government is basically leveraging their relationship and buying out their compliance. It would be nice for the UK to incentivise some of the businesses and some of the opportunities—not doing it with China, but supporting businesses to seek opportunities outside China, such as in Taiwan, and also supporting some of those countries that are getting punished or facing economic difficulties because of China. The US used the embassies.

We talk about the Muslim-majority countries earlier, and I just want to add to that. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation criticised China and released a statement at the beginning—I think that was in April 2019. But immediately the Chinese regime sent a 20-person delegation to Abu Dhabi, where they met and pressured them—offered them money—to get the resolution that Peter mentioned earlier. If China is using the money to buy out countries' silence, I think the UK could build alliances and support the countries facing economic difficulties as a result of standing up to China and addressing this genocide. We should back those countries.

Q213 Royston Smith: I understand that. I think this country does back those countries, but what we cannot do is compete with the economic might of China, can we? When they turn up with carrier bags full of cash—although I am sure it is a bit more subtle than that—we cannot really compete with that. When we look at the multilateral organisations that we would normally turn to in a time of crisis like this, they are not fit for purpose. I understand that you would like to see the UK do more: I think I would like to see the UK do more. But where is the breakthrough, where is the way forward here?



Rushan Abbas: I am happy to answer this exact question. You are absolutely right that multilateral institutions and the accountability mechanisms are limited when it comes to China. By design, the Chinese Government have reserved a lot of dispute resolution mechanism for that particular purpose.

But there is one way we can move forward despite the limits. That is China's obligation under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is also known as CERD convention. Its inter-state complaint procedure provides a unique mechanism to hold China accountable to its treaty obligation via a UN sanction multilateral dispute resolution process that features an independent fact-finding body composed of experts.

So you can trigger this mechanism either unilaterally or preferably together with other countries like the United States, because this is the only convention in which China actually did not reserve its right not to have a complaint filed against it. That is something that we must trigger and invoke.

Q214 **Royston Smith:** In that case, why do you think that this country, along with other countries individually or collectively, are not doing that?

Rushan Abbas: I think that has not been explored, and I think we must. It took a long time, almost five years, for us to even realise the depths of destruction taking place, and now I think we do. There is international consensus, whether many countries designated the atrocity determination or not. Like-minded countries do agree now that at the minimum this is a crime against humanity, and it is now time for us to take concrete action. The resolution that I propose is actually a practical and viable solution to the current situation, under which China reserved its right in many conventions to not to have a complaint filed against it.

Royston Smith: That is very interesting.

Peter Irwin: I have a slightly different approach. Yes, multilaterals are not fit for purpose, but at the same time there is a sign that there is a bit of a changing tide in terms of the makeup of the Human Rights Council, for example. In terms of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination that was mentioned, this was actually the treaty body in which, although China will simply deny the recommendations and say, "Look, we don't have human rights violations at all." and that is the problem you are going to run up against, the treaty body in August 2018 came out with concluding observations which were cited by press around the world. You will see this paragraph in every piece of journalism on the Uyghur issue. The UN estimates that there are 1 million people in the camps. That comes from that treaty body's review in 2018 when we were at the World Uyghur Congress.

These options are important. We cannot necessarily rely on one of them, and we cannot force China to live up to its obligations under these conventions, because it simply does not admit that human rights violations



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are taking place at all. So on a more practical level, I would say that, of course, we should keep pursuing them. Treaties are important, UN independent experts are important, as is pressuring the Secretary-General of the UN, who, until last week, really had said absolutely nothing about the situation. But the UK should within the council be pushing for a remote investigation; it is called remote monitoring.

A lot of people are saying that the UK should be pushing for unfettered access to the region. I think it is important to push for that as well, but we have to be very careful of the terms on which China allows independent investigators to go in. There have been basically two years in which the Chinese Government have said, "We have accepted the visit, but we do not agree to the terms of the visit—unfettered, unconditional access." Remote investigations can actually start today.

Of course, the office of that commissioner needs resources, but the UK can press for those. The UN system itself is not adequate to address the issue, but if you work within different agencies at the same time, they often point to each other. The genocide office says, "We don't know anything about forced labour, because the ILO hasn't said anything about forced labour." The Human Rights Council and some people will say, "We don't know about this issue, because this other agency hasn't said anything on this." We have to work on all these levels: treaty bodies, independent experts within the ILO, and UNESCO, which is very important too. When there is the destruction of mosques and shrines, you can see it from satellite imagery. You cannot hide that, but UNESCO has been absolutely silent.

UNESCO is not going to solve the problem. They are not equipped to solve the problem, and they seem to be unwilling. But again, I think there needs to be pressure from a number of different areas at the same time, to actually compel some kind of action and to support Government action or Government statements. Governments want to be able to point to something that independent experts have said, so that they can support, for example, joint statements that have been made by the UK.

Q215 **Chair:** Before we close the session, it is worth putting on record that the ILO chief at the moment is a British citizen, so this is an area where we should have particular influence. But it is quite concerning what you have said about that, Peter, for which I am very grateful. Can I extend to the families of Rushan and Rayhan, and indeed to many others in your community, the sympathy of the entire Committee and many others in the UK Parliament? By the way, I pay tribute to the work of Nus Ghani on the other Committee, which I am very grateful that you mentioned, Rayhan. I am sure she will be very pleased to hear it.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Azeem Ibrahim and Charles Parton.

Q216 **Chair:** Welcome to our second set of witnesses. I will ask Azeem Ibrahim



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and then Charles Parton to introduce themselves very briefly in the same manner as before.

