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## US Lawmakers Push SEC to Order Audit of Shein IPO Over Uyghur Forced Labor Fears

By Arriana McLymore, Reuters, 2023.5.1

A bipartisan group of two dozen U.S. representatives was calling for the Securities and Exchange Commission to halt the initial public offering of Chinese-founded fast-fashion giant Shein until it verifies it does not use forced labor, according to a letter seen by Reuters.

The U.S. lawmakers want the SEC to mandate Shein to independently audit and verify “that the company does not use Uyghur forced labor as a condition of being registered to issue securities in the United States,” the letter said.

Sources have said Shein is eyeing an IPO in the U.S. this year.

The rapid growth of the cheap fashion firm is

attracting political scrutiny in several countries where leaders say the retailer is threatening homegrown businesses.

A 2022 Bloomberg report found that its garments contained cotton linked to China's Xinjiang region. Rights groups and governments have accused China of forced labor and internment of Uyghurs, a mainly Muslim ethnic minority, in Xinjiang. Beijing denies any rights abuses.

The key to Shein's success, according to some politicians and analysts, is a little-known trade exemption known as the de minimis rule. They say the exception allows websites selling cheap Chinese goods to evade millions of dollars in taxes and fees,

as well as regulations banning forced labor in the consumer product supply chain.

The push was led by Democratic Representative Jennifer Wexton and Republican John Rose, and includes a signature from Democrat Earl Blumenauer, who previously introduced legislation in 2022 that would have effectively ended de minimis treatment for imports from China and other non-market economies.

"We strongly believe that the ability to issue and trade securities on our domestic exchanges is a privilege, and that foreign companies wishing to do so must uphold a demonstrated commitment to human rights across the globe," the letter said.

A spokesperson for Shein said the company

has "zero tolerance" for forced labor and that suppliers are required to adhere to "a strict code of conduct that is aligned to the International Labour Organization's core conventions."

"As a global company, SHEIN takes visibility across our entire supply chain seriously. We are committed to respecting human rights and adhering to local laws and regulations in each market we operate in," the spokesperson said.

Now headquartered in Singapore, China-founded Shein continues to source many of its clothes from China. The company was set to raise \$2 billion in funding in March and is planning to IPO in the second half of this year.

## China: Phone Search Program Tramples Uyghur Rights

By HRW, 2023.5.4

Police in the Xinjiang region of China rely on a master list of 50,000 multimedia files they deem "violent and terrorist" to flag Uyghur and other Turkic Muslim residents for interrogation, Human Rights Watch said today.

A Human Rights Watch forensic investigation into the metadata of this list found that during 9 months from 2017 to 2018, police conducted nearly 11 million searches of a total of 1.2 million mobile phones in Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital city of 3.5 million residents. Xinjiang's automated police mass surveillance systems enabled this phone search.

"The Chinese government's abusive use of surveillance technology in Xinjiang means that

Uyghurs who simply store the Quran on their phone may trigger a police interrogation," said Maya Wang, acting China director at Human Rights Watch. "Concerned governments should identify the technology companies involved in this mass surveillance and social control industry and take appropriate action to end their involvement."

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly raised concerns about China's approach to countering acts it calls "terrorism" and "extremism." China's counterterrorism law defines "terrorism" and "extremism" in an overly broad and vague manner that facilitates prosecutions, deprivation of liberty, and other





restrictions for acts that do not intend to cause death or serious physical harm for political, religious, or ideological aims.

The Human Rights Watch searches found a total over 1,000 unique files on about 1,400 Urumqi residents' phones that matched those on the police master list. The analysis of these matched files revealed that over half of them – 57 percent – appear to be common Islamic religious materials, including readings of every surah (chapter) of the Quran, the central religious text of Islam.

The list is part of a large database (52GB) of over 1,600 data tables from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region leaked to the United States media organization the Intercept in 2019. The Intercept reported that Urumqi police conducted surveillance and arrests from 2015 to 2019 based on texts of police reports that were part of this database.

The master list of multimedia files that Human Rights Watch examined is located in a different part of the same database and has not been previously reported on or analyzed. Some of the numbers in this reporting have been rounded up so that the authorities cannot identify the source of the leak.

