

## POLICY MEMO

# The Atrocities Against Uyghurs and Other Minorities in Xinjiang

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*May 2021*

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*This memo is adapted from Nury Turkel's testimony before the US House of Representative's Committee on Foreign Affairs' hearing on May 6, 2021, "The Atrocities Against Uyghurs and Other Minorities in Xinjiang." He testified on behalf of the Uyghur Human Rights Project.*

### Genocide and Genocide Denial

The Chinese government's systematic, comprehensive, and multi-faceted genocidal policy against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims has reached a new phase in my homeland.

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) has warned for more than three years that the end goal of this policy is the destruction of Uyghur culture, traditions, language, and faith. The Chinese state has criminalized being Uyghur. The policies are eliminating our community ties, all genuine practices and expressions of our culture, language, and civilizational accomplishments in poetry, literature, and all the arts, theology, architecture, and scholarship. Uyghur society's religious and

secular leadership, the university professors and high school teachers, successful business owners, and entrepreneurs have been swept wholesale into camps and prisons. In many cases, their entire families have disappeared, including their parents, siblings, and children.

Very soon, anything remaining that can be described as "Uyghur" in our own homeland will be an empty shell, a Potemkin show. In fact, it is already a reality due to the inadequate international response to this staggering 21st century high-tech genocide.

I want to emphasize that genocide denial is in full swing. The Chinese government is not only carrying out a brutal policy of state violence that is causing immeasurable, irreversible human suffering. It is demanding that the world praise its policy. The CCP is now producing a daily stream of material for international audiences about its policies towards Uyghurs: government statements, state-media print and video output, and highly

produced content for social media platforms. The CCP is taking advantage of its seat in multilateral forums to assert that it deserves praise for (1) commendable “anti-terrorism” policies, (2) successful “poverty alleviation” by the Xinjiang government, and (3) enabling Uyghurs to live a “happy life.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, China is not only committing genocide and demanding that the world praise its actions. The government also forces Uyghurs to participate in the genocide, dancing and singing for the cameras and recording in a string of videos denouncing criticism of China. Dozens of Uyghurs have been forced to denounce their own relatives abroad for speaking up for their freedom. In February, UHRP released a detailed analysis of this cruel propaganda, in which Uyghurs say scripted lines such as “the government never oppresses us.”<sup>2</sup>

The government has mounted an aggressive campaign to push back against the global pressure campaign to end the state-imposed forced labor of Uyghurs.<sup>3</sup> On March 24, 2021—just two days after coordinated human-rights sanctions on Xinjiang officials by the US, UK, EU, and Canada—the government manufactured a purported boycott by Chinese consumers against foreign brands to defend what they call “Xinjiang cotton.” As part of the “defend Xinjiang cotton” campaign, one video showed Uyghurs dressed in traditional performance costumes, dancing, holding a fluffy ball of unprocessed cotton in each hand, and singing a song of praise for “Xinjiang cotton.” The Chinese government has also recruited foreigners to praise its policies.<sup>4</sup> China Global Television Network has also played a significant role in justifying China’s Xinjiang policies, the topic of a forthcoming UHRP publication.

### The Evidence of Atrocity Crimes

The international documentation of the Chinese government’s criminal policies is so voluminous that a bibliography of related research and reporting, covering 2017-2021, produced by Professor Magnus Fiskesjö of Cornell University,

currently runs 1,450 pages.<sup>5</sup> The evidence comes from a wide variety of sources.

The key sources are Uyghur and Kazakh survivors of concentration camps and forced labor — like Ms. Tursunay Ziyawudun, who is testifying before a government for the first time today, Uyghur and Kazakh diaspora members testifying about the fate of their loved ones,<sup>6</sup> independent investigative journalism, satellite imagery documenting the rapid construction of vast prison-camps, analysis of open-source information on the Chinese internet, the Chinese government’s public statements, and leaked Chinese government policy documents.

