

DANGEROUS LIAISONS:

**UK PARTNERSHIPS WITH CHINESE
POLICING INSTITUTIONS LINKED TO CRIMES
AGAINST HUMANITY IN XINJIANG**



**FREEDOM
FROM** EMPOWERING
SURVIVORS.
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LIVES
TORTURE

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE

Freedom from Torture is dedicated to healing and protecting people who have survived torture. We provide therapies to improve physical health, we medically document torture, and we provide legal and welfare help. We expose torture globally, we fight to hold torturing states and those that support them to account and we campaign for fairer treatment of torture survivors in the UK.

Through our Torture Accountability Programme, we work to expose torture in support of efforts to strengthen prevention, secure justice and ensure international protection for survivors of torture. Survivor expertise and voices are at the heart of this work.

For over 30 years, through our services, we have been helping survivors overcome their torture and live better, happier lives. The experiences of people who have survived torture drive and inform everything we do.

Cover image: A Xinjiang Police College webpage shows students at the college on parade.

Source: Xinjiang Police College website

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FOI	Freedom of Information
HPA	Hunan Police Academy
IBAP	International Police Assistance Brief
IFPEC	International Forum on Police Education and Cooperation
ILES	International Law Enforcement Studies
JIBC	Justice Institute of British Columbia
JIPH	Joint International Policing Hub
LPC	London Policing College
NPCC	National Police Chief's Council
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSJA	Overseas Security and Justice Assessment
PPSUC	People's Public Security University of China
QC	Queen's Council
The Met	The Metropolitan Police Service
UWL	University of West London
WMP	West Midlands Police
WYP	West Yorkshire Police
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps

Note on this report

In April 2022, following a request for comment on the findings of an investigation by Freedom from Torture, China references were removed from the website of the London Policing College. In parallel, the following statement was issued:

"In view of changing UK Government advice the London Policing College has suspended all activities involving police and police academic organisations from the People's Republic of China or their Ministry of Public Security".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Xinjiang, China's largest region, has become a byword for abuse. Repression of religious and ethnic minorities has been condemned across the globe. Mass abuses, amounting to crimes against humanity - including torture, forced labour, forced sterilisation and mass internment - are driven by policies to strip Uyghur and other mainly Muslim minorities of their religious and cultural identity. The aim of the authorities is to forcibly assimilate millions of people into China's majority Han culture. The police have been at the forefront of a horrifying campaign of violence and repression carried out under the guise of "counter-terrorism". This report reveals details of partnerships between the UK and police training institutions in China that are linked to atrocities in Xinjiang.

London Policing College (LPC) is a private UK company that provides police training internationally. An investigation by Freedom from Torture has uncovered evidence that LPC's Chinese partners include police training institutions with close connections to Xinjiang. Until April 2022, LPC's website contained details of declared partnerships with eight universities in China - at least some of which have ties to policing in Xinjiang. At the same time, the company, which is founded and run by former senior police officers, has enjoyed a close relationship with the UK police service. LPC names the London Metropolitan Police (the Met) as a partner. The Met and at least three other UK police forces have participated in LPC's programmes for China.

This report reveals details of an LPC-led project funded by UK aid money, via the British Council China, for a five-year partnership with Hunan Police Academy and Shanghai Police College. Freedom from Torture's investigation has found evidence of cooperation and training exchanges between Hunan Police Academy and Xinjiang Police College, an entity sanctioned by the USA for its role in human rights violations. Equally startling, is that LPC and Xinjiang Police College have been in direct contact through their joint participation in a Beijing-led international police education forum.

In 2021, the UK government echoed sentiments expressed across the globe when it described abuses in Xinjiang as being "*on an industrial scale*" and "*truly horrific*". As part of its response, the UK government issued guidance designed to ensure that British organisations are not complicit in, nor profiting from, human rights violations in the region. The use of taxpayers' money to fund a partnership with at least one Chinese police academy linked to Xinjiang indicates a stunning failure by the UK government to observe its own guidance and the values that should underpin that.

Freedom from Torture's investigation has uncovered wide-ranging evidence that another LPC partner - China's most elite national policing university, the Beijing-based People's Public Security University of China (PPSUC) - has multiple links to policing in Xinjiang. The university appears to take great pride in training and supplying personnel for police work in the region. Unsurprisingly however, the university does not mention that policing in Xinjiang involves brutal and systematic persecution of minority communities. PPSUC also co-operates with Xinjiang policing entities that are the target of sanctions by the UK or USA, for their role in human rights violations.

Within China, the government publishes regular propaganda describing Xinjiang as the “*main battlefield*” of China’s “*counter-terrorism*”. Public reporting in China by the PPSUC on its relationship with London Policing College, focuses heavily on counter-terrorism training, and learning about the UK’s “Prevent” strategy. The partnership appears at risk of being exploited by China to lend legitimacy to “counter-terrorism” policies which have seen minorities in Xinjiang sent to brutal internment camps for reasons as absurd as having a beard.

Mass repression of millions of people in Xinjiang requires a nationally resourced police force. Under a programme euphemistically entitled “Xinjiang Aid”, police from across China have been deployed to Xinjiang to enforce brutal policies in the region. The Chinese authorities make no secret of the existence of Xinjiang Aid, even if its real purpose is shrouded in doublespeak about regional “*development*” and “*stability*”. Freedom from Torture’s investigation found multiple references to the programme by Chinese state media, Xinjiang Police College and a policeman turned whistle-blower. The UK must acknowledge that British trained police in any part of China are at risk of participating in the perpetration of systematic torture and repression of minorities in Xinjiang.

At least four UK police forces have participated in LPC’s programmes for visiting Chinese policing delegates in the UK, apparently without any formal oversight. Despite its status as a private company, LPC has been able to engage informally with the UK’s Joint International Policing Hub (JIPH) on its China programmes. Under the National Police Chiefs’ Council, the JIPH is the UK’s central coordination point for overseas, non-operational policing deployments by the UK police service. Far from operating beneath the radar, LPC’s China programmes appear to have taken place with the knowledge, support and, at times, participation of the UK police.

It is mandatory for UK government or police service proposals for overseas police assistance to be accompanied by human rights risk assessments. However, this requirement appears to have been disregarded when police are supporting programmes led by a private actor. The British Council told Freedom from Torture that in the case of London Policing College’s UK government-funded China policing project, no human rights risk assessment had been carried out, despite requirements in government guidance, “*including where the engagement is undertaken by external agencies on behalf of a Department or agency and/or with UK funding or endorsement.*”

International capacity-building delivered in contexts where there is genuine political will to improve policing standards, including with respect to human rights, can potentially reap benefits. However, police training for countries such as China, where torture is used as a tool to achieve political goals, can afford unwarranted legitimacy and cover to abusive security forces. Indeed, China appears eager to portray the collaboration as evidence that their policing practices are endorsed by the UK.

In the context of egregious human rights violations perpetrated by police in Xinjiang, the risks posed by any UK-China police partnership cannot be underestimated. As an absolute minimum, any proposal for such partnerships should be treated with extreme caution and intense scrutiny. Links revealed in this report between LPC’s Chinese partners and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang make this crystal clear.

