



Hikvision's Links to Human Rights Abuses in East Turkistan

By Nuzigum Setiwaldi

October 2023

I. Key Takeaways

- **Hikvision is the world's largest surveillance technology company and manufactures tens of millions of cameras each year.** The state-founded and controlled company is a major provider of surveillance technology to 155 countries, and it sells products through 2,400 partners worldwide;
- **The United States and the United Kingdom are among the countries with the most Hikvision camera networks in the world.** As of 2021, more than 600,000 Hikvision surveillance camera networks were installed throughout the US, and 250,000 were installed in the UK, 55,000 of which were in London;
- **Hikvision camera networks have been installed in sensitive locations.** In the US, UK, Australia, Germany, and elsewhere, Hikvision's camera networks are installed in government buildings, police departments, military bases, hospitals, universities, and schools;
- **Hikvision is directly involved in mass surveillance schemes targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples.** The company took lucrative contracts with the government in the Uyghur Region to supply, develop, and directly operate mass surveillance systems, including those equipped with facial recognition capabilities. Hikvision's networks are installed in and around internment camps, schools, and mosques in the Uyghur Region;
- **Chinese authorities use Hikvision cameras to directly track, monitor, and target Uyghurs.** Research has shown that police across the Uyghur Region use Hikvision's surveillance cameras and software identifying and targeting Uyghurs as part of a mass surveillance and predictive policing system, the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP);
- Despite marketing its technology for public safety, **Hikvision is directly facilitating genocidal crimes** and should be subject to comprehensive sanctions, including procurement bans, export bans, and investment bans.

II. About Hikvision

Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co., Ltd (Hikvision) (Chinese: 海康威视 *Hai Kang Wei Shi*) is a video surveillance company based in Hangzhou, China. Hikvision is a state-founded company controlled by the Chinese government and has

received significant subsidies from the state.¹ Hikvision was established in November 2001 by the No. 52 Research Institute under the state-owned China Electronics Technology Corporation (CETC),² which was originally founded to create military uses for consumer technology.³ According to the *New York Times*, "CETC traces its roots to the military research

labs that helped build China’s first nuclear bomb, satellite and guided missile,” and later turned to civilian security.⁴ China Electronics Technology HIK Group Co, Ltd. (CETHIK) was established to run Hikvision and remains its controlling shareholder.⁵ Hikvision was listed on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in May 2010.⁶ Currently, five state-owned corporations jointly own over 40 percent of Hikvision’s shares: CETC and its subsidiaries, China Electronics Technology HIK Group Co, Ltd. (CETHIK Group), the No. 52 Research Institute, Central Hujin Investment Co., and Shenwan Hongyuan Securities Co.⁷

currently the world’s largest manufacturer of security products based on sales revenue, followed by Dahua.⁹ In 2016, Hikvision reported manufacturing over 55 million cameras, and claimed in publicity materials that it had the capacity to make 95 million cameras per year.¹⁰ In 2021, Hikvision’s sales revenue was worth US\$10.1 billion, up nearly 17 percent from US\$8.64 billion in 2020,¹¹ while in 2021, Dahua’s sales revenue stood at US\$5.1 billion. In 2021, Hikvision and Dahua accounted for over a third of the world’s market for security cameras, estimated at US\$35 billion in total.¹²

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Hikvision manufactures security products, including CCTV cameras, access controls, smart cities and smart policing systems, and security solutions.⁸ Hikvision is

III. Global Markets

Hikvision is a major provider of surveillance technology to 155 countries and regions worldwide.¹³ Headquartered in Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province in eastern China, Hikvision has 32 provincial business centers and more than 300 city branches and offices across the PRC.¹⁴ It currently has 23 regional functional centers and 66 sales branches and service offices overseas in more than 50 countries, including

Hikvision Camera Networks Globally



Top 25 countries with Hikvision camera networks installed as of 2021, excluding China. Source: Top10VPN

the US and Canada.¹⁵ Hikvision also has after-sales service points in 19 regions and 115 authorized maintenance service partners in more than 70 countries.¹⁶ It sells products through 2,400 partners in 155 countries and regions, in addition to which,

Country	Hikvision Camera Networks
Vietnam	671,828
United States	607,859
Mexico	260,719
United Kingdom	254,529
Brazil	186,129
India	180,883
Korea	179,566
Romania	146,646
Thailand	140,502
Italy	130,603
Malaysia	99,861
Russia	95,996
Canada	89,429
Argentina	85,940
Taiwan	76,671
Ukraine	76,507
Spain	68,380
Uruguay	67,539
Saudi Arabia	62,605
Turkey	61,333
Germany	58,235
Greece	54,495
Israel	54,350
Colombia	54,197
Poland	52,260

