

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons

19/2/2021

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

I write in response to your letter of the 8th of February raising questions around the visit in May 2018 of CETC representatives to my group in the University of Cambridge.

I hope it will help if I begin by giving some background information which will place the visit in context before I answer your specific questions. I and my group in Cambridge are heavily involved in the design and construction of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a project you may be aware of, as it is a major international science project being led by the UK.

China are one of the contributing countries to the SKA, alongside for example Australia, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal and South Africa, and it is via our joint involvement in this project that our interaction with CETC came about. The design phase of the project, which we were in in 2018, was based around a set of design consortia each with representation from multiple countries. Specifically, both the UK and China were involved in the Aperture Array Design Consortium responsible for the design of the system which is to be deployed to Western Australia, and CETC were the main Chinese contributors to this work. At the time of the visit in 2018, both the UK and China had expressed interest in involvement in the construction of this element of the telescope. This was the context of the visit with the possible future collaboration being around the SKA project. While the UK and China both remain strongly involved in the SKA project, negotiations concerning the allocation of work to different member countries resulted in China not having the anticipated involvement discussed in the 2018 meeting.

To answer your specific questions:

1. At the time of the 2018 visit we were not aware of the role of CETC in state surveillance in Xinjiang. Furthermore, as part of our robust due diligence process, we were not made aware of any such involvement by any UK agency nor to our knowledge was this raised as a concern when visas for the trip were applied for. At the time of the visit, UK-Chinese collaboration was, as you know, strongly encouraged at UK national level.
2. No agreement, either formal or informal, was planned or signed by either the University or CETC. The "strong collaboration" referred to within the meeting and associated publicity was within the context of the SKA project and would have been governed by the overall engagement at an international level. Given the agreed distribution of work in the SKA project, no collaboration or discussion materialised as a result of that meeting.
3. As noted under 2, no agreement is in place.
4. We have no plans to develop collaboration with CETC and do not expect to be asked to work with them in the context of the SKA project.



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5. No members of staff raised concerns at the time of the visit or subsequently.

I hope the above fully answers your questions and addresses any concerns you and your committee may have had. I am of course happy to answer any further question that you may have.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "P. Alexander,".

Professor Paul Alexander



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Professor Paul Alexander
Head of Astrophysics
University of Cambridge

Letter by email: pa@mrao.cam.ac.uk

8 February 2021

Dear Professor Alexander,

I am writing to ask you if the University of Cambridge is currently engaged in any partnerships or other forms of collaboration with the China Electronics and Technology Corporation (CETC). In May 2018, the University publicised a visit by a CETC delegation, including the Presidents of CETC38 and CETC54. The purpose of the visit was to “discuss specific opportunities for a strong, long term, collaboration with the University”. In light of this, I am concerned that a UK university may be working with an organisation that is directly involved with the repression of the Uyghurs and other minority ethnic groups in Xinjiang, China.

I would be grateful if you could answer each of the following questions:

1. At the time of the visit, were you aware of the CETC’s role in creating and maintaining the surveillance state in Xinjiang?
2. What agreements has Cambridge University made with CETC?
3. If there are agreements, what is the specific purpose of them, and their intended outcomes?
4. If no agreements have been made, do you intend to take further steps to develop collaboration with CETC?
5. Have any members of staff raised concerns over a possible collaboration between Cambridge and CETC?

It would be helpful to have a response to this letter by 22 February. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,

TOM TUGENDHAT