Azeem Ibrahim: My name is Azeem Ibrahim, and I am a director at the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy in Washington DC and a research professor at the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College.

Charles Parton: My name is Charlie Parton. I am a senior associate fellow at the think-tank RUSI and an associate fellow at the think-tank the Council on Geostrategy, and I spent most of my diplomatic working life working on or in China.

Q217 **Chair:** Thank you. I know you both very kindly have given up not only the time to be witnesses, but you were also listening to the earlier session, so I would be very grateful if you would help build on some of the information that our previous witnesses gave us. Perhaps starting with you, Azeem, what avenues does the UK Government have for holding China to account through the multilateral system? What do you expect would be the response from China to such action? I speak here as somebody who has been sanctioned by the Chinese state for speaking out, and no doubt we will see more of that kind of response.

Azeem Ibrahim: The multilateral system as it stands at the moment is clearly inadequate to hold China to account. It was simply not designed for a function like this. We in the west, led by the United States, have spent the last 35 years trying to integrate China into the multilateral system in exchange for China to accept the international rules-based order. This is simply not—*[Inaudible.]* The international system, in its current iteration, is simply ill equipped. We can see this not just in the various international bodies. For example, the World Trade Organisation—the WTO—is unable to curb China’s unfair trade practices. The WHO is unable to call out China on false data on Covid, the consequences of which we are all feeling today. Most recently, the UN Law of the Sea has not stopped China’s creeping expansion in the South China sea.

In fact, I would argue that the exact opposite is happening: China is now influencing and reshaping the multilateral system as we know it, to serve its own interest. In all fairness, China is not solely to blame for this. We carry a significant amount of blame for this strategic posturing to happen. If you recall, the previous UK Government wanted to be China’s best friend in Europe in a golden era of relationship. In the previous Administration in the United States, President Trump enacted a policy of “America first”, which essentially withdrew America from the international stage. The director of the Chinese centre for One Belt, One Road studies in Shanghai said that if this is your voluntary withdrawal—not driving us away—filling in the vacuum should not be considered a provocative action. He is absolutely right. This is a vacuum that we allowed to emerge and that has been filled by China.

The UN system, in particular, which is obviously the most famous, most authoritative multilateral body, is simply not fit for purpose. China now



HOUSE OF COMMONS

controls four of the 11 major UN agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the International Telecommunication Union. You may think: what is the purpose of this control? On the UN Industrial Development Organisation, for example, they managed to get 30 UN agencies to support the Belt and Road initiative and, in 2015, the International Telecommunication Union issued a statement saying that Huawei was a most effective international telecommunications system that other countries should adopt.

So the current system is simply not adequate. I think new bodies and new co-operation are required on the international stage to try to curb China's influence. I think we can do this in a number of ways. First, institutions that already exist, like NATO, the G7 and the Commonwealth, should be repostured and made much more strategic in terms of countering China's rising threat. At the same time, we need new bodies to take care of the new reality that is emerging, like the D10 proposed by this Government, and organisations like the Quad have to be sufficiently repostured to cater for this. I think the UK can play a very effective, leading role in this, particularly as we are the current chair of the G7, we have a seat at the Security Council and we still have considerable influence out in the globe.

This is something that the UK has historically been very effective at. If you recall, during the financial crisis, for example, Prime Minister Gordon Brown did lead an international effort to try to bring the world together for a global financial package to rescue various countries. I know this personally, because when I was teaching at the University of Chicago, Professor Austan Goolsbee, who was Obama's chair of economic advisers, was also in the faculty, and he told me personally that Gordon Brown led the way on this. So this is something that the UK has been historically very good at and, particularly in the post-Brexit era, this is a role that we should relish and definitely take on.

Q218 Chair: Thank you very much. Charles, we will come to you in just a moment, but I have a quick question about UN organisations. You highlighted four of the principal 11. You could have mentioned, but did not mention, the World Health Organisation, which has a director general selected to some significant degree in agreement with China who has been accused of having too close a relationship with the Chinese Communist party. You also did not mention the International Labour Organisation, which was mentioned before. Perhaps you can touch on those two, because they do raise separate concerns—certainly the ILO, as it is led by a British citizen. It would be interesting to have your perspective, certainly after Peter's comments in the earlier session.

Azeem Ibrahim: The four organisations I mentioned are those that are actually controlled by the Chinese. They have Chinese citizens—members of the Communist party—leading them. There are many others, including the human rights organisations, in which China has considerable influence, but they are not actually led by Chinese citizens.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The WHO is a very good example of China's coercive practices. This is something that has to be investigated much more thoroughly, possibly post pandemic, in terms of how, for the first time ever, a non-medical doctor managed to get a position such as this, and what was the connection of loans to Dr Tedros's country in him getting the position. Exactly the same goes for the ILO. China is able to use coercive practices against member countries to influence their votes. We have seen this become much more pronounced recently with vaccine diplomacy, as countries are being coerced into supporting Chinese positions.

One of your previous panellists mentioned how, in June 2019, 59 countries signed a letter supporting China's actions. It is my understanding that another letter, signed by over 60 countries, is in process and that China is using its vaccine diplomacy to coerce these countries to take this position. It is quite well known that China is very effective at this global manipulation of countries. My views on this are a matter of public record. Any country that is aligned with China, even a fraction, has to be fully on board with the Beijing project. There is absolutely no room whatsoever to sit on the fence or be neutral. You have to be fully supportive of Beijing at every possible opportunity.

Q219 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Charlie, perhaps you could pick up on that and start addressing the question that rises from it. How should the UK be working through UN organisations, given the situation that we have heard from previous witnesses and now from Professor Azeem?