KEY FINDINGS

- ★ London Policing College (LPC) is a UK private company which provides police training internationally - including for China, where it has declared partnerships with eight universities, at least some of which have ties to policing in Xinjiang.
- ★ LPC has close ties to the UK police. Its founders and trainers include numerous former senior police officers. Its “contact us” webpage lists an address at the “Metropolitan Police Hayes Sports Club”, a venue run by serving and former Metropolitan police officers, for the benefit of the Metropolitan Police Service, which LPC names as a partner.
- ★ LPC has received UK Official Development Assistance funding via the British Council China for its partnerships with Shanghai Police College and Hunan Police Academy.
- ★ Hunan Police Academy declares that it has a cooperative relationship with Xinjiang Police College, which was sanctioned by the USA in 2019 for its role in human rights violations, and its website shows evidence of training exchanges between the two institutions.
- ★ Through its role as Vice-Chair of the Beijing-led “International Forum on Police Education and Cooperation”, LPC has been in direct contact with Xinjiang Police College. Both organisations were appointed to the forum’s Executive Council.
- ★ UK police forces, including the Metropolitan Police Service, Lancashire Constabulary, West Midlands Police and West Yorkshire Police have all hosted Chinese policing delegates during visits to the UK under LPC-led programmes.
- ★ LPC has collaborated with China’s Ministry of Public Security which is responsible for policing across China. The Ministry of Public Security plays a leading role in “Xinjiang Aid”, a national programme under which police reinforcements have been deployed to Xinjiang from across the country to enact the government’s brutal policies.
- ★ LPC partnered with China’s most elite national policing university, the People’s Public Security University of China (PPSUC). PPSUC both trains and supplies personnel for police work in Xinjiang.

- ✪ PPSUC engages in training cooperation with Xinjiang Police College and the Xinjiang Public Security Department, which was sanctioned by the USA for its role in human rights violations in 2020, as well as the Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, which was sanctioned by the UK in 2021.
- ✪ The Chinese government regularly describes Xinjiang as the “*main battlefield*” of China’s “*counter-terrorism*”. Public reporting by PPSUC on counter-terrorism collaboration with LPC appears to be used to support Chinese government propaganda that policies in Xinjiang are equivalent to global counter-terrorism work.
- ✪ No evidence has been provided to indicate that London Policing College, the British Council or the UK Police Service have carried out human rights risk assessments on LPC-led policing partnerships with China.

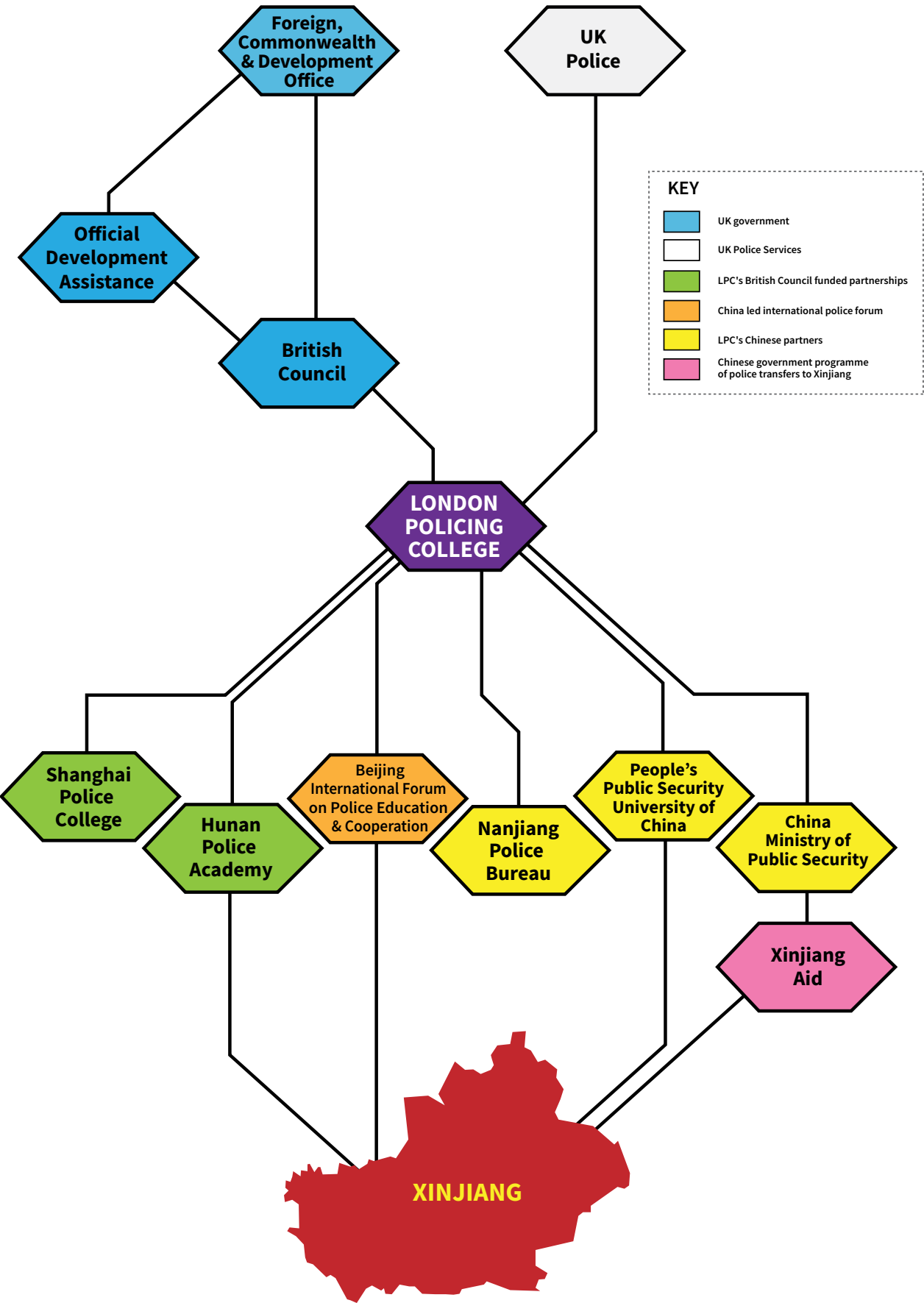
RESPONSES TO REQUESTS FOR COMMENT

In April 2022, Freedom from Torture received responses to requests for comment on the events described in this report from: the London Policing College; University of West London; the Metropolitan Police Service; West Yorkshire Police and the National Police Chiefs’ Council. Summaries of their responses are provided in the body of the report where relevant.

The British Council, Lancashire Constabulary and West Midlands Police did not respond to Freedom from Torture’s enquiries.

The People’s Public Security University of China, Hunan Police Academy, Nanjing Public Security Bureau, Xinjiang Police College and China’s Ministry of Public Security did not respond to Freedom from Torture’s enquiries.

London Policing College’s relationships with Chinese policing institutions, the UK government and UK police.



INTRODUCTION

The severe human rights violations in Xinjiang, in western China, are well known and well documented. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and an independent people's tribunal¹ have all talked of “crimes against humanity” against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the region.² The repression includes widespread torture. In 2021, the UK government announced a package of measures which were intended “to help ensure that British organisations, whether public or private sector, are not complicit in, nor profiting from” crimes committed. The measures were designed “to send a clear signal to China that these violations are unacceptable”³.

The scale of human rights violations led the UK to announce a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing hosted Winter Olympics, in February 2022.⁴ And yet, in parallel to this apparently strong stance against human rights abuses, the UK government has funded the London Policing College - a British company with close ties to the UK Police Service which partners with Chinese police training institutions linked to Xinjiang.

Though the London Policing College is a privately owned company, the contact address listed on its website is an establishment run for the benefit of the Metropolitan Police. Many of its team are former senior police officers. The College receives government funding and UK police have participated in its activities for China.

