

**Testimony of
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Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee On East Asia, The Pacific, And International Cybersecurity
Policy
December 4, 2018**

Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to testify on the human rights situation in China. This hearing is particularly timely coming one week before the 70th anniversary of the United Nation's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration, which the General Assembly adopted by consensus, states that every individual has the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Defending these universal rights and fundamental freedoms has been, and will continue to be, an essential element of American foreign policy, including U.S. policy toward China. As the President's National Security Strategy states, *"the United States supports those who seek freedom, individual dignity, and the rule of law...and we will advocate on behalf of religious freedom and threatened minorities."* Governments that respect human rights remain the best vehicle for prosperity, human happiness, and peace.

Vice-President Pence aptly summed up the situation in China in his speech at the Hudson Institute on October 4: *"For a time, Beijing inched toward greater liberty and respect for human rights. But in recent years, China has taken a sharp U-turn toward control and oppression of its own people."*

Today, the Chinese Communist Party is implementing a system where, to quote President Xi Jinping, *"the Party exercises overall leadership over all areas of endeavor in every part of the country."* Space for civil society and free thought continue to shrink. There is mass detention of Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). Surveillance is intrusive and omnipresent, not only in Xinjiang but also in many other parts of China. The government blocks U.S. press and social media websites and imprisons its own people for sharing their opinions online. Those who call on China to live up to its own laws and commitments to protect human rights have been punished. And China is doing the same to Chinese citizens abroad, including harassing political dissidents on foreign soil, detaining journalists' family members who remain in China, and coercing members of Chinese Muslim minority groups to return from overseas.

Some of the worst human rights abuses are occurring unchecked in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Since April 2017, Chinese authorities have detained at least 800,000, and possibly more than 2 million, Uighurs and members of other Muslim minorities in internment camps for indefinite periods of time. This is the U.S. government assessment, backed by our intelligence community and open source reporting. Reports suggest that most of those detained are not being charged with crimes, and their families lack information about their whereabouts, their well-being, and for how long they will be held. The reasons given for detention appear to

vary widely; in some cases, police have claimed they are detaining someone merely because they travelled abroad, or because they have family abroad. There appears to be no ability to contest such detention.

At first, China denied such camps existed. As numerous public reports emerged through the testimony of brave victims and intrepid researchers and journalists, the international community began to speak out about the mass internments. Chinese authorities have recently asserted that these internment camps are “vocational education centers” designed to help young, unemployed people in Xinjiang learn job skills and the Chinese language, glossing over the fact that renowned Uighur intellectuals and retired professionals are also detained there. Former detainees who have reached safety have spoken of relentless indoctrination and harsh conditions. They report mandatory classes where detainees are required to recite Communist slogans and sing songs praising the Chinese Communist Party. Failure to quickly learn these lessons leads to beatings and food deprivation. There are reports of the use of stress positions, cold cells, and sleep deprivation in the camps. We have also seen reports of other forms of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, including sexual abuse. One common goal in reports from former detainees seems to be to forcing detainees to renounce Islam and embrace the Chinese Communist Party. For example, praying and using common Muslim greetings are forbidden in the camps. There are reports that authorities constantly surveil detainees to ensure that they do not pray, even in their own beds in the middle of the night. Detainees are reportedly forced to eat pork and drink alcohol. Some have reported being forcibly medicated with unknown substances.

Life in Xinjiang outside these internment camps is not much better. The Chinese government is engaged in an effort to monitor every aspect of life for Uighurs and members of other Muslim minority groups. Families have been forced to accept Communist officials into their homes for extended “home stays.” Thousands of mosques have been shuttered or destroyed; some have even been converted into Communist propaganda centers. Those that are still open are often guarded and monitored, and entry is limited via checkpoints with electronic ID scanners. Neighborhoods also have entry and exit checkpoints manned by armed police. The pervasive surveillance in place across Xinjiang today has been frequently described as an “open-air prison.”

