

The New York Times and its Uyghur “activist”

By Peter Symonds
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The *New York Times* has furnished a case study of the way in which it functions as the conduit for the utterly hypocritical “human rights” campaigns fashioned by the CIA and the State Department to prosecute the predatory interests of US imperialism.

While turning a blind eye to the gross abuses of democratic rights by allies such as Saudi Arabia, the US has brazenly used “human rights” for decades as the pretext for wars, diplomatic intrigues and regime-change. The media is completely integrated into these operations.

Another “human rights” campaign is now underway. The *New York Times* is part of the mounting chorus of condemnation of China over its treatment of the Turkic-speaking, Muslim Uyghur minority in the western Chinese province of Xinjiang.

In an article on May 4 entitled “In push for trade deal, Trump administration shelves sanctions over China’s crackdown on Uyghurs,” the *New York Times* joined in criticism of the White House, particularly by the Democrats, for failing to impose punitive measures on Beijing.

The strident denunciations of China involve unsubstantiated allegations that it is detaining millions of Uyghurs without charge or trial in what Beijing terms vocational training camps.

The *New York Times* reported, without qualification, the lurid claims of US officials, such as Assistant Secretary of Defence Randall Schriver, who last Friday condemned “the mass imprisonment of Chinese Muslims in concentration camps” and boosted the commonly cited figure of up to a million to “up to three million” in detention. No evidence has been presented for either claim.

The repression of the Uyghurs is completely bound up with the far broader oppression of the working class by the Chinese capitalist elites and the Chinese Communist Party regime that defends their interests. The US campaign on the Uyghurs, however, has nothing to do with securing the democratic rights of workers, but is aimed at stirring up reactionary separatist sentiment.

The US has longstanding ties to right-wing separatist organisations based on Chinese minorities—Tibetans as well as the Uyghurs—that it helped create, fund and in some cases arm. As the US, first under President Obama and now Trump, has escalated its diplomatic, economic and military confrontation with China, the “human rights” of Uyghurs has been increasingly brought to the fore.

Washington’s aim, at the very least, is to foment separatist opposition in Xinjiang, which is a crucial source of Chinese energy and raw materials as well as being pivotal to its key Belt and Road Initiative to integrate China more closely with Eurasia. Such unrest would not only weaken China but could lead to a bloody war and the fracturing of the country. Uyghur separatists, who trained in the US

network of Islamist terrorist groups in Syria, openly told Radio Free Asia last year of their intention to return to China to wage an armed insurgency.

The *New York Times* is completely in tune with the aims behind these intrigues—a fact that is confirmed by its promotion of Uyghur “activist” Rushan Abbas.

Last weekend’s article highlighted Abbas as the organiser of a tiny demonstration in Washington to “pressure Treasury Department officials to take action against Chinese officials involved in the Xinjiang abuses.” She told the newspaper that the Uyghur issue should be included as part of the current US-China trade talks, and declared: “They are facing indoctrination, brainwashing and the elimination of their values as Muslims.”

An article “Uyghur Americans speak against China’s internment camps” on October 18 last year cited her remarks at the right-wing think tank, the Hudson Institute, where she “spoke out” about the detention of her aunt and sister. As reported in the article: “I hope the Chinese ambassador here reads this,” she said, wiping away tears. “I will not stop. I will be everywhere and speak on this at every event from now on.”

Presented with a tearful woman speaking about her family members, very few readers would have the slightest inkling of Abbas’s background, about which the *New York Times* quite deliberately says nothing. Abbas is a highly connected political operator with long standing ties to the Pentagon, the State Department and US intelligence agencies at the highest level as well as top Republican Party politicians. She is a key figure in the Uyghur organisations that the US has supported and funded.

Currently, Abbas is Director of Business Development in ISI Consultants, which offers to assist “US companies to grow their businesses in Middle East and African markets.” Her credentials, according to the company website, include “over 15 years of experience in global business development, strategic business analysis, business consultancy and government affairs throughout the Middle East, Africa, CIS regions, Europe, Asia, Australia, North America and Latin America.”

The website also notes: “She also has extensive experience working with US government agencies, including Homeland Security, Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Justice, and various US intelligence agencies.” As “an active campaigner for human rights,” she “works closely with members of the US Senate, Congressional Committees, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the US Department of State and several other US government departments and agencies.”

This brief summary makes clear that Abbas is well connected in the

highest levels of the state apparatus and in political circles. It also underscores the very close ties between the Uyghur organisations, in which she and her family members are prominent, and the US intelligence and security agencies.