British links to China's police force - particularly during a period of intense and brutal crackdowns⁵ - raise serious human rights concerns, especially in a context where torture by police is widespread across the country.⁶ Via the British Council, the UK government sponsored a London Policing College led project including collaboration with two Chinese police colleges. These partnerships were agreed without human rights checks. At least one of the Chinese institutions has ties to Xinjiang.

Any overseas police assistance funded by the UK government is supposed to include human rights risk assessments. This is especially important in the context of China because of a nationally resourced programme of police transfers to Xinjiang, which means that police from any part of the country are at risk of supporting or participating in abuses in the region.

In addition to the British Council funded project, the London Policing College has engaged in other partnerships and initiatives in China which have direct links to policing in Xinjiang. Public reporting by Chinese partners on their relationship with the British training provider, in particular on the subject of counter-terrorism, suggests the association with London Policing College is being exploited as a propaganda tool. It supports a state-sanctioned narrative that the Chinese government's brutal response in Xinjiang is a necessary and appropriate form of “counter-terrorism”.

In Canada, a comparable programme was shut down in 2021 amidst concerns over potential links to human rights abuses. The provision of UK funding for policing partnerships with China means that the government risks being accused of complicity in the very abuses it purports to condemn.



Human rights monitors regularly document torture by China's Public Security Bureau.

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TORTURE BY POLICE IN CHINA

In recent years, the global spotlight on human rights in China has shifted to Xinjiang amidst reports of mass human rights violations against the region's ethnic and religious minorities. However, torture is widespread throughout China, with the police playing a key role as perpetrators.

In a 2015 report,⁷ Amnesty International documented the widespread practice of torturing suspects into forced confessions in China. The report concluded that China's criminal justice system relies heavily on such confessions as the basis of most convictions, *"providing an almost irresistible incentive for law enforcement agencies to obtain them by any means necessary"*.⁸ Amnesty described forms of torture and other ill-treatment as prevalent in all situations where individuals are deprived of their liberty.

Human Rights Watch noted:

"The Public Security Bureau, or police, remains the most powerful actor in the criminal justice system. Use of torture to extract confessions is prevalent, and miscarriages of justice are frequent."⁹

During the 2018 United Nations Universal Periodic Review of China, human rights and legal organisations expressed concern about the risk of torture in detention, including the torture of lawyers, activists, and human rights defenders¹⁰.

Analyses of medico-legal reports prepared by Freedom from Torture's expert doctors between 2012 and 2019¹¹ for seven Chinese nationals who had fled to the UK, indicate that in all cases torture was perpetrated by police. Examples of abuse include assault, sexual assault, and sexual torture, burning and cutting. The survivors had been detained and tortured for reasons including their religious beliefs, their perceived political affiliation, supporting Tibetan independence, and land disputes.

The prevalence of torture by police in China means that no police training should be considered by the UK without a thorough assessment of human rights risks. This should allow for, if necessary, disengaging from activities which may contribute to harms. Failure to put these measures in place risks providing structural support to a police force which regularly perpetrates torture.

“Before 2017, I had a normal, happy life. Xinjiang is a beautiful place. The people are lovely, the atmosphere was amazing. I was a student in [redacted - city in Xinjiang] and in [redacted - city in China] and was top of my class in my studies. But in 2017, after my arrest, after the camps... all of this changed”.

Uyghur survivor of a Xinjiang prison camp

Uyghurs celebrate the end of Ramadan in Xinjiang, where men have been sent to brutal detention camps for growing a beard.

© GREG BAKER/AFP via Getty Images

REPRESSION IN XINJIANG

“Internment camps, arbitrary detention, political re-education, forced labour, torture, forced sterilisation. All on an industrial scale. It is truly horrific.”

Dominic Raab, then UK Foreign Secretary, January 2021¹²

Repressive policies and brutality against Uyghur and other mainly Muslim minority communities in Xinjiang in recent years - including torture, forced labour, forced sterilisation, restrictions on movement, and mass internment - have provoked condemnation by governments across the globe.¹³ The police have been central to Beijing’s campaign to forcibly assimilate Xinjiang’s minorities into the majority Han culture with one language, culture, and allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party.¹⁴

According to the United Nations, more than a million people are estimated to have been held in internment camps in Xinjiang and detainees are routinely denied due process. Most have never been charged with any offence or been seen in a court of law.²² The BBC and others have reported on widespread and systematic torture.²³ Amnesty International asserts that “...torture and other ill-treatment are an inescapable aspect of daily life for every detainee.”²⁴ In order to enact its policies in Xinjiang, the Chinese government has engaged operational assistance from across the country, including through police transfers to the region, as described in more detail in the “Xinjiang Aid” section of this report.





Strike Hard

The Chinese Government's "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism",¹⁵ was launched in 2014, after a group of Uyghur separatists staged an attack at a railway station in Yunnan province.¹⁶ China's President Xi Jinping reportedly told local officials to respond "*with absolutely no mercy*".¹⁷

Under "Strike Hard" the number of people arrested in Xinjiang sky-rocketed. Analysis of the most recently available government data for 2017 and 2018 paints an alarming picture. Criminal arrests in Xinjiang accounted for one in five of all arrests in China in 2017, though the population comprises only around one in sixty of China's total.¹⁸ In 2017 and 2018 the number of arrests in the region was 70% higher than the combined figure for the preceding decade.¹⁹ Xinjiang courts handed down ten times more five-year or longer jail sentences in 2017 than in the previous year. In 2018 the number of court sentences continued to climb.²⁰

Human rights groups have documented the arbitrary nature of arrests and convictions under the crackdown.²¹

Upwards of a million people have been detained in Xinjiang's notorious "vocational education centres".

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Extracts from testimony of a Uyghur survivor of a Xinjiang prison camp

“At the time that I was arrested I was at home in Xinjiang. I had just returned from abroad.”

“I was taken to a police station first and then after a few hours I was taken to prison. They wouldn’t tell me why I was being taken. I was in prison for seven days, before they transferred me to the camp. They called it a ‘re-education camp’ but they didn’t teach us anything. I just sat in my cell, being monitored 24 hours a day. I was there for over a year.”

“After a while, they began to ask me questions. I had been abroad to study. They asked me why I’d been there. They began to torture me every day. They used a taser on me. They used the tiger chair on me. And this happened to a lot of the people I was there with. I saw a lot of terrible things.”

“The second time I was interrogated was about two months after the first interrogation. The room had changed this time. The chair now had electric wires on it and there were three policemen... Every time I was asked a question I was beaten. They also used a button to electrify the chair and I was tortured like this for about an hour and a half. I was asked questions like why I had gone abroad but they disagreed with my responses and then I was tortured.”

“The third time... Three policemen and two soldiers with guns pointed at me. I was blindfolded and taken to a basement, called a ‘black room,’ where I was hung, beaten and tortured for an entire seven days. I couldn’t even go to the toilet. When they finished after seven days I had to be carried back to my cell.”

OVERSEAS POLICING ASSISTANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The strong reputation of British security forces has long been exploited as a global export. UK police train counterparts in countries around the world as well as welcoming overseas officers to the UK. Training is carried out by various official police bodies, including the national College of Policing, regional police forces, Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Campaigners have repeatedly pointed out the risks when the UK provides police training to countries with poor human rights records.²⁵ Freedom from Torture has previously raised concerns that UK collaboration can afford unwarranted legitimacy and political cover to abusive security forces.²⁶ In late 2021, Police Scotland announced the termination of a 15-year training engagement with the Sri Lankan police, following an outcry over human rights abuses perpetrated by police in the country.²⁷

Where the government and state bodies - such as the UK police - are involved, mandatory processes are in place which purportedly ensure a degree of oversight and accountability for potential human rights impacts. These include requirements for government and police permissions and structured human rights assessments. However, these requirements do not apply to a private company engaged in the same type of service provision.

