

**Testimony of  
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U.S. Department of State**

**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity  
Policy**

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Chairman Gardner, Ranking Member Markey, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the invitation to appear before you today to testify on the human rights situation in China. President Trump wants a constructive, results-oriented relationship with China grounded in principles of fairness, reciprocity, and respect. Improving China's respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential to our ability to achieve this vision and realize a sustainable U.S.-China relationship.

Today, however, China is doubling down on repressive domestic controls in stark contrast to the universal values that the United States and its partners have championed for many decades. In recent years, we have witnessed a regression in terms of China's respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom; the rule of law; and civil society. China's mass detentions of members of Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang, while perhaps the most egregious example, is only one of many recent actions taken by the Chinese leadership that run counter not only to China's international human rights commitments, but also to Chinese law.

Today I will share with you the actions that the State Department is taking to reinforce our support for human rights and fundamental freedoms in China in the face of these challenges.

**China's Human Rights Situation**

The State Department's annual Human Rights Report and its International Religious Freedom Report document how China routinely and severely restricts freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion or belief. Deputy Assistant Secretary Busby outlined many of them in his testimony.

Chinese security officials reportedly elicit forced confessions through torture and other abuse, target members of religious and ethnic minority groups, arrest human rights lawyers, censor media and online speech, and restrict citizen participation in the political process. The death of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo while in custody in July 2017, and the prolonged, unfounded house arrest of his wife, Liu Xia, are glaring symbols of China's mistreatment of those seeking to defend the rights of all individuals to exercise their fundamental freedoms.

Beijing is also significantly strengthening censorship controls on the internet, media, and academia. Its 2016 law on foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) constricts the activities of these groups by imposing stringent registration requirements and granting

supervisory authority to public security agencies. Many of the American NGOs that have been negatively affected by this law have contributed significantly to China's economic and social development over several decades and have facilitated important people-to-people exchanges between our two countries.

There have been continued reports that Tibetan Buddhists have been subjected to forced disappearance, physical abuse, arbitrary detention, and arrest. The Chinese government asserts authority over the selection, approval, and veneration of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and supervises their religious education. We remain concerned about the lack of meaningful autonomy for Tibetans, and we regularly urge China to cease restrictions on the rights of Tibetans, as well as their unique religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions and practices.

Recently, oppressive activities aimed at residents of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous region reportedly have severely intensified, as documented by the dogged reporting of diplomats, reporters, academics, and Muslim communities abroad. The concluding observations on China by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination further shined a spotlight on the worsening human rights crisis there. Under the guise of fighting "terrorism" and so-called "religious extremism," China's leadership is intensifying long-standing repressive policies targeting individuals who practice non-violent cultural and religious practices in Xinjiang, including by reportedly torturing and abusing prisoners held for their beliefs and forcing individuals to renounce their religion and pledge allegiance to the Communist Party.

We are particularly alarmed by reports that since April 2017, extremely large numbers of Uighurs and other members of Muslim minority groups have been detained in camps. Detainees are reportedly trained to diminish their ethnic identities, religious beliefs, and nonviolent cultural and religious practices. There are reports of abuse, including torture, and deaths in these camps. China's claims that these camps are all "humane job-training centers" are preposterous. These brutal tactics risk creating the very radicalization to violence that China seeks to avoid. We consistently urge China to reverse its counterproductive policies that conflate terrorism with the peaceful expression of religious beliefs or political views.

We have received reports that U.S. lawful permanent residents (LPRs), family members of U.S. citizens, and individuals who have participated in State Department exchange programs have been detained in these internment camps. This treatment of U.S. citizens, U.S. LPRs, and their family members is unacceptable. We regularly raise these cases with Chinese authorities and insist that China provide information about the locations and medical conditions of those detained and immediately release them.

We are also concerned by Chinese security services harassing Uighurs abroad in order to compel them to act as informants against other Uighurs, or return to Xinjiang, sometimes by detaining their family members in these centers, or keep silent about the situation there. This includes harassment of American citizens, LPRs, and individuals legally residing in the United States. China has applied similar pressure to dual nationals or family members of citizens in other countries. The detention and persecution of Uighur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang

reportedly have compelled them to stop communicating with their family and friends based abroad, including in the United States, for fear of retribution by authorities.

### **U.S. Policy and Advocacy Regarding Human Rights:**

The Administration regularly condemns human rights violations and abuses in China. We routinely raise and advocate for individual cases of concerns with our Chinese counterparts. The Secretary has made clear in his engagements, including this past month with his counterpart in the Politburo and China's Defense Minister, that the United States would continue to advocate for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Vice President spoke about this publicly in early October, and UN Ambassador Haley did the same in speaking about the security challenges that China's campaign in Xinjiang pose to the international community.

