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SUBMISSION TO THE UK CONSERVATIVE PARTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION INQUIRY ON CHINA

26 May 2020

The Chinese (PRC) state is repressive domestically and aggressive internationally.

Internal repression is exercised by

- outright terror
- ruthless control of information
- relentless propaganda, steeped in nationalist rhetoric.

It is a misunderstanding that “ordinary people” are not subjected to terror and can by and large go about life as they will. Terror is a constant threat and even those not personally terrorised are denied freedom of information, speech and assembly and hence access to the life of the citizen.

External aggression is exercised by

- crude might, such as in the annexation of South China Sea territory
- by threats and intimidation
- by manipulation of information, in e.g. press and academia
- by domination and the creation of dependency, e.g. on Chinese investments.

The Chinese state is not (now) militarily aggressive outside of what it considers its own orbit, but it sits on vast military power, is ruled by a closed dictatorial clique, and is a regime that surrounds itself with propaganda of nationalistic greatness.

Hence, the Chinese state is a threat to its own people's dignity and to established liberties in the democratic world.

The outside world has ample means to contain the dangers that the present Chinese regime represents. It is not correct to think that because of China's size and strength, economically and otherwise, there is nothing “we” can do. It is our choice whether or not we engage to contain the PRC regime.

I recommended an approach in three main points:

1. Engagement with China on all relevant levels: economically, culturally, academically. Non-engagement, never mind isolation, boycott and the like, would be counterproductive, and is anyway not feasible.
2. Speaking up in clear language about domestic repression. The Chinese State Constitution and further law enshrines standard citizenship rights. Speaking up should be done in the context of Chinese law.

3. Speaking up in clear language about international aggression. China has signed up to most of the relevant conventions of international law. Speaking up should be done in the context of accepted standards in international law.

Speaking up is effective vis-à-vis the Chinese regime. The leaders are extremely sensitive to international respect and repute. It is in our gift to grant or withhold that respect and repute. The staying-silent-about-China policy should and can now come to an end. British authorities should join as much as possible with other countries in clear and consistent messaging to the rulers in Beijing. The democracies of the world need to find a voice up against Chinese assertiveness.

We need better information than we now have about PRC policy and regime behaviour. For example, we have limited knowledge about political prisoners. There is much that British authorities, embassies and consulates could do to maintain factual documentation about regime behaviour. I recommend a review of British practices with the aim of maintaining robust systems of documentation in respect to PRC policies up against established standards of human rights and international law.

The fault line between democratic freedom and PRC repression now runs through Hong Kong and Taiwan. Freedom is being curtailed in Hong Kong and is under threat in Taiwan.

I recommend British authorities to adopt a firm and consistent line of moral support for pro-democracy activists and groups in Hong Kong. That support should not extend to acts of violence and should not contain financial support, both of which will be exploited by Chinese authorities and used as pretexts for action against such persons and groups. Britain has a special responsibility arising from the hand-over of Hong Kong to the PRC.

In respect to Taiwan, it is time to bring the One-China policy to an end. Taiwan today is a de facto nation state, of a population with a predominant Taiwanese identity, and with a strong economy and a mature democracy. There is no justification for this country's international isolation. However, reconsidering the One-China policy cannot be done other than in careful consultation with the Taiwanese themselves.

I recommend a fact-finding mission to Taiwan, for example under the auspices of this Commission, hence a non-government mission but with government blessing, to consult with Taiwanese authorities and civil society groups towards a possible strategy out of the strictures of the One-China policy.