



Muslim countries reject claims of ‘cultural genocide’ against Xinjiang Uighurs

By Richard Bardon

23 July—Efforts by the United Kingdom and allied countries to marginalise China over its supposed mistreatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang Province backfired earlier this month, after almost twice as many countries, influential Muslim-majority nations among them, not only supported Beijing’s programs in Xinjiang but also demanded the Anglo-led bloc cease using feigned concern for “human rights” as a pretext for interference in other nations’ affairs. The anti-China propaganda onslaught in the English-language mainstream media has only grown louder since then, however; and one of the worst offenders is Australia’s public broadcaster ABC, which in the 15 July instalment of its flagship current affairs program Four Corners plumbed new depths of gutter journalism to whitewash the Uighur separatist terrorism that precipitated Beijing’s security crackdown in Xinjiang (box, p. 10). The agenda is clear: if the Anglo-American empire cannot frighten China’s neighbours and other would-be economic partners away from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to spread China’s science-driven developmental model from East Asia to West Africa and beyond, at the very least the empire must frighten its own population—especially in far-flung colonies like Australia—out of any idea of partaking in the BRI themselves.

On 8 July ambassadors to the United Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland from 22 nations—including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, and 18 European countries, most of them NATO members—signed a letter to the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the President of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) complaining about China’s alleged mass detention of Uighurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, as China’s vast but sparsely populated north-western province is officially known. New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), a pseudo-Non-Governmental Organisation with deep ties to US intelligence and a propensity for attacking Anglo-American geopolitical targets, crowed in a 10 July press release that the 22 states had “called China to task for its horrific treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang”. But in fact their weakly worded statement merely recycled the old and unproven allegations of a US government-backed NGO, which none of China’s detractors have ever supplied evidence to back up.

“We recall the 2018 concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in its review of China, which *expressed concern* about *disturbing reports* of large-scale arbitrary detentions of Uighurs, and other Muslim and minority communities” (emphasis added), the ambassadors wrote, and called on China to “uphold its national laws and international obligations and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief, in Xinjiang and across China”. As researchers Ben Norton and Ajit Singh had revealed 23 August 2018 on investigative journalism website The Grayzone Project, however, the CERD is an independent committee that does not speak for the OHCHR, let alone the UN as a whole.¹ The “disturbing reports” were

noted in the 2018 CERD review (along with China’s denials) because they were raised by the committee’s sole US representative, Gay McDougall, a lawyer with no expertise on China who provided no source for what she described as “credible reports” of Uighur “internment camps”. British Intelligence-linked news agency Reuters then falsely reported McDougall’s remarks as an official UN finding, under the headline “UN says it has credible reports that China holds million Uighurs in secret camps”. Norton and Singh traced McDougall’s “credible reports” back to a research paper by an “activist group” called the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), which is headquartered at the same address as HRW’s Washington, DC office and funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy, the State Department’s arms-length funding organ for “colour revolutions” and general dirty tricks in countries targeted for regime change. The CHRD paper’s most-cited source, in turn, was Radio Free Asia—an official US government propaganda agency.

Breaking ranks

A similar anti-China statement to the OHCHR and HRC in 2016, which attracted only 12 signatories, was coordinated by the USA’s Barrack Obama administration. Ostensibly the USA was not involved this time, President Donald Trump having pulled out of the HRC and severed communication with the OHCHR in June 2018. Which nation or nations led the present effort is not clear, and US officials may still have been involved behind the scenes. But significantly, a number of the USA’s allies have this time sided with Beijing, signing on to a countervailing letter praising China’s “remarkable achievements in the field of human rights” in Xinjiang.

The letter had not been published in full as of this writing, but according to media reports its 37 signatories include (in no particular order) ambassadors from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Syria, Tajikistan, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Nigeria, Togo, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, Angola, Belarus, Myanmar, North Korea, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe. Australian China scholar David Brophy noted 17 July on Twitter that cross-referencing with a study by the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Pennsylvania’s Brown University revealed that the United States had “military training and assistance collaborations with 16 [of the signatories] in 2017-18, ... bases or ‘lily pads’ (defined as ‘smaller military outposts involved in counterterrorism activity’) in 15 of them, and held military exercises in 14.” If the two letters “really represent Team Freedom vs Team Authoritarianism, as we’re being encouraged to think”, Brophy asked dryly, “then why is the US partnering with so many countries on the wrong side?” More importantly, one third of the signatories are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the world’s second-largest intergovernmental body after the UN, whose stated purpose is “to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world”. Logic would dictate that even if only (as in Saudi Arabia’s case) to bolster their own

dist”, AAS, 26 Sept. 2018.

1. “Uighur ‘mass detention’ reports fabricated by US, British propagand-

credibility, these countries would have a vested interest in exposing, rather than helping cover up, the systematic oppression of Muslims in China, were such a thing occurring.