Unfortunately, fleeing China is not enough to escape the long arm of the Chinese Communist Party. China has routinely pressured other countries to return Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other Muslim minority groups to China, many of whom are seeking asylum overseas. In 2015, Thailand returned nearly 100 Uighurs to China and roughly 50 remain in detention in Thailand today. In July 2017, Egyptian authorities deported two dozen Uighurs, who promptly disappeared upon arriving in China. According to civil society groups, most Uighurs involuntarily returned to China face arbitrary imprisonment, disappearance, torture, or summary execution. In some cases, most recently in Malaysia, foreign governments have resisted Chinese pressure – often at the urging of the United States and other like-minded countries – and refused to deport or return Uighur individuals to China, instead considering their asylum claims or allowing them to travel onwards to safe destinations.

Even when Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups reach safety, Chinese security services and their proxies continue to harass and intimidate them. In 2017, Uighurs worldwide reported being contacted by Chinese police and ordered to return home. Those who complied often disappeared; those who did not received calls from family members begging them to return, for fear of retribution. The government also threatens the family members of Uighurs abroad whose work the government opposes. For example, six Uighur journalists for Radio Free Asia (RFA) living in the United States have reported that family members have been disappeared or detained. Of those, five have said Chinese authorities raised their work at RFA with their families prior to the disappearances and detentions of family members. China has also exploited international law enforcement cooperation mechanisms, like INTERPOL, in attempts to persuade countries to arrest Uighur dissidents on politically motivated charges. For instance, Dolkun Isa, the president of the World Uyghur Congress, has been repeatedly detained and harassed around the world due to an INTERPOL Red Notice issued based on China's false accusation of terrorism. INTERPOL rescinded this Red Notice in February.

While the focus is often on Uighurs, who at 45% of the population of Xinjiang are the largest of the Muslim minority groups targeted by China's repressive campaign, it is not limited to them. . Several ethnic Kazakh Chinese nationals have given public interviews about their own experiences in camps. We also have reports from family members in the United States that ethnic Uzbeks have also been detained by Chinese authorities.

China's repression of minority groups does not end in Xinjiang. China's repressive policies toward minority Muslim groups have spread hundreds of miles away to Hui Muslim communities with plans to shut down mosques in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Tibetans also face continued repression and pervasive surveillance; the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) was the testing ground for many of the techniques now used in Xinjiang, especially the pervasive surveillance based on ethnicity. Outside the TAR, the Chinese government maintains harsh controls on Tibetans and religious and educational centers focused on the study of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, within the past few years, authorities have reduced the number of people living in the monastic communities of Larung Gar and Yachen Gar by forcibly evicting thousands of monks, nuns, and laypersons and destroying thousands of their homes. According to RFA, authorities forced many monks and nuns evicted from Larung Gar to attend patriotic re-education classes for up to six months, with eerie parallels to the repressive practices on Muslims in Xinjiang.

Chinese authorities also continue to restrict the freedom of religion of Christian communities in China. Unregistered Protestant "house churches" like the Zion Church in Beijing and the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu continue to be shut down throughout the country; in one notable case in January, authorities used dynamite to demolish a house church in Shanxi province. Even officially registered churches are under increased government scrutiny, with the government requiring the removal of crosses and, in some cases, the hanging pictures of Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong inside the church and the installation of surveillance equipment. We have received reports of officials destroying or limiting the access to religious materials, like the allegations that Chinese authorities have burned both Bibles and Qurans. In September, the Holy See and China signed a two-year provisional agreement on the selection of bishops in

China. The agreement has not been made public, however reports suggest the Vatican committed to filling vacant bishop positions from a slate of candidates selected by the Chinese government-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA). Such procedures raise concerns regarding the freedom of religion. Falun Gong members and members of the Church of Almighty God also reportedly continue to face detention, forced labor, and torture on account of their religious beliefs.

