



Civil Resistance Against Authoritarian and Religious Radicalism



**Transnational Repression and Uyghur
Advocacy: Nonviolent Resistance Against
Authoritarian Narratives of the People's
Republic of China**



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About the Author

Mehmet Tohti is a prominent Uyghur-Canadian activist and co-founder of the World Uyghur Congress, serving twice as its vice-president. As Executive Director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP), he has led national efforts to secure protection and justice for Uyghurs persecuted by the Chinese state. Tohti played a key role in lobbying for Motion M-62, which calls on Canada to resettle 10,000 Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims at risk of refoulement. He has testified before Parliament, mobilized civil-society partners, and urged

Canadian governments and businesses to cut ties with supply chains tainted by Uyghur forced labour. Beyond humanitarian advocacy, Tohti has been a leading voice exposing transnational repression and foreign interference by Beijing targeting Uyghur communities in Canada. Despite repeated threats and harassment, he continues to campaign for stronger protections for diaspora activists. In December 2024, China sanctioned him under its Anti-Foreign-Sanctions Law for “interfering in China’s internal affairs,” a move widely viewed as retaliation for his successful lobbying efforts.



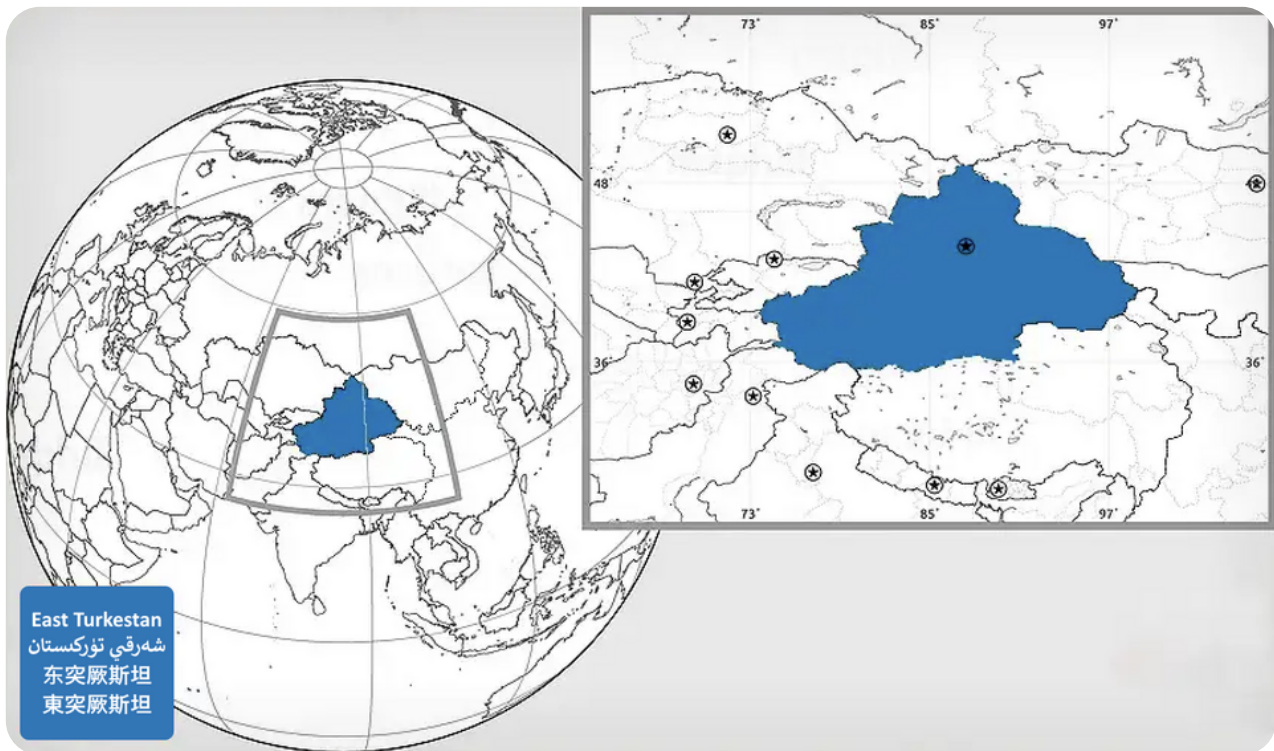
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Abstract

