

# US push for sanctions of China over treatment of Uyghur minority

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4 September 2018

As the Trump administration escalates its trade war measures with China, a powerful group of US lawmakers headed by Senator Marco Rubio issued a letter last week calling for sanctions against Chinese officials allegedly responsible for human rights abuses against the Muslim Uyghur minority in the western province of Xinjiang.

There is no doubt that the Chinese police-state apparatus is responsible for gross violations of democratic rights against the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, as well as the Chinese working class as a whole. Under conditions of slowing economic growth and rising social tensions, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime is terrified that any opposition can become the focus for a broader movement that could threaten its rule.

Washington's selective spotlighting of human rights abuses, however, has nothing to do with defending the Uyghur minority. It is aimed at whipping up anti-Chinese sentiment and encouraging separatist movements. Rubio chairs the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)—an anti-China body that last month tabled a report replete with unsubstantiated allegations of Chinese interference in American politics (see: US report on Chinese “United Front Work” seeks to whip-up hostility towards China).

The letter signed by Rubio and 16 other members of Congress called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to impose sanctions on Chen Quanguo, CCP secretary for the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and other officials involved in human rights abuses. It also called for sanctions against Chinese companies, such as Hikvision and Dahua Technology, that allegedly profit from government contracts for surveillance projects.

“The detention of as many as a million or more Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in ‘political re-education’ centres or camps,” the letter declared, “requires a tough, targeted, and global response.” It called on the State Department to engage in “robust diplomatic engagement with likeminded governments to further elevate this human rights crisis” on the international stage.

Just days after the letter was published, the US and international media exploited a report from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to inflate claims of Uyghur persecution in China. The *Los Angeles Times* headlined its article “UN accuses China of holding more than a million Muslims in secret detention centres.”

The UN report itself was more cautious about its claims, stating that large numbers of ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities were held without charge or trial under the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism. “Estimates about them range from tens of thousands to upwards of a million,” it declared, without citing any evidence to support the claim.

In its submission to the UN committee, the US-based Human Rights Watch suggested that “at least tens of thousands of Uyghurs” have been arbitrarily detained in political education centres. It referred to human rights abuses, including torture and restrictions on movement, freedom of religion and expression.

China, in its submission to the UN committee, said “there are no such things as re-education centres or counter-extremism training centres in Xinjiang,” adding that claims of a million Uyghurs being held in such facilities were “completely untrue.” Such declarations are certainly false. Beijing has cracked down ruthlessly on any protests or expressions of separatist sentiment in Xinjiang and heavily censors

news reports.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying pointed to the hypocrisy of the US congressmen by suggesting that “China’s ethnic minority policy and actual situation are much better than those of the United States.” Highlighting the atrocious US record on democratic rights and its support for autocratic regimes around the world, however, is not a justification for CCP police-state measures.

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Significantly, Rubio and his fellow lawmakers have concentrated on Xinjiang, rather than Tibet, which has been exploited previously in a similar fashion. Their letter hints at why. It declared that “the last thing China’s leaders want is international condemnation” of its abuses, “at a time when the Chinese government is seeking to expand its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative.”

The Belt and Road Initiative is a massive Chinese infrastructure project involving the construction of rail, road, port and communication facilities to link the Eurasian landmass by land and sea. In response to the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” aimed at undermining and encircling China, Beijing is trying to more closely integrate Eurasia economically and in doing so prevent China’s isolation.

As the westernmost province of China, Xinjiang is a focus for many of the land routes and pipelines planned to Central Asia and on to Europe. The congressional letter to the Trump administration seeks to encourage Washington to exploit Uyghur separatism to disrupt the Belt and Road Initiative and potentially fracture China itself.

The CIA and other agencies of US imperialism have long-standing ties with various Uyghur and Tibetan separatist organisations around the globe. Funds have been funnelled through the US-financed National Endowment for Democracy to the Uyghur American Association and the World Uyghur Congress based in Munich, which has close connections to the US propaganda arm, Radio Free Asia. These US activities are used by Beijing as another justification for their own repressive measures.

Democratic rights for the various ethnic minorities in China will not be won through the reactionary intrigues

of the US and its various accomplices, but only in unity with the working class throughout China in a struggle against the oppressive CCP regime as part of the fight for genuine socialism internationally.



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