

Written evidence submitted anonymously (XIN0032)

Short summary

I wish the committee to accept my submission anonymously.

I have just finished my MA in International Politics at Aberystwyth University, and wrote my Dissertation on Kazakhstan-China relations, focusing on the treatment of the Kazakh minority in Xinjiang.

Summary: China is an International bully which only respect strength and real consequences for its actions and will refuse to apologise for flagrant human rights violations. The Chinese government has sought world domination through an approach based on stealth, massive industrial espionage and economic leverage. Under Xi, China operates as a corporation, a close analogy would be the East India Company, with Xi as a kind of CEO. Approaching Xinjiang as an isolated problem will not be an effective strategy without addressing the border UK-China relationship.

Many Han Chinese, while disliking the corruption and nepotism within the Chinese Communist Party, are also highly nationalist. This is especially true of the younger generation who have been taught a programme of patriotic education which advocates ideas and concepts which border on fascist. Many Han see China's ancient history and recent meteoric economic rise as evidence that they are in some way racially superior. This attitude is reflected in their relationship with the Uighurs, who are generally despised within Chinese society. This means that an appeal to China based on universal human rights is unlikely to have an effect.

Instead, the UK should adopt a strategy based on economic incentives and making China lose International prestige, seeking to block China from having influence wherever it can and building alliances against China, and dividing the link between the Chinese government and its own population by associating the gross human rights violations in Xinjiang with a lower standard of living for the Chinese population. Attacking China directly is most likely to provoke a victim-like nationalist response from its population. Instead, the UK should seek to subtly undermine China's International policies and associate Xi with poor economic performance in the eyes of the majority Han population and the Communist Party.

I am submitting evidence because I have a strong interest in the human rights situation in Xinjiang and believe the sovereignty of the UK to be under threat from the Chinese government.

- ***How can the UK use organisations and agreements such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Genocide Convention to influence China towards better human rights practices?***

For decades, the belief in International Relations was that improved economic performance would translate into a more liberal political landscape in China. This view was strongly influenced by political scientist Francis Fukayama's thesis '*The End of History?*' Fukayama believed that the Chinese elites who had studied in the West would be influenced and would be influenced by liberal political ideals.

Despite a growing middle class, which has demanded some freedoms and benefited enormously from globalisation, China has proven Fukayama wrong. Instead, China's elites have adopted to the global capitalist system without moving into democracy. This is because the elites and many of the middle classes occupy their privileged position in Chinese society

because of their links to the Party, either through membership or through family ties. Abolishing the very organisation which has given them such opportunities would be illogical. Deng Xiaoping also expanded Communist Party membership after 1989 to give more citizens the privilege of Party membership, increasing the number of Chinese who have a vested interest in the continuation of the Party.

The Chinese government has cynically signed up to UN laws with little intention of ever enforcing them. The Chinese state has had a poor human rights record for millennia. Although repression has stepped up under Xi, his predecessors also had highly questionable human rights records. Jiang Zemin carried out a widespread campaign of persecution and torture against Falun Gong practitioners and Hu Jintao was indicted for genocide in a Spanish court for his repressive policies in Tibet. Even the widely respected Deng Xiaoping ordered the brutal crackdown and massacre in Tiananmen Square. No one in the Communist Party leadership has ever dared to openly condemn Mao Zedong's legacy of mass murder, perhaps the most brutal regime in human history.

Furthermore, for Western governments to enforce human rights standards and have an influence on policy in China would be anathema to most Han, who display a highly territorial mindset, even towards Xinjiang which Mao annexed in 1949.

In addition, many Western approaches to China have failed to understand the Chinese own view of themselves as 'The Middle Kingdom'. The concept of 'Tianxia' places China is the centre of the universe. Most Chinese believe that only America is above them in the International hierarchy. China wishes to displace America and will use any means possible in order to achieve this end.

Despite the unfortunate legacy of the Opium wars, Hong Kong and the sacking of Peking in the nineteenth century, surprisingly, many Chinese people display affection for British

football teams, the idiosyncrasies of British culture hold a bizarre, outdated view of the UK, believing it to be something out of a Jane Austen novel. British brands are highly popular and the UK has often been able to leverage its soft power to economic benefit in this regard.

The maxim of ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu was ‘know yourself and know your enemy’. The Chinese government has researched the UK extensively while shrouding its intentions in mystery. The rampant aggression of Xi and perhaps the response to Covid too have unmasked these ambitions clearly.

Likewise, it is important to understand China’s weaknesses – a corrupt ruling party, an overheated domestic property market, ageing population, a disastrous one child policy, environmental degradation, high debt levels which make it dependent on continuous direct foreign investment, an economy dependant on exports and industrial espionage and fear of being shut out of the lucrative global market and dreadful soft power due to its aggression and the lack of transparency or even apology over Covid-19. The Chinese leadership is simultaneously arrogant and insecure. The UK, with the support of its allies must exploit China’s weaknesses and seek to form closer ties with India, a potential manufacturing competitor to China, and an economic rival that China is concerned about.

