

Detainee Says China Has Secret Jail in Dubai, Holds Uyghurs

By Associated Press/ Aug. 16, 2021,

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A young Chinese woman says she was held for eight days at a Chinese-run secret detention facility in Dubai along with at least two Uyghurs, in what may be the first evidence that China is operating a so-called “black site” beyond its borders.

The woman, 26-year-old Wu Huan, was on the run to avoid extradition back to China because her fiancé was considered a Chinese dissident. Wu told The Associated Press she was abducted from a hotel in Dubai and detained by Chinese officials at a villa converted into a jail, where she saw or heard two



Wu Huan speaks during an interview in a safe house in the Ukraine on Wednesday, June 30, 2021. Wu claims that she was held for eight days at a Chinese-run “black site” in Dubai along with at least two Uyghurs, in what may be the first evidence that China is operating a secret detention facility beyond its borders. She was on the run from the threat of being sent back to her home country because of her support of her fiancé, Wang Jingyu, a perceived Chinese dissident. (AP Photo) THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

other prisoners, both Uyghurs.

She was questioned and threatened in Chinese and forced to sign legal documents incriminating her fiancé for harassing her, she said. She was finally released on June 8 and is now seeking asylum in the Netherlands.

While “black sites” are common in China, Wu’s account is the only testimony known to experts that Beijing has set one up in another country. Such a site would reflect how China is increasingly using its international clout to detain or bring back citizens it wants from overseas, whether they are dissidents, corruption suspects or ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs.

The AP was unable to confirm or disprove Wu’s account independently, and she could not pinpoint the exact location of the black site. However, reporters have seen and heard corroborating evidence including stamps in her passport, a phone recording of a Chinese official asking her questions and text messages that she sent from jail to a pastor helping the couple.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said: “What I can tell you is that the situation the person talked about is not true.” Dubai did not respond to multiple phone calls and requests for comment.

Yu-Jie Chen, an assistant professor at Taiwan’s Academia Sinica, said she had not heard of a Chinese secret jail in Dubai, and such a facility in another country would be unusual. However, she also noted that it would be in keeping with China’s attempts to do all it can to bring select citizens back, both through official means such as signing extradition treaties and unofficial means such as revoking visas or putting pressure on family back home.

“(China) really wasn’t interested in reaching out until recent years,” said Chen, who has tracked China’s international legal actions. Chen said Uyghurs in particular were being

extradited or returned to China, which has been detaining the mostly Muslim minority on suspicion of terrorism even for relatively harmless acts like praying. Wu and her fiancé, 19-year-old Wang Jingyu, are not Uyghur but rather Han Chinese, the majority ethnicity in China.

Dubai has a history as a place where Uyghurs are interrogated and deported back to China, and activists say Dubai itself has been linked to secret interrogations. Radha Stirling, a legal advocate who founded the advocacy group Detained in Dubai, said she has worked with about a dozen people who have reported being held in villas in the UAE, including citizens of Canada, India and Jordan but not China.

“There is no doubt that the UAE has detained people on behalf of foreign governments with whom they are allied,” Stirling said. “I don’t think they would at all shrug their shoulders to a request from such a powerful ally.”

However, Patrick Theros, a former U.S. ambassador to Qatar who is now strategic advisor to the Gulf International Forum, called the allegations “totally out of character” for the Emiratis.

On May 27, Wu said, she was questioned by Chinese officials at her hotel and then taken by Dubai police to a police station for three



days. On the third day, she said, a Chinese man who introduced himself as Li Xuhang came to visit her. He told her he was working for the Chinese consulate in Dubai, and asked her whether she had taken money from foreign groups to act against China.

Li Xuhang is listed as consul general on the website of the Chinese consulate in Dubai. The consulate did not return multiple calls asking for comment and to speak with Li directly.

Wu said she was handcuffed and put in a black Toyota. After half an hour, she was brought inside a white villa with three stories, where rooms had been converted into individual cells, she said.

Wu was taken to her own cell, with a heavy metal door, a bed, a chair and a white fluorescent light that was on all day and night. She said she was questioned and threatened several times in Chinese.

She saw another prisoner, a Uyghur woman, while waiting to use the bathroom once, she said. A second time, she heard a Uyghur woman shouting in Chinese,

“I don’t want to go back to China, I want to go back to Turkey.” Wu identified the women as Uyghurs, she said, based on their distinctive appearance and accent. The guards also gave her a phone and a sim card and instructed her to call her fiancé and pastor Bob Fu, the head of ChinaAid, a Christian non-profit, who was helping the couple.