Sri Lanka's police force has long been associated with torture.

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This omission is highly problematic given that human rights risks remain.

Before undertaking overseas police training, the UK police service is required to seek authorisation from the Home Secretary.²⁸ Police officers providing non-operational assistance to other countries, whether carried out overseas or in the UK, are required to submit an International Police Assistance Brief (IPAB) to the Joint International Policing Hub.²⁹ The UK's government-established, College of Policing, which has standard-setting responsibilities, emphasises that all courses delivered at home or abroad should have both an IPAB and Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) assessment in place prior to commencement.³⁰

The OSJA Checklist for Capacity Building Overseas includes the requirement to “*identify risk including any human rights concerns about the institution/unit that will receive the assistance*” and “*consider whether there is any reputational or political risk*”.³¹

Many have argued that these measures are too limited, and are lacking in transparency.³² In the case of the Chinese police partnerships described in this report, however, there appears not even to be the weak protections that are included under the OSJA.

LONDON POLICING COLLEGE

The London Policing College (LPC) is founded and run by former senior police officers. It talks of its “*extensive partnerships*” with organisations including the Metropolitan Police Service and the National Crime Agency.³³ Its website lists its contact address as the “the Metropolitan Police Hayes Sports Club”³⁴, cementing the impression of the company's self-professed “*strong connection with Metropolitan Police Service*”.³⁵

LPC describes considerable UK policing expertise and experience of delivering police education programmes around the world.³⁶ However, despite its official-sounding name, the London Policing College is registered as a private limited company. Unlike the similarly named “College of Policing”, it is not a professional police service body.

According to its website, LPC has experience of delivering police training globally. It refers to international partnerships with police departments in Abu Dhabi and Dubai; the Royal Thai Police Academy; the Police Academy of Cambodia and the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, named after the former Saudi interior minister and located in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.³⁷

Up until April 2022, LPC's referred to partnerships with eight universities in China. LPC described “*formal partnerships*”³⁸ with the People's Public

Security University of China and the Criminal Investigation Police University of China, both under the direct control of the Ministry of Public Security, which is responsible for policing across the country. LPC also stated it collaborates with the Ministry of Public Security itself.

A People's Public Security University of China webpage pictures the elite institution.

Source: People's Public Security University of China website



LPC's engagement with a number of Chinese police training institutions linked to policing in Xinjiang is detailed in reports on the websites of some of the Chinese institutions involved. These websites provide evidence of cooperation, training and support to Xinjiang's own police training provider, Xinjiang Police College. In some cases, LPC's Chinese partners mention their direct delivery of training to police from Xinjiang and/or supplying police to the region.

LPC's links with the Chinese authorities appear friendly and close. In a tweet posted in November 2019, LPC reported on a *"Really interesting day of discussion at UWL [University of West London] with members of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security and the Chinese Embassy"*.³⁹ The tweet includes two hashtags *"#partnershipworking"* and *"#Britishcouncil"*, alluding to the College's relationships with a UK government body and the Chinese government ministry responsible for approximately 2 million police officers across the country.⁴⁰

Despite the potential human rights risks, the only reference on the LPC website to human rights appears to be a short course entitled *"Human Rights Police, Society and Law"*,⁴¹ which talks of making decisions *"which are effective and compliant with Human Rights legislation"*.⁴²

In response to Freedom from Torture's enquiries about their relationship with LPC, the Metropolitan Police Service (the Met) stated that they have no record of LPC as a supplier or customer or of any financial relationship. They stated that they do not have any control over the Metropolitan Police Hayes Sports Club but acknowledged that this address and images of Met officers on the LPC website appear to, *"imply that the MPS and LPC have a deep and close working relationship – which does not exist"*. The Met said they would take this matter up with LPC.

The Met did acknowledge hosting LPC and visiting Chinese policing delegates in the UK, as described in the "London Policing College and the UK Police" section of this report.

“Overall, the UK’s counter-terrorism strategies have adapted to the changes of its counter-terrorism situation and achieved relatively good results so far. In particular, the concept of preventative intervention... is especially important to maximally weaken the impact of terrorism.”⁴³

Translated from a report on the website of the People’s Public Security University of China, describing learning points during an LPC hosted visit to the UK.

COLLABORATION ON “COUNTER-TERRORISM”

The People’s Public Security University of China (PPSUC) is an elite national police training institution that sits directly under the Ministry of Public Security and plays a prominent role in China’s security apparatus. The university trains both police leaders and “backbone” officers. Information on the PPSUC website suggests that counter-terrorism training formed a significant element of what London Policing College has described as their “formal partnership”. PPSUC’s extensive connections to policing in Xinjiang, where - under the guise of counter-terrorism - the Chinese government is committing mass human rights violations, are evidenced on its website, as described in this section of the report.

Fuelling propaganda

“The Chinese government argues that it is countering terrorism, separatism and extremism in Xinjiang in an attempt to legitimise its actions there.”

Extract from UK Foreign Affairs Committee report, “Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond”⁴⁴

In October 2019, at the invitation of the London Policing College, a delegation from the People’s Public Security University (PPSUC), visited the UK. The visit was authorised by China’s Ministry of Public Security and the delegation was headed by the Dean of the University’s School of National Security and Counter Terrorism. An extended report on the visit, available on the PPSUC website, gives some insight into the nature of the relationship between the British and Chinese police training providers.

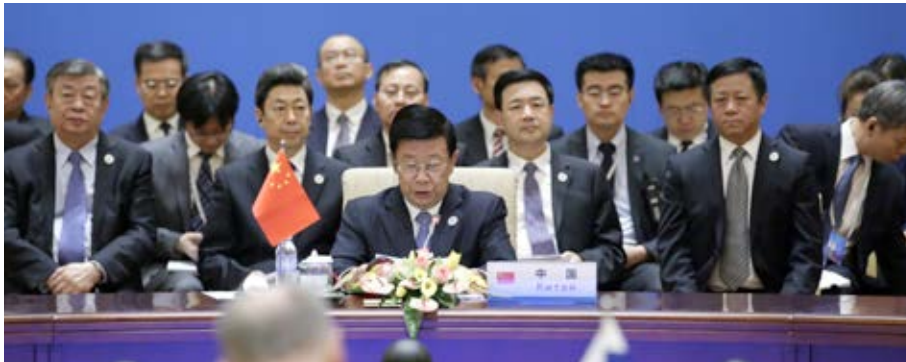
In its report, PPSUC emphasises, above all else, the counter-terrorism element of LPC’s work. The UK visit is described as laying the foundation for the university’s study program in the UK and as having two main purposes; first, to understand the LPC’s capability in training foreign police, and second, to understand the counter-terrorism situation in the UK, “especially the main approaches that the UK and its law-enforcement agencies have adopted in the prevention and fight against terrorism.”⁴⁵

The PPSUC reports that LPC’s “faculty” includes senior UK police officers, such as recipients of the Queen’s Police Medal and the Order of the British Empire, with long service records in the police.⁴⁶ The report creates the impression of high-level endorsement, and indeed participation, in LPC’s activities by the UK police.

