

# Uighur ‘mass detention’ reports fabricated by US, British propagandists

By Richard Bardon

Tales of the Chinese government’s detention in “internment centres” of up to a million members of China’s Uighur Muslim minority do not derive from a United Nations report, as many Western human-rights activists, geopolitical pundits, and the Australian government and Labor Party opposition seem to believe. The Chinese government has indeed greatly tightened security in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region—the large but sparsely populated province in China’s north-west bordering Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India—in response to terrorist activity by Uighur (also spelled Uyghur, Uygur) separatist groups allied with al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS); and thus Uighurs are subject to greater suspicion and scrutiny than the region’s other ethnic groups. But the UN did *not* report the mass incarceration of Uighurs, nor has any evidence of such been presented. Furthermore, almost all reports of human rights abuses in Xinjiang originate with Western media outlets linked to the US State Department or British Intelligence; and/or with organisations funded by the US government to promote regime change in China.

Australian Shadow Foreign Minister Sen. Penny Wong said in a 12 September press release that “Labor is deeply concerned by continuing reports of the mass detention of China’s minority Uighur population and other violations of human rights, including those outlined by members of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [UNCERD] in Geneva earlier this month.” Welcoming Foreign Minister Marise Payne’s confirmation the previous week that Australian officials had raised the issue with their counterparts in Beijing, Wong called upon the government to go farther and “use Australia’s membership on the UN Human Rights Council, in coordination with other members, to continue to pursue this issue with the Chinese Government.” In an interview with ABC Radio National two days later, she reiterated: “we’ve seen a human rights report, a report from the [UNCERD], that does raise some real concerns.”

First, it must be said that Labor’s “deep concern” for human rights would be more convincing were it not itself guilty of systematic human-rights abuses against refugees and asylum seekers—a matter in which it marches in lockstep with the Liberal-National coalition.<sup>1</sup> But in fact, as Ben Norton and Ajit Singh had already shown in a [23 August article](#) published by investigative journalism website The Grayzone Project, no such UN report exists.

“A spokesperson from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed in a statement to the Grayzone that the allegation of Chinese ‘camps’ was not made by the United Nations, but rather by a member of an independent committee [the UNCERD] that does not speak for the UN as a whole”, they wrote. “That member happened to be the only American on the committee, and one with no background of scholarship or research on China.” The American rep,

1. “Australia’s treatment of refugees is a crime against humanity”, AAS 5 Sept. 2018.



China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Source: RFA

Gay McDougall, made the allegation on 10 August during a review of China’s compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (periodic reviews being one of the Convention’s terms, to which all 179 state parties are subject). Like Sen. Wong, Ms McDougal declared herself “deeply concerned” at “credible reports” of Uighur “internment camps”—but failed to name a source for these reports. The OHCHR noted McDougall’s concerns in its official news release on the China review; and the UNCERD later catalogued them, along with China’s denials, in its concluding observations published 30 August (not in early September as Sen. Wong mistakenly said). But neither the UNCERD nor any UN body levelled any accusations. Nonetheless, immediately McDougall made her remarks, British press agency Reuters rushed out an inflammatory article headlined “UN says it has credible reports that China holds million Uighurs in secret camps”, which was echoed throughout the mainstream Western media. “The impression readers were given was that the UN had conducted an investigation and had formally and collectively made such charges against China”, Norton and Singh wrote. “In fact, the UN had done no such thing. ... The report by Reuters is simply false.”

## Propaganda organs

Reuters’ propagation of this anti-China scare story is likely no coincidence. One of the largest news agencies in the world, Reuters was long ago taken over by British Intelligence—during World War One its managing director, Roderick Jones, was also head of the Ministry of Information’s Department of Propaganda. Its ties to the Establishment are not so open these days, but it remains the go-to “respectable” press organ for smear campaigns against any country upon which the Anglo-American war party trains its gunsights, China included. The British Establishment seeks good relations with China for its own part, so as to cement the City of

London's position as the gatekeeper of financial exchanges between China and the West.<sup>2</sup> But its post-Brexit "Global Britain" strategy (or as some in Whitehall call it, "Empire 2.0") also entails alienating China from as many nations as possible—especially the "former" colonies of the British Commonwealth, Australia chief among them—so as to preserve the "rules-based international order" of neoliberal globalism, and suppress China's win-win model as embodied in the world-spanning Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure program.<sup>3</sup>