**Concentration Camps:** The Xinjiang government’s concentration camps, a massive program to “round up those who should be rounded up,”<sup>7</sup> are built on extrajudicial detention, collective punishment, guilt-by-association, systematic torture and rape, and medications inducing infertility and impaired mental function.

Since 2017, the Chinese government has arbitrarily detained millions of Uyghur, Kazakh, and other Turkic Muslims in concentration camps. People are taken from their homes or off the street, a black hood is put over their heads, and then their nightmare begins. Camp survivors have reported that they have suffered torture, rape, forced abortion and sterilization, withholding of medical care, and intense political indoctrination.

In the camps, they are forced to shout, over and over, “My soul is infected with serious diseases,” “I don’t believe in God, I believe in the Communist Party.” The number of deaths in custody is unknown.

The reasons for detention provided in Chinese government documents, such as the Qaraqash document,<sup>8</sup> include being an “unsafe person” who is 40 or younger, ordinary Muslim

practices such as growing a beard or wearing a veil, having relatives outside of China, or a history of traveling abroad, and violations of family planning regulations.

The thought-crimes recorded in this document, which is a record of actual detentions in one subdistrict in Qaraqash county, include:

- Household has a thick religious atmosphere, susceptible to religious extremist thought infection  
家庭宗教氛围浓厚 · 易受宗教极端思想感染人员
- Person with religious extremist thought infection  
宗教极端思想感染人员
- Influenced by religious extremist thinking  
受宗教极端思想的影响
- Slightly infected by religious extremist thought  
受宗教极端思想感染轻微人员
- Received religious thinking infection, unsafe post 90s person  
受宗教思想感染90后不放心人员
- Thinking unstable, ability to resist religious infiltration low  
思想不稳定 · 宗教极端思想渗透 抵抗能力较低
- Person spreading extremist thinking  
传播极端思想被遣返人员

**Separation of Children:** Nearly half a million Muslim children have been separated from detained parents and placed in state-run orphanages and boarding schools, where they are forced to praise the Chinese Communist Party and its leaders and to speak Mandarin. These are, in effect, concentration camps and brainwashing facilities for children.<sup>9</sup>

**Total Control, Forced Labor, and International Complicity:**

The government’s objective for those not in prisons and extra-legal detention, according to government documents, is to have every Uyghur in a government-assigned place of work.

Table 1: Reasons supplied by the Chinese government for the internment of Uyghurs

REASON	NUMBER
Birth policy violations	115
Unsafe post 80s, 90s, or 00s person	91
Ex-convict or other past law violation	40
Wore veil/wife wore veil/had beard	33
Applied for passport (and didn’t leave country)	25
Reason related to religious practice	23
International travel	20
Religious extremist thought infection	19
Related to prisoner	12
Movements within China	8
Possessed or watched illegal media	5
Two-faced official	5
Related to someone outside of country	4
Did not obey <i>shequ</i> personnel	4
Fraudulent marriage certificate	3
Overseas communication	2

Source: The Uyghur Human Rights Project, “*Ideological Transformation: Records of Mass Detention from Qaraqash, Hotan* (Washington, DC: 2020), p. 9, [https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP\\_QaraqashDocument.pdf](https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP_QaraqashDocument.pdf).

Forced labor is such an integral part of the government’s plan for total control that all products coming from the Uyghur Region, from cotton to solar panels, must be assumed to be tainted by forced and prison labor. Through partnership with companies from the eastern part of China, so-called “poverty-alleviation” and “mutual pairing programs” bring hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs to work in fields and factories within the Region and cities across China against their will.

A deeply troubling aspect of China’s forced labor scheme, however, is the complicity of international companies, including



US companies. Uyghur forced labor is deeply embedded in these companies' Chinese supply chains. Given that 80% of China's cotton is grown in the Xinjiang Region, 20% of the entire global apparel industry is potentially implicated. American and international companies declare that they have "zero tolerance" for forced labor and claim that audits have found no evidence of forced labor in their supply chains. As I pointed out in my October 2019 Congressional testimony, "due diligence" audits are impossible in the Uyghur Region.