Hikvision has three manufacturing plants and 11 logistics centers outside of China.¹⁷ Hikvision operates manufacturing facilities in Hangzhou, Chongqing, Tonglu, and Wuhan within China, as well as others in India, Brazil, and the UK.¹⁸ Hikvision works with more than 1,000 long-term suppliers worldwide,¹⁹ and operates 11 research and development centers in locations including Montreal and London.²⁰

Hikvision operates surveillance cameras in 188 countries, primarily in Vietnam, the US, Mexico, the UK, and Brazil.²¹ Prior to measures enacted by governments around the world to ban their use, Hikvision products were extremely prevalent. More than 600,000 Hikvision cameras were installed in the US, with the majority located in New York City, Los Angeles, and Houston.²² More than 100 US state and city governments have used surveillance technology made by Hikvision and Dahua at locations including public schools and police departments,²³ and more than 89,000 Hikvision cameras have been identified in Canada.²⁴

In October 2021, the London-based computer network reviewing service, Top10VPN.com, discovered 4.8 million Hikvision and 1.5 million Dahua surveillance camera networks outside of China using Shodan scans²⁵ of IP addresses and port combinations.²⁶ Since Shodan scans can by nature only pick up a limited range of network configurations, and each network can operate several or even dozens of cameras, Top10VPN.com's estimates likely represent only a fraction of the true numbers.

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In Europe, the majority of Hikvision surveillance networks detected using Shodan scans were located in the UK, Romania, and France.²⁷ In October 2021, there were more than 250,000 Hikvision surveillance networks in the UK, more than 55,000 of which were

located in London.²⁸ More than 30,000 Hikvision surveillance networks were in Bucharest in Romania, and nearly 20,000 in Paris, France.²⁹

Hikvision had supplied 1.2 million video surveillance cameras to UK organizations and companies as of June 2018, including government offices, police departments, hospitals, universities, and schools.³⁰ In February 2022, a UK health minister reported that the Department of Health and Social Care used 82 Hikvision products.³¹ According to investigations based on freedom of information requests by Big Brother Watch, a UK nonprofit group that investigates the use of surveillance systems, as of July 2022, 73 percent of UK councils, 57 percent of secondary schools in England, 60 percent of regional National Health Service (NHS) trusts, and UK universities and police forces used cameras manufactured by Hikvision and Dahua.³² Of the UK's 20 largest city councils and London's 32 borough councils, more than 65 percent reported using surveillance technology made by Hikvision and Dahua in 2021 with Hikvision making up more than half.³³

[A] tender required 4,835 facial recognition cameras to be installed around all 967 mosques in Qaraqash County in addition to video conferencing systems to broadcast official government “unified” sermons.

In Australia, there are more than 41,000 Hikvision surveillance camera networks, the majority of which are located in Melbourne and Sydney.³⁴ In February 2023, a government audit found that more than 900 Hikvision and Dahua cameras were installed in more than 250 Australian departments and agencies.³⁵ In the Netherlands, more than 26,000 Hikvision surveillance cameras and recorders are installed in the municipalities of Amsterdam, Zeist, Borsele, Eijsden-Margarten, Venrey, and Huizen, according to an investigative journalism report by Follow the Money.³⁶

In Germany, tens of thousands of Hikvision cameras are currently in use in police stations and ministries.³⁷ In Turkey, there are more than 60,000 Hikvision surveillance camera networks, one third of which are located in Istanbul,³⁸ and there are nearly 20,000 Hikvision surveillance cameras in Kazakhstan and approximately 10,000 across other Central Asian countries.³⁹

IV. Human Rights Violations

Hikvision is a major provider of surveillance technology in China, particularly in the Uyghur Region where it has collaborated with the Chinese government tailoring its products to precisely serve the Chinese authorities' agenda of imposing highly targeted surveillance of Uyghur, Kazakh, and Krygyz peoples in East Turkistan.

Many governments have declared that the human rights abuses, including systematic discrimination, arbitrary detention, and forced labor, amount to genocide.⁴⁰ The United Nations has also found these violations may constitute crimes against humanity⁴¹ which is facilitated to a large extent by the surveillance capabilities provided by companies like Hikvision and Dahua.