The analysis of the metadata of this master list reveals photo, audio, and video files that contain violent content, but also other material that has no evident connection to violence. The media files contain materials that:

Are violent or gruesome, including content depicting beheadings or forms of torture that appear to have been carried out by armed groups such as Mexican and other drug cartels, Chechen fighters, or the Islamic State (ISIS);

Involve foreign organizations, including the East Turkistan Independence Movement,

which the Chinese government labels a separatist group; the World Uyghur Congress, a group run by Uyghur exiles; and a Uyghur-language broadcasts by Radio Free Asia, a US government-funded media outlet;

Contain pro-democracy audiovisual content such as the “Gate of Heavenly Peace,” a documentary about the Chinese government’s Tiananmen Square massacre of student-led protests in 1989;

Mention the names of cities in Syria, including documentaries about Syrian history and two 2015 episodes of a popular Chinese-language travel show, “On the Road” (侣行), that include references to the Syrian conflict;

Contain common Islamic religious content, including Quran readings and wedding songs.

Human Rights Watch also found another related list in the database that has the same MD5 hashes – the unique signature of these files. This list apparently contains the search result of the Jingwang Weishi app, a surveillance application. The search results spanned 9 months between 2017 and 2018. This data shows the app surreptitiously conducted nearly 11 million searches involving a total of 1.2 million phones and found a cumulative total of 11,000 matches of over 1,000 different files on 1,400 phones.

The Human Rights Watch analysis of the file names and the police’s own labeling, or coding, of the approximately 1,000 files found that:

57 percent of the 1,000 files are common religious materials, including readings of every chapter (surah) of the Quran.

Nearly 9 percent of the matched files include violent content, including crimes committed by members of the Islamic State (ISIS);

4 percent of the matched files include calls for violence, for example by urging “jihad;”

28 percent of the matched files cannot be identified based on the available information alone (for example, the file name and police labels).

Human Rights Watch further analyzed those 1,400 phones that were flagged by police:

Nearly 42 percent of phones contained violent or gruesome material;

12 percent of phones contained common Islamic religious material;

6 percent of phones contained files that are overtly political, such as an anthem to “East Turkistan” – the name some Turkic Muslims use to refer to the region that the Chinese government calls “Xinjiang” – videos about the Syrian war, and pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong;

4 percent of phones contained files that call for violence, such as “jihad;”

48 percent of phones contained files that Human Rights Watch could not identify.

International law obligates governments to define criminal offenses precisely and to respect the rights to freedom of expression and thought, including holding views considered offensive. Criminalizing mere possession of material deemed extremist even if the accused has no intent to use it to cause harm to others is a particularly severe threat to freedom of belief, privacy, and expression. These rights are guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed but not ratified.

The United Nations Human Rights Council should urgently establish an independent, international investigation into grave rights violations and the suppression of fundamental freedoms in Xinjiang by the Chinese government against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, Human Rights Watch said. An unprecedented number of UN independent human rights experts and

hundreds of nongovernmental organizations from around the world have recommended such action.

“The Chinese government outrageously yet dangerously conflates Islam with violent extremism to justify its abhorrent abuses against Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang,” Wang said. “The UN Human Rights Council should take long overdue action by investigating Chinese government abuses in Xinjiang and beyond.”

## Meta Shuts Down Network of Fake Accounts That ‘Signal A Shift’ in China-Based Influence Efforts

By Donie O’Sullivan and Sean Lyngaas, CNN, 2023.5.3

Facebook’s parent company Meta announced Wednesday that it has taken down a network of more than 100 China-based accounts that posed as organizations in the US and Europe and pushed pro-Beijing talking points.

The Facebook and Instagram accounts, which included a fictitious news organization and posed as a think tank, likely used deepfake images developed through artificial intelligence to make the fake accounts appear legitimate, Meta said.