As for McDougall's "credible reports", Norton and Singh wrote that they seem to have been drawn from a recent paper by "activist group" the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), which is headquartered in Washington, DC—at the same address as Human Rights Watch, a pseudo-Non-Governmental Organisation which "has long been criticised for its revolving door with the US government and its excessively disproportionate focus on designated enemies of Washington". CHRD does not name its donors, but its tax forms reveal that it is funded almost entirely (99.4 per cent in 2015) by government grants. Which government(s) is unclear, Norton and Singh wrote, but "it appears likely that CHRD could be receiving funding from the US government-backed National Endowment for Democracy (NED)", the supposedly independent foundation that funds dissidents and foments uprisings and "colour revolutions" in countries targeted for regime change. "A search of the NED's grants database shows funding from 2014 and 2015 totalling approximately half a million dollars to 'support the work of Chinese human rights defenders'", they wrote. "It is not clear if this is a reference to the organisation specifically, but the description accompanying the grants matches that of CHRD."

The CHRD, whose board of directors Norton and Singh describe as a Who's Who of exiled Chinese anti-government activists, uses its lavish government funding to support similar characters back in China. Of particular note is its advocacy on behalf of anti-state ideologue Liu Xiaobo, from at least 2010 until his death from cancer in 2017. Whilst media promotion made Liu "a *cause célèbre* of the Western liberal intelligentsia", they reported, he was in fact a supporter of colonialism and staunch neoconservative who vociferously supported the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003; and "a hard-core libertarian ... [who] led numerous US government-funded right-wing organisations that advocated mass privatisation and the Westernisation of China. ... 'To choose Westernisation is to choose to be human', Liu insisted."

In a final twist, the CHRD report's most-quoted source for accusations against Beijing is none other than Radio Free Asia (RFA)—an agency *created and run by the*

*US government*, whose broadcasting standard is to be "consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States". Norton and Singh wrote: "The near-total reliance on Washington-linked sources is characteristic of Western reporting on Uighurs Muslims in China, and the country in general, which regularly features sensational headlines and allegations." Another common source, the World Uighur Congress, is also funded by the NED; in a recent interview with Grayzone editor Max Blumenthal, its chairman Omer Kanat took credit for feeding stories of internment camps to Western media.

### Legitimate concerns

Of greater immediate concern than Western-funded political agitators, there are at least 5,000 Uighur militants (some estimates range as high as 20,000) who have been fighting in Syria, mainly in the northern Idlib Governorate bordering Turkey, under the banners of separatist militia the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Chinese authorities state that the latter group has been allied with al-Qaeda since at least the 1990s; and they are determined that these men not be allowed to return, hardened by battle and trained in weapons and tactics, to wreak havoc at home in Xinjiang. Their intention to do just that was spelled out in an ISIS execution video in early 2017, in which a group of Uighur militants threatened China with "rivers of blood", before another declared: "We didn't care how the fighting went or who [Syrian President Bashar al-] Assad was. ... We just wanted to learn how to use the weapons and then go back to China."

Small wonder, then, that Beijing has tightened security in Xinjiang. But Zhang Peilan, spokesman for the Chinese Consulate-General in New York, wrote in the 24 September *Wall Street Journal* that this has not come at the expense of religious freedom or other human rights. "There are 10 Muslim ethnic groups in Xinjiang with 24,400 mosques, and religious freedom is fully guaranteed", he wrote. "The government has repaired and renovated many of the old mosques. The Chinese government promotes the bilingual teaching of Mandarin and minority ethnic groups' spoken and written languages, respects minority folklore traditions and protects Xinjiang's intangible cultural heritage." And whilst tighter security is a necessity right now, China's long-term solution is the same for Xinjiang as everywhere else: peace through economic development. "With the continuous development of China's Belt and Road Initiative", Zhang wrote, "Xinjiang has become China's transportation hub and the trade, financial, cultural, science, education and medical-service centre for Central Asia. At present the China-Kazakh Horgos Border Cooperation Zone has attracted more than US\$4.5 billion. Xinjiang will strengthen import and export industries and all ethnic groups in Xinjiang will fully enjoy the dividends and unite to create a better life."

2. "The City of London's China pivot", AAS 11 July 2018.

3. "Brits, Canberra plot 'Empire 2.0' at AUKMIN summit", AAS 25 July 2018.