Charles Parton: Yes, I take his point that we need to look at other sorts of groupings, whether that is D10, or formal or informal working together with like-minded countries, not just necessarily democracies. But I would not give up on the UN system just because, at the moment, China has indeed taken very active measures to try to wrest control of it, not least in the Human Rights Commission.

We do have to get our Foreign Office and other organisations battling hard to ensure that those UN institutions fulfil the point for which they were established. In the case of human rights, which we are talking about, that is a set of universal values. Let's not forget that, when China inevitably comes back at you and says, "Yes, but those are western values. We don't believe in universal values," when it came to the 1948 universal declaration on human rights, largely instrumental in the work on that were two Chinese diplomats.

The argument that China is different really doesn't hold water. It is not just that they set that up. We are not trying to put forward our views on human rights; these are embodied in the Chinese constitution itself—the PRC's constitution. If you look at Taiwan, there are in many ways Chinese views and culture there.

I agree that we really do need to work hard in the United Nations system, but I would also look at other elements of world bodies beyond that. You mentioned the WHO. I am sure that, at some stage, we are going to come



to the Olympic games, and I certainly wouldn't miss out FIFA. That is a very important area for the near future, not just the far future.

Q220 **Chair:** Perhaps we could touch briefly on the Olympic games. I am interested in both your views on the events that I think are going to take place next year, and whether the UK should attend. Charlie, what do you think?

Charles Parton: I would take a different position from the one Rushan Abbas took earlier. I would not boycott the Olympics, but I would make them cost. I don't think the athletes should bear the brunt of our political will. There are many ways we can make it cost. For instance, nobody on the official side should attend either the opening or closing meetings. We should ensure, to the extent that we can, that companies do not sponsor or advertise, and those that do should be shamed on that.

I do not think we should encourage fans and tourists to stay away.¹ We should ensure that the teams don't allow any propaganda opportunities. Within the rules of the IOC, I would like to think that, when it comes to things like the opening and closing ceremonies, or interviews with television, the athletes would talk only about the events, and definitely conduct themselves with the sort of demeanour at an opening and closing ceremony that makes quite clear their attitude, even if they are not allowed to hold placards etc. I think you can make the Olympics a form of highlighting what is going on, rather than allowing the Chinese to use it as propaganda.

That brings me to the World cup. Decisions will be made in the first half of next year. Results of the bidding process are announced in 2024. A lot of thought needs to be given to how we can ensure that it is made quite clear to FIFA that, if the 2030 World cup, which is what we are talking about, is held in in China, it is likely that there will be no participation from the main teams—that is Europe, on the whole, and Latin America. If there are the genocide games next year for the Olympics, we cannot afford to have a genocide World cup later. That is not an area where China can retaliate and say that they will not attend the next World cup, because the chances of the Chinese ever getting a team to the World cup in the foreseeable future are rather small, and if the Russians go out in solidarity, well, they would go out in the first round anyway, so that probably does not matter. I cannot see Latin Americans giving up World cup football.

We need to think very seriously about that, and our Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and others need to start lobbying very early to ensure that countries and FIFA do not do what the Olympic movement did, in this case, which was to disregard the human rights abuses; I know that the Xinjiang genocide was not current at the time the games were awarded to China, but there were plenty of human rights

¹ Note by witness: In referring to 'I do not think we should encourage fans and tourists to stay away.' I misspoke. I meant to say: 'I do think we should encourage fans and tourists to stay away.'



HOUSE OF COMMONS

abuses, which have only got worse. There is no excuse in the case of the World Cup.

Chair: Thank you very much. Royston, you wanted to come in?

Q221 **Royston Smith:** Charles, you have had a distinguished diplomatic career, much of it spent in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, I believe. Certainly among this panel, you are one of the experts who would be able to advise on what diplomatic representations the UK should make to China about their actions in Xinjiang.

Charles Parton: What is the Chinese reaction to this? In a sense, I don't think it really cares what other countries think at the moment, when it comes to the question of abusing its own. I certainly do not see the Chinese Communist party being subject to any form of guilt, although of course it is often said that China has a sort of shame culture.

In terms of trying to modify behaviour, at the end of the day it comes down to concrete—if that is the right word—actions, which means either bringing to bear some form of economic costs or reputational costs. The World cup will be one way of hitting the reputation, and the Olympics too. In terms of economic cost, it was a theme throughout the earlier part of this session that nothing will happen without unity, so before one even considers what the Foreign Office can do, unity is absolutely essential, because otherwise the costs to us will be too great.

That brings you, I suppose, to the first thing the FCDO can do, which is to use its diplomatic skills to try to build that sense of unity, not only among the like-minded democracies or, one might say, like-minded countries, even if they do not have a democratic system, but among other countries in Africa, the middle east and Asia. That is an overarching thing that I think the Foreign Office needs to do.

Again, it goes back to a point that I have made in the past, and which one of the earlier speakers made—that quiet diplomacy doesn't work. It is all very well for Mrs Merkel and other leaders to say they went to China and had this big meeting and raised human rights. In a sense, big deal! I do not think that actually makes a great deal of difference. It is about reputational cost and economic costs. It is not so much about quiet diplomacy or a quiet word, but about letting the Chinese Communist party know that it will be a loud word and that costs will be imposed.

Q222 **Royston Smith:** I understand the point of using the FCDO's network to talk to other diplomats around the world, but if we are talking about diplomats around the world from countries that are becoming more and more dependent on Chinese money, what sort of reception are we likely to get, and what benefit is there likely to be?