Department of State officials regularly attend the trials and sentencing of Chinese human rights lawyers and activists, and hold meetings privately with the wives and family members of those who have been detained. We press for the release of all political prisoners, including but not limited to prominent figures like Ilham Tohti, Tashi Wangchuk, Li Yuhan, Yu Wensheng, Pastor Cao "John" Sanqiang, and Huang Qi. Last July, State Department officials highlighted the third anniversary of the Chinese government's nationwide campaign of intimidation against defense lawyers and rights defenders and the fact that Wang Quanzhang has been detained more than three years without trial. We expressed concerns about the detention of Swedish citizen and Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai, the sentencing of Chinese human rights defenders Wu Gan and Xie Yang, and the conviction of human rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong. Though we were unsuccessful in our intensive efforts to secure the freedom of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo, persistent, public and private advocacy secured the long-sought release of his widow Liu Xia in July this year. Ambassador Branstad has been especially active in engaging China's leadership on cases such as these.

Speaking out publicly is just one tool we have. The Department of State has also taken actions to promote accountability for those responsible for human rights abuses in China, including Chinese government and party officials. In December 2017, the Department of Treasury, in consultation with the Department of State, designated a former Chinese prison official, Gao Yan, for the detention and torture of human rights activist Cao Shunli using Executive Order 13818, which builds on and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. We have also used our high-level meetings with the Chinese to urge China to address our concerns on China's foreign NGO management law and unfair exit bans placed on U.S. citizens.

Last month in Geneva, the United States delivered comprehensive and strong recommendations on human rights at China's Universal Periodic Review. At every opportunity, we urge China to address policies in Tibetan areas that threaten the rights and distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity of the Tibetan people, and to end counterproductive policies in Xinjiang that restrict peaceful expression and religious freedom and risk inciting radicalization to violence. The United States will continue to stand up and speak out when the Chinese government cracks down on civil society, imprisons peaceful reformers, silences legitimate dissent, or enacts legislation at odds with the freedom of religion and expression, including for members of the press. When we speak up, we will do so in concert with allies and partners throughout the world that are similarly worried about China's human rights abuses.

### **U.S. Policy and Advocacy Regarding Xinjiang:**

The most severe human rights crisis in China – perhaps since the Cultural Revolution – is the mass detention and deployment of high-tech surveillance technologies to systematically repress Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. In April, Spokesperson Nauert met with the six brave U.S.-based Radio Free Asia (RFA) journalists, who shared troubling reports of Uighurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang, including their families, who have been harassed and arbitrarily or unlawfully detained. Secretary Pompeo and Vice President Pence highlighted our concerns about the situation in Xinjiang at the Ministerial to Advance International Religious Freedom in July, where they also met with Survivors of Religious Persecution representing China’s Christian, Uighur Muslim, and Tibetan Buddhist communities. The Secretary raised this again at the U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue last month.

Department officials meet with members of the Uighur diaspora and coordinate with U.S. law enforcement agencies to address the harassment of Uighurs in the United States. The Department of State has conducted outreach to U.S. and Chinese companies with business in Xinjiang to draw attention to the risks of their exposure to China’s abuses and to underscore the U.S. commitment to avoid complicity. There is a steady drip of asylum seekers from Xinjiang seeking refuge outside of China for fear of detention, torture, or worse. U.S. embassies around the world are providing assistance to survivors of Xinjiang’s camps, including Ms. Miriguli Tuerson Mahmoud, who testified here before Congress last week and spoke about the horrifying abuses in these camps. In addition to consistently pressing China to end its campaign of repression, we have engaged dozens of foreign governments to successfully prevent the refoulement to China of Uighurs and other members of Muslim minority groups whose lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their religion or where there are substantial grounds to believe they are in danger of being subjected to torture.

The State Department is leading interagency efforts within the Administration to review and develop a U.S. whole-of-government strategy to address the campaign of repression in Xinjiang. Elements of this strategy could include utilizing a number of tools to promote accountability of Chinese officials for human rights abuses, preventing China’s use of U.S. goods and services to perpetrate its egregious activities in Xinjiang, and strengthening our diplomatic and public diplomacy efforts throughout the world, not just in the West. If we are to fundamentally change China’s behavior in Xinjiang, the international community must act together.

### **Conclusion:**

America’s critical role in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms in China is more important today than in many years. There is more the United States can do to lead on global human rights; this is part of our moral responsibility as Americans, and it is profoundly in our interests. We look forward to working closely with this subcommittee to support the efforts of the Chinese people to realize their human rights and fundamental freedoms and promote accountability for those who seek to violate or abuse those rights and freedoms.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.