This paper examines the urgent issue of transnational repression faced by the Uyghur community, wherein the People's Republic of China (PRC) extends its reach beyond national borders through intimidation, surveillance, coercion, and disinformation to silence advocacy abroad and frame it as extremism. Drawing on testimonies of survivors, the paper demonstrates how these tactics not only violate individual freedoms but also erode democratic norms and civic discourse within host societies. The Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP), based in Canada, has been instrumental in advancing nonviolent resistance through diaspora testimony, survivor storytelling, economic noncooperation, the establishment of legitimate Uyghur-led voices, and strategic engagement with democratic governments to counter transnational repression. URAP and its advisors were subjected to retaliatory sanctions by the PRC in response to the Government of Canada's sanctions against eight former or current senior officials implicated in human rights abuses, underscoring the risks activists experience and the extent of the PRC's extraterritorial influence. These efforts exemplify broader civil resistance strategies, protest, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention that challenge PRC narratives while safeguarding civic space. Building on URAP's advocacy, the paper identifies best practices for countering disinformation, strengthening democratic resilience, and reframing Uyghur activism as a movement grounded in human rights rather than extremism. Drawing from both theoretical and empirical analysis, it advances concrete policy recommendations for democratic governments, including Canada, to strengthen protections against foreign interference, enhance institutional coordination, and empower civil society actors combating authoritarian influence. To conclude, the findings reinforce URAP's call for an integrated and well-resourced response to transnational repression. The paper recommends expanding sustainable funding for civil society organizations, increasing dedicated resources for law enforcement to recognize and respond effectively to transnational threats, and fostering collaboration between government agencies and diaspora communities. By investing in both community resilience and institutional capacity, Canada and its partners can better protect vulnerable populations, uphold democratic values, and set a global precedent in countering authoritarian repression beyond borders.

Introduction

The persecution and repression of Uyghurs, by the People's Republic of China (PRC), in East Turkistan (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) have continued to escalate over the past decade. There is widespread, documented evidence from survivor testimonies, Chinese official government documents, and satellite imagery to confirm the existence of mass internment camps, state-imposed forced labour, sexual violence, and coercive assimilationist policies, which many governments and civil society organizations have identified as genocide. An extension of the PRC's broad and constantly expanding repressive regime, targeting Uyghurs, is transnational repression (TNR).



Extent of East Turkistan in Central Asia, as defined by the East Turkistan Government in Exile

TNR not only violates the rights of individuals but also undermines Canada's democratic institutions by attempting to influence or intimidate members of diaspora communities. This year, Canada had the opportunity to hold the 2025 G7 Presidency in Kananaskis, Alberta. One of the key priorities for Canada's G7 Presidency is TNR. The G7 Leaders' Statement on Transnational Repression defined TNR as an "aggressive form of foreign interference whereby states, or their proxies, attempt to intimidate, harass, harm, or coerce."



51st G7 Summit Hosted by Canada



Freedom House's Special Report 2021: "China: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study" states that China conducts the world's most advanced, far-reaching, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression (Freedom House 2021). This form of repression and authoritarian control transcends national sovereignty while undermining the security and freedoms of diaspora groups, journalists, human rights defenders, political activists, dissidents, citizens, civil society organizations, and leaders residing in democratic nation-states, like Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and South Africa.

The PRC exerts state control through family intimidation, espionage, digital surveillance, spyware, coercion, threats, harassment, manipulation, diplomatic influence, weaponization of Interpol, sanctions, extraditions, illegal deportations, detentions, rendition, assaults, abductions, and assassinations (Freedom House 2021). Freedom House (2021) posits that the PRC's pressure and control are discernible by specific characteristics, such as TNR that targets a wide range of groups and the use of a wide range of tactics. It is a global campaign and network of influence that also targets PRC's own officials residing abroad, organized crime networks, and other foreigners/ non-Chinese citizens critical of the PRC (Freedom House 2021). The campaign relies on technological capacity to extend control and repression globally, and the campaign aims to extend the PRC's geopolitical influence (Freedom House, 2021). These strategies not only threaten the personal safety of Uyghurs but also erode democratic norms, as nation-states fail to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens within their own borders.

Within the challenging geopolitical landscape, the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP), based in Ottawa, Canada, has emerged as a leading example of nonviolent resistance to address and combat transnational repression. URAP mobilizes the Uyghur diaspora along with their allies through storytelling, survivor testimony, policy engagement with the Government of Canada, and coalition-building. URAP's advocacy and policy engagement seeks to expose the PRC's repression, misinformation, and disinformation while reframing Uyghur advocacy as a human

rights movement rather than an expression of ethnic or religious extremism as historically asserted by the PRC. By grounding its resistance in nonviolence, URAP offers a replicable model for how diaspora-led movements can counter authoritarian narratives.



FILE - Uyghur activists protest China's treatment of Uyghurs, in Vancouver, Canada, on May 8, 2019.