Charles Parton: It makes it very difficult. At the extreme end—I am not a legal expert, and others would need to advise whether this was possible—it might be possible to take some countries to the International Criminal Court if they are actually aiding China by sending back Uyghurs. There may be responsibilities there. I agree it is not easy for the Foreign Office



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to persuade countries that are unwilling to be persuaded, but that is a question of sticking at it and at least preparing the ground for the day when perhaps China is not perceived as 10 feet tall.

The common assumption is that China will dominate this century as the economic superpower. Those were the sorts of comments made about the Russians in the '60s and '70s and about Japan in the '80s, and it might not be so. The so-called Belt and Road is on occasion stumbling—we have just seen what happened in Montenegro—and countries will, I think, begin to perceive that some of the promises made are not as rosy as they thought. If they are starting to be seen by other countries, and are called out by other countries, as supporting genocide, they may start to change their attitude. At the very least, one has to have Gramsci's optimism of whatever it is—I keep forgetting it. The optimism of the will and the pessimism of—no, I have forgotten it, but you know what I mean. You have to keep bashing on and hoping.

Q223 Royston Smith: I do understand what you mean. While we are on diplomacy, may I ask about the UK embassy and consulates in China? Should they be doing anything—overtly or covertly, not that it matters—to help or support persecuted groups?

Charles Parton: It is extremely difficult for them to do so in individual cases now. It used to be possible, in the old days, but one sometimes wonders whether, in attempting to have dealings with dissidents and human rights defenders, they are perhaps bringing more trouble on them than they are solving. That said, it is very important to give these groups the knowledge that they are being supported, if not on a person-to-person basis, then in terms of their aims, and that we are working in support of proper human rights. This is not interference in other people's countries; China has in its own constitution that it allows free speech and all the other things that are part of human decency.

Royston Smith: Thank you, and thank you, Chair.

Q224 Chair: May I push you slightly not to be pessimistic on the intellect or optimistic on the will? How do you think China will respond? What do you think the likely responses are? We keep being told that the correct way to deal with China is that you can say anything you like in private, and that is the way to handle the relationship. However, frankly, we have seen no change. China's response so far has been some cyber-attacks on me and perhaps other UK citizens.

China's response so far has been some cyber-attacks on me, and perhaps other UK citizens. It has been sanctions on me and eight other UK citizens, including four other Members of the House of Commons.

Those are all, let's be honest, symbolic and rather irrelevant moves for people like me, who do not have assets in China, unlike, for example, many Chinese officials who hide their money in offshore jurisdictions or seek to send their children to universities or schools overseas, for whom sanctions really do have an effect. Forgive me—I am not intending to buy beachfront property in Macau any time soon. Is there another response



that you can see the Chinese state conducting that might actually have an effect on the UK?

Charles Parton: There is a very obvious one, apart from attacks on individuals, which you have talked about, and which do have an effect. Look particularly in academia. Jo Smith Finley is a brave woman and I do not think that she will be affected by it, but that is not the point. The point, in the way of the old Chinese phrase, is to kill a chicken to scare the monkeys. There will be many academics who will think to themselves, "Hmm. I wonder about this. This is a bit worrying. If I'm going to be put on that list, that might affect my future abilities."

There is the individual line, but I think that we can also see that China as a state likes to threaten other states. In the case of the UK, it usually goes down to five areas. One is: "Well, your exports will suffer." Two: "We won't invest any more in the UK. As for the City of London, that is going to get hit. Tourism will suffer, and so will the students and the education fees that you gain from us."

I have argued elsewhere, and I am prepared to argue to this Committee at great length, that those five areas are actually far less bad than is put forward. Very briefly, for all the countries that have been in the diplomatic doghouse, including the UK after 2012 with the Dalai Lama visit, and Norway for six years, South Korea, Canada and Australia, in all those years in the past their exports have risen.

Investment is not charity. If you look at investment, money is cheap. You can borrow it pretty easily if you have a good project for it, and the point of investment is that you get good technology, good management and good jobs coming. Hold on a second. Name me a big greenfield site in the UK that is Chinese on the scale of Honda and Nissan. Do they bring us technology? No, the flow is the other way around. Have we learned new management techniques? No, again the flow is the other way around.

I am not saying that it is not without use, but actually China benefits from it. It is very adept at making a loud noise and threatening. I could go on into the other sectors, too. There will no doubt be those forms of state-to-state bullying, and of course Ministers will suffer. Ministers not going to China is regarded as a great tragedy but, as I have said elsewhere, they are not the cake; they are merely the icing, in fact, although not unimportant. I think we need to resist that, and of course one of the ways of resisting that yet again gets back to the idea of working together with other like-minded countries.

Q225 **Chair:** Before we come to you, Azeem, because I know you have written about this, and indeed have studied it, may I build on Charlie's point? The most obvious response that we have seen in recent years has been China's response to Australia. There is a recent report that has come out—I think I am right in saying—certainly in the last week, and possibly even yesterday or the day before. Forgive me—the days have blurred into one. It is on the impacts of Chinese sanctions on Australia, which appear to be much less.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

This is, of course, hardly surprising. If China will not buy off Australia, it will have to buy off someone else, and whoever was buying off that third country will now move their clients, as it were, not deliberately but unintentionally to Australia. Globalised trade, after all, supports globalised countries like Australia. What are the impacts that you see the Chinese Government carrying out? Is it just going to be more noise and more sound and fury, signifying nothing?