A more extensive article and interview with Abbas appeared in the May 2019 edition of the magazine *Bitter Winter*, which is published by the Italian-based Center for Studies on New Religions. The magazine focuses on “religious liberty and human rights in China” and is part of a conservative, right-wing network in Europe and the United States. The journalist who interviewed Abbas, Marco Respinti, is a senior fellow at the Russell Kirk Centre for Cultural Renewal, and a board member of the Centre for European Renewal—both conservative think tanks.

The article explains that Abbas was a student activist at Xinjiang University during the 1989 protests by students and workers against the oppressive Beijing regime, but left China prior to the brutal June 4 military crackdown that killed thousands in the capital and throughout the country. At the university, she collaborated with Dolkun Isa and “has worked closely with him ever since.”

Dolkun Isa is currently president of the World Uyghur Congress, established in 2004 as an umbrella group for a plethora of Uyghur organisations. It receives funding from the National Endowment for Democracy—which is one of the fronts used by the CIA and the US State Department for fomenting opposition to Washington’s rivals, including so-called colour revolutions, around the world.

Isa was the subject of an Interpol red notice after China accused him of having connections to the armed separatist group, the East Turkestan Liberation Organisation, a claim he denied. East Turkestan is the name given to Xinjiang by Uyghur separatists to denote its historic connections to Turkey. None of the Western countries in which he traveled moved to detain him and the red notice was subsequently removed, no doubt under pressure from Washington.

Bitter Winter explained that after moving to the US, Abbas cofounded the first Uyghur organisation in the United States in 1993—the California-based Tengritagh Overseas Students and Scholars Association. She also played a key role in the formation of the Uyghur American Association in 1998, which receives funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Last year its Uyghur Human Rights Project was awarded two NED grants totaling \$320,000. Her brother Rishat Abbas was the association’s first vice-chairman and is currently the honorary chairman of the Uyghur Academy based in Turkey.

When the US Congress funded a Uyghur language service for the Washington-based Radio Free Asia, Abbas became its first reporter and news anchor, broadcasting daily to China. Radio Free Asia, like its counterpart Radio Free Europe, began its existence in the 1950s as a CIA conduit for anti-communist propaganda. It was later transferred to the US Information Agency, then the US State Department and before being incorporated as an “independent,” government-funded body. Its essential purpose as a vehicle for US disinformation and lies has not changed, however.

In a particularly revealing passage, *Bitter Winter* explained: “From 2002–2003, Ms. Abbas supported Operation Enduring Freedom as a language specialist at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.” In the course of the interview with the magazine, Abbas attempted to explain away her involvement with the notorious prison camp by saying that she was simply acting on behalf of 22 Uyghurs who were wrongfully detained and ultimately released—after being imprisoned for between four to 11 years!

Given the denunciations of Chinese detention camps, one might expect that Abbas would have something critical to say about Guantanamo Bay, where inmates are held indefinitely without charge or trial and in many cases tortured. However, she makes no criticism of the prison or its procedures, nor for that matter of Operation Enduring Freedom—the illegal US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq that resulted in the deaths of a million civilians.

It is clear why. Abbas is plugged into to the very top levels of the US state apparatus and political establishment in Washington. Her stints with Radio Free Asia and at Guantanamo Bay are undoubtedly not the only times that she has been directly on the payroll.

As *Bitter Winter* continued: “She has frequently briefed members of the US Congress and officials at the State Department on the human rights situation of the Uyghur people, and their history and culture, and arranged testimonies before Congressional committees and Human Rights Commissions.

“She provided her expertise to other federal and military agencies as well, and in 2007 she assisted during a meeting between then-President George W. Bush and Rebiya Kadeer, the world-famous moral leader of the Uyghurs, in Prague. Later that year she also briefed then First Lady Laura Bush in the White House on the Human Rights situation in Xinjiang.”

It should be noted, Rebiya Kadeer is the “the world-famous moral leader of the Uyghurs,” only in the eyes of the CIA and the US State Department who have assiduously promoted her, and of the US-funded Uyghur organisations. She was one of the wealthiest businesswomen in China who attended the National People’s Congress before her husband left for the US and began broadcasting for Radio Free Asia and Voice of America. She subsequently fled China to the US and has served as president both of the World Uyghur Congress and the American Uyghur Association.

The fact that Russan Abbas is repeatedly being featured in the *New York Times* is an indication that she is also being groomed to play a leading role in the mounting US propaganda offensive against China over the persecution of the Uyghurs. It is also a telling indictment of the *New York Times* which opens its pages to her without informing its readers of her background. Like Abbas, the paper of record is also plugged into the state apparatus and its intelligence agencies.

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