

Ever-changing testimony of Xinjiang ‘witnesses’ points to coaching by US-backed separatist groups

“The broad masses ... more readily fall victim to the big lie than the small, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation.”

—Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 1923

15 Feb.—The Anglo-American establishment is working hard to keep alive its Hitlerian “big lie” that Beijing is committing genocide against Uyghurs and other minority groups in the northwestern province of Xinjiang. In the latest escalation, UK state propaganda organ the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) earlier this month began trumpeting allegations that female detainees in so-called internment camps in Xinjiang have been subjected *en masse* to systematic and state-sanctioned gang rape. The purported principal eyewitnesses to and survivors of this alleged abuse, however, are simply not credible. Their stories have changed multiple times in previous remarks to media; and in each case, their accusations of systematic mass rape have arisen only after they had fallen in with discredited pseudo-nongovernmental organisations funded by the US government to promote violent extremism to Uyghurs in Xinjiang and abroad, and spread false accusations of genocide abroad to manufacture consent among the “Western” public for confrontation with China.



The BBC’s latest anti-China salvo adds to the fabric of lies. Pictured is Tursunay Ziawudun. Photo: Screenshot

The star of the BBC’s 2 February horror story, headlined “‘Their goal is to destroy everyone’: Uyghur camp detainees allege systematic rape”, is Uyghur woman Tursunay Ziawudun, who reportedly spent a total nine months in two so-called “internment camps” in Xinjiang in 2017- 18. According to the BBC, “Ziawudun, who fled Xinjiang after her release and is now in the US, said women were removed from the cells ‘every night’ and raped by one or more masked Chinese men. She said she was tortured and later gang-raped on three occasions, each time by two or three men.” The BBC acknowledges that Ziawudun has “spoken to media before” about her supposed ordeal, “but only from Kazakhstan, where she ‘lived in constant fear of being sent back to China’”, and that she did not raise her rape allegations at the time because “she believed that if she revealed the extent of the sexual abuse she had experienced and seen, and was returned to Xinjiang, she would be punished more harshly than before.”

Changing tune

The content of those interviews, however, casts serious doubt on this statement, as does the way Ziawudun’s story evolves with each re-telling. As noted in an [analysis](#) posted 4 February on geopolitics blog site Moon of Alabama (MoA), Ziawudun gave her first interview on 15 October 2019 at the office of the Atajurt Kazakh Human Rights NGO in Almaty, Kazakhstan, an English summary of which was later posted on a Xinjiang-focused website called “Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia”. Given the latter was supplied by one Gene A. Bunin, founder and proprietor of the anti-China “Xinjiang Victims Database”, any incriminating details would surely have been included. Yet as MoA points out, “There are no allegations of rape or overly harsh treatment” in Ziawudun’s account. “The biggest problem seem to have been ‘urinary disorders’”, which she reported were what afflicted “most people” she encountered at her detention facility’s infirmary.

According to MoA, the Atajurt NGO, founded in 2017 by Chinese-born Kazakh Serikzhan Bilash, had set itself up as a broker between former Xinjiang residents and “Western” media, apparently for the purpose of propagating allegations of human rights abuses. “There is no information on who has financed the quite sizeable Atajurt”, MoA reported, and local authorities have since shut the organisation down. According to an 18 January 2020 report by US State Department propaganda outlet Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Bilash was convicted, fined and placed on a seven-year good behaviour bond for “inciting ethnic hatred” in August 2019; after further charges of inciting hatred and of desecrating the state flag were brought against him in April 2020, he and his family fled to Turkey last September. (RFE/RL of course frames this as evidence of Kazakhstan’s supposed subservience to China, failing to mention that Turkey is notorious throughout Central Asia for sponsoring exactly the kind of activities of which Bilash is accused.) “Tursunay Ziawudun also moved from Kazakhstan to Turkey before coming to the US”, MoA notes.

A fortnight after her Atajurt interview, Ziawudun spoke to another official US government mouthpiece, RFE/RL’s sister channel Radio Free Asia (RFA). This time, her story had expanded to include forced sterilisation, a theme then beginning to be popularised via the English-language mainstream media. Ziawudun did not, however, claim to have suffered this indignity herself, only that it had been done to others. “I was taken to a hospital to undergo a [sterilisation] operation”, she is quoted, “*but because I have always suffered from a gynaecological condition the doctor said I could suffer complications that include death, so they spared me.*” (Emphasis added.) She also accused the facility’s staff of “torture”. Having gone that far, what more risk would she have been taking to air her rape accusations? But the only mention of rape was by the interviewer, in relation to accusations by other “former detainees”. Ziawudun replied ambiguously that “We all went through all kinds of mistreatment”, but did not claim either to have experienced or witnessed any sexual abuse.

On 15 February 2020, still in Kazakhstan, Ziawudun gave yet another interview, to US online tabloid BuzzFeed News. Once again she did not claim to have been raped; rather, “Each night, she had struggled to sleep, terrified she *might* be raped. ... The real torture, she discovered, took place in silence, in the inmates’ minds. *‘I wasn’t beaten or abused’*, she said. ‘The hardest part was mental’.” (Emphasis added.)