Azeem Ibrahim: Yes. In every case, China has to react excessively, despite what the initial issue may be. This is a mechanism that it uses to send a message to the international community that it simply will not tolerate any sort of criticism whatsoever. More recently we have seen China become much more confident, particularly after the Covid crisis. There has been lots of coverage in Chinese media about the deaths in Europe, the US and the UK. There has been lots of coverage in Chinese media about the Capitol riots, Black Lives Matter, et cetera, to demonstrate, "Look, here is the system. This is what democracy brings. It is just chaos—societal chaos—whereas here you have a single-party authoritarian system that is much more effective. Look how quickly we managed the Covid crisis, and how quickly we had the lockdown and managed to get a hold of it."

They have become much more confident and have a much stronger belief in the system than the Soviets ever had in their system, for example. They essentially have a strategy to react extremely excessively. You can have the general manager of the Houston Rockets, for example, send one tweet saying, "Let's stand with Hong Kong," and immediately China will threaten over \$1.5 billion worth of investment. It is the same thing with Cathay Pacific and any other organisation.

Even when individuals are being sanctioned, this is not necessarily to target those individuals themselves, but essentially to send a message to other business leaders and individuals who may want to have any sort of interaction with China in the near future. We have seen that the law firm Essex Chambers was sanctioned as well. A number of its people were sanctioned for the report they did on the Uyghur genocide. Immediately, Essex Chambers had not only to withdraw the report, but to distance themselves and say that it was just a couple of barristers, because they obviously have offices in Singapore and elsewhere that deal with Chinese businesses. So this is sending the message very clearly.

Charles is absolutely right about academics and academia being targeted. I have a friend who is actually looking to undertake a PhD in Uyghur studies. I was doing some research for her, trying to find a supervisor, and I was told that not a single supervisor will take her on, because all of these China experts need access to China in order to actually be China experts, and if they supervised such a PhD, that link would essentially be cut off. The only supervisor she will ever find is somebody who has burned all their bridges. These are all mechanisms that are designed to coerce and influence not just individuals, but everybody around them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Charles Parton: May I add that I wouldn't want to give the impression that this is without pain? For instance, when it comes to exports, China is quite clever in selecting things that are symbolic, such as Norwegian salmon, although you are absolutely right that there was displacement trade and global sales of fish actually grew in that period. But there would be attacks on certain companies, and one can imagine which ones they would be. They are also not only symbolic, but temporary. It is very disruptive in that sense. Yes, they can hit those industries where there is a global glut, such as Australian wine, for instance. So there will be losses, but I do not think they will be nearly as great as people suggest, and I think the question that always arises is, "At what expense are your values?" Or indeed, to put it very crudely, "At what expense genocide?"

Chair: Thank you. Just before I hand over to Chris Bryant, you reminded me that I was speaking to a Norwegian official the other day, who pointed out that when the sanctions came in for Norwegian salmon, the sale of Norwegian salmon to Vietnam went up enormously, and the Chinese consumption of Vietnamese salmon went up enormously, which is quite remarkable for a country that doesn't have a salmon industry. Anyway, over to Chris.

Chris Bryant: I think all the questions I was going to ask have already been covered.

Chair: Okay. Henry?

Q226 **Henry Smith:** It has been a very comprehensive session so far. I just want to ask about the recent integrated review set out by the Government and its vision for the future relationship with China. Is it possible to separate trade, environment and health issues from China's human rights abuses? If that were to happen, in your view what would the impact of such a separation be on action on human rights?

Charles Parton: I am happy to jump in there, because it is one of the bees in my bonnet. The Chinese communist party is very good at linking things that are not really to be linked. I think in our way of operating we tend to think that if we are talking about trade then we are talking about trade. We don't then link it up to and try to threaten or bring in something else. The Chinese have no qualms whatsoever in the negotiating process. Again, I think you just need to look at that a lot more carefully.

There was an editorial in *The Times* a while back saying that we have got to be careful because we need the Chinese for climate change and so we can't be too unhelpful to them. Hold on a second. Who, numerically at least, will suffer the most from global warming? China. Most of its population is on the east coast, but any effects of extreme weather will increase the drought to China, which already suffers from an extraordinary and serious water shortage problem.

It is simply not right to think that we are the demanders in this case any more than it is in trade and investment, as I said earlier. China doesn't invest in the UK because it has charitable feelings towards us. It has



HOUSE OF COMMONS

definite aims and they are far more concentrated and focused than they were before, if you look at what they are investing in now, compared with before 2016. Whereas they will try to confound those two things—human rights and so on—just ride it. You have no choice anyway. I think they play on that one.

Azeem Ibrahim: The UK integrated review, as it stands at the moment, is extremely welcome. The United Kingdom cannot fight this battle alone. One of China's key strategies is to isolate countries and go after them individually, picking them off, for example with very heavy sanctions on Canada and Australia. What the UK needs to do, and the integrated review demonstrates this, is to work with all partners, particularly our European partners, who unfortunately have not come to the full realisation yet of the threat that China poses, particularly Angela Merkel, who is looking for the post-Covid German economic recovery to come from China with the export of multitudes of their cars.

At the same time, I believe that countries such as the UK should be offering a comprehensive strategy to counter the Chinese influence. As I indicated earlier, that means organisations such as the G10, which was primarily set up for technological co-operation. This is an area that has to be examined very thoroughly—strategic investment in key technologies such as biotechnology and artificial intelligence. AI, in particular, is going to revolutionise the global economy as we know it. It will be weaved through everything that we deal with—medical care, transport, manufacturing, warfighting, defence, intelligence, and every single aspect of the global economy. It will become a key platform driver. It is estimated that it will be over \$50 trillion-worth in 20 years' time.

