



Religious Freedom in China: The History, Current Challenges, and the Proper Response to a Human Rights Crisis

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SUMMARY:

The People's Republic of China (PRC) restricts religious practice and oppresses religious minorities on a sweeping scale. China's religious persecution targets those of every faith. Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners are all victims of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) effort to suppress any set of beliefs that might compete with the party's ideology. This campaign against religion has had and continues to have devastating consequences for those who simply wish to live according to their conscience. The PRC's consistent abuses of human rights prove that it cannot be treated just like any other country. In the United States' trade and diplomatic dealings with China, human rights and religious freedom must be addressed.

Introduction

A strong case can now be made that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has become one of the most totalitarian states in human history. Numerous states have killed tens of millions of people – as has China.¹ Yet, the PRC is distinct because it has the technological tools of a modern information-based society to enhance its iron grip on its own people. No state has had the capacity, which it uses, to control the thoughts, words, and actions of its own people for the benefit of the 90 million members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).²

While the number of allowable children for married couples has increased to two, an immense, intrusive, bureaucracy still exists to regulate family size.³ Enforcement of the "one child policy" has included the nation-wide use of coerced abortion to correct infractions. Now, with the rise of modern, digital surveillance capabilities (i.e., ubiquitous hi-def street cameras, facial recognition software, internet device intrusion), Chinese people are being given "social credit" scores.⁴ These scores may be lowered for minor infractions that can keep one from participating in key activities of life like traveling on trains or planes. While seeking to exercise such total control of its people, the Chinese regime feels threatened when its people hold to any higher authority – including God. To the severe detriment of Chinese residents, the current Chinese president has reinforced Mao-era religious suppression policies, often by the most brutal means imaginable.

Today, freedom of religion in China is rapidly deteriorating. Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners all face intense persecution from the Chinese state. In the PRC, religious

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practice is tightly restricted. Even religious institutions that closely follow applicable regulations are subject to surveillance and intimidation by the state.

The severity of religious persecution in China is staggering. Over 1,000 Christians were arrested for reasons related to their faith in 2018.⁵ This number is likely the tip of the iceberg considering the extent of the PRC's widespread extralegal detentions.⁶ Conservative estimates suggest at least one million Uyghurs – a Turkic, mostly Muslim ethnic group – remain forcibly detained in what the Chinese government calls “re-education” camps.⁷ Such numbers are difficult to comprehend, and they point to a terrifying situation for religious minorities in China.

China currently has the world's largest population, and its global, economic, and cultural influence is increasing. What happens in China matters – both for those in China and around the world, and it's something that U.S. citizens and political leaders should not ignore. As the Chinese seek to engage the United States and other countries economically, diplomatically, and otherwise, there is an opportunity for the United States government to address human rights concerns in China. Given the scale of the religious freedom violations there, this is an opportunity we cannot afford to waste.

How We Got Here: A Brief History of Religious Persecution in China

While religion has long been a part of Chinese life, the PRC's government, established after a civil war in 1949 by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Mao Zedong, has had a consistent track record of persecuting religious believers. Under Mao's leadership, the CCP started a campaign to stamp out religion, culminating in the Cultural Revolution of the 1960's and 70's. Churches, mosques, and monasteries were destroyed and religious believers were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.⁸ With the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980's, CCP leaders eased Cultural Revolution-era policies meant to eliminate religion.⁹ Beijing started to regulate religion, rather than completely eradicate it from society.¹⁰

In 2013, the current president, Xi Jinping, assumed office. Under his leadership, China has again “seen a strong reduction in freedom in all sectors of society.”¹¹ The CCP has grown increasingly totalitarian and imperialistic.¹² The Chinese regime not only restricts the freedom of its people at home, but actively seeks to export systems of control to other authoritarian countries.¹³