China's repression is not limited, though, to members of religious groups or ethnic minorities. The Chinese government continues to abuse lawyers, human rights defenders, and other activists. Despite the restrictions China puts on information gathering, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China maintains a database with detailed information on more than 1,400 current Chinese political prisoners. I would like to highlight a few of the most egregious cases. Authorities have held Wang Quanzhang incommunicado for over three years because of his work defending in court those whose human rights were abused. In April, his wife, Li Wenzu, attempted to walk the 100 kilometers from their home to Beijing to the Tianjin detention facility where Wang was rumored to be held. Chinese authorities forced her to turn around and placed her under house arrest instead. Her courage and dedication in the face of adversity is inspiring, and we highlighted Li Wenzu's story during our series on women human rights heroes in March.

Huang Qi, who founded the Tianwang Center for Missing Persons, later renamed the Tianwang Human Rights Center, is another priority case. His initial mission was to stop trafficking in persons, and he created a website to track missing persons thought to have been trafficked. Over time, the site began tracking all manner of human rights abuses. Since 1998, Huang has been in and out of prison, but has not given up his fight for human rights. In 2016, authorities arrested him again. Reports suggest he is suffering from a number of illnesses and is at risk of dying in prison. Despite this, the government reportedly has stopped providing him with necessary medical care. Moreover, officials have reportedly tortured him to extract a confession to "leaking state secrets overseas." Despite this, he has persevered and refused to confess.

Students, independent labor activists, and others advocating for fair and safe working conditions are also increasingly under threat. For example, in August, authorities in Guangdong, Beijing, and other parts of China detained approximately 50 workers and students from several universities who had been supporting workers that had been dismissed for trying to organize an independent trade union. This case is only the latest in a long-standing crackdown on independent labor organizers, which includes coordinated efforts by the Chinese government at all levels to disrupt labor rights advocacy. Workers' ability to freely associate and advocate for decent working conditions are both human rights and critical to ensuring a level playing field in global supply chains. The only unions allowed in China are affiliated with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, or ACFTU, which is a Chinese Communist Party organ chaired by a member of the Politburo. This ban on independent unions contravenes workers' freedom of association.

We also have ongoing concerns about forced labor in China. Despite China officially ending its "re-education through labor" system, we continue to receive reports of detainees compelled to perform menial labor in "administrative detention facilities" and "drug rehabilitation centers" without appropriate compensation or judicial processes. And though information is limited,

we've also heard anecdotal reports about forced labor in Xinjiang's internment camps as well. Every year, the Department addresses forced labor around the world in our Trafficking in Persons report; China remains a Tier 3 country, the lowest ranking.

Any organizing or political mobilization in China to raise collective concerns or advocate for social change runs the risk of intimidation and harassment by Chinese authorities. Women's rights advocates are routinely evicted from their homes on the orders of police. LGBTI content is routinely removed from the Chinese internet. Prior to one event to celebrate "International Day Against Homophobia," students were warned to avoid the event as it was being organized by "an illegal organization that may collude with Western powers." In November 2017, Beijing authorities evicted tens of thousands of migrant workers without advance notice, despite the freezing weather. When locals organized to assist those evicted, authorities evicted them from their homes and offices as well.

And despite changing the infamous one-child policy to a two-child rule, coerced abortions and sterilization continue across China. *National Public Radio* recently published a story about Chinese authorities forcing an ethnic Kazakh woman to abort her baby, because she already had two children, by threatening to detain her brother in the internment camps in Xinjiang. After she had the abortion, officials detained him anyway.

Journalists also continue to have their rights abused. The Committee to Protect Journalists ranks China as the country with the second highest number of journalists jailed. The government controls most media outlets, dictating what stories journalists can cover and often the language they must or cannot use. Regulations passed in 2017 requires online content providers to obtain licenses from the government or be shut down, subjecting online content to censorship. China's restrictions are not limited to domestic media outlets. U.S. and international journalists in China face various undue restrictions and harassment, including limitations on visa issuances or renewals in retaliation for objectionable content.