This paper argues that URAP's nonviolent advocacy, anchored in storytelling, civic engagement, and human rights framing, provides an effective strategy to resist and combat the PRC's influence, safeguard Uyghur identity, and reinforce democratic resilience. The analysis commences with the theoretical framework analyzing authoritarianism and civil resistance, which follows an in-depth examination of the PRC's mechanism of repression targeting Uyghurs, along with highlighted testimonies from Uyghurs impacted by TNR. Subsequently, this paper will focus on a detailed case study of URAP and its civil resistance dimension and conclude with policy implications and recommendations for democratic governments to strengthen protections against TNR and uphold the rights and freedoms of vulnerable diaspora communities.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of transnational repression emerges from the convergence of two key theoretical perspectives. The first is transnational authoritarianism, which identifies the expanding scope and breadth of the phenomenon. The second draws on the theory of civil resistance to examine and explain how URAP and similar movements resist and counter authoritarian narratives through nonviolent strategies.

a. Authoritarian Repression: Beyond Borders

Transnational repression is a key mechanism operating within the broader framework of transnational authoritarianism. Gerasimos Tsourapas coined the term transnational authoritarianism, referring to the strategies through which authoritarian states extend their influence beyond national borders, aiming to secure economic and social benefits from their citizens abroad while simultaneously limiting political dissent (Tsourapas 2022). This concept expands traditional understandings of authoritarianism, shifting the focus from a purely domestic framework to one that encompasses global and diaspora populations (Tsourapas 2022). Contemporary authoritarian nation-states extend their resilience, legitimacy, and strengthen their authoritarian control through authoritarian mobility management and extraterritorial strategies to control a population (Glasius 2018). Through this theoretical framework, the extraterritorial authoritarian practices deployed by the PRC against Uyghurs in democratic countries conceptualize a deliberate campaign to sustain its authoritarian regime, its legitimacy, and control the narratives of human rights abuses.

Glasius (2018, 186) asserts that authoritarian mobility management is based on the cognizance that its population, either residing at home or abroad, are not citizens with rights, but rather as subjects whose movements, affiliations, and behaviours must be monitored. This is achieved through the conceptualization of how different spatial practices are designed to control in transnational spaces, which differ from those used at the physical borders of a nation-state.

In the case of the Uyghurs, the PRC employs strategies through a combination of domestic surveillance, restrictions on mobility, and transnational monitoring of diaspora communities. These measures reinforce the state's control over historical narratives by framing Uyghurs as historically belonging to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), People's Republic of China, as opposed to the original inhabitants of the land, East Turkistan. This permits the PRC to not only assert territorial sovereignty but also delegitimize Uyghur claims to distinct national or cultural identity. In this way, narrative control functions as an extension of authoritarian mobility management, shaping both physical movement and belonging, thereby consolidating the state's authority over Uyghurs who are identified by the PRC as potentially disloyal, separatist, or extremist. However, Uyghurs are a Turkic

ethnic group with a deep-rooted cultural and linguistic tradition that spans several millennia, with a leading majority of Uyghurs practicing Islam, adhering primarily to the Hanafi school of Sunni thought (URAP 2022). Throughout history, they established powerful kingdoms as early as the 9th century and later played important administrative roles within Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire in the 13th century, which means that the history, culture, ethnicity, and geography of the Uyghur people remain markedly distinct from China's Han majority population (URAP 2022).

Drawing on Gerschewski's (2013) framework of how authoritarian governments maintain stability through repression, legitimation, and co-optation, Glasius (2018, 186-187) argues that for stabilization, the authoritarian state incorporates its citizens as subjects to be controlled and repressed. In the context of Uyghurs, it can be argued that the PRC treats Uyghurs as a population to be repressed in the pursuit of regime stabilization. The "inclusion" of Uyghurs as "subjects" explains why the PRC asserts its authority as though the subjects remained within its jurisdiction and maintains control of the subjects even if they are abroad through a spectrum of different extraterritorial authoritarian repressive tactics and strategies.

b. Mechanisms of Repression Targeting Uyghurs-Canadians

URAP's (2022) "Intending and Unending: A Report on China's Transnational Harassment and Intimidation Campaign Against Uyghur-Canadians" contends that "not a single one of these community members has escaped the long arm of the Chinese state's campaign of transnational repression, intimidation, harassment, and even direct threats." The report argues that the CCP's repression against Uyghurs in Canada manifests in a variety of ways, each designed to silence, intimidate, and control members of the Uyghur diaspora (URAP 2022). Interviews with Uyghur-Canadians reveal a pattern of coercive tactics that extend far beyond China's borders, threatening the safety, privacy, and freedoms of those living in Canada, including intimidation, intelligence gathering operations, digital and bureaucratic repression, and severing of family contact (URAP 2022). Intimidation is the most common form of repression, which includes harassment, robocalls, threatening messages, and controlling members of the Uyghur community through coercive demands (URAP 2022). These threats are aimed at discouraging Uyghurs from exercising their rights to free speech and speaking out against the Chinese government. Intelligence gathering operations are attempts by the Chinese government or their proxies/intermediaries to collect sensitive personal information on their location, workplace, and information on friends and family members. It has been reported that individuals have been subject to pressure to function as informants and betray the trust within the community (URAP 2022).