President Xi has made the crackdown on religious belief a priority for Beijing. He has taken unprecedented steps to harass and intimidate religious believers, using facial-recognition technology, mass incarceration, and indoctrination to shape the beliefs of Chinese residents to reinforce the authority of the CCP. In addition to these new measures, Xi started to enforce old laws which were previously neglected, including a ban on foreign-based religious organizations or their proselytizing in China.¹⁴ These actions led U.S. Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, to label Beijing's efforts a “war with faith.”¹⁵

In a move that observers argued “represents the end of China's 40-year-long reform era” following Mao's death in 1976, Chinese lawmakers amended the constitution in 2018 to abolish presidential term limits, allowing Xi to stay in power past the end of his second term in 2023.¹⁶ The constitution was also amended to include an ideology that is officially called “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” Essentially, “Xi Jinping Thought” is a plan to strengthen power at three levels: that of the nation, the party, and the president.¹⁷

The ideology of today's CCP features a Marxist-Leninist intolerance of pluralism.¹⁸ The PRC is an openly atheistic regime, in which only five religions are legally recognized: Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam,

Buddhism, and Daoism.¹⁹ However, even state-sanctioned religious institutions are subject to state supervision and government surveillance.

The PRC's constitution promises in Article 36 that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief."²⁰ Yet, the constitution includes an important caveat by indicating that this applies only to "normal religious activities," a term which is not defined.²¹ The constitutional declaration that Chinese citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief has never provided any real protections for those of faith. The U.S. Department of State has designated China a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) on religious freedom issues every year since 1999 as part of a designation system set up by the International Religious Freedom Act.²²

What Is Happening Now: Current-Day Religious Persecution in China

Christianity

Protestant Churches

Open Doors USA estimates that there are approximately 97,200,000 Christians in China, making up approximately 6.8 percent of the population.²³ The Chinese Communist Party has a long history of suppressing the full expression of Christianity. China allows legal status for Protestant churches that are part of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the government-run China Christian Council (CCC). However, state-sanctioned churches that submit to these authorities still experience a high degree of government interference.

In 2018, President Xi issued new regulations for religious affairs and gave the officially atheist CCP the power to enforce them.²⁴ Behind these new regulations is the CCP's "sinicization" campaign, supposedly intended to strengthen Chinese culture. To "sinicize" is to "to modify by Chinese influence."²⁵ The "Five-Year Plan for the Sinicization of Christianity" began in 2018. Chinese officials call this effort a "thought reform" campaign intended to promote "Chinese Christianity."²⁶ The plan includes "retranslating and annotating" the Bible to find similarities with socialism.²⁷ Churches and believers who refuse to compromise their faith by accepting the "sinicization" of Christianity will likely face punishment.

China's crackdown on Christianity has had visible consequences. In the Zhejiang province alone, the Chinese government removed crosses from 1,200 to 1,700 Christian churches from 2015-2016.²⁸ At times, officials have replaced the crosses with Chinese flags.²⁹ In the provinces of Jiangxi and Henan, portraits of Jesus have been forbidden, even in private homes.³⁰ Chinese authorities have also forcibly removed door plaques on Christian homes that convey religious themes with sayings such as "God loves the world" and "The Lord gives peace."³¹ In 2019, witnesses reported that the Ten Commandments were removed from nearly every "Three-Self" church and replaced with quotes from President Xi.³² Churches have been shut down for their failure to comply with this instruction. The government has also started to install surveillance cameras in churches to monitor the contents of sermons.³³

China's restrictions on churches is not conducive to fostering a sincere faith and the volume of restrictions makes it difficult to live within the law. Minors and college students are barred from entering all churches.³⁴ Bibles cannot be sold online.³⁵ In April 2019, Chinese authorities prevented several state-sanctioned churches from holding worship services and warned Christians not to participate in Easter celebrations.³⁶