- *Where these mechanisms prove ineffective, what other international laws and agreements can be used effectively for atrocity prevention?*

There has never been a strong legal system in China. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, China’s rulers generally relied upon a combination of Confucianism and coercion to maintain societal order. Today, there is a general lack of respect for rules and laws in Chinese culture, where laws are often arbitrary and based on the interests of those in power rather than any objective standard of fairness.

China does not respect International law in the South China Sea and believes the UN system is designed for the benefit of America, suppresses China's greatness and natural superiority in Asia. This is not simply the policy of the Chinese government, the majority of Han support China's actions in the South China Sea. China will never respect International law, viewing the International arena as a battleground that requires strength and guile rather in order to achieve its aims.

- ***How can the UK use its influence on countries other than China who are complicit in the persecution of Uyghurs?***

Many Muslim majority countries signed up to the Belt and Road Initiative, notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Kazakhstan, which all enjoy extensive trade ties with China. Many of their citizens may be unhappy with China because of its persecution Uighurs and because of its trade practices and Covid 19 and China's complete lack of transparency around the issue.

Capitalising on global anti-China sentiment among billions of people around the world through the UK's soft power, historically strong stance on human rights and through organisations such as the British Council is a way to combat and negate China's increasing global influence.

- ***What mechanisms can the Government use to discourage private sector companies from contributing to human rights abuses?***

Imposing heavy fines and publicly exposing companies through press releases and media outlets are the only real ways to discourage this. Firms outsourcing to China could be made to pay higher taxes.

- ***How can UK-linked businesses with operations in Xinjiang be made accountable for any involvement in human rights abuses?***

UK businesses should pull out of all operations in Xinjiang. Given the scale of human rights abuses taking place there, it is highly unlikely that there are legitimate large-scale businesses operating in the region which are ethical. Trade with other Chinese provinces is also now potentially morally compromised given that many Uighurs have been dispersed and put into slavery in factories across China.

Preventing UK businesses from forming trade relationships with the Xinjiang Production Corps or any State Enterprises linked to the People's Liberation Army is essential.

- ***What is the best form of support to offer to members of the Uyghur diaspora (and others) who are experiencing persecution and harassment abroad?***

The policy of harassment of Uighurs has been going on for decades in Xinjiang. To date, the UK government's policy towards China has completely failed to protect the Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, both in China and Internationally. China's surveillance state has a global reach and is unparalleled in human history. The vast majority of Uighurs are arguably not safe anywhere in the world to speak out without some kind of reprisal.

While the UK has tens of thousands of wealthy Han Chinese students in its private schools and Universities, Uighurs live a miserable life in the dystopian Xinjiang and are persecuted abroad, even in Western countries. Actions such as a scholarship for Uighurs to attend a prestigious public school or a financial compensation programme and housing for refugees would be a step in the right direction, although arguably it is too late to have an impact.

The Uighurs have lived in the region now called Xinjiang for over a thousand years. The majority wish to be independent and create an East Turkestan state and do not want to be part

of China. They have watched their culture be systematically destroyed by the Communist Party and become second class citizens in their homeland. It is very unlikely that any kind of financial compensation will atone for the decades of atrocity and abuse that they have suffered at the hands of the Chinese government.

- ***How can the UK support the promotion of knowledge and transparency about this issue, both within China and internationally?***

It is important to understand that the majority of people within China read Chinese language media which is heavily censored. While some of the middle class may be aware of this and even resent this, there is not a strong interest in Western media and a general distrust of the political intentions of Western countries.

Han culture places a strong emphasis on hierarchy, power, influence and perceived intelligence. There is also a hierarchy of provinces in China, with some provinces such as Henan and Heilongjiang widely mocked by other Han and the Hukou system effectively enforcing an apartheid style system of laws which discriminate against rural Han in the cities.

Regrettably, many urban Han also display a high level of racism towards other ethnic groups in China which they deemed inferior to themselves. Since 1989, China's patriotic education has amplified this feeling of racial and national superiority among many young people.

High levels of ethnic tension and even hatred exists between Uighurs and Han in Xinjiang, an atmosphere which has become much more tense after the 2009 Urumqi riots. Many Han give derogatory names to the Uighurs, for example calling them 'thieves' or suggesting they are involved in terror activities or are uneducated or dirty and showing a lack of respect for Islam. On the other hand, some Han may exoticize the Uighurs as beautiful and mysterious. The Uighurs also use highly derogatory terms towards the Han. Xinjiang is viewed as a backward

and inferior province within China. There is little evidence that the majority of Han Chinese would care or take any kind of protest if they knew the full extent of atrocities in Xinjiang.