#### **Destruction of Uyghur Religious and Cultural Sites:**

Numerous independent reports<sup>10</sup> have documented large-scale destruction of Uyghur religious and cultural sites, at a level unseen since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). For example, out of approximately 24,000 mosques in Xinjiang, fewer than 15,000 now remain standing; out of those 15,000, more than half have suffered damage inflicted by government authorities.<sup>11</sup>

The destruction of these important religious sites, including an 800-year-old mosque, is a critical part of the government's plan to erase Turkic Muslims' ethno-religious and cultural identities in East Turkistan forcibly assimilate them under Xi Jinping's "Sinicization of Religion" policy.

**Digital Authoritarianism:** Integral to China's overall suppression of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims is the pervasive use of advanced surveillance technology and a myriad of digital tools such as the ubiquitous presence of surveillance cameras, compulsory collection of DNA and other biometric data, iris scan, facial and voice recognition, big data, and artificial intelligence.

The Xinjiang and national governments have turned the Uyghur homeland into a frontline laboratory, where the most extreme and repressive forms of these invasive technologies and programs are deployed.<sup>12</sup> Linked to a centralized database system known as the "Integrated Joint Operation

Platform" (IJOP) and combined with the Social Credit System, the Chinese government conducts mass surveillance and "preventive policing" to control and subdue Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang.

Digital authoritarianism is not limited to domestic use, however, as China has exported its surveillance technologies to dozens of countries, including countries ruled by authoritarian regimes that may use the "China Model" to persecute human rights activists and political opponents.

**Prevention of Births:** The Chinese government's genocidal practices also include forced sterilization and forced abortion. The combined natural population growth rates in Kashgar and Hotan, two of the prefectures that make up the Uyghur heartland, fell by a staggering 84 percent between 2015 and 2018. Xinjiang authorities officially reported that birth rates in the Region declined by an additional 24 percent in 2019, with declines between 30 and 56 percent in some majority-Uyghur districts. In contrast, birth rates across the whole country fell by only 4.2 percent between 2018 and 2019.

In January, the Chinese Embassy in Washington boasted about this policy, saying that the government had ensured that Uyghur women would no longer be "baby-making machines."<sup>13</sup>

Based on these statistics alone, the Chinese government's egregious policies in the Uyghur region meet the legal threshold for genocide under provisions of the Genocide Convention as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

#### **The Policy Response**

In January 2021, the Trump administration determined that the atrocities taking place in Xinjiang indeed represent genocide and crimes against humanity, and the Biden administration has affirmed this determination. Secretary Blinken told 60 Minutes

on Sunday, once again confirmed that “we’ve made clear that we see a genocide having taken place against the Uyghurs.”<sup>14</sup>

From 2019 through 2021, the US has imposed punitive sanctions against 74 PRC officials, government entities, and companies for gross human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples. Five specific policies were implemented to end complicity in US supply chains.

The Canadian, Dutch, and the UK parliaments have joined the United States in recognizing the CCP’s policies as genocide. However, the international response is far too little, far too late. To date, other governments had imposed sanctions of any kind only once, when Canada, the UK, and the EU jointly imposed coordinated Magnitsky-style human-rights sanctions on March 22, against four PRC officials and the Xinjiang police department.

### Swift Congressional Action

UHRP endorses the following pending legislation and resolutions and urges swift passage:

1. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (H.R.1155 and S.65)
2. Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act (H.R.1630 and S.1080)
3. Strategic Competition Act (S.1169)
4. Includes 9 provisions to address the Uyghur genocide, and international complicity, including condemnation of the atrocities as genocide, additional human-rights sanctions, the China Censorship Monitor and Action Group (S.413), among others
5. Non-binding resolutions to condemn the genocide and urge Presidential action at the UN and with like-minded governments (H.Res.317 and S.Res.131)
6. Five pending non-binding resolutions urging the removal of the 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games from Beijing