The PRC also extends its repression into the digital realm through cyberattacks and cyberoperations, hacking, and social-media trolling campaigns (URAP 2022). Uyghurs in Canada also experience bureaucratic repression, which entails restricting mobility by denying visas and passport renewals to prevent Uyghurs from remaining safely in Canada or stopping them from visiting family members in East Turkistan (URAP 2022). Lastly, severing of family contact is a form of repression where the PRC has cut off all communications with relatives in China, and some have even received direct calls from Chinese officials to warn relatives that they will receive severe punishment if they do not stop their activism abroad. The goal is to discourage Uyghur-Canadians from speaking publicly about human rights abuses, participating in activism, or engaging with advocacy groups to silence, intimidate, and control them (URAP 2022).

Testimonies

In URAP's report, a series of interviews and surveys were conducted across Canada to better understand the scope, methods, and impact of the PRC's transnational repression campaign on the Uyghur diaspora in Canada (URAP 2022).

a. Intimidation

In September 2016, Arzu (pseudonym) and her former husband, both Uyghur residents of East Turkistan, were arrested and brought in for questioning by Chinese authorities. They were accused of accessing a "forbidden" website using a virtual private network (VPN). "The charges were made up," recalls Arzu. "I believe the real reason we were arrested was because of my husband's company, which promoted the Uyghur language." While Arzu was detained overnight, her then-husband was held for three days and deprived of food and water. Upon their release, a security official they knew privately warned them that if they did not leave China immediately, they might never be able to do so. Two days later, they fled to the United States, leaving behind most of their possessions. In September 2017, Arzu moved to Canada and applied for asylum.

Beginning in mid-August 2021, Arzu began receiving messages via WeChat, a Chinese social media and messaging app, from an account claiming to be her sister. A week later, during a video call, Arzu briefly spoke with her parents, who repeated pro-CCP slogans and appeared to be speaking under duress. Shortly after, a Chinese state official took over the call. The official demanded detailed information about Arzu's current location and personal life before delivering a chilling message: "I was told that if I did not return to China, I would never see my parents again, as they were going to die soon," Arzu recounts. "I was warned that they were in poor health." Although her parents had been healthy the last time she saw them, Arzu noticed during the call that her father could no longer walk. She believes Chinese

authorities knew she would not return and that the message intends to silence her, given her firsthand knowledge of China's campaign against the Uyghur people. Since that call, Arzu reports feeling unsafe and under threat, deeply concerned for the well-being of her family still in East Turkistan. She is no longer able to communicate freely or speak openly with them.

b. Severing of Family Contact: Family Reprisals

Turnisa Matsedik-Qira, a nurse and activist based in Vancouver who immigrated to Canada in 2006, reported that she once maintained regular communication with her family in East Turkistan. However, in late 2017, that contact was abruptly severed. She discovered she had been removed from her relatives' WeChat group, as well as another group of friends in China, and since then, she has been unable to reconnect. "They won't pick up my calls," she explained. The sudden and complete loss of communication deeply alarmed her and motivated her to intensify her activism. Matsedik-Qira began delivering speeches in both Canada and the United States about the Uyghur genocide, organizing public awareness campaigns and boycotts, and protesting almost weekly outside the Chinese consulate in Vancouver. Her protests, however, have drawn unwanted attention. She reports that during her demonstrations, individuals frequently approach her, shouting insults and demanding she stop her activism.

Matsedik-Qira suspects that these people are either consulate employees or individuals acting on its behalf. In September 2019, while protesting a speech by the head of the Chinese consulate at the Vancouver Art Gallery, she was confronted by several Chinese attendees who told her she was not welcome. Shortly afterward, she received a phone call from an unknown man who warned her in Mandarin, "Don't go too far. Think about your family in China." The call left her shaken and fearful, as she imagined what Chinese authorities might do to her loved ones. Her fears were realized in August 2021, when she received devastating news: her brother, Omarjan Matsedik, a father of two and, in her words, "the kindest person she'd ever known," had died in a Chinese concentration camp. Turnisa believes that her brother's death was an act of retribution for her long-standing activism and is also convinced that the Chinese government fully understands the immense psychological toll Uyghurs endure (URAP 2022).

c. Digital Repression: Cyberattacks

In March 2021, Facebook disclosed the discovery of a China-based cyber-espionage network using its platform to surveil and target Uyghurs living in Canada, the United States, and several other countries (URAP 2022). Interview participants currently engaged with Uyghur advocacy organizations in Canada, including Tuyghun Abduweli, former President of the East Turkistan Association of

Canada, and Mehmet Tohti, Executive Director of URAP, reported experiencing persistent cyberattacks over the years. According to their accounts, the websites of their respective organizations, as well as those of earlier initiatives they had been affiliated with, have been repeatedly subjected to hacking attempts. Both individuals and their organizations have also been consistently targeted with malware-embedded emails, necessitating frequent replacement of computer equipment to maintain operational security.