Since Deng Xiaoping's pronouncement that 'to be rich is glorious', shorn of the rich historical legacy of Chinese culture by the destructive cultural revolution, contemporary Han culture is largely centered around economic performance and maintaining 'mianzi' or face. One potential positive is the growing number of Christians in China who may be concerned about human rights. Certainly, there are Han who are appalled by the situation in Xinjiang.

Many working-class Han, known as laobaixing, dislike the Communist Party and have many grievances against the Party for its nepotism and poorly built infrastructure projects and exploitative working practices. Furthermore, tension over the disputed legacy of Mao and the Cultural Revolution is never far from the surface. The public mood in China can often turn volatile and every year there are thousands of instances of explosive unrest across the country, especially linked to the overpriced housing market in cities and to land clearances in the countryside. This is partially why Xi chooses to pick fights with countries, in order to portray China as the victim as deflect blame from the Party's frequently inept domestic governance.

Xi's highly nationalist and anti-corruption stance is his main advantage in the eyes of many laobaixing. Nonetheless, some middle-class Han Chinese and some in the Party are aware that Xi has sought to brainwash the nation through his personality cult and fear a return to one-man rule as in the days of Mao Zedong. Criticising state policies directed by Xi may further alienated those who dislike the direction Xi is taking China and those who hold a personal grudge against him.

Showing how the Communist Party's policies in Xinjiang are tarnishing the International reputation and soft power of China may have a greater effect on China's middle class, who desire China to be Internationally respected and do not like to lose face. Furthermore, many

young people dislike the lack of freedom under the Communist party. Linking the lack of freedoms in Xinjiang to their own situation may make them rethink their support of the Chinese government.

Linking the Chinese government's actions in Xinjiang to decreasing domestic prosperity would make many Han question the wisdom of these policies. Highlighting how the policies in Xinjiang are now being rolled out in Tibet, a people group that the Han have more affinity with, would also highlight the dangers of Xi's leadership. Appealing to other ethnic minorities in China would also help to de-legitimise the Party.

- ***How effective is the FCDO's current approach to atrocity prevention, and how can it be restructured to maximise the UK's impact in this area?***

The FCDO's current approach to atrocity prevention in China is completely ineffective. This most likely won't change anytime soon given due to the huge trade deficit with China. China knows that it can leverage its economic clout and the extensive ties with UK universities, as well as Chinese students studying in the UK.

China understands that the UK is in a weak position to enforce human rights in Xinjiang. Due to a combination of Covid-19, Brexit and Trump's protectionist trade policies, the UK currently has no choice but to maintain trade ties with China. China is also a major player within the City of London. Disentangling the UK from Chinese influence will prove extremely difficult and will require immense skill, as Australia is currently finding out. The UK will need to work closely with Western corporations and banks in the City to limit China's influence. The UK does not enjoy the economic leverage that America has, and fully disengage from China.

Trump has weakened International institutions, and lowered the soft power of America around the world. Arguably, he has failed to protect the Uighurs, in some ways encouraged the policies in Xinjiang, as well as initiating bizarre friendships with Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un.

Nonetheless, many middle-class Han Chinese fear Trump and are concerned about the effect of his trade tariffs on their future prosperity. Trump has stood up to China's bullying and trade theft and his policies have actually been highly effective in slowing the spread of China's influence. Imposing some kind of tariffs and ones that have a financial impact on the Chinese middle class would be an effective deterrent. Limiting international travel to the UK from China's middle class would be more effective in making China's citizens question the legitimacy of their own government.

Interestingly, Xi has employed United Front operations in Xinjiang to influence the Uighurs and to China's middle class, suggesting that he believes the Uighurs and the middle classes are the two biggest threats to the continuing stability of the regime.

For the time being, the UK is stuck with China whether it likes it or not. The Chinese government does not care about human rights for the majority of its own citizens. It will pay lip service to human rights in International organisations but this should be seen for what it is – a token gesture devoid of meaning, which enables them to access global markets. China will only show an interest in human rights if it affects China's economic performance.

The Chinese government is laughing at the UK right now. The UK continues to trade with China despite appalling human rights violations in Xinjiang and Tibet. The UK can decide whether it wants to accept this for the sake of economic ties, or if it will wean itself off China and stand up for the rights of the Uighurs and other oppressed ethnic minorities in China.

The UK should not compartmentalise China's actions and view what occurs in Xinjiang from their other domestic and International policies. China wants the following from the UK – market access, technological sophistication from elite universities and to influence British political and cultural elites. The shameful human rights abuses in Xinjiang must prevent China from enjoying these privileges that it does not deserve.

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