

**CHINESE INTERROGATION VS. CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT: THE
UIGHURS AT GUANTANAMO**

**Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight**

July 16, 2009

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

This hearing will come to order.

This is the third hearing that this Committee has held on the plight of the Uighurs both in China and those 22 Uighurs formerly and currently detained at Guantanamo Bay.

For those who are unfamiliar, the Uighurs are a Muslim minority that live in northwestern China. For years the Uighurs have been persecuted and oppressed by the Communist Chinese regime.

It has come to the Committee's attention that in September 2002, Communist Chinese agents were welcomed to Guantanamo Bay for a period of seven to ten days to interrogate the group of 22 Uighurs. It is important to note, in anticipation of the arrival of the Chinese delegation, the Department of Justice Inspector General found that American forces "softened up" the Uighur detainees by routinely waking them up at 15 minute intervals the night before.

It is the Committee's intention to provide a venue, whether here in Washington or elsewhere, for these men-- who have fled Communist

Chinese persecution-- to come forward and testify so that our colleagues and the American people can have an opportunity to hear them-- first hand – and make their own judgment. Until that happens, the Committee has been provided with statements from three former Uighur detainees who are currently residing in Bermuda and Albania. I have reviewed these statements and I personally find them profoundly disturbing. I believe the American people will share those sentiments. And I ask unanimous consent to enter into this testimony into the records of the Committee—

[WITHOUT OBJECTION]

The Chinese delegation interrogated each of the 22 Uighurs. All 22 told consistent stories of intimidation and threats by these the Communist agents. They also reported that their files-- which included their real names and that of their families-- were turned over to the Chinese by American personnel.

Imagine the fear of these men for their families as the Communist Chinese government routinely targets not only dissidents but also their family members.

To meet our oversight responsibilities, the Ranking Member and myself requested permission from the Bush Administration to fly to Guantanamo to meet with those very same Uighur men that the Chinese had full, unfettered access to. Our request was denied.

And we never received a satisfactory explanation for why our visit was refused. The Department of Defense, however, provided a statement to Fox

News which I will now read into the record and that you can see on the floor.

“We have permitted many countries from which these detainees are from to visit: 1. to see they are being treated humanely and 2. to help us understand who they are and to provide us with insight and information about the detainees.

Foreign nationals are permitted to come in—they help us understand who these people are and what they are involved in—and that includes official delegations from their country of origin. **But Congressman, the general public, media are not permitted to question detainees. It can only be done in an official capacity and no Congressman can interrogate or question detainees because it is not part of their oversight responsibilities.”**

Let me first address the issue of oversight responsibility. I want to be very clear—there was no Congressional oversight during the Bush-Cheney Administration. It simply did not exist. As former Senator Chuck Hagel said the Bush-Cheney Administration treated Congress “like a Constitutional nuisance.” I reject any suggestion that the Executive can define what constitutes the Congressional oversight. It is not the prerogative of the Executive to determine the role of the first branch of government. I am confident this position is shared by most, if not all, members of Congress.

Now things have changed. This is a new Congress and we have a new President. And I want to acknowledge that a Department of Defense

representative is present-- and, I would submit, that during the previous Administration our invitation to testify would have been simply ignored. This Committee intends to vigorously exercise the oversight responsibility explicitly tasked to it—not to confront or to embarrass but to ensure we don't repeat mistakes of the past.

So I am happy to welcome Mr. Liotta here today so we can explore the policy of the Department of Defense to permit governments like Communist China to interrogate detainees in U.S. custody. This issue is particularly prescient in light of the recent events in the Uighur Autonomous Region these past couple weeks. The atrocities now taking place in China are only further evidence of the oppression and persecution the Uighur people.

As the 2008 Human Rights report published by our own Department of State confirms-- the recent events in the Uighur Autonomous Region are not new or novel to the Uighur people. Human rights violations against the Uighurs are meticulously documented by our State Department and the Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Yet, the Department of Defense, led by then Secretary Rumsfeld, welcomed a Communist, Chinese delegation to Guantanamo in September of 2002. And gave them full access to a minority which they have relentlessly persecuted.

It is our purpose to determine why the Pentagon made this choice-- because in light of what we know about the Communist Chinese government's

relationship with the Uighurs-- their stated explanation does not make sense to me-- Could we really have believed that the Communist, Chinese regime cared if the Uighurs were being treated humanely?

I realize this incident occurred during the Bush-Cheney Administration. The question is—is this policy still in effect? Has it been changed? Or is it being re-assessed by the Obama Administration?

Our first president, George Washington, once wrote that he hoped that America-- and these are his words-- “might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.” By allowing the Chinese Communists into our detention facility we became something other than a safe and agreeable asylum.

On June 19, 2008 my Ranking Member and I sent a letter to the Bush Administration requesting that the Uighurs then at Guantanamo be promptly paroled into the United States. In the near future I/we will be sending a similar letter, that I hope many of my colleagues will join, to President Obama and Secretary Gates calling on them to parole and resettle at least some of the Uighurs at Guantanamo into the United States. As was stated at an earlier hearing by former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Chief of Staff to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage the “situation of the [Uighurs] can be described [as] nothing short of ‘tragic’” and that these men were “wrongly imprisoned.”

It is now time to seize this opportunity—it is time to fulfill Washington's dream and become once again a safe and agreeable asylum for the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind.

Let me now turn to my friend and colleague, Mr. Rohrabacher, for any statements he may care to make.