Wang confirmed to the AP that Wu called and

asked him for his location. Fu said he received at least four or five calls from her during this time, a few on an unknown Dubai phone number, including one where she was crying and almost incoherent. The AP also reviewed text messages Wu sent to Fu at the time, which are disjointed and erratic.

The last thing Wu’s captors demanded of her, she said, was to sign documents testifying that Wang was harassing her.

“I was really scared and was forced to sign the documents,” she told the AP.

After Wu was released, she flew to Ukraine, where she was reunited with Wang. After threats from Chinese police that Wang could face extradition from Ukraine, the couple fled again to the Netherlands. Wu said she misses her homeland.

“I’ve discovered that the people deceiving us are Chinese, that it’s our countrymen hurting our own countrymen,” she said.

Staff reporters Nomaan Merchant and Matt Lee contributed to this report from Washington, D.C.



Children of Detained Uyghur Parents Held in ‘Welfare Schools’ in China’s Xinjiang

RFA, August/ 16/ 2021

“Preschoolers are allowed brief video chats with their parents while under strict monitoring.”

More than 80 percent of the Uyghur children at a village preschool in China’s far-western Xinjiang have at least one parent in state custody, while pupils with both parents in detention attend a separate “welfare school” where they are continuously monitored, RFA has learned.

China has been separating Uyghur children from parents under the program of mass internment camps launched by Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Communist Party chief Chen Quanguo. The campaign has seen up to 1.8 million Muslim Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities rounded up and sent to political re-education camps under the pretext of vocational training.

About six months after the internment campaign began in early 2017, reports began to surface about the children of “double-detained” parents — those whose mother and father both were incarcerated — being placed in state care, according to independent German researcher Adrian Zenz, who has documented the XUAR’s internment



Two Uyghur children walk down a street in Yarkand county, Kashgar prefecture, in East Turkistan, June 24, 2017.

camp system.

Twenty-five of the 30 children enrolled in the preschool at one township in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) prefecture have one parent being detained by authorities, while those with both parents detained are being taught at a separate “welfare preschool”— a boarding school that functions like an orphanage for children four to six years old — a security officer at the school told RFA.

“At our preschool, some of the children still have their mother [on the outside], and some of the children still have their father,” she told RFA’s Uyghur Service. “There are something like 25 of these children” among the total 30.

About 150,000 people live in 15 villages of Chaharbagh township in Yarkand (Shache) county.

During the winter, the children with one detained parent live in dormitories at the preschool, and during the warmer months, they are allowed to live at home and be brought to school each day by their other parent, said the security officer who declined to be named in order to speak freely.

The children of detainees are sometimes allowed to have video chats with their parents, though they are unable to speak freely during the brief meetings, she said.

"Whenever there is a notification that it's OK for the children to meet with their parents, they let them do so," the security officer said. Some of the children are aware that their parents are in re-education facilities when they speak to them via video chats, she added.

Constant monitoring

RFA has confirmed similar arrangements for children in other parts of the XUAR.

A welfare preschool in Aksu (Akesu) prefecture has 40-some students, according to a security officer who has worked there for nearly four years and took part in political studies.

"We live in a [school] housing area, [and] we take turns in the security office at the school's entrance," said the security guard from Kuchar (Kuche) county's Ishkhala township who declined to give her name.

"There are arranging meetings — on-screen, face-to-face meetings — for the children at the preschool, in particular for those under our jurisdiction," she said.

Children with both parents detained, who are being educated in separate schools, are monitored by police and security guards 24 hours a day, said an official in central Xinjiang's Korla (Ku'erle), the second-largest city

in the XUAR.

He said that guards make sure the children do not leave the school and enforce political indoctrination.

Omer Hemdulla, a Uyghur from the XUAR who now lives in Turkey, has participated in "Where is my family?" protests outside the Chinese Embassy in Istanbul, demanding information about the disappearance of his two children, and the imprisonment since October 2017 of his two millionaire older brothers.

The children were one and two years old when he left them in Xinjiang and moved to Turkey in hopes of relocating his family members to the country, which is home to 50,000-100,000 Uyghur exiles. But his children were taken away after his brothers and in-laws were detained.