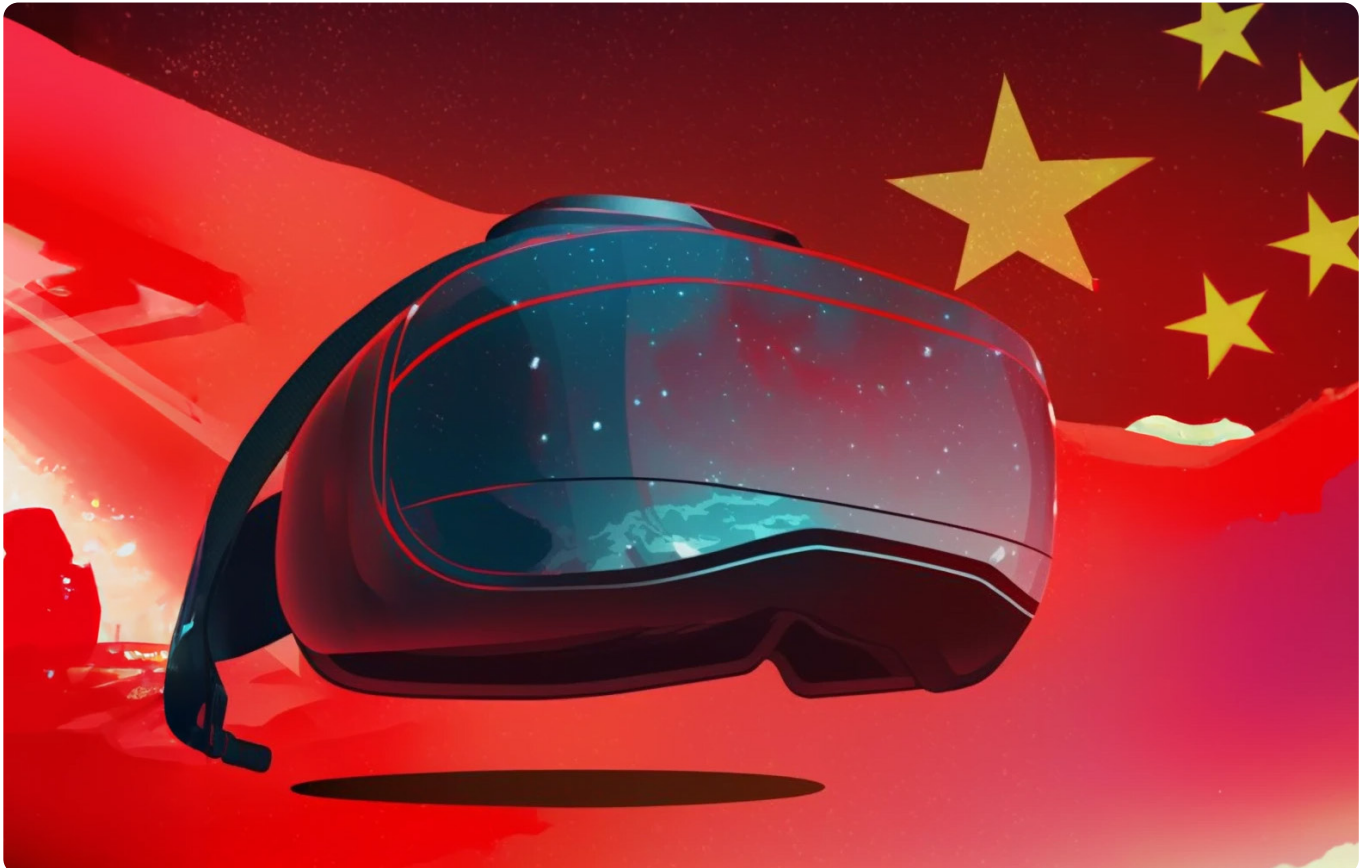
The network, which had more than 15,000 followers on Meta’s platforms, appears to have had some financial resources behind it. In one instance, the people behind the accounts called for protests in Budapest against George Soros, the billionaire philanthropist and frequent target of right-

wing groups, and posted on Twitter an offer to pay people to attend. The accounts also offered to pay freelance writers to contribute to at least one of its websites.

The accounts were awash with pro-China commentary, including “warnings against boycotting the 2022 Beijing Olympics; allegations of US foreign policy in Africa,” and “claims of comfortable living conditions for Uyghurs in China,” Meta said in its report. The fake accounts also posted “negative commentary about Uyghur activists and critics of the Chinese state,” it said.

Meta did not link the network to the Chinese government, instead saying it found links to individuals in China associated with a technology company. CNN has reached out to the company for comment. Meta regularly takes down covert influence campaigns and discloses information





about them in quarterly reports.

The takedowns “signal a shift in the nature” of China-based influence networks, as Chinese operatives embrace new tactics like setting up a front company, hiring freelance writers around the world and offering to recruit protesters, Ben Nimmo, Meta’s global threat intelligence lead, told reporters on Tuesday.

While the networks are generally small and have struggled to build an audience, “they are experimenting with diverse tactics and that’s always something we want to keep an eye on,” Nimmo said.

The tactics are similar to those used by Russian operatives during the 2016 US presidential election campaign. Using fake personas and posing as representatives of US political and activist organizations, Russians successfully recruited unwitting

Americans to take part in political stunts.

Chinese operatives have in recent years “evolved their posture” from being concerned about being caught influencing US elections to seeing influence operations as another tool to project power, a US official told CNN.

“We’re keeping a close eye” on the Chinese influence operations heading into the 2024 election, the official said.

Indictments from special counsel Robert Mueller’s team in 2018 detailed how disinformation from Russia were designed to exacerbate existing divisions in the United States.

Ahead of the 2022 US midterm election, FBI officials expressed concern that Chinese operatives appeared to be engaging in “Russian-style influence activities” that stoke American divisions. Russian and



Chinese government-affiliated operatives and organizations both promoted misinformation about the integrity of

American elections that originated in the US during the midterm election season, FBI officials have said.