House Churches

Beijing is fine with allowing Christianity as long as it can be used as a platform to advance the Communist party. Churches and individual Christians who refuse to let their faith be used as a platform to promote government-sponsored communist propaganda can face real danger. What have come to be known as “house churches” (whether they meet in a house or not) lack government approval. The house church movement started under Mao when Christians were forced to worship secretly in homes or face persecution.³⁷ House churches were especially important during the Cultural Revolution.³⁸ Today, some house churches have hundreds of members. It’s estimated that two-thirds of Chinese Christians attend a house church.³⁹ When discovered by the government, house churches are often completely shut down.⁴⁰ After rural churches have been forced to close, their members have occasionally been sent to labor camps.⁴¹

Provincial religious affairs departments have subjected house churches to intense investigations and inspections. Beijing’s Chaoyang district required communities to investigate house churches in their jurisdiction through home visits.⁴² In the city of Wenzhou, schools have started to collect information on students’ religious beliefs, identify students whose parents are Christian, collect Christian parents’ information, and visit Christian parents at their homes to request that they give up their religious beliefs.⁴³

Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Covenant Church has been in prison since December 2018.⁴⁴ He pastored a house church with hundreds of members and was outspoken about freedoms of religion and of conscience. Consequently, Chinese authorities charged him with “inciting to subvert state power.”⁴⁵ Yet, this wasn’t entirely unexpected for Wang, who gave his congregants his “Declaration of Faithful Disobedience” to be released upon his imprisonment – a declaration stating, “no one in this world can force me to renounce my faith.”⁴⁶

Religious restrictions apply not just to Chinese Christians, but also to foreign missionaries and foreign persons living in China. According to a 2018 report by ChinaAid, a non-profit Christian human rights organization, foreign-based “Christians involved in church ministries in mainland China were often taken into police custody for interrogation, forced to write a confession, sent over to the national security protection bureau for interrogation, or expelled from China for engaging in religious activities and congregating illegally.”⁴⁷

Even as Beijing works to control religious belief, Christianity has managed to flourish in China. Although proselytizing is illegal, Christianity has still rapidly expanded in China since 1980. Researchers estimate that China is on course to have more Christians than any other country in the world by 2030.⁴⁸

The Catholic Church

Yet, it is not just Protestant churches that feel the burden of government restrictions and control. On September 22, 2018, the Chinese government and the Vatican reached a “provisional agreement” on the appointment of bishops. This issue has been a point of contention which has put a strain on Vatican-Chinese relations for decades.⁴⁹ Before 2018, the Catholic Church in China that remained loyal to the Vatican was dubbed the “Underground Catholic Church.”⁵⁰ Two state-run institutions, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPCA) and the Council of Chinese bishops, oversee the bishops who are recognized by both the Vatican and the Chinese government.⁵¹ Following the Vatican-China Deal of 2018, the Vatican considered the CPCA and the underground Catholic Church as the unified Chinese

Catholic Church.⁵² The text of the deal was never disclosed, yet it reportedly allows the Chinese government to nominate bishops, while the Pope has the power to veto nominees.⁵³

Under Chinese law, priests and bishops are required to register with the state and to sign a document agreeing to the principles of independence, autonomy and self-administration of the Church in China.⁵⁴ Some priests and bishops have declined to join the CPCA for reasons of conscience, and the Vatican has requested that the CCP respect such conscientious objectors.⁵⁵ While the Vatican and the Chinese government are cooperating more now than in the past several decades, critics question why the atheistic Chinese regime should be choosing bishops.

Ultimately, the Chinese Communist Party demands that residents find their identity in being communists, not religious believers. And so, the PRC finds itself at odds with all faiths, including Christianity, unless believers are willing to make the tenants of Chinese communist ideology central to their faith. The freedom to practice a religion that includes state-imposed doctrine is no religious freedom at all.