Methods of Civil Resistance

In response to the tactics of repression mobilized by the PRC, Uyghurs have remained resilient. URAP's report defines civil resistance theory as a theoretical framework to understand how individuals, communities, and organizations can contest power through nonviolence. Stellan Vinthagen (2015, 2) states that in a nonviolent movement, activists challenge violence, oppression, or injustice without resorting to those same methods. In the context of Uyghurs, this framework contests the PRC's narrative of grounding Uyghur resistance and activism in the three. Some parts jump between past and present when describing past events (e.g., "She reports feeling unsafe evils: separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Thus, the framework of nonviolence serves as a strategy to delegitimize the PRC's narratives that justify its authoritarian and repressive tactics, both within and beyond its borders.

Gene Sharp's (1973) categorical organization of strategies of nonviolent resistance can also be used to understand how nonviolence is mobilized in Uyghur resistance and activism. Sharp (1973) identifies methods grounded in protest and persuasion, economic noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Protest and persuasion are defined as the nonviolent groups' organization or participation in symbolic actions, such as protests or vigils, designed to persuade opponents/ others, express disapproval, influence opinions, or demonstrate disagreement (Sharp 1973, 68-69). Sharp (1973, 69) categorizes noncooperation into three sub-categories: social noncooperation, economic noncooperation, and political noncooperation. These are all methods of withdrawal to refuse participation, peacefully, to show disapproval, apply pressure, and trigger change. Lastly, nonviolent intervention refers to direct action, such as nonviolent obstructions, taken by the nonviolent group to intervene in a situation to transform a situation rather than protesting or withdrawing (Sharp 1973, 69).

Case Study: Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project

URAP engages in all three categories of nonviolent resistance: protest and persuasion, economic noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention through a multifaceted approach that includes storytelling, coalition-building, and policy engagement to address transnational repression and other issues related to the Uyghur genocide. In practice, URAP's successful advocacy work emphasizes mobilizing legal and regulatory mechanisms to hold the PRC and implicated nation-states, entities, and companies accountable. This section will discuss the best practices implemented that are in line with non-violent methodology.

a. Protest & Persuasion

Consistent with Sharp's (1973) framework of nonviolent action, URAP employs nonviolent methods of protest and persuasion by convening events that bring together leaders of the global Uyghur diaspora, human rights practitioners, governmental actors, and representatives from civil society organizations. URAP's projects are designed to counter the PRC's narratives of the ongoing Uyghur genocide and its global dimensions with a focus on accountability and systemic reform to persuade, express disapproval, and influence opinions. This method is strategically implemented in tandem with the utilization of social media platforms to amplify URAP's outreach and engage an international audience, thereby furthering its mission of raising global awareness on a multitude of issues through nonviolence.

A key area of work involves investigating state-imposed forced labour in the Uyghur Region to counter the PRC's narrative of vocational training/ poverty alleviation for Uyghurs and economic development in Xinjiang. URAP's research exposes how multinational corporations are complicit in coercive labour systems sustaining the region's repressive economy. The findings contribute directly to efforts aimed at strengthening Canada's trade policies, advancing strong legislation, and ensuring that economic relationships do not perpetuate human rights abuses. Complementing this research is URAP's advocacy for the implementation and enforcement of import bans on goods produced through forced labour. This initiative focuses on ensuring that Canada's border and customs enforcement mechanisms effectively restrict products linked to coercive practices. By aligning domestic trade enforcement with international standards, particularly the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act, URAP promotes policy coherence and corporate responsibility. These efforts help close regulatory loopholes and encourage Canadian companies to audit their supply chains, thereby reducing the flow of forced labour goods into the Canadian market.

Furthermore, URAP engages the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) by filing complaints against Canadian companies linked to forced labour or other abuses in their global supply chains. This process seeks to ensure that Canadian corporations uphold ethical standards abroad and that victims of exploitation have avenues for redress. Through these complaints, URAP advances transparency, corporate accountability, and the integration of human rights principles into Canada's international business practices.

URAP also plays a vital role in submitting sanctions proposals to Global Affairs Canada. Through detailed evidence-based reports, the organization recommends sanctions against PRC officials and entities implicated in the Uyghur genocide. This work leverages Canada's Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Magnitsky Act) and Special Economic Measures Act (People's Republic) to hold perpetrators accountable.