China's weak adherence to the rule of law only exacerbates these issues. The new "liuzhi" detention system, which replaced the Party "shuanggui" system by formally combining Chinese State and Communist Party investigatory mechanisms, does not represent any improvement. Under the old system, Party members could be informally held and subjected to solitary confinement, beatings, sleep deprivation, and stress positions to force a confession. The new system, legally codified under the National Supervision Law, can target any public official, and those held are not entitled to appeals or to file suit against their captors. This is the rule by law, not the rule of law.

China's human rights abuses are being assisted by the government's increasing technological sophistication. For example, Chinese authorities have many capabilities to filter and block access to objectionable online content, known collectively as "the Great Fire Wall." These techniques include the ability to inspect data at a deep level in transit, to reset connections with sites sending data with blacklisted keywords, and to identify and block the use of encrypted protocols. China is also capable of attacking sites it dislikes and it employs various methods to interrupt or intercept online content. The online activities of Tibetans, Uighurs, and others are frequently subject to monitoring.

China is also investing heavily in artificial intelligence and machine learning, especially in pattern recognition software. The security services seek to use facial and voice recognition to rapidly identify and track individuals in a crowd. To support these systems, the authorities have initiated the mass collection of biometric information including voice samples, pictures, fingerprints, and DNA.

In total, we see a concerted effort by the Chinese Communist Party to use both new advanced technologies and old-fashioned repression to intensify control or constraints on social interaction and civil liberties in China. One concerning example is the creation of a “social credit system” to provide real-world incentives to people for being “good citizens” and punish those who are not.

The United States continues to advocate for human rights in China. While my colleague, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Laura Stone, can speak better to the bilateral relationship, our bureau is implementing \$10 million of FY2018 Economic Support Funds for human rights in China. This funding will support programs that improve rights awareness, strengthen citizen participation in policy formation, promote transparency and accountability, increase the ability of rights-focused civil society groups to work together, promote internationally recognized labor rights, and engage on rights-focused issues of broad concern to the Chinese public. Our strategy is to support existing reform trends within Chinese society where they exist, seeking out reformers and activists who are already having success advocating for and protecting the rights of their fellow citizens, and giving them the tools and support they need to deepen and expand their impact.

The operating environment in China continues to be highly constrained due to the intensified Chinese government crackdown on civil society organizations, lawyers, and activists; increasing restrictions on and closures of organizations receiving foreign funding and partnering with foreign organizations; and heightened scrutiny of foreign NGOs and their staff. The Foreign NGO Management Law that went into effect on January 1, 2017 also has cast a shadow over the operating environment by subjecting international NGOs to greater scrutiny, leading many international funders to suspend their China programs. In the face of these difficulties, Chinese activists, lawyers, and civil society continue to request U.S. government support for their work, and DRL programs make progress within their areas of focus as implementers work creatively and courageously faced with these Chinese government restrictions.

We are also using multilateral fora to encourage China to improve its human rights situation. Prior to China’s Universal Periodic Review in November, for example, we submitted advance questions to push China to answer for its human rights abuses on a range of topics, including Xinjiang, Tibet, religious freedom, and the rule of law. During our intervention at the review, we specifically stated our concern about the situation for Muslim minority groups in China and called on China to abolish arbitrary detention, including within the internment camps in Xinjiang; cease the harassment, detention, and abduction of human rights defenders; amend the definition of subversion to remove all exercise of an individual’s human rights and fundamental freedoms from its scope; and cease interference in the selection and education of religious leaders, such as Tibetan Buddhist lamas.

We also continue to push back against China's vision of a closed internet under state control. The United States, through the State Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media, is funding several programs, including proven anti-censorship technologies and the creation of protocols to be adopted by tool developers to make their technology less susceptible to censorship or interception.

We welcome the spotlight that this hearing shines on the human rights situation in China. The Chinese people deserve a government that respects their human rights and governs under the rule of law. We continue to call on the Chinese government to end the counter-productive repression in Xinjiang, to release all political prisoners, and to respect the fundamental freedoms of all in China. We will continue to work closely with this subcommittee to support the efforts of those in China who are seeking to realize their rights.