Within China, senior officials put a premium on enhancing international collaboration to support the country’s domestic “counter-terrorism” initiatives.⁴⁷ The government frequently refers to Xinjiang as the “main battlefield” of China’s “counter-terrorism”.⁴⁸ This is reflected by a “counter-terror-

ism” policy response which singles out Xinjiang from all of China’s provinces and special administrative regions.⁴⁹

While there has been evidence of cause for real concern by Beijing,⁵⁰ a “counter-terrorism” narrative has been exploited to justify entirely disproportionate and indiscriminate repression and abuse - including widespread torture - of Uyghur and other mainly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.⁵¹



China’s Minister of Public Security has urged the country’s public security departments to prevent “terrorism” from “from the root”.

© Jason Lee - Pool/Getty Images

Beijing’s propaganda machine and Xinjiang

The Chinese government frames the situation in Xinjiang as a response to the “*three evil forces*”: separatism, terrorism, and extremism.⁵² China’s domestic propaganda is central to its efforts to control the narrative and it is well placed to do so as one of the most restrictive media environments in the world. News websites and social media platforms are strictly controlled. Chinese journalists and media organisations operate under tight restrictions, and risk arrest and legal attacks if they go against the official line.⁵³

State media reporting on the situation in Xinjiang consistently relays similar themes - the fight against terrorism, the heroic sacrifices made by police in Xinjiang, and a preferred narrative of the crackdown as part of global counter-terrorism efforts.⁵⁴

China only began framing its actions in Xinjiang as counter-terrorism in the post 9/11 period, using the global precedent set by countries including the US, in perpetrating abuses in the name of the “war on terror”.⁵⁵ Beijing has stuck to this narrative as its central line of defence against international criticism.

“According to Chinese government policy, Uyghurs are systematically and collectively defined as “terrorists” ... And many of my fellow police officers were ready to accept these explanations to repress the Uyghurs. This is because they believed that, even if a Uyghur had not yet committed any terrorist offenses, it was only a matter of time before they do.”⁵⁶

**Testimony at the Uyghur Tribunal
from a former policeman who served
in Xinjiang in 2018**

Referring to learning from UK counter-terrorism strategy, the PPSUC report describes the need to empower law enforcement agencies, “...through legislation to ensure that they could intervene in terrorism development at an early stage” and that “support should be given to localized interventions that are carried out on those groups of people who are vulnerable to extremism”,⁵⁷ apparently a reference to the UK “Prevent” strategy.⁵⁸

China’s abuses in Xinjiang are carried out under the guise of “counter-terrorism” and Beijing’s “preventative repression” policy.⁵⁹ In this context, there appears to be a significant risk that learning and exchange on counter-terrorism with a British provider with close ties to the UK police and government, is being exploited to legitimise abusive policies targeting minorities, and align them with global counter-terrorism efforts.

Research into abuse of criminal proceedings in Xinjiang has noted: “Intellectual exchanges with China risk lending legitimacy to the idea of general comparability between the legal systems in China and elsewhere. The propaganda risks from international cooperation are highest in the fields of criminal law, national security and counter terrorism”⁶⁰.

In its 2021 report, “Never Again: The UK’s responsibility to act on atrocities in Xinjiang and beyond”, the cross-party Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK parliament raised concerns about connections between UK universities or private actors with Chinese institutions linked to repression in Xinjiang, stating that, “UK organisations—whether private companies or universities—should take much greater care in investigating those they work with.”⁶¹

Despite the risks, reporting by PPSUC on an online meeting with LPC in December 2020 refers to “positive progress” in the two organisations’ cooperation as well as support from the UK to develop the relationship between the two institutions into “a model of Chinese-British law enforcement cooperation”.⁶²

A PPSUC webpage shows the university’s President in a meeting with LPC via video-conferencing in December 2020.

Source: People’s Public Security University of China website



Chinese partner's links to Xinjiang

Multiple reports on the website of the People's Public Security University of China (PPSUC) mention the university's involvement in Xinjiang. In a speech delivered in November 2020, the PPSUC President lists elements of the university's work including *"training and supplying"* personnel for police work in Tibet and Xinjiang.⁶³

A May 2019 report on the PPSUC website, provides details of the first national training course for police drone instructors and examiners organised by the university. According to the report, *"Students from all provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps participated in the one-week study training."*⁶⁴ Drones are reported to be one of the means by which China is maintaining its mass surveillance operation in Xinjiang.⁶⁵

In March 2021, the UK Foreign Secretary announced the first UK sanctions for gross human rights violations in Xinjiang. The Public Security Bureau of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, *"a state-run organisation responsible for security and policing in areas administered by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps"* was included on the sanctions list.⁶⁶



A Xinjiang Police College webpage shows a "counter-terrorism" law lecture at the College.

Source: Xinjiang Police College website

Xinjiang Police College makes direct reference to its connections with PPSUC, and vice-versa.⁶⁷ The university refers to the establishment of its *"correspondence education station"* in Xinjiang. The Xinjiang Public Security Department, which is sanctioned by the USA for its role in human rights violations, is named as the correspondence station's *"supporting unit"*.⁶⁸

London Policing College's direct link to Xinjiang

Until April 2022, London Policing College's website stated that it was a Vice-Chair of the Beijing-led "International Forum for Police Education Cooperation" (IFPEC). LPC asserts that it was elected to this position *"through the development of the work with the British Council"*.⁶⁹ In this role, LPC joined Xinjiang Police College⁷⁰ on IFPEC's Executive Council. Xinjiang Police College was sanctioned by the USA in 2019 for involvement in human rights violations in the region.⁷¹

A PPSUC webpage shows the Executive Council of the International Forum on Police Education Cooperation, Beijing.

Source: People's Public Security University of China website



The People's Public Security University of China is the first Chair of IFPEC and hosts the permanent secretariat in Beijing. In line with a drive from within China to enhance international policing collaboration to support the country's domestic "counter-terrorism" initiatives, IFPEC's aims include to *"maximize the exchanges and cooperation between member institutes...and enhance cultural mutual trust and mutual understanding among countries and regions"*.⁷²

The theme of the forum's 2020 annual meeting, to be hosted in Beijing was "The state of international terrorism, counter strike and preventative strategies"⁷³ A social media post in September 2021 shows an image of LPC and Xinjiang Police College representatives at the forum's 12th annual meeting, held via video conferencing.⁷⁴

LONDON POLICING COLLEGE AND THE BRITISH COUNCIL

“We have worked closely with the [British] Council to support them in focusing their activity to align strategically with Government priorities in areas where they can be most effective”.⁷⁵

Dominic Raab, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. May 2021

Funding from the British Council for a London Policing College-led partnership with China’s Hunan Police Academy and Shanghai Police College, was provided under the UK China Belt and Road (BRI) Education Partnership Initiative.⁷⁶ The initiative is described as a *“funding venture designed to forge sustainable, innovative and multilateral partnerships between educational institutions and industry in the UK, China and, primarily, BRI countries.”* The funding decision-making bodies are listed as the British Council, the Ministry of Education China and higher education representatives from both countries.⁷⁷

The British Council

The British Council is a registered charity and an executive Non-Departmental Public Body of the UK government which operates in over 100 countries with a focus on artistic, cultural and educational opportunities. It is a vehicle for the extension of UK “soft power” across the globe, strategically aligning its work to international aims set out by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Around 85% of the British Council’s income comes from its own activities, contracts and partnerships. The other 15% is made up of Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided by the FCDO.⁷⁸ The UK’s Foreign Secretary accounts for the activities and performance of the British Council in Parliament.⁷⁹ In China, the British Council has offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing.⁸⁰



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and then Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in 2021. The Foreign Secretary accounts for the activities of the British Council in Parliament.