URAP's team and legal advisor, Sarah Teich, were also actively involved in the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions. URAP contributed by providing detailed testimonies, sharing evidence, and offering expert insights that helped the inquiry better understand the scope, mechanisms, and impact of these activities. A key element of the intimidation and harassment targeting members of diaspora communities is the use of threats against their family members living overseas. URAP's Executive Director, Mehmet Tohti, testified at the public inquiry and noted that:

“...when it comes to [the] individual level, it is about threat. It is about hijacking of your family members to force you or compel you to live within the rule of hostile regime in a democratic country like in Canada and force you to be an informant and use all of the arresting power, just like proxies in institutions or covert legions underground, just like police stations, just to chase you and put pressure on you to stop what you are doing.” (Human Rights Coalition 2024)

The evidence collected counters Chinese government disinformation, informs legal and policy actions, and raises public awareness. The public inquiry highlights the challenges faced by affected diaspora communities and informs potential policy responses and recommendations to the Government of Canada.

Finally, URAP contributes to humanitarian protection through its work on Uyghur resettlement under Canada's M62 refugee resettlement program. Countering the narrative that China protects its citizens abroad and Uyghurs, along with other ethnic minorities, are not persecuted. This initiative facilitates the safe relocation of Uyghurs

at risk of deportation or persecution in third countries. By assisting with documentation, sponsorship, and integration, URAP helps build resilient Uyghur communities within Canada while urging the government to expand and expedite resettlement opportunities. These efforts reflect Canada's broader moral and legal obligations to protect those fleeing genocide and persecution.

b. Noncooperation

URAP engages in economic noncooperation by deliberately withdrawing support from companies that are implicated in human rights violations and that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the continuation of the Uyghur genocide. This approach emphasizes systemic accountability and the utilization of formal legal and regulatory mechanisms, rather than relying exclusively on individual consumer action. In practice, URAP advances this strategy through the submission of targeted sanctions requests to Global Affairs Canada (GAC), seeking to hold entities that benefit from human rights abuses accountable. Notably, URAP, along with Human Rights Action Group (HRAG) and Center for Advanced Defence Studies (C4ADS), has submitted comprehensive sanctions dossiers for Chinese surveillance technology firms, including Hikvision, Dahua, Uniview, and Tiandy, urging their inclusion under Canada's Special Economic Measures (People's Republic of China) regulations (Human Rights Action Group 2024) as a means of confronting the global reach and coercive practices of the PRC.

Complementing this, URAP also files formal complaints with the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) against corporations linked to Uyghur forced labour, thereby leveraging institutional oversight and enforcement frameworks to promote ethical corporate conduct and mitigate complicity in human rights violations. While this method primarily targets Uyghur forced labour and corporate complicity in the Uyghur genocide, it is intrinsically linked to addressing transnational repression. Companies that exploit Uyghur forced labour often operate within broader systems that facilitate the Chinese government's surveillance, intimidation, and coercion of Uyghurs both inside China and abroad. Targeting the financial and operational interests of these entities undermines their capacity to enforce repression internationally. In this way, economic noncooperation functions as a nonviolent tool that simultaneously addresses Uyghur labour and the broader transnational apparatus of repression, demonstrating the interconnected nature of corporate complicity and state-led coercion.

URAP also engages in economic noncooperation through divestment strategies such as initiatives that encourage universities, pension funds, or other institutional investors to withdraw financial support from companies complicit in repression. For example, the Clean University Initiative is part of URAP's advocacy strategy to

prevent universities and other institutions from financially or operationally supporting companies implicated in Uyghur human rights abuses. By promoting divestment from firms linked to forced labour, mass surveillance, or coercive state programs, the initiative encourages ethical investment, strengthens institutional accountability, and raises awareness among students and faculty about the Uyghur genocide.

c. Intervention

URAP implements nonviolent intervention by actively exposing and challenging the systemic structures that enable oppression. One key method of intervention is civil disobedience. For example, URAP participates in weekly protests outside the Chinese embassy in Ottawa, Ontario, which have been ongoing consistently for about five years, as a visible and sustained act of resistance. Another significant strategy involves the dissemination of information campaigns. URAP has effectively compiled and disseminated research reports, survivor testimonies, and investigative findings on transnational repression, foreign interference, and various aspects of the Uyghur genocide.