"After they took my in-laws in, our communication was essentially cut off," he said. "I have been unable to obtain any information about where my daughters are."

RFA contacted the Justice Department of Bayingolin (Bayinguoleng) prefecture to try to find out about Omer's children, but an offici-



al was unable to provide details. The official confirmed that children there with both parents detained were attending a welfare school run by the Bureau of Civil Affairs, but declined to provide information

about the school, including the number of children enrolled.

Reported by Shohret Hoshur for RFA's Myanmar Service. Translated by the Uyghur Service. Written in English by Roseanne Gerin.

How Award-Winning Journalist Uses Technology to Detail Abuses in Xinjiang

By Liam Scott, August 18, 2021

WASHINGTON - Journalist **Megha Rajagopalan** has made a name for herself over the years covering the plight of Uyghurs in the autonomous Xinjiang region in northwestern China.

When Beijing denied her visa renewal in 2018, the **Buzzfeed News** reporter refused to be deterred. With access to residents and on-the-ground reporting limited, Rajagopalan found unique ways to broaden her coverage.

Her efforts, which included analyzing satellite imagery to search for evidence of mass prison and internment camps, earned Rajagopalan and her team -- architect Alison Killing and digital security trainer Christo Buschek--a Pulitzer Prize this year.

The United States, Britain, United Nations and others have condem-



FILE - Police officers stand at the outer entrance of the Urumqi No. 3 Detention Center in Dabancheng in East Turkistan, April 23, 2021.

ned Beijing for human rights abuses including reports of torture, forced labor and sterilization in Xinjiang -- sometimes called East Turkistan by Uyghurs and their supporters -- where China is detaining more than 1 million Uyghurs and other ethnic groups.

Beijing denies wrongdoing and rejects accusations by some that the abuses constitute genocide. It has accu-

sed Western media of bias and fake news over the coverage, and expelled or refused to renew visas for some journalists.

In Rajagopalan's case, she says Beijing never provided a clear reason for denying her visa. But while Rajagopalan told VOA she couldn't definitively say why the visa was blocked, "it did come a few months after our first big piece from Xinjiang."

Rajagopalan said she never considered stopping reporting on China after she left in 2018. She knew there was still a lot to uncover in Xinjiang and believed that could be done from outside.

The following are excerpts from a VOA interview with Rajagopalan. The questions and answers have been edited for length and clarity.

VOA: When Beijing declined to renew your visa, did you ever consider changing direction? What pushed you to still report on China?

Megha Rajagopalan: I have a unique job in that I get to cover a broad range of issues, often in different parts of the world, and that was true both when I was based in China and now. After I left China, I mainly wanted to continue reporting on the Xinjiang story because of the scale of the harm being done to people, the fact that there were ways to cover it from abroad including interviewing exiles, and because there was, and continues to be, a lot to uncover.

Since losing access, I've relied on interviewing Uyghur and Kazakh exiles who left the country and have relatively fresh memories of their experiences in Xinjiang. Other journalists, even those based in China, have used this same technique very successfully. It's helpful because of the ethical quandary of interviewing in Xinjiang, where sources often face police harassment and other repercussions.

I was extremely lucky to work with (geospatial analyst) Alison because she brought a totally different perspective and set of skills to approach the problem of geolocating camps and prisons in Xinjiang. Because we couldn't drive to all these camps and prisons, this was a different approach to documenting their locations.

Interviewing former detainees helped us fill in details that we couldn't get from satellite images alone. Former detainees helped us verify locations of camps and prisons, and conversely, using satellite images (meant) we could corroborate parts of their stories.

VOA: You started reporting on the experiences of Uyghurs in China a little less than a decade ago. How has your reporting, and more broadly, international coverage of this issue evolved since then?

Rajagopalan: I think the biggest evolution has been the period after about 2017, which



Journalist Megha Rajagopalan has analyzed satellite imagery to search for evidence of mass prison and internment camps during her coverage of the plight of Uyghurs in East Turkistan, northwestern China.

is when we started to see and hear about internment camps and mass surveillance.

My biggest challenge today is lack of access, but that's a problem that all journalists working on China face to different degrees, including those in the country.

VOA: What does your experience of reporting on Xinjiang underscore about the current state of press freedom in China?