Hong Kong

Though less noticed until recently, another threat posed to religious freedom is Beijing's encroaching influence over Hong Kong, which has thrived with a relatively high degree of autonomy since the city was returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997 under the "one country, two systems" policy. Hong Kong maintains freedom of assembly, a free press and a judicial system free from the corruption of Chinese Communist Party.⁵⁶ Religious freedom is also respected in Hong Kong. Unlike in mainland China, churches in Hong Kong experience the same level of religious freedom experienced in the West.⁵⁷ Increasing Chinese control of Hong Kong could mean that Hong Kong residents will lose many of the freedoms they now enjoy, including religious freedom. Therefore, it is not surprising that Christian activists have been at the forefront of the 2019 pro-democracy protests.⁵⁸ Catholics and Protestants make up over 10 percent of Hong Kong's population. The erosion of the "one country, two systems" policy is a threat to them because it means they would soon be faced with the same religious restrictions that Christians in mainland China face.

Uyghur Crisis

Uyghurs (also spelled Uighur), an ethnic, mostly-Muslim Turkic people concentrated in the northwest region of China labeled the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), find themselves in the midst of one of the greatest mass persecutions of the last century.⁵⁹ China claims their aggressive actions to crack down on Uyghurs are counter-terrorism measures needed to suppress "separatism."⁶⁰ A terrorist attack in 1997 was the first to be blamed on a group of Uyghurs; two other notable attacks occurred in the Uyghur region in 2014.⁶¹ While these incidents were a legitimate concern, the scale and brutality of Beijing's crackdown on the Uyghur community cannot be hidden behind the terminology of "counter-terrorism." There's little evidence of any cohesive separatist movement to validate Beijing's paranoia.⁶²

Xinjiang is home to about 11 million Uyghur Muslims,⁶³ most of whom practice a moderate form of Islam. It is estimated that at least 1.5 million Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities are currently forcibly detained in what Chinese officials call "re-education" camps.⁶⁴ In reality, these are massive camps in which detainees are subjected to inhumane living conditions and torture,⁶⁵ forced to abandon their religious and cultural practices,⁶⁶ and indoctrinated with Chinese Communist Party propaganda.⁶⁷ Reports have surfaced of beatings, solitary confinement, and other harsh punishments for detainees who fail to follow orders.⁶⁸ Mounting evidence points to numerous factories in Xinjiang using detainees from

the camps as forced labor.⁶⁹ The children of detained Uyghurs are sent to mass boarding schools to be raised and taught by the state, where they are taught communist propaganda.⁷⁰

Authorities continue to claim they are providing “free vocational training” to combat extremist thought.⁷¹ However, this fails to explain why most Uyghurs are sent to the camps, such as Mihrigul Tursun, a young Uyghur mother who was arrested and detained in a re-education camp without cause, and had her 2-month-old triplets taken away by authorities, one of whom died in state custody.⁷² The conditions of the camps have reportedly led to the death of detainees during or following their detention.⁷³ Recent testimonies of those who have been detained detail accounts of detainees being raped and used for medical experiments.⁷⁴

In addition to the growing number of re-education camps, China has turned the entire Uyghur region into what some have called an “open-air” prison. As technology has evolved, it has provided the Chinese government with more tools to harass this community. China has started to use facial recognition technology to track Uyghurs throughout Xinjiang as they go about their daily lives. Facial recognition devices are fixed to the entrances of supermarkets, malls, hospitals, and at police checkpoints every few hundred feet.⁷⁵ China has also taken to monitoring social media apps. Uyghurs are often arrested for information found on their phones, including downloads of apps blocked in China such as WhatsApp, or being caught with religious content on their phones.⁷⁶

Chinese authorities ensure that the Uyghur region is isolated from the outside world. It’s almost impossible for Uyghurs to leave Xinjiang due to tight travel restrictions.⁷⁷ Foreign journalists who travel to Xinjiang are closely followed by Chinese police.⁷⁸ Well-armed police patrols on almost every block greatly restrict movement around the region.⁷⁹

Beijing is making a clear effort to strip Uyghurs of their unique cultural and ethnic identity. Uyghur intellectuals have been targeted for detention in re-education camps because they are the very people that keep Uyghur culture flourishing.⁸⁰ This effort leads some to call the Uyghur crisis a “cultural genocide.”⁸¹