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Of six proposals which were awarded funding, only the London Policing College (LPC) project relates to police cooperation and LPC is the only lead organisation that is a private company. All other leads are UK universities. Only the proposal title, “Developing policing cooperation, education and research between the UK police, China (Hunan and Shanghai Police Academies) and the University of West London”, makes a UK university connection.⁸¹ The reference to the UK police implies official UK Police Service involvement, and raises questions about their role in the project.

The UK China Belt and Road (BRI) Education Partnership Initiative, under which the LPC police project sits, is sponsored by Official Development Assistance (ODA). ODA is funded by UK taxpayers’ money and, according to government guidelines, should be used to promote economic development and welfare of developing countries.⁸⁶

In July 2021, in response to a Freedom of Information request, the British Council informed Freedom from Torture that a grant of £71,000 for the

Belt and Road Initiative

“I want to offer London’s world class expertise in project financing and the associated legal, professional and technical skills as a partner of choice...”

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, at the Belt and Road Forum, Beijing, 2019.⁸²

Under Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, is at the heart of China’s foreign policy to propel the country’s development. At an estimated cost of over one trillion dollars, the Chinese government is investing in infrastructure projects across Asia and beyond.⁸³ More than 100 countries from almost all continents have signed agreements with China to cooperate in BRI projects - including railways, highways and other infrastructure projects.⁸⁴ While some non-participating Western governments, and especially the USA, have voiced their concerns about the global expansion of China’s economic and political influence, British foreign policy appears to take a more cooperative approach. Remarks by UK government officials have frequently alluded to the commercial opportunities offered by BRI and have sought to position the UK as the world’s leading exporter of financial and professional services, well placed to support BRI needs.⁸⁵

LPC-led project was made for a five-year academic collaboration.⁸⁷ The British Council stated that the project would run from 2019 to 2023 for students and academics from Hunan and Shanghai Police Academies, as well as the Royal Police Cadet Academy of Thailand. An additional institution, The Police Academy of Cambodia, was included after the initial proposal was accepted. The project has significant reach aiming to target:

- 1250 academics and 30,000 students through virtual online engagement
- 325 students on international courses
- 95 academics and 50 students on exchange

According to official guidance, an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) assessment is required for all proposals for overseas security and justice assistance work by the British government, its departments and agencies *“including where the engagement is undertaken by external agencies on behalf of a Department or agency and/or with UK funding or endorsement.”*⁸⁸ The British Council advised Freedom from Torture that no OSJA assessment has been carried out in relation to the LPC-led police education project, despite the use of UK aid money.⁸⁹

The absence of an OSJA assessment raises significant concerns about a lack of human rights oversight. This omission also raises the question of whether the government is in breach of its own guidelines by allowing the project to go ahead without scrutinising potential human rights risks.

In response to Freedom from Torture’s request for comment on the findings of this report:

- The British Council did not respond.
- LPC stated, *“All our activities have been properly authorised and assessed”*. However, they did not provide further details.
- The University of West London (UWL) stated that it had been assured by LPC, *“that it undertook to complete formal Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) risk assessments when working with Chinese Police Universities on programmes”*.

Not only does UWL’s statement appear to contradict the British Council’s statement in July 2021, it is not clear how a private company could conduct an OSJA which is an internal government-led assessment.

UWL also stated that they have not and will not engage *“in partnerships with policing institutions in China that or could enable crimes against humanity in the Xinjiang region or elsewhere”*. They told Freedom from Torture that the involvement of UWL in the British Council sponsored project was *“limited to the attendance at conferences and the provision of meeting rooms for leadership events and cultural visits”*.

XINJIANG AID: A NATIONAL POLICE EFFORT

“This vast apparatus of state repression could not exist if a plan was not authorised at the highest levels”⁹⁰

Sir Geoffrey Nice, QC, at the Uyghur Tribunal, 2021.

The Uyghur Tribunal hearings were chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, who led the prosecution of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic

© Freedom from Torture

In 2021, London was the venue for an initiative termed the “Uyghur Tribunal” by its organisers. A series of hearings was organised, without UK government backing, in an attempt to gather evidence on allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang.⁹¹ Thirty witnesses were called upon to provide testimony to an eight-member panel chaired by British barrister, Geoffrey Nice QC,⁹² at the request of Dolkun Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress.⁹³ In its judgement, the tribunal found that crimes against humanity, including torture, as well as genocide through the systematic suppression of Uyghur births, have taken place.⁹⁴



Included in the hearings was the account of a former serving police officer, who was deployed to Xinjiang in 2018 from a province in mainland China. The defector reported that during his term in the region, as many as 150,000 police recruits were sent to Xinjiang from across China, attending training on arrival on *“how to deal with the Uyghurs.”*⁹⁵

According to the former policeman’s testimony, the recruitment drive was part of the Chinese government’s policy of “Building Xinjiang”, facilitated by a nationwide “Xinjiang Aid” programme. Under Xinjiang Aid, offices were established in provinces across China to aid recruitment of various public sector professionals including police officers.⁹⁶ The cross-provincial assistance programme raises the risk that police trained anywhere in China may subsequently be deployed to Xinjiang.

A Uyghur survivor of torture from Xinjiang told Freedom from Torture, *“We knew they were sending cops from other parts of China. In the camps they were local cops, but in the police station there were cops from other places. They were transferred from other places”.*

These testimonies align with reports on various Chinese language websites. One 2016 report on the website of the Communist Party of China refers to a member of Xinjiang’s public security department extolling the importance of public security aid to the region and stating the need to expand this initiative. The report also refers to the role of the Ministry of Public Security and the *“public security organs in fraternal provinces”* in sending comrades to Xinjiang.⁹⁷

In a 2020 report, Xinjiang Police College refers to the arrival of Xinjiang Aid *“cadres”*, at an important time when the college was making plans for the establishment of a dedicated course in counter-terrorism.⁹⁸ The college also describes sending its own teachers out on exchange visits to other public security colleges so that their contribution can be greater on return to Xinjiang.⁹⁹

Combined with indications of Xinjiang’s mass police recruitment drive,¹⁰⁰ these reports indicate that Beijing’s policies in Xinjiang are resourced by police officers and training institutions from across China. They support the former policeman’s testimony at the Uyghur Tribunal of the existence of cross-provincial police transfers to Xinjiang.

The former policeman described *“arrest rounds”* as a first duty for officers arriving in Xinjiang, referring to his own participation in a *“round”* in which 300,000 Uyghurs were arrested.¹⁰¹ He said that the restrictive environment in Xinjiang discouraged officers from committing to long stays, suggesting that regular reinforcements were required.

The whistle-blower described torture by police in Xinjiang as routine and systematic. He referred to denial of food, sexual violence, electrocutions, and waterboarding as methods used to extract purported confessions. His testimony is in line with other reports of torture that have emerged from Xinjiang in recent years.¹⁰²

HUNAN POLICE ACADEMY AND XINJIANG

Hunan Police Academy is the provincial police training provider for Hunan Province, a region in southern China with a population of 67 million, the same population size as the UK. Ninety-five per cent of the college's graduates are recruited into the police force. *"In-depth co-operation"* with public security bureaus in the province sees the college playing a direct role in operational policing.

A Hunan Police Academy webpage shows senior police officers at the academy in discussion with LPC in 2019.