Rajagopalan: Diminishing freedom for the press in China has a much deeper impact on Chinese journalists and publications than it does on non-Chinese reporters like myself.

I feel very lucky in that I've been able to report on Xinjiang for many years, and though I've encountered some obstacles, nobody has ever stopped me from publishing my work. It would be a better world if journalists with Chinese nationality had the same freedom to investigate and to publish.

State media in China routinely criticize international reporting on Xinjiang--as well as a

number of other topics. Determining the impact of these kinds of reports outside China is a difficult but worthwhile question.

VOA: Do you think the free press in democratic countries has been doing enough to cover the situation facing the Uyghurs?

Rajagopalan: It's really important to understand that press freedom exists on a scale. It's not a binary thing where some countries simply have it or others do not. Journalists routinely face government pressure and attacks in democratic countries including the United States.

Conversely, there are many exceptional journalists working in authoritarian countries. I know some, outside China, who have pushed for their publications to cover the Xinjiang issue.

Building more awareness that these abuses are taking place is always good, but it's not a solution in and of itself.



CCTV watchdog criticises Hikvision Uyghur response

By Shohret Hoshur, August 19, 2021

The UK's CCTV watchdog has criticised a Chinese firm for not saying if its cameras are used in Uyghur internment camps.

Professor Fraser Sampson, said: "If your company wasn't involved in these awful places wouldn't you be very keen to say so?"

In July, MPs said Hikvision provided the "primary camera technology" used in Uyghur internment camps.



The company said it respected human rights. On 8 July, MPs on the foreign affairs committee published a report which said: "Cameras made by the Chinese firm Hikvision have been deployed throughout Xinjiang, and provide the primary camera technology used in the internment camps".

More than a million Uyghurs and other minorities are estimated to have been detained at camps in the north-west region of Xinjiang, where allegations of torture, forced labour and sexual abuse have emerged.

China has denied the allegations and claimed the camps are "re-education" facilities used to combat terrorism.

The foreign affairs committee recommended that Hikvision "should not be permitted to operate within the UK".

In June, President Biden signed an executive order prohibiting US investments in Hikvision. Hikvision cameras are widely used in the UK, including by many local councils.

In a letter sent to "partners" after the report's publication, Hikvision wrote that the committee's accusations were "unsubstantiated and not underpinned by evidence".

It called the suggestion of a ban a "knee-jerk response... disproportionate, ill-measured, and reinforces the notion that this is motivated by political influences".

Biometrics Commissioner

On 16 July, Professor Sampson, the UK Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, followed up that response, asking the company if it accepted that crimes are being committed against the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

In a reply sent this week, Justin Hollis, Hikvision's Marketing Director for UK & Ireland, wrote: "It is beyond our capability to make a judgement on this matter, particularly against a backdrop where the debate surrounding the Xinjiang issue comes with clashing geopolitical views."

The firm said it was difficult to answer "nar-

row pointed questions on paper”, fearing what it called a “kangaroo trial by media”. It added that an “independent” report by former US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues (2001-2005), Pierre-Richard Prosper, had concluded: “We do not find that Hikvision entered into the five projects in Xinjiang with the intent to knowingly engage in human rights abuses or find that Hikvision knowingly or intentionally committed human rights abuses itself or that it acted in wilful disregard.”

The company has previously said it had retained a law firm led by Ambassador Prosper “to advise on human rights compliance”.

Hikvision said it fully embraced the UN guiding principles of business and human rights. The firm said that it did not oversee or control its devices once they are passed to installers, adding that “operational matters are not within our remit”.

Simple Questions

But the letter’s answers were not a satisfactory response for Professor Sampson, who told the BBC: “It’s a simple enough question - ‘Were your cameras used in these intern-

ment camps?’”

“Saying ‘we’re not involved in operations’ or ‘we don’t have any control over what’s done with them’ isn’t really an answer.”

He wrote: “Our parliamentary committee accepted that these internment camps exist and that substantial and sustained human rights abuses are being enabled by sophisticated surveillance technology. I need to understand the level of Hikvision’s involvement.

He said he was “unimpressed” with what he had heard, and remained unconvinced he was getting a “full account”.

The company has invited Professor Sampson to meet Ambassador Prosper, but the commissioner says he wants answers to “basic questions” first.

Hikvision told the BBC: “We are looking forward to meeting the Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, and have nothing to add to our letter.”



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