Tibetan Buddhists

Shortly after Mao came to power, Chinese troops invaded Tibet in 1950, in pursuit of a long-held Chinese claim of sovereignty. This has been a cause of unrest in Tibet, where the population, who mostly adhere to a unique confluence of Buddhism and indigenous traditions, remains loyal to their now-exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.⁸² During the Cultural Revolution in the 1960’s and 70’s, Beijing set out to eliminate what it saw as the old, superstitious belief system of Tibetan Buddhism that was standing in the way of a monolithic socialist China.⁸³ The Chinese military destroyed over 6,000 monasteries, and killed and imprisoned many Tibetan clergy, reducing Tibet’s monastic population by 93 percent.⁸⁴

Under Deng Xiaoping’s leadership in the 1980’s, the crackdown on Tibet eased. Renewed demonstrations in 1987 resulted in a security crackdown from Beijing that indicated a gradual return to a policy of suppression, where religious practice and beliefs were forced to conform in order to be more acceptable to the CCP.⁸⁵ These policies are still in effect today. The Buddhist Association of China closely supervises officially recognized Buddhist institutions.⁸⁶ The State Department’s annual Report on International Religious Freedom found that in 2018, Chinese authorities “routinely denigrated the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists revered as their most important spiritual leader, and forbade Tibetans from venerating him and other religious leaders associated with him.”

Chen Quanguo is the Chinese official credited with successfully suppressing unrest in Tibet through intense security crackdowns. The success of his program led Beijing to put Chen in charge of the Uyghur region, where he has now installed many of the measures he used in Tibet.⁸⁷ These methods of oppression continue to spread. We are already starting to see some of the surveillance methods used on Uyghurs now being used on Christians, such as facial recognition technology like that in Xinjiang which is now being installed in churches across China.⁸⁸

Beijing's actions in Tibet further demonstrate their intolerance for any religion or culture not centered around the Chinese Communist Party. To reinforce China's authority in Tibet, the government even started to offer cash payments to impoverished Tibetan families who displayed portraits of Chinese President Xi Jinping in their homes.⁸⁹ In 2018, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom reported forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrests, and physical abuse against Tibetans because of their religious beliefs.⁹⁰ In Tibet, as in every region under Chinese rule, Beijing seeks to secure its own power and enforce party loyalty and ideology above all else.

Falun Gong

Falun Gong (also referred to as Falun Dafa) is not a formal religion, but rather a spiritual discipline based on a set of meditation exercises and texts which preach the virtues of truth, benevolence, and forbearance.⁹¹ Nevertheless, this rapidly growing practice raised the ire of the Chinese government in the late 1990's when it reached between 70 and 100 million adherents, thereby surpassing the number of Chinese Communist Party members at 69 million.⁹² In the wake of a decades-long effort to suppress traditional Chinese beliefs, the rising interest in spirituality was seen as a threat to the CCP.

July 1999 marked the beginning of the government's drive to eradicate the belief in Falun Gong. This effort included mass arrests, imprisonment in labor camps, brainwashing, and torture for anyone who refused to renounce their Falun Gong beliefs and practices.⁹³ Authorities tortured practitioners as they tried to force them to renounce their faith and will stop practicing – something that continues today.⁹⁴

The most horrifying form of persecution against the Falun Gong (and, at times, other religious minorities⁹⁵) is forced organ harvesting. This is the act of forcibly removing organs from prisoners of conscience and selling the organs. A team of researchers have proven that patients in China (including those that travel from abroad) are promised matching organs for transplant within a few days – an unbelievably short amount of time compared to the wait in Western countries which ranges from a few months to a few years.⁹⁶