### Additional Recommendations for US Policy

1. The US government should urge every State Party of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to fulfill their obligations under Article I, to take action to prevent genocide. This obligation arises at the moment the State becomes aware of the potential for genocide. Even in the absence of a genocide determination, therefore, states must take action to prevent further human rights abuses.
2. The US should provide global leadership for a safe haven for Uyghurs fleeing the horrors of China’s genocidal repression. Congress should find a way to support expediting Uyghurs’ asylum claims pending for as long as 5 or 6 years. In addition, Uyghurs should be designated as “Priority 2” refugees to allow Uyghurs stranded in third countries to reach safe haven in the United States. For this reason, I urge the Foreign Affairs Committee for to approve the Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act (H.R.1630) and urge swift passage of the Act in both the House and the Senate (S.1080).
3. The US should sustain robust bilateral diplomacy with countries hosting Uyghurs who qualify for safe refuge in the US, including Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand, and Central Asian countries. Collaboration with these governments is critical for resettlement processing and securing commitments to refrain from “black renditions” of Uyghurs under pressure from the Chinese government.
4. Diplomatic efforts must be redoubled with member-states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to end the near-total silence by governments of Muslim-majority countries regarding China’s war on Islam since 2017.
5. The US should ensure that American Olympic and Paralympic athletes are not forced to compete in the shadow of concentration camps at the 2022 Beijing Winter Games. The US should coordinate with like-minded countries to ensure that the Beijing 2022 Games do not go forward as long as atrocity crimes continue.

6. The US should do more to prohibit US companies from abetting repression and supporting the Chinese Communist Party's surveillance state. Congressional and multilateral action is necessary to sanction companies and researchers contributing to racial profiling and persecution of Muslims in China.
7. To deal with the digital authoritarianism that enables the Uyghur genocide, Congress should focus on the potential complicity of Silicon Valley and US universities with hearings. We are urging the DOJ to investigate the role of US technology firms in ongoing genocide, as some of the companies subject to the "Entity List" export ban have reportedly changed their names to evade the sanctions, and US firms have continued to work with them.
8. Universities should be required to report all cooperation with Chinese research institutes and companies in artificial intelligence, big data, "smart policing" and "smart cities," biotech, and other fields responsible for building China's ethnic-profiling and total-surveillance systems. The Department of Commerce should prohibit American sales to all Xinjiang entities, in addition to the 48 Chinese companies and government departments currently on the "Entity List" for helping to build China's surveillance state and forced-labor scheme for Uyghurs.
  - a. US companies are still free to export software, hardware, and other inputs to state entities, the education sector, the retail sector, and automotive, agricultural, chemical, pharmaceutical, and extractive industries in Xinjiang that are compliant with Chinese government policies of ethno-religious persecution.
9. The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act will place the burden of proof on any importer attempting to bring products originating in the Uyghur Region. This is entirely appropriate, given the ubiquity of the state-imposed forced labor – a form of modern slavery – systematically imposed on Uyghurs from all walks of life, including teenagers aged 16-18. The 11 current Withhold-release orders (WROs) are a wholly inadequate response to the gravity of the crimes, the harm to American workers whose wages are undercut by forced-labor competition, and the unwitting complicity of American consumers who buy face masks, hair weaves, cotton apparel, and solar panels produced by the forced labor of Muslim Uyghurs.
10. Revise and re-issue the Supply Chain Business Advisory on Forced Labor and other Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang. Issued July 1, 2020, by the Departments of State, Commerce, Treasury, and Homeland Security, the advisory warns businesses with potential supply chain exposure in the XUAR of "the reputational, economic, and legal risks of involvement with entities that engage in human rights abuses."
  - a. The new Administration should strengthen the advisory with a call to action to technology companies, which benefit from the fruits of democracy, to ensure their algorithms and platforms are not empowering the surveillance state, racial profiling, and repression in China. In addition, the Supply Chain Advisory must shine a spotlight on solar cells. Some estimates show as much as 95% of the global solar-power industry relying on polysilicon from the Uyghur Region.
11. Congress passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act in May 2020 with overwhelming bipartisan support, and it was enacted into law on June 17. The Committee should take steps to ensure full implementation of this important law. This legislation directs the President to Magnitsky sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for atrocities against Uyghurs.
  - a. Congress should review the four reports due to Congress under this law to ensure they contain robust analysis and administration commitments regarding (1) human rights abuses; (2) efforts to protect US citizens and residents from harassment and coercion by the Chinese government; (3) the Chinese government's