Experts say that the emergence of AI is going to have the same effect on the global economy as the internet initially did. The West is currently ahead, but we may lose that lead. China, in order to be the leader by 2030, is putting resources into quantum computing through its central planning system. They can move much faster because of the way they have set it up. They have twice as many super computers as the United States. The West are still the best innovators, but China is leading in technology, such as surveillance, facial recognition and 5G, and we are not prepared for this kind of challenge.

The difficulty is that if we do not invest in and master this technology, then the next generation of great technological companies, like the Googles, Facebooks, Microsofts, IBMs and Ciscos, will all come out from China, and we will be forced to use them if we want to play a role in the global economic system. Once these companies come out from China, they will also reflect Chinese values. Beijing will be able to bend countries to their will once they have mastered this kind of technology.

This is something that, I believe, will result in the international rules-based order being completely turned on its head. We will see a new system emerging in the globe—almost a new cold war. China's economy, for example, is expected to take over that of the United State by 2028. What will this mean to the lives of individuals like me and you? Probably nothing



HOUSE OF COMMONS

at all, but there is a psychological impact of seeing, for the first time in a generation and our lifetime, an authoritarian regime as the largest economy in the world, shortly to be followed by being the largest military power in the world. The international system will be turned on its head. The challenge is very significant.

I had a conversation with a US admiral, who is a commandant of the US naval war college, and he has access to much better information than I do. We had lunch and he was telling me how China will behave once it becomes the global economic power—the global superpower. They anticipate that China will just take what it wants. If it wants Hong Kong, it will take it. If it wants Taiwan, it will take that. If it wants the South China sea, it will take that, and there will be nobody there to stop it. I think that the consequences of inaction are going to be very large, and that we haven't fully understood the magnitude of how the world is going to change.

Q227 **Henry Smith:** That is certainly a very solemn assessment. Thank you both for those answers. I have one more question, which leads on from what you were both saying. How can the UK Government use its future economic relationship with China, and any potential trade agreements, to promote better human rights practices? Could this investment from China lead to it acting with greater impunity, or is that a threat that wouldn't actually have the effect that the Chinese would claim it would have?

Azeem Ibrahim: As I said earlier, I think the probability of the UK working alone and having any sort of impact is minimal. I think we need to work with our partners, particularly in the European Union. I fully appreciate that our relationship with the European Union is a little bit sketchy at the moment, but I think that Europe is at extreme risk of essentially becoming a remote outpost—a satellite entity—of Beijing.

The European Union in 1980 was 30% of the global economy—almost one third of the global economy was Europe. By 2020, this has been reduced to 16%, and by 2050 it is expected to go down to 9%. In about 30 years' time—in three decades—there will be only three global economic powers in the world: the United States, China and India. Unless Europe now starts asserting its own independent position and stands up for its own founding values, it will essentially just become an extension of Beijing.

One of the things that the UK in particular could do is to use our network in the Commonwealth. I had a conversation with an African diplomat quite recently, and he was telling me how China is sending major delegations to Africa to provide them with infrastructure investment and with loans. On the one hand, you have the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State—one individual with maybe a few of his staffers—whereas on the other, the Chinese send over delegations of over 25 people at a time, and each one of them speaks a local language very fluently; they will recite Arabic poetry and they will speak the language at about 80% of their capacity.

It is almost like the Soviet system, in which they specialise very early and stick to that specialisation, so they will only speak Arabic and Chinese, or



HOUSE OF COMMONS

they will speak Spanish and Chinese—they won't speak English, but there will be a very deep specialisation.

What the Chinese delegations offer is also much more sophisticated and much cleaner; there is no obligation on countries to buy American weaponry or American debt or British products, or so on, with the loans that they are provided. They are essentially seen as being honest brokers; you can either take the loan or you can take the infrastructure project, and Beijing will deliver that project from A to Z. You don't have to do anything. It is almost an off-the-shelf package.

The citizens in some of these countries are unhappy, because they have these Chinese tent cities emerging. In Pakistan, for example—a country that nobody would touch with a barge pole, which was on the list of terrorist nations—China steps in and invests \$62 billion through the China-Pakistan economic corridor. I have been to Pakistan many times; you see the infrastructure everywhere, with Chinese signs. Their port of Gwadar is an entire city that has emerged, in which Pakistani citizens are not permitted to enter—this is just for the Chinese. This is Pakistani sovereign territory, so the citizens, in many occasions, are not too happy. However, the Governments are very happy because they are getting their infrastructure developed, and they are also able to fleece from the top—this is also something that the Chinese essentially turn a blind eye to.

The African diplomat said to me, very clearly, "China is the future; China is doing the Marshall plan of the future." Unless we work with our international partners to create something equivalent, then we know that, given the choice between poverty and development, these countries will always choose development, no matter what strings come attached to that.

Q228 **Henry Smith:** That is fascinating. I have seen that Chinese neo-colonialism in Pakistan and elsewhere myself. Mr Parton, we would be grateful for your assessment.

Charles Parton: If I may say so, your question boils down to another aspect of the way that the Government might be able to help human rights through trade. When it comes to investment agreements or indeed a free trade agreement, we need a sense of realism over this. Look at the investment agreement that the European Union has agreed. It took seven years to come about, and it was not nearly as strong and robust as had been promised at the start—I was in the EU delegation in Beijing at the start of that negotiation.