Source: Hunan Police Academy website



A 2015 report by Human Rights Watch outlines cases of torture in Hunan and shows that according to an analysis of court records, Hunan was reported to have the second highest count of torture allegations by province in China.¹⁰³

Hunan Police Academy (HPA) emphasises its ties with its counterpart Xinjiang Police College, mentioning their *"friendly co-operation"*. HPA also praises its relationship with the London Policing College in the UK, saying that such engagements have extended the international influence of Hunan province's public security education.¹⁰⁴ In 2019, HPA talked of its work with the London Policing College (LPC) including *"short-term training and exchange programs"* taking place between 2019-2023, and praised the British partner's reputation in policing fields including counter-terrorism. LPC reportedly expressed their hope to develop *"a joint talent training model with the strong support of the British Council."*¹⁰⁵

Signs of the *"friendly cooperation"* between Hunan and Xinjiang police academies are indicated by a report on the HPA website relating to the deployment of an official from HPA to Xinjiang in 2017, as part of a Ministry of Public Security initiative. The report states that the *"counterterrorism struggle in southern Xinjiang is long lasting, complex, sharp and very intense"* and details the Ministry of Public Security's first training course



in Xinjiang, on planning “mutual aid”, attended by 100 police officers trained in combat.¹⁰⁶

A Xinjiang Police College webpage shows students at the college “ready to go”.

Source: Xinjiang Police College website

A 2016 report describes a training course on policing in practice, held at HPA. The course was attended by seven officers from five provinces including Xinjiang as well as 180 students from across China.¹⁰⁷

Evidence of cooperation between HPA and its counterpart in Xinjiang, raise the risk that the British Council funded project could be providing indirect support to policing in Xinjiang. The UK has condemned human rights abuses, sanctioned a police body,¹⁰⁸ and issued specific guidance for UK businesses with direct or indirect links to Xinjiang, all the while sponsoring partnership with an entity linked to policing in the region.

In response to enquiries about the British Council funded partnership with Hunan Police Academy and Shanghai Police College:

- London Policing College told Freedom from Torture that activities under the project, “cannot be construed as training. They are about the open exchange of information and ideas.”
- The University of West London agreed that Freedom from Torture’s assertion that the British Council sponsored project includes provision of training to Shanghai Police College and Hunan Police Academy was “correct”.
- The British Council did not respond to a request for comment.

THE UK, CHINA AND XINJIANG

“Today we are announcing a range of new measures to send a clear message that these violations of human rights are unacceptable, and to safeguard UK businesses and public bodies from any involvement or linkage with them. This package will help make sure that no British organisations, Government or private sector, deliberately or inadvertently, profit from or contribute to the human rights violations against the Uyghurs or other minorities in Xinjiang.”¹⁰⁹

Dominic Raab, then UK Foreign Secretary, 2021

The United Kingdom recognises China as a human rights country of concern, reflecting the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. The UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s (FCDO) Human Rights and Democracy report for 2020, published in July 2021, describes an increase in grave abuses, including torture in Xinjiang.¹¹⁰ It reports widespread harassment and intimidation of lawyers working on civil rights cases, journalists, and human rights defenders. In recognition of these abuses, the UK expressed its determination to continue leading international efforts to hold China to account on priority issues, including Hong Kong and Xinjiang

In January 2021, the UK Foreign Secretary announced measures to ensure British organisations, whether public or private sector, are not complicit in, nor profiting from, the human rights violations in Xinjiang.¹¹¹

Included in the measures were:

- New guidance to UK business setting out the specific risks faced by companies with links to Xinjiang and underlining the challenges of effective due diligence.
- Guidance and support for all UK public bodies to exclude suppliers where there is sufficient evidence of human rights violations in supply chains.
- A Minister-led campaign of business engagement to reinforce the need for UK businesses to take action to address risk.

Specific guidance provided for UK businesses with links to China states that *“businesses that directly or indirectly provide goods and services to authorities in Xinjiang, or that have supply chain links to the region, are at risk of unintentionally facilitating or being otherwise complicit in human rights violations.”*¹¹²

Police in Xinjiang play an instrumental role in the human rights violations perpetrated in the region.¹¹³ In this context, a UK company providing

training and support to police academies which have ties to Xinjiang raises serious concerns.

The UK Foreign Secretary is ultimately accountable for the activities of the British Council to Parliament. The provision of UK Official Development Assistance to train Chinese police institutions linked to Xinjiang, without oversight of human rights risks, appears to be inconsistent with the UK's own guidance.

In response to Freedom from Torture's enquiries about the 'UK-China-Global Education Partnership Fund - Police Education Initiative': The University of West London (UWL) stated that "*Since January 2021 and following the UK Government's advice, UWL and LPC withdrew from all collaborative activity in China*".

LPC told Freedom from Torture that that they have not been involved in "*commercial activities with police academies or universities in China*" since 2019. Evidence detailed in this report indicates that LPC's engagement with Chinese police institutions carried on at least into late 2021.

The British Council, in response to a Freedom of Information request in July 2021, stated that the LPC led project was running from 2019-2023. At that time, the British Council said they were reviewing the project's targets "*in light of covid*".

Protestors in London call for a boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games amid abuses in Xinjiang.

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via Getty Images



LONDON POLICING COLLEGE AND THE UK POLICE

A Hunan Police Academy webpage shows police officers from Hunan Police Academy and London's Tower Hamlets exchanging gifts in London during an LPC hosted visit.

Source: Hunan Police Academy website



The Joint International Policing Hub (JIPH), sits under the International Coordination Committee of the UK's National Police Chiefs' Council.¹¹⁴ It is responsible for coordinating the UK's overseas police assistance, to ensure compliance with government policy¹¹⁵.

In July 2021 in response to a Freedom of Information request, the British Council told Freedom From Torture that the JIPH had not been formally notified of the London Policing College (LPC) led project with Hunan and Shanghai police colleges, but quoted the LPC as saying that their project team had “fully engaged” with the JIPH when participants came from China to the UK, and “briefed [JIPH] on the project”.¹¹⁶ This hints at the close but informal relationship between the UK police and a private training provider.

Despite the involvement of government funding and of the UK Police Service, the formal oversight and safeguards required by a state-led initiative appear to be absent. In response to enquiries about the project, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) told Freedom from Torture that they “do not hold any information on this project in any of its IPAB referrals”. The International Police Assistance Brief (IPAB) is the formal approval process for UK overseas police assistance proposals.

There are indications of multiple links between LPC and the UK police, including through UK police participation in LPC-led international policing partnerships and initiatives. The annual UK-based “International Police Education Conference” led by LPC and sponsored by the British Council, ¹¹⁷ regularly features senior UK police figures, including senior officers from the Metropolitan Police, and the Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council, as keynote speakers. ¹¹⁸

In October 2019, LPC posted a series of tweets detailing a visit they hosted of police officers from Nanjing Municipal Public Security Bureau (PSB) to the UK, which included interactions with UK police. ¹¹⁹

In 2015, Human Rights Watch published a report about police torture in China, documenting incidents across the country. According to analysis of court records, Jiangsu Province, the home of Nanjing Public Security Bureau, was reported to have the fourth highest count of torture allegations by province in China.¹²⁰

A post by “West Midlands Police Learning” twitter handle , in October 2019, reads: *“Midlands Region Tactical Training, Proud to host the @LonPolCol and Senior Executive team Police delegates from the Nanjing Public Safety Bureau. Staff showcased British policing and our gold standard training to police chiefs”*.¹²¹

The post also tags three other regional police forces: Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Mercia. A separate twitter post reveals West Yorkshire Police also hosted the Nanjing officers, *“sharing models of neighbourhood policing”*.¹²²

Interactions facilitated by LPC with other UK regional police forces, including Lancashire, as well as the London Metropolitan Police, pepper reports by Hunan Police Academy about its UK visits.¹²³ A twitter post by West Midlands Police reveals that, in addition to the officers from Nanjing Public Security Bureau, they had also hosted LPC and visiting Hunan Police Academy delegates at their Tactical Training Centre in July 2019.¹²⁴

London Policing College is not operating beneath the radar to develop partnerships in countries with poor human rights records. In fact, LPC appears to work with the knowledge, support, and, at times, participation, of the UK police. While the human rights risks of overseas policing partnerships are not removed by LPC’s status as a private company, that status could be used to circumvent already weak human rights checks.