acquisition and development of technology to facilitate internment and mass surveillance; and (4) A classified DNI report on (a) Chinese government Xinjiang policies that constitute gross violations of human rights, and (b) the scope and scale of China's detention and state-imposed forced labor targeting Turkic Muslims.

12. In the United Nations, the US should bring the issue to the UN Security Council. The Biden administration's commitment to coordinated international action and engagement with multilateral institutions to address the atrocities. The US should engage our partners to expose and condemn China's rogue behavior and desperate attempts to undermine the international human rights system and norms and its domestic policies that are in gross violation of the international treaties it has signed and agreed to.
  - a. UHRP strongly endorses H.Res.317 and S.Res.131, urging the President to ensure that the UN, at last, becomes seized with this crisis.
13. The US should also urge the UN Human Rights Council and other governments to go beyond the fruitless

demand for an international delegation to access the Uyghur Region for an investigation, raised by many governments and the President of the UN Human Rights Council, Michele Bachelet, since May 2019. Instead, the UN should immediately prepare a report based on available evidence, what is known as "remote monitoring" within the UN system. In February, Fifty genocide prevention organizations and experts have called for a UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Chinese government's atrocity crimes.<sup>15</sup> The US and like-minded countries should push for immediate action to stand up such a COI.

14. The US government should allocate funding and other resources for humanitarian intervention and refugee resettlement assistance for Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims currently at risk in other countries. In addition, the US should provide funding for Uyghur human-rights documentation and international advocacy, cultural preservation and expression, counseling and other psycho-social support for victims and secondary survivors of the genocide through the global Uyghur diaspora, and appropriations for the full, authorized budget for Radio Free Asia's Uyghur Service.

## Endnotes

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Note: One PBS station in California released a documentary in association with the Chinese state media outlet, China Global Television Network, CGTN, that has been producing prolific justifications of the government’s Xinjiang policy. The film, *China’s War on Poverty*, was produced by an American. The film does not mention how “poverty alleviation” is being implemented as part of forced labor and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic Muslims. In addition to Southern California PBS, the documentary was aired by Idaho Public Television and Vegas PBS. <https://current.org/2020/05/after-pbs-drops-film-pbs-social-reviews-documentary-co-produced-by-chinas-state-tv-network/>.
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- 7 Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, “The Xinjiang Papers: ‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>.
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## About the Author



Nury Turkel is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute. He specializes in national security, foreign policy, digital authoritarianism, and issues of forced labor and supply chain risk. Turkel's expertise also includes global justice enforcement, human rights and religious freedom in China, and the prevention of atrocities including genocide.

As an attorney, Turkel specializes in international corporate compliance, internal investigation, U.S. government enforcement relating to the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), and other anti-corruption and human rights standards. He also focuses on customs and import trade, economic sanctions and export control, business and human rights, legislative advocacy, and humanitarian immigration.

Turkel was born in a re-education camp at the height of China's tumultuous Cultural Revolution and spent the first several months of his life in detention with his mother. He came to the United States in 1995 as a student and was granted asylum in 1998.

In May 2020, Turkel was appointed by Congress as a Commissioner to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). He has testified before Congress about Uyghur internment camps, and advocating a legislative response to China's atrocities. Many of his recommendations have been incorporated into U.S. laws and pending bills relating to China, including the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-145).

Turkel currently serves as the Chairman of the Board for the Uyghur Human Rights Project, which he co-founded in 2003, and has also served as the president of the Uyghur American Association. Turkel received an M.A. in International Relations and a J.D. from the American University in Washington, D.C.

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