URAP also relies on the expertise of its legal advisors, Sarah Teich and David Matas, who have been instrumental in the comprehensive examination of the mechanisms and impacts of transnational repression on diaspora communities in Canada, including Uyghurs (Teich, Matas & Taylor 2023). In a joint paper with Secure Canada and Human Rights Action Group, *“Combating Transnational Repression and Foreign Interference in Canada”* proposes several recommendations to intervene and combat TNR. This report has been a critical resource for URAP’s advocacy and engagement with the Government of Canada and relevant agencies on the scope and nature of TNR affecting Uyghur Canadians. These efforts serve to educate the public, inform, and influence policymakers, and counteract misinformation that obscures the realities of repression in East Turkistan, as well as propaganda disseminated by the People’s Republic of China.

URAP also intervenes by directly transforming the circumstances of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims at risk of refoulement in third countries through initiatives such as the M62 Refugee Resettlement Program (House of Commons of Canada). This legal pathway for resettlement in Canada has had a measurable impact, providing genocide survivors with physical safety, the opportunity to rebuild their lives, psychological relief from precarious immigration status, and the preservation of long-term community cohesion.

Through these multifaceted interventions, URAP exemplifies a strategic and systemic approach to nonviolent action that combines public advocacy, knowledge dissemination, international cooperation, and tangible humanitarian support. Lastly, URAP engages in international solidarity actions through coordinated awareness

events and coalition advocacy. Including URAP's collaboration with the Coalition Against Forced Labour in Trade (CAFLT), a global network comprising eighteen civil society organizations from major importing economies such as the United States, Canada, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the United Kingdom to introduce and enforce import bans against goods produced using forced labour, ensuring that there is no safe harbour for such products in any country.

Lessons Learned

URAP's success over the past few years is due to its ability to think innovatively and adapt to its lessons learned. As mentioned earlier, a central lesson is the importance of leveraging legal and regulatory mechanisms to amplify advocacy impact beyond symbolic protest. Filing complaints with institutions such as CORE and submitting sanctions proposals to governmental bodies hold both states and corporations accountable, translating advocacy into enforceable action. Engagement with formal inquiries, like the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference, ensures that Uyghur experiences are directly incorporated into policy decisions. Legal avenues, therefore, serve as powerful nonviolent tools, enabling both accountability and systemic change.

Central to leveraging legal and regulatory mechanisms is evidence collection. Storytelling, knowledge dissemination, and evidence collection are central to effective advocacy. Documenting survivor testimonies, research reports, investigative findings, and other forms of evidence strengthens credibility, informs policy, and supports legal and regulatory action. Survivor narratives humanize the issue and foster empathy, while research-based reports and investigative findings provide rigorously documented evidence for policy proposals, sanctions requests, and formal complaints. Evidence collection, including official records, corporate disclosures, and firsthand accounts, forms the foundation for filings with bodies such as the CORE, sanctions submissions to Global Affairs Canada, and legal advocacy in inquiries. Strategic dissemination through social media, public events, and coalition channels amplifies both stories and evidence, raising awareness and pressuring governments and corporations to act.

In line with the theoretical framework of civil resistance, a blended approach is required. URAP's integration of protest and persuasion, economic noncooperation, and intervention can significantly strengthen advocacy impact. By convening diasporic leaders, human rights actors, and policymakers, advocacy efforts gain visibility and legitimacy, raising awareness of critical issues. Targeting corporate complicity through sanctions and regulatory mechanisms disrupts the systems that enable human rights abuses, creating structural pressure for change. Meanwhile, civil disobedience, legal action, and direct humanitarian programs, such as refugee

resettlement, deliver tangible relief while promoting systemic reform. Effective advocacy, therefore, combines the power of public visibility, structural disruption, and direct support to the populations most affected. URAP has also maintained its global impact through coalition-building with other civil society organizations, academic think tanks, and diaspora communities, to enhance advocacy influence by uniting diverse actors around a common cause. Coordinated international and domestic campaigns further amplify pressure on governments and multilateral institutions, ensuring that advocacy efforts resonate beyond local or national contexts. Lastly, navigating the geopolitical context and governmental adversity is a vital component of effective advocacy. Efforts to engage the Government of Canada, for example, require maneuvering through complex bureaucratic processes, addressing varying political priorities, and managing sensitivities surrounding the PRC's influence. Advocacy groups like URAP illustrate that achieving impact in such a landscape demands persistence, resilience, strategic presentation of carefully documented evidence, and broad/ global coalition support to amplify influence on policymakers.

Lastly, a lesson learned is the necessity of sustaining resilience in the face of retaliatory measures imposed by the PRC. In December 2024, Canada imposed sanctions on eight Chinese officials under the Special Economic Measures (People's Republic of China) Regulations (Global Affairs Canada 2024). These sanctions were a direct response to China's systemic repression of ethnic and religious minorities, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, and practitioners of Falun Gong. The measures were announced on December 10, 2024, coinciding with International Human Rights Day in Canada. On December 22, 2024, the PRC imposed retaliatory sanctions on URAP and its advisory board (Joseph 2024). The sanctions were enacted under China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, a legal framework established to counteract foreign interference and punitive actions perceived as unjust by the Chinese government (Huld 2025). This legislation empowers the Chinese government to impose countermeasures against foreign individuals and entities that it deems to have engaged in activities against its interests. URAP's designation as a target of these sanctions underscores the organization's impactful advocacy on behalf of the Uyghur community but highlights the effectiveness of URAP's efforts in challenging the PRC.