In response to Freedom from Torture’s request for comment on these events:

The Metropolitan Police stated that there is no *“formal agreement”* in place regarding their hosting of LPC and visiting Chinese delegates in the UK. They described these arrangements as *“purely a courtesy”* during which the Met has *“showcased elements of its work”*. The Met emphasised that this was not training and no training was undertaken. They also stated that the Met does this for other visiting law enforcement agencies, though they did not specify which agencies or whether this was arranged with LPC or another private company involved in the provision of international police training.

West Yorkshire Police stated that they *“do not work with or endorse the organisation called the London Policing College”* and that an LPC led visit of Chinese police officers to West Yorkshire Police was hosted by a local Police Commander.

West Midlands Police and Lancashire Constabulary did not respond to Freedom from Torture’s enquiries.

THE CANADA COMPARISON

“Are these Canadian-educated officers committing human rights violations in China? Are they ending up in Hong Kong, where the democratic government has effectively been dismantled by Beijing with the support of police actions? Could they work in Xinjiang to arbitrarily detain Muslims in “re-education camps” in the name of anti-terrorism initiatives? May they suppress freedom of thought in Tibet? Or, could the recruits facilitate the disappearance of journalists and businessmen who fall out of favour with a corrupt official?”¹²⁵

Quote in a “Business in Vancouver” article on police training provided to China. The training programme has since been cancelled

In its online profile, Hunan Police Academy refers to overseas partnerships with two police training providers- the London Policing College (LPC) and the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC). In April 2022, LPC announced a suspension of all their China policing partnerships “*in line with government guidance*” issued in January 2021. Cancellation of the Canada hosted programme was precipitated by concerns about human rights and espionage in 2021.¹²⁶

In January 2021, “Business in Vancouver” published an article on cooperation between the JIBC, which includes a police academy, and China’s Public Security Bureau.¹²⁷ From 2013 onwards the institute trained nearly 2,000 Chinese students, recruits and officials destined to become law enforcement officers, border agents and prison guards.¹²⁸

The article noted: “*Despite JIBC having partnered with one of the world’s most authoritarian regimes, whose criminal justice systems enable widespread human rights violations, the ILES [International Law Enforcement Studies] program had operated with limited guiding principles and oversight for such considerations.*”¹²⁹

The JIBC programme included recruits from the People’s Public Security University of China, with which LPC declared a formal partnership. Similarly, LPC partners Hunan Police Academy and Jiangxi Police College, are amongst a number of provincial police training institutions that sent recruits to Vancouver. However, unlike LPC’s work with China, all training was hosted by JIBC on Canadian soil. The programme was widely criticised before being cancelled, as both a risk to human rights and a source of potential espionage.

Alarm was expressed about the risk of Canadian educated police recruits going on to commit human rights abuses in China, including in the name of so-called anti-terror initiatives and against perceived critics of the Chinese government.¹³⁰

Following a vote in the Canadian parliament which declared China was committing genocide in Xinjiang,¹³¹ a retired police chief on the JIBC board called for an end to the police academy’s China programme, “*Because it is, in fact, the police officers in that state who are the actors in that activity that our Parliament has just condemned*”¹³²

In June 2021, British Columbia’s Ministry of Advanced Education responded to a request for information about the status of the China programme by stating it was closed and that no programme had been in operation since November 2019 (the global pandemic likely had some impact on this timeline).¹³³

JIBC minutes of a board meeting in March 2021, three months before this disclosure, after the media exposé, are publicly accessible. They show discussion by the board centred on areas including: defining problematic behaviour from another state prior to engagements; guidance on human rights; risk assessment and how a country’s human rights record affects decisions on whether to conduct training.¹³⁴

Police officers on patrol in Kashgar, Xinjiang.

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CONCLUSION

In recognition of the scale of the human suffering in Xinjiang, the UK government has been vociferous in its condemnation of China's actions in the region. Alongside this criticism, the government has issued guidance to UK businesses deemed at risk of complicity in human rights abuses. These are laudable moves. However, their credibility is called into question by the simultaneous use of UK taxpayers' money to fund a partnership with Chinese police academies that appears devoid of human rights checks.

Publicly available evidence shows that a number of Chinese police academies with direct links to Xinjiang have received UK training or support. This includes at least one police academy which is part of a project funded by the UK government and involves the UK police. Not only does this indicate failure by the UK government and police to ensure implementation of adequate human rights checks, it also raises broader questions about the government's effective monitoring of the application of Xinjiang human rights guidance by UK businesses.

Widespread reporting on torture in China should ring alarm bells for any UK police training provider. Grave abuses carried out in line with Beijing's brutal policies in Xinjiang are enforced by police deployed from across the country under "Xinjiang Aid". This is a red flag indicating that UK trained police from any part of China could support or participate in the perpetration of systematic torture and repression of minorities in Xinjiang. In particular, the Chinese government's unequivocal positioning of its response in Xinjiang as "counter-terrorism" means that any UK collaboration in this area is at risk of being used to support Beijing's campaign of violence.

The risks of the UK contributing to human rights abuses through police assistance for China are clear. Any overseas police assistance proposal that involves the UK government, police, or British companies must acknowledge and account for human rights risks. Failure to do so may see the UK stand accused of turning a blind eye to torture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

British Council

- Conduct a review of all British Council sponsored projects in China in line with the UK's human rights obligations and human rights guidance on Xinjiang.
- Institute a review into the failure to conduct an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment on the 'UK-China-Global Education Partnership Fund - Police Education Initiative' and make the findings public.

UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

- Ensure that any overseas police assistance funded by UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) - regardless of which entity delivers the training - meets with guidelines for the provision of ODA, including through an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment with reference to relevant country guidance issued by the UK.
- Make all Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessments transparent and accessible to the UK Parliament and the public, with permissions for justifiable redactions.
- Require UK companies providing overseas security training to conduct robust human rights due diligence, and provide transparent public reporting.
- Review the implementation of Xinjiang human rights guidance by UK businesses.

National Police Chiefs' Council

- Ensure that all overseas police training and support taking place with the participation of UK police is subject to human rights risk assessments and relevant permissions.
- Require that, as a condition of engagement with the UK police, private actors carrying out overseas police assistance are conducting rigorous human rights assessments on all service provision and publicly reporting on their efforts to do so.
- Incorporate assessment of third-party human rights due diligence into Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessments and International Police Assistance Briefs in any engagement with private actors involved in overseas police assistance.

UK Police Service

- Ensure that any UK Police Service support for, or involvement in, overseas policing assistance programmes led by private actors is subject to the same scrutiny and human rights oversight as police led proposals.

London Policing College

- Undertake robust human rights due diligence on all international partnerships and report publicly on these assessments.
- Provide a company human rights policy that is publicly accessible.

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