On June 17th, 2019, the Independent Tribunal Into Forced Organ Harvesting of Prisoners of Conscience in China concluded with certainty that Falun Gong adherents have been used as a primary source of forced organ harvesting.⁹⁷ Human rights lawyers estimate that at least 65,000 Falun Gong practitioners have been killed for their organs since 2001.⁹⁸ The Chinese government is making large profits off of organ trafficking. Evidence suggests that patients from over 20 countries have traveled to China for transplants.⁹⁹

It is suspected that Uyghurs are beginning to suffer the same fate. Uyghurs across Xinjiang are forced by the government to undergo medical exams which include DNA sampling.¹⁰⁰ Uyghur residents claim their information was stored in computers during the exam, but they were never given the results of the testing.¹⁰¹ According to reports by China's state media, examinations were conducted on more than 90 percent of the population of Xinjiang.¹⁰² Chinese authorities claim that the Uyghurs' DNA database is intended to help solve crimes and identify bodies.¹⁰³ However, the great expense of the program and

forced nature of the exams are causes for great suspicion. China's attempt to profit from their human rights abuses against Falun Gong practitioners and Uyghurs approaches a scale and brutality not seen since the atrocities of the Second World War.

How We Can Respond: Policy Proposals and Citizen Activism

While it may feel like China is a world away, its power and influence is growing at a rapid pace. This growth is having a tangible impact around the world through its massive Belt and Road Initiative and other projects.¹⁰⁴ The scale of Chinese influence should motivate U.S. lawmakers to address China's religious freedom violations through all available means, including those authorized by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Passed in 1998, IRFA outlined and authorized methods through which the U.S. government could advance religious freedom abroad, and created mechanisms like the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation to help do so.¹⁰⁵ IRFA also set up and authorized structures to advance international religious freedom within the U.S. government, including creating the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to monitor and make recommendations to the U.S. government on religious freedom policy abroad.¹⁰⁶ IRFA also set up an Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department, headed by the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, in order to advance religious freedom through foreign policy.¹⁰⁷

Through these mechanisms and others, the United States should continue to utilize all applicable methods of addressing foreign countries responsible for committing religious freedom violations, including continuing to label China a CPC. Other relevant actions the U.S. might take include applying targeted visa restrictions and financial sanctions on individuals responsible for human rights violations, and preventing U.S. agencies from issuing licenses to export goods or technology to the specific Chinese agencies or government official responsible for human rights violations.¹⁰⁸

Despite PRC expansionism, Chinese leaders are exceedingly sensitive to embarrassment on the world stage. When the governments of other powerful countries publicly speak out about Beijing's religious freedom violations, they take note. The following are a few policy options for U.S. lawmakers and diplomats to consider as they address the religious freedom situation in China, and hold China to account for its religious freedom violations.

- "Naming and Shaming" for Religious Freedom Violations: The U.S. government should publicly call attention to China's religious freedom abuses and form a coalition of like-minded governments to join us in this effort. Such multi-government initiatives include:
 - Condemning counterterrorism as a pretext for the repression of religious freedom. At the 2019 Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, 34 countries signed a statement of concern which addressed the use of "national security" terminology to justify the oppression of religious minorities.¹⁰⁹
 - Condemning the use of technology by governments to suppress expression of religious belief and punish those who hold religious beliefs. At the 2019 Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, 14 countries signed a statement of concern about the use of technology and religious freedom.¹¹⁰
- Applying Sanctions for Religious Freedom Violations: Targeted sanctions against foreign individuals responsible for religious freedom violations have proven effective in other countries.¹¹¹ The U.S. Treasury Department should use the authority provided by Global Magnitsky Act sanctions (pursuant to Executive Order 13818) to sanction Chen Quanguo, the

mastermind of the crackdown on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, among other leaders who have contributed to human rights violations in Xinjiang.¹¹² Chen is directly responsible for the mass incarceration and dystopian crackdown in Xinjiang, making him an obvious candidate for targeted sanctions.¹¹³

