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JERRY'S BLOG



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China, Xinjiang and UN Human Rights

PHOTO BY JOHN WEBBOLD

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By Jerome A. Cohen

On Nov.6, the People's Republic of China underwent its third UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is a peer review at the Human Rights Council of China's human rights record. Each country,



ridiculously, only had 45 seconds to speak! All eyes were watching if China's mass incarceration of Muslims in Xinjiang and related

Source: AP (*Uyghur protesters outside the UN Headquarters in Geneva, Nov. 6, 2018.*)

repression outside the detention prisons would be criticized. [Many countries did speak out, including the U.S., Canada, Germany and the UK. The only Muslim country that raised this issue is Turkey.](#) It is shameful that Muslim countries and their regional organizations have done so little to date. The PRC cleverly lined up a large number of sycophant states to sing its praises and take time away from states that wanted to be critical. (All UPR-related documents are here at the [UN's website.](#))

The PRC has moved relentlessly to increase its influence over the Human Rights Council while the U.S. has withdrawn from it. Accordingly, many countries, including developing and authoritarian countries that rely on China's economic ties, [lavished high praise on China's human rights achievements](#), instead of treating the session seriously. But there are a few other UN possibilities for condemning the PRC's misconduct in Xinjiang and elsewhere, for example, the [recent criticism of the PRC by the committee that reviews violations of the racial discrimination treaty](#). Other treaty review committees can also become relevant forums. The UN Working Group on arbitrary detention is another institution that quietly—too quietly—frequently condemns PRC violations against individuals..

Demands by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to send special rapporteurs to China on one mission or another have occasionally been acceded to by Beijing after very long pressure and have resulted in withering criticisms of the PRC's dictatorial suppression. I don't expect Beijing to allow any such scrutiny over Xinjiang soon, but it depends on how much international public opinion becomes informed on what is taking place. There are many opportunities for regional groups outside the UN to embarrass the PRC for its human rights oppression, for example, NATO, the EU and the various Western countries' economic policy meetings.

NGOs and academics have become much more active. As one of the organizers of [the recent protest by public speakers promising to criticize the PRC for Xinjiang atrocities](#), I mention this in every public appearance, as do many of the [over 250 China watchers who have taken the pledge](#). I hope there will be a multiplicity of the above efforts.

In China, Religion, Xinjiang, Human Rights Tags "reeducation camps"

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Created in August 2015, this website is maintained by Jerome Cohen's colleagues at the [U.S.-Asia Law Institute](#) and edited by Yu-Jie Chen. Send comments/complaints to yu-jie.chen@nyu.edu.



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