As far as the UK is concerned, that is either going to be—depending on whether you are a pessimist or an optimist—a floor for what we might get, and we can only do better, or a ceiling, and we can only do worse. The point is that it will take a long time. As for free trade agreements, it took the Australians 10 years, and many Australians were very dissatisfied with what they got. Largely, it was pushed through for political reasons and they are very regretful of that now, I think.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I do not think we should think of these sorts of agreements as being short term, for a kick-off, and in any way effective for the human rights situation. But that does bring on the topic that we have not really touched on. What can the UK Government do in order to encourage our companies and their companies in reference to Xinjiang? It is fairly obvious that whatever measures the UK Government can take to stop UK companies contributing to the surveillance and repression in Xinjiang need to be taken as soon as possible. But then you look at it the other way round and say, "Yes, but what about Chinese companies that are heavily involved in that, and what are we doing to prevent that?"

When it comes to cotton and tomato paste, there are things that we can do there, possibly even in the technology sphere. I understand there is a New Zealand company that is pretty confident it can tell from a couple of fibres, within 95%, where exactly some cotton is grown. There might be technological solutions to this. Indeed, when it comes to packaging, I can buy some tomato paste and it tells me that it is prepared and packaged in Italy, but where did the tomatoes come from? I would like to know, thank you, and then I will not buy it if it is from Xinjiang. There are those sorts of things.

More than that, when you look at companies such as Huawei, Hikvision and Dahua, Huawei, as we know, has three joint laboratories with public security areas in Xinjiang. It is actively helping the genocide. We know that it has commissioned, I think in the UK, research into facial recognition, which would help spot to Uyghurs. What can we do when a UK consumer buys a Huawei handset and is thereby supporting the supporters of genocide? At the very least, the UK Government should be looking into all these things. Publicity and law are the two methods for exposing that.

HMG should do a lot more on elucidating which Chinese companies are deeply involved in the surveillance and genocidal actions that are going on there, using the sorts of methods that Bellingcat has used in Russia and so on. If we look at the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which is a state within a state, or a state within a province—an autonomous region—it owns vast tracts of land. Its millions of employees are also militia. They are the back-up to the People's Armed Police, and they spend some of their time on training and indeed putting down what they see as troubles in Xinjiang.

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps has a vast array of companies underneath it and a vast array of subsidiary companies throughout China. Let's not forget, incidentally, that forced Xinjiang labour is not just in Xinjiang. There are lots of them being transported elsewhere into other parts of China and press-ganged into work. Using the sorts of methods that have already been used to elucidate the concentration camps and the extent of the genocide—satellites or looking at the documents and tenders that the Chinese have put out, and so on—you can find out an awful lot. We can find out which companies are exploiting the slave labour, for instance. We should have two forms of dealing with that. One is transparency and publicity: "Sorry, but if you buy this particular



HOUSE OF COMMONS

product on sale in Marks & Spencer or on your local high street, you are supporting slave labour". The other is some form of law that also inhibits that trade—you are the parliamentarians and lawmakers, not me.

On the whole question of looking at helping to keep that area clean, I hope that the Government are either putting resources in themselves or commissioning resources. I know of several teams in think-tanks who are perfectly capable of doing that work, but they need the money and the go-ahead to do it.

Henry Smith: Thank you both very much. That is extremely useful and fascinating.

Q229 **Chair:** May I pick up on a few very last issues? Azeem, you mentioned various different countries and jurisdictions. I wonder whether you have seen the recent video of a Kenyan Member of Parliament highlighting the issues that his country faces with Chinese investment. It is quite clear that this is causing issues in other parts of the world. Could you comment very briefly on whether the Chinese investment that we are seeing in Hungary, including a university, raises any concerns for you?

Azeem Ibrahim: It is interesting, Mr Chairman, because some countries are waking up to the fact that Chinese investment is not positive for their overall economic wellbeing. On many occasions, we have seen that authoritarian leaders in other countries are happy to take the investment because it absolves them from providing economic development for their country when they have a foreign entity there. Also, as I mentioned, it allows them to fleece off the top. On many occasions, as I said, the Chinese provide an A to Z full package and will bring in their own workers, so it does not even create local jobs or economic incentives for the locals. They have their own workers, their own staff, their own tent cities. They are almost completely isolated, and they will extract from that.

I think the European Union is a very interesting study, because it certainly has not fully woken up to the fact of the malign influence that China will have on its local economies. Any sort of co-operation with China—technological co-operation, for example—will essentially just mean that they will steal much of your technology, with IP thefts. General Keith Alexander from the National Security Agency called this the largest transfer of wealth in history: more than \$350 billion a year. China itself is not a very innovative country from that perspective. India is much more innovative in terms of a major growing economy. China is much better at executing and essentially becoming like the workshop of world.

Any country that engages with China, whether in Europe or Africa, does so at its own peril, with the long-term consequences of that. A study done by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany examined over 100 publicly available working contracts, and 90% of them had clauses stating that if you take this money from China, China can actually recall those funds at any time if there is a change in the law of that country, so they are essentially able to dictate the foreign policy of those countries within that actual legal contract. If the country changes its policy towards forced



HOUSE OF COMMONS

labour, for example, by passing a parliamentary law or whatever, China can recall those funds. They are using that very explicit mechanism to manipulate and coerce countries and control their policies. As China expands, more and more countries will fall into that trap. It is essentially economic colonisation; it is not colonisation in the traditional sense, but it is economic colonisation and debt diplomacy.

I would just like to respond to some of the earlier questions on what the UK can actually do. To understand how we got into this situation in the first place and how it evolved, you have to understand the internal make-up in China. Previous Chinese leaders, whether it was Hu Jintao or Jiang Zemin, were very content for China to play its role in the international rules-based order. They believed that China will inevitably become a superpower, because it was a historical destiny—a historical destiny that was interrupted, but only by what they call the century of humiliation. That was inevitable, but they were happy to work within the international system and bide their time.