- Addressing Religious Freedom in Trade Negotiations: China's treatment of their religious minorities must be the litmus test to determine what future economic ties between the United States and China look like. Behind-closed-doors trade negotiations between the U.S. and China should be a platform to raise human rights concerns and advance religious freedom for the benefit of oppressed communities. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recently issued a Withhold Release Order on one Chinese company suspected of using forced labor in Xinjiang.¹¹⁴ CBP should continue investigating companies with factories in Xinjiang to ensure that they are not contributing to the abuse of religious minorities.
- Addressing Religious Freedom Abuses Through Technology: China has used technology to oppress religious minorities in unprecedented ways. Where appropriate, Congress should seek to enact legislation (including legislation authorized under the International Religious Freeform Act) that would increase restrictions on the export of advanced technology to China from the United States. Chinese firms have also sold their high-tech surveillance tools to at least 18 countries, including Venezuela, Pakistan, and Rwanda.¹¹⁵ These intelligence monitoring systems are subject to abuse by the governments who purchase them. The U.S. should discourage other countries from purchasing surveillance technology from China.
- American Citizens Can Hold International Companies Accountable: There is considerable evidence to suggest that China is not only harvesting the organs of Uyghurs, Falun Gong practitioners, and others, but is also using forced labor from Uyghur detainees in cotton production as well as textile and garment factories in Xinjiang.¹¹⁶ Many major international companies use materials from Xinjiang in their products, and many of the same companies claim to be ethically sourced. Due to the scale of the issue,¹¹⁷ it touches most Americans. This provides an opportunity to reach out to these companies and demand they investigate their supply chain to ensure they are not contributing to human rights violations in Xinjiang. American citizens can raise awareness of this issue among companies and let them know this issue won't go unnoticed by customers.
- Congressional Action Aimed at Religious Freedom Violations: Because China is concerned with earning respect on the world stage, action from Congress in the form of legislation that acknowledges China's human rights and religious freedom violations can be effective in calling attention to China's religious freedom problem. Even through resolutions, Congress can increase the social pressure felt by Chinese leaders. The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 would make China the subject of U.S. security reports for their actions in Xinjiang, causing embarrassment for a government which wants to portray itself as a respectable member of the world community.¹¹⁸ When the Senate version of this bill was passed in September 2019, China's foreign ministry spokesperson responded by expressing China's opposition to the bill and to U.S. criticisms of China's policies in Xinjiang.¹¹⁹ A House resolution, H.Res.493, would condemn the persecution of Christians in China.¹²⁰ We know congressional action matters to Beijing because they respond to it. Where possible, Congress should seek to act and specifically address religious freedom in China.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the reason that China has no tolerance for any faith is because the Chinese Communist Party wishes to replace the human need to worship with a fake, substitute religion centered around communism. The CCP has created a cult of personality around their current president, Xi Jinping. To be a good citizen of the PRC, you may not find your identity in anything other than the Chinese Communist Party. In China, The CCP is god, and Xi is its prophet. Consequently, the only religious institutions that China will legally allow must reinforce a China-centered identity and support for the party. With an ideology like this driving Chinese government policy, it is no surprise that even the Three-Self Churches are being forced to remove their crosses to make room for Chinese flags and replace copies of the Ten Commandments with quotes from the Chinese president.

More than ever before, China's power and influence is expanding in a way that affects the entire world. What happens there has a global impact. How the international community responds to China's aggressive religious freedom violations will act as a model for how other countries might behave without diplomatic or economic repercussions. In the face of Chinese atrocities, U.S. politicians and citizens should enunciate the human rights standard for religious freedom articulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and hold China and everyone else to abide by it.¹²¹

It is essential to affirm that everyone has the right to freedom of religion, the right to change their religion or belief, and the right to practice and live out their faith. China must adhere to this standard expected of the world's leading countries and must not be allowed to shamelessly commit human rights and religious freedom violations without consequences from the international community. In the end, we must remember that the freedom to exercise religion as dictated by the state is no freedom at all.

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