What most of the otherwise geographically, politically and religiously diverse grouping have in common, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesman Geng Shuang said on 15 July, is that they have sent representatives to Xinjiang to assess the situation for themselves, whereas the signatories to the first letter—despite repeated invitations—have not. “We appreciate China’s commitment to openness and transparency”, the 37 ambassadors wrote, as cited by Chinese state broadcaster CGTN. “China has invited a number of diplomats, international organisations officials and journalists to Xinjiang to witness the progress of the human rights cause and the outcomes of counterterrorism and deradicalisation there. ... We call on relevant countries to refrain from employing unfounded charges against China based on unconfirmed information before they visit Xinjiang.” Even Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, long one of the most vociferous backers of separatism in Xinjiang, changed his tune during a visit to China this month. Reuters noted 2 July that whereas Turkey “is the only Muslim nation to have regularly expressed concern about the situation in Xinjiang”, including at the HRC as recently as February, Erdogan had declared that day in Beijing that “It is a fact that the peoples of China’s Xinjiang region live happily in China’s development and prosperity”, and that Turkey “[would] not permit any person to incite disharmony in the Turkey-China relationship ... and is willing to increase mutual political trust with China and strengthen security cooperation.”

24,400 mosques in Xinjiang

The Anglo-European bloc’s letter’s assertion that China is trampling the “freedom of religion and belief” in Xinjiang does not stack up either. As MFA spokesman Geng

noted in a 24 June press briefing, freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Chinese constitution, “and people of all ethnic groups enjoy full religious freedom in accordance with law”, he said. “There is a total of nearly 200 million believers, including 20 million Muslims, more than 380,000 clerical personnel, approximately 5,500 religious groups and about 140,000 places of worship registered for religious activities in China”, Geng said. “There are 24,400 mosques in Xinjiang, which means a mosque for 530 Muslims on average. ... In sharp contrast, the religious and human rights situation in the USA is disturbing. According to poll results released by Gallup and Pew Research Centre, 42 per cent of Americans say that they are very concerned about race relations and 75 per cent of Muslims believe there is serious discrimination against them. According to publicly available statistics, the number of mosques in the US is even less than one tenth of that in Xinjiang.”

As AAS reported last year,² many of these mosques have been built and/or funded by the government itself. Pakistani scholar Sultan M. Hali, a former Group Captain in the Pakistan Air Force, wrote in the 26 September 2018 *Pakistan Today* that “Since extremists have been distorting the tenets of Islam, quoting verses out of context and leading the faithful astray”, the government had responded by assisting the Xinjiang Islamic Institute to “produce scholars and religious teachers [about 1,200 a year], who can become Imams in various mosques, and university professors and teachers, as well as research scholars to guide the faithful and protect them from extremism”. As well as new mosques, the government has also funded new halal slaughterhouses, and has even sponsored Xinjiang Muslims on their pilgrimage to Mecca, Hali wrote.

2. “Pakistani scholar debunks ‘Uighur internment’ smear”, AAS, 31 Oct. 2018.

ABC whitewashes terrorism to smear China

ABC Four Corners, in its 15 July segment on Xinjiang, not only stooped to implicitly justifying the mass murder of innocent civilians by Uighur separatist terrorists in 2008-15, but reported the largest such attack in so misleading a manner as to invert reality.

Four Corners reporter Sophie McNeill stated that “The crackdown on Uighurs followed decades of religious and separatist tensions, and after millions of Han Chinese [China’s majority ethnic group, but a minority in Xinjiang] were re-settled in the region”, as the video showed various demonstrations by Uighurs, some involving violent clashes with riot police. “In July 2009, demonstrations broke out. Nearly 200 people were killed, with reports that over 1,000 Uighurs were arrested”, she continued, over footage of a (presumably) Uighur woman wailing in grief. Any viewer not already familiar with the facts would be led to believe that the victims were Uighurs, who had been killed by Chinese security forces. In fact, the 197 victims were mostly Han Chinese who were stabbed, hacked and beaten to death on 5 July 2009 in Xinjiang’s capital city Urumqi by radicalised Uighur terrorists. According to a Chinese government information paper released this March, another 1,700 people were injured, while more than 300 shops were trashed and 1,325 vehicles destroyed. “Terrorist and extremist forces in Xinjiang, driven by the goal of separatism, engaged in sabotage activities”, the paper reported. “This badly undermined local stability and brought

enormous suffering to all ethnic groups in the region.”

The main Uighur separatist group in Xinjiang, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) a.k.a. Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), has been allied with al-Qaeda since at least the 1990s, and was responsible for virtually all bomb, knife and vehicular attacks on civilians and police across China in 2008-16. The ETIM/TIP is proscribed as a terrorist organisation in both the USA and UK, but both countries continue to support the group to destabilise Xinjiang, albeit Beijing’s security measures have prevented any attacks there in almost three years. Four Corners did not bother to mention this, nor that as many as 20,000 ETIM fighters have fought alongside the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and other al-Qaeda offshoots in Syria, whence an estimated five to six thousand (at least) are even now seeking a way home to wreak fresh havoc in Xinjiang. It is worth noting in this regard that whilst McNeill, in her previous role as ABC Middle East correspondent, has done valuable and truthful reporting on Saudi atrocities against civilians in Yemen and Israel’s brutal oppression of Palestinians, on Syria she adhered religiously to the Anglo-American propaganda line, routinely accusing the “regime” (i.e. the government of popularly elected President Bashar al-Assad) and, since 2015, its ally Russia of responsibility for all ills, while legitimising manifestly non-Syrian groups like ETIM, al-Qaeda franchise Jabhat al-Nusra, and other multinational jihadist and mercenary terror gangs as the “opposition” forces in a “civil war”.