Xi Jinping is very different. He is one of the most powerful leaders since Chairman Mao, and his philosophy is that China must assert itself on the global stage. He is much more of a Han nationalist than he is a communist ideologue. One of the reasons they are targeting the Uyghurs—it is not just the Uyghurs, but the Kazaks, the Uzbeks and even the Christian minorities—is because he was a Han nationalist and he is trying to enact a policy of Sinification throughout China by eliminating all the other identities, languages, religions and so forth, so that there is Han superiority. One of the key ways to target and try to influence and bring about change is to target those around Xi Jinping. The Magnitsky sanctions that the US has enacted are actually very effective. A US policymaker told me—it had not occurred to me before—that almost everybody in China is monitored and surveilled.

The most surveilled people are actually the Uyghurs. There is no doubt that they are the most monitored and controlled people, but there is also another group of people who are equally as monitored: the members of the politburo of China, so that they do not get any ideas of trying to remove Xi Jinping and his entourage from power. If we want to enact any sort of change, we have to target those members of the politburo with sanctions. Many of them made enormous amounts of money. They like to make their money in China but spend it in the United States and in Europe. What they like more than anything else—the No. 1 ambition of every Chinese politician—is to send their son or daughter to Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge or somewhere like that. Once you start sanctioning them and targeting their money and assets overseas, it will put immense pressure on them to try to force Xi Jinping to change his policies.

Like I said, they are under immense control at the moment, but very interestingly, a friend of mine has a theory that you will not see any change in China until Jiang Zemin, the previous president, dies. Once he dies, all the leaders of the politburo will come to Beijing for his funeral. That is when they will start conspiring, and that is when they will start



plotting and planning. We have to put enough pressure on them before that happens, so that they can actually force Xi Jinping to change his policies or he can be replaced with somebody who is much more moderate.

Q230 **Chair:** That was interesting. Charlie?

Charles Parton: On the question of sanctions, I think it was extraordinary that Chen Quanguo, who is the Party Secretary of Xinjiang, was excluded. I presume that is because in order to bring the EU on board, or certain countries of it, anything that was too high was excluded. Above all, he is responsible, although in practice the politburo standing committee member in charge of Xinjiang policy is Wang Yang, and the person who has actually initiated all this, according to professors and others at the Xinjiang party school itself, is of course Xi Jinping. But I don't expect any country to put Magnitsky sanctions on Xi Jinping or Wang Yang, even if they are ultimately responsible.

I think that we and other countries should be looking at a range of people who are responsible for Xinjiang policy. In the Chinese system, obviously you would not want to—I don't think, anyway—sanction all 93 million members of the Communist party. I don't think that makes any sense, but you might say that those who are responsible for policy are the 40,000 to 60,000 at office director level. It would not be difficult to identify those in certain organisations—such as the United Front Work Department, which is responsible for minority ethnic policy within Xinjiang itself and within the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps—of that rank. Those people—I don't know how many they would number, but perhaps 1,000 or so—could be identified, and they should be sanctioned as much as any of the ones that have been so far.

The tenor of this conversation—unsurprisingly, because it has been about Xinjiang and genocide—has been pretty much universally hostile to China, and I do think we should distinguish between the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist party. I do think we should make the point towards the end here that it is unwise and foolish to say that all Chinese investment is bad. There is good Chinese investment. There is good Chinese investment under—I never use the words “Belt and Road initiative” because it is a propaganda slogan—Chinese globalisation. There is good Chinese investment in other countries as well.

The important thing is to look at the particularities of that investment. I am very happy that a Chinese company, as much as a French or any other company, took over the London Taxi Company, because I like London taxis and I think they are very useful. It may well be that the takeover of British Steel by Jingye works out as a good thing. We shall see; it is still far too early to say. But we need therefore to look at each of these projects, whether in the UK or worldwide investment, on the basis of whether they are advantageous to both sides or whether they are really harming our interests. I leave aside the Xinjiang-related ones and companies related to Xinjiang, because I think that is too damned obvious.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

However, as a general point, if a Chinese investment is to the detriment of our science and technology, or can be used to promote their military expertise, and so on, then for sure. Or, if there are environmental aspects of it—I think this is another area where we should be helping other countries a lot more—we should look at the environmental and other labour aspects of Chinese contracts. If those militate against it, fine; we should oppose it. But there will be many where it is perfectly acceptable and perhaps a good thing that we support Chinese investment or trade, because it is a globalised, interconnected world.

Chair: Thank you both very much indeed. I have to say that I agree entirely with your last point, Charlie, and I know members of the Committee do. There is a very big distinction between the Chinese Communist party and those Chinese Communist party officials who are dealing in the abuses that we are seeing in various parts of the country. There are 90 million members of the Chinese Communist party, so it is not a universal guilt, either. There is a distinction here, and I am very grateful to you for making it, because it is something we all agree with.

I think the other thing that we would all agree with is China having its rightful place as a major economy and having a say in the governance of the global system. That is also something that we would entirely support. As you rightly pointed out, Charlie, P.C. Chang—the Chinese diplomat in the 1940s who largely wrote and held the pen for the UN declaration on human rights—demonstrates not only that we welcome China's voice on human rights, but actually that we find that China's views on human rights are what bind us, not the other way round. This is actually somewhat different to the way it is being portrayed by so many officials in Beijing.

On that note, I am going to leave it there and say thank you very much to all our witnesses today, but particularly, because you are still here, to Charles and Azeem for joining us this afternoon.