Conclusion

Effective advocacy must recognize that Uyghur repression extends well beyond the geographical boundaries of China, manifesting through an intricate network of surveillance, intimidation, and coercion targeting Uyghurs living abroad. Such tactics serve to silence dissent, deter activism, and maintain the Chinese state's control over Uyghur diaspora communities, even in democratic societies that guarantee freedom of expression. Addressing these forms of multifaceted repression requires an advocacy approach that integrates both domestic and international perspectives. Governments, civil society organizations, and technology companies must recognize that transnational repression operates across legal and political jurisdictions, blurring the traditional distinction between internal state actions and external interference. As a global issue, it demands coordinated international responses, including stronger digital protections, policy frameworks to deter foreign intimidation, and avenues for accountability. Only through such comprehensive and collaborative strategies can advocacy efforts effectively safeguard Uyghur communities worldwide and challenge the extraterritorial reach of China's repression.

Policy Recommendations

In light of the evidence presented, a series of recommendations has been formulated to reinforce institutional responses to transnational repression. URAP proposed the following recommendations for the Government of Canada, law enforcement, and civil society organizations at the domestic and international level to devise an informed and coordinated response to transnational repression.

a. **Government of Canada:** Create an integrated, systemic response that reinforces global accountability and safeguards human rights in Canada and beyond national borders to strengthen international coherence on transnational repression.

1. A unified, coordinated approach among nation-states is essential to effectively confront transnational repression. The Government of Canada should coordinate with other Governments to adopt clear and consistent definitions of transnational repression to ensure aligned legal, diplomatic, and policy responses, closing the loopholes that authoritarian regimes exploit to evade accountability.
2. Joint legal and economic measures, including coordinated sanctions, extradition policies, and shared legal frameworks, to prevent coercive actors from operating across weaker jurisdictions.
3. Global information strategies that harmonize public messaging, education, and awareness campaigns to counter state propaganda and disinformation.
4. Shared intelligence and collaborative research should underpin these efforts, enabling states to identify repression networks, anticipate risks, and implement targeted protections for vulnerable communities.



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b. **Civil Society:** Civil society organizations should strengthen collaboration across borders to build a unified front against transnational repression. By coordinating research, advocacy, and capacity-building, civil society can reinforce accountability mechanisms, close gaps left by state inaction, and create a resilient, globally coherent network to counter authoritarian repression.

1. A key priority involves enhancing funding mechanisms for civil society organizations, academic institutions, and community groups that engage in research and advocacy on transnational repression and its impact on diaspora communities.
2. Civil society organizations should develop shared definitions and monitoring frameworks to document and expose patterns of state intimidation, surveillance, and coercion.
3. Civil society should pursue joint advocacy and strategic litigation, leveraging complementary expertise in human rights law, technology, and diaspora protection to increase collective impact. Expanding into a jurisdictional coalition between NGOs, academia, labour groups, and the private sector can amplify awareness campaigns and apply sustained pressure on complicit corporations and policymakers.
4. Organizations should invest in digital security, survivor protection, and information-sharing mechanisms to safeguard activists and affected communities.

c. **Law Enforcement:** Law enforcement agencies in Canada play a critical role in identifying, preventing, and responding to acts of transnational repression (TNR). Strengthening their capacity is essential to ensure effective protection for targeted individuals and diaspora groups while also contributing to an infrastructure of prevention, victim support, and policy development.

1. Law enforcement agencies should develop specialized training programs to help officers recognize and respond to cases of transnational repression. Training should cover patterns of harassment, intimidation, and digital surveillance of diaspora communities, ensuring frontline personnel can identify such cases. Training should adapt to the complex nature of TNR.
2. Create clear, accessible channels for victims and targeted communities to report incidents of transnational repression safely.
3. Enhanced funding and improved coordination among the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Global Affairs Canada to ensure a whole-of-government approach.
4. Build stronger relationships with diaspora communities that are often the primary targets of transnational repression. Regular dialogue, community liaison programs, and culturally sensitive outreach.
5. Strengthen collaboration with cybersecurity units and education to detect and mitigate digital threats.
6. Canadian law enforcement should deepen cooperation with allied countries, Interpol, and international organizations to monitor and disrupt transnational networks that facilitate repression abroad.

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