Leading the witness

The most damning indictment of her credibility as a witness, however, came on 25 September last year, in a press release from US-based organisation the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) announcing that Ziawudun, “one of only a handful of Uyghur concentration camp survivors known to have reached the outside world, has arrived safely in the United States. ... She spent nine months in detention, where she suffered *malnutrition, dehydration, forcible ingestion and injection of unknown drugs, and physical and mental torture. Her testimony will be vitally important for future atrocity-crimes determination processes and tribunals.*” (Emphasis added.) Once again, rape is not mentioned, despite there now being no reason to fear being “sent back to China”, and indeed every reason to shout it from the rooftops. Only in her BBC interview, after four months of coaching by her new hosts, do her incendiary allegations of organised mass gangrapes appear fully formed, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus. Her chronic “gynaecological condition” has also metamorphosed into a savage stomping by police interrogators which required her to have a hysterectomy a week after she arrived in the USA.

The BBC admits that “It is impossible to verify Ziawudun’s account”, but adds that “travel documents and immigration records she provided to the BBC corroborate the timeline of her story”—as though that had any bearing on the veracity of her other claims. Otherwise, the only purported corroboration provided is that “several former detainees and a guard have told the BBC they experienced or saw evidence of an organised system of mass rape, sexual abuse and torture”. It likewise admits, however, that “It was not possible to independently verify the guard’s testimony”. He reportedly “provided documents that appeared to corroborate a period of employment at a known camp”, but neither he nor the camp is named; and in any case, whilst he did allege detainees had been tortured with electric shocks, “The guard said he did not know anything about [the] rape in the cell areas” that Ziawudun had described.

Meanwhile, the most incendiary rape allegation in the piece does not come from Ziawudun herself, but from another, even less credible source. “[A] teacher forced to work in the camps, Sayragul Sauytbay, told the BBC that ‘rape was common’ and the guards ‘picked the girls and young women they wanted and took them away’”, the BBC reported. “She described witnessing a harrowing public gang rape of a woman of just 20 or 21, who was brought before about 100 other detainees to make a forced confession. ‘After that, in front of everyone, the police took turns to rape her’, Sauytbay said. ‘While carrying out this test, they watched people closely and picked out anyone who resisted, clenched their fists, closed their eyes, or looked away, and took them for punishment.’”

Sauytbay too has changed her story multiple times. As MoA reported last December, Qatari state media agency Al Jazeera had that month quoted “former detainee” Sauytbay, an ethnic Kazakh late of Xinjiang who now lives in Sweden, repeating the dubious claim that Uyghurs and other Muslims had been force-fed pork in detention “camps” two years earlier—dubious, because pork was then at a high premium after heavy culling due to an African Swine Fever outbreak had drastically reduced China’s

pig herd, making it doubtful if only for economic reasons that authorities would bother with so petty a gesture. (Pork is forbidden in Islam, but no blame attracts if one is forced to eat it, or if the alternative is starvation.) Yet in July 2018, in an interview with Canadian newspaper the *Globe and Mail*, Sauytbay had claimed the opposite—that “There was no meat. There was never enough to eat. People were malnourished.” MoA catalogues how in this and several other interviews Sauytbay has given over the years, “The details of her story continued to change in anti-Chinese directions:

“In early interviews Sauytbay claimed to have been an instructor working in a re-education camp. In later interviews she claims to have been a detainee;

“In more recent interviews she claims that she had seen torture and violence in the camps. In earlier interviews she had refuted such claims; [and]

“In one story she claims to have observed mass rape. In older interviews she insisted that she had observed no violence at all.”

The other thing Sauytbay has in common with Ziawudun, MoA reports, is that “The accounts of both women ... have ‘evolved’ after they have been handled through a chain of organisations set up to propagandise against China’s anti-terror and development program in Xinjiang”—in Sauytbay’s case the Swedish Uyghur Association, which like the US-based UHRP is part of the Munich, Germany-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC). As American investigative journalist Ajit Singh shows in a 5 March 2020 [report](#) for independent news site The Grayzone, the WUC was established in 2004 by the US National Endowment for Democracy, the State Department-funded fake-NGO used by Washington to foment internecine strife in countries whose governments the Anglo-American Empire aims to overthrow. Further, Singh reports, “While seeking to orchestrate a colour revolution with the aim of regime change in Beijing, the WUC and its offshoots have forged ties with the Grey Wolves, a far-right Turkish organisation that has been actively engaged in sectarian violence from Syria to East Asia. None of these links seem to have troubled the WUC’s sponsors in Washington. If anything, they have added to the network’s appeal, consolidating it as one of the most potent political weapons the US wields in its new Cold War against China.”

Plainly the testimony of such organisations, or any individual associated with them—let alone those who have changed their stories so many times that they are as scrambled as a breakfast omelette—should not be accepted unless supported by hard proof, something neither they nor any of China’s accusers have ever provided.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 17 February 2021