## France Drops Fashion Groups Probe Over Uyghur Forced Labour

By RFI, 2023.5.5

French magistrates have dropped a probe into allegations that four fashion retailers were sourcing supplies in China involving the forced labour of the Uyghur population.

The national anti-terror prosecutor's office in Paris, which looks into purported crimes against humanity, said it had halted the investigation.

### New complaint?

The plaintiffs' lawyer William Bourdon told French news agency AFP they would file a new complaint.

Magistrates had in 2021 started looking into claims the multinational companies, including Uniqlo and the owner of Zara, were complicit in crimes against humanity.

The case was based on a complaint lodged

by the anti-corruption group Sherpa, the French branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign, and the Uyghur Institute of Europe, as well as by a Uyghur woman who had been held in a camp in Xinjiang, China.

They accused Inditex, the Spanish owner of Zara and other top brands, Uniqlo, the French fashion group SMCP, and the footwear manufacturer Skechers of using cotton produced in the Xinjiang region.

Rights groups believe at least one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been incarcerated in camps in the Xinjiang region, where China has also been accused of forcibly sterilising women and imposing forced labour.





The allegations followed a March 2020 report by a non-governmental organisation called the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

## ‘Lack of jurisdiction’

On 12 April, the prosecutor’s office sent the plaintiffs a letter telling them that it was halting the investigation as it lacks “jurisdiction to prosecute the facts contained in the complaint”.

All four fashion groups at the time rejected

the accusations, with Inditex saying it had strict traceability controls in place.

Uniqlo said it carried out inspections via third parties to ensure its suppliers were not violating human rights.

SMCP said on Thursday that it had always denied the allegations, and that it believed the probe was dropped “after the name of the SMCP group and its brands were removed in October 2022” from the Australian NGO report.

## France Drops Fashion Groups Probe Over Uyghur Forced Labour

By Rob Gillies, ABC News, 2023.5.4

Canada’s foreign minister said Thursday the country is considering the expulsion of Chinese diplomats over an intelligence agency report saying one of them plotted to intimidate the Hong Kong relatives of a Canadian lawmaker.

Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said her department was summoning China’s ambassador to a meeting to underline that Canada won’t tolerate such interference.

She said the intelligence agency report indicated that opposition Conservative lawmaker Michael Chong and his Hong Kong relatives were targeted after Chong criticized Beijing’s human rights record.

“We’re assessing different options including the expulsion of diplomats,” Joly said before a Parliament committee.

Canada’s spy agency has not released details publicly. Chong has said the report identifies a Toronto-based diplomat as

being part of the plot. Chong has been critical of Beijing’s treatment of Uyghur Muslims in China’s Xinjiang province.

“I cannot imagine the shock and concern of learning that your loved ones have been targeted in this way,” Joly said to Chong at the committee hearing. “There will be consequences.”

Chong said the diplomat should be on the first plane out of Canada.

“It is inexplicable that this diplomat hasn’t been told to leave the country already,” he said.

“If we do not take this course of action we are basically putting up a giant billboard for all authoritarian states around world that says we are open to foreign interference targeting Canadian citizens. That’s why this individual needs to be sent packing.”

Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu denied interference in a statement and warned



against expelling its diplomats.

“Once again, China strongly urges the Canadian side to immediately stop this self-directed political farce, and not go further down the wrong and dangerous path. Should the Canadian side continue to make provocations, China will play along every step of the way until the very end,” Cong said.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Wednesday that he did not learn of the spy agency report until a Globe and Mail article Monday, citing top-secret documents, said the spy agency had the intelligence. But Cong told Parliament that Canada’s national security adviser informed him the 2021 report went to various points in government, including to the national-security adviser at the time.

Trudeau has ordered Canada’s intelligence agencies to immediately inform lawmakers of any threats against them, regardless

of whether those threats are considered credible.

Canada’s spy agency didn’t tell Cong about the targeting of his family until this week.

Many governments, the United Nations, and human rights groups accuse China of sweeping a million or more people from its Uyghur community and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups into detention camps, where many have said they were tortured, sexually assaulted, and forced to abandon their language and religion. China denies the accusations, which are based on evidence including interviews with survivors and photos and satellite images from Uyghur’s home province of Xinjiang, a major hub for factories and farms in far western China.

Last month, Trudeau named a former governor general as a special investigator to look into allegations of Chinese interference in Canada’s last two elections. David Johnston will decide if a public inquiry is needed and Trudeau has said he will abide by recommendations.

The Globe and Mail, citing unidentified intelligence sources, has reported that China preferred to see Trudeau’s Liberals re-elected in the 2021 election and worked to defeat Conservative politicians considered unfriendly to Beijing.



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