Investigations by Internet Protocol Video Market (IPVM), a research company specializing in surveillance systems, found that Hikvision started providing surveillance technology in the Uyghur Region in 2016 and expanded its operations significantly as the Chinese government escalated its crackdown in 2017.⁴² Between 2016 and 2017, Hikvision and Dahua won more than 7 billion RMB (US\$1 billion) in public-private partnership surveillance projects in the Uyghur Region.⁴³ In 2017, Hikvision entered into public private partnerships with public security authorities worth 1.86 billion RMB (\$275 million) in five sensitive or majority-Uyghur locations: the regional capital Ürümchi, and Guma (Ch. Pishan), Qaraqash (Ch. Moyu), Kériye (Ch. Yutain), and Lop (Ch. Luopu) counties.⁴⁴

Under these ongoing public security projects, Hikvision supplies and develops mass surveillance

systems with facial recognition capabilities across the urban areas of the five locations, including in concentration camps and mosques.⁴⁵ In addition to production and design, Hikvision directly operates these systems and installations across the Uyghur Region.⁴⁶

According to an internal review of Hikvision’s contracts with police agencies, Hikvision flagged the Qaraqash contract as problematic due to language targeting Uyghurs as a group. The investigator, Pierre-Richard Prosper, told Hikvision: “In the contracts, we saw some concerning language where it said Uyghurs, mosques, and this and that, which would appear that the contracts were looking at groups and not isolated to a criminal, let’s say.”⁴⁷ Prosper further stated, “We don’t think you were responsible, but there were some failings in the system where there’s some flags you should have looked at.”⁴⁸ Prosper advised Hikvision to be “sensitive” to problematic language targeting ethnic groups in contracts.⁴⁹

In 2018, AFP reported Hikvision won a tender for a network of 35,000 surveillance cameras in Qaraqash County to monitor “re-education centers” (the Chinese authorities’ term for concentration camps), mosques, schools, offices, and streets.⁵⁰ The tender required 4,835 facial recognition and dome/bullet cameras to be installed around all 967 mosques in Qaraqash County in addition to video conferencing systems to broadcast official government “unified” sermons.⁵¹ Hikvision told AFP they would continue its project in Qaraqash but declined to disclose any details.⁵²

IPVM has found that Hikvision has collaborated with Chinese government entities, including the First Research Institute of the Ministry of Public Security.⁵³ IPVM reports Hikvision co-authored three public security project standards on ethnic detection detailed criteria specifications and criteria for awardees, formalizing the technological requirements for surveillance products to be capable of identifying people’s ethnicity.⁵⁴ These standards applied to potentially hundreds of security projects within the region.⁵⁵

Hikvision’s technology was integral to a camera marketed on its Chinese website in 2018 as being capable of detecting Uyghurs.⁵⁶ Hikvision’s documentation for its “DeepinMind Server” included information on detecting minority groups and people with beards.⁵⁷ Nearly two dozen police departments across China started using facial recognition technology in 2018 to identify and target Uyghurs in eastern cities, according to tender documents.⁵⁸ And in December 2022, Hikvision signed a contract for a security project in Chengmai County in Hainan Province in southern China, in which it described video analytics used to identify “ethnic minorities” and Uyghurs.⁵⁹

Hikvision also operated a research and development center in a People’s Armed Police training camp in Ürümqi. However, when IPVM inquired about the institute, Hikvision removed its map of R&D centers from its website and then claimed it didn’t have an R&D center in the Uyghur Region.⁶⁰ However, Hikvision listed dozens of recruitment ads for positions at the center for designing large-scale surveillance projects, ads which explicitly stated that non-Chinese applicants need not apply.⁶¹

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IPVM found that police in the Uyghur Region used Hikvision surveillance cameras (facial recognition and license plate cameras) to target Uyghurs as part of its Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) “anti-terrorism” mass surveillance and predictive policing platform.⁶² IJOP, which was developed and supplied by Hikvision’s parent company, China Electronics Technology Corporation (CETC), relies heavily on surveillance cameras provided by companies including Hikvision.⁶³ In 2017, Hikvision won a contract to supply equipment for the IJOP, including Wi-Fi sniffers, which collect personal data from smartphones and laptops, including device IDs.⁶⁴ Wi-Fi sniffers

integrate with local surveillance cameras to enable facial recognition of people using unregistered devices.

Analysis of the “Xinjiang Police Files” – tens of thousands of leaked documents from the Chinese authorities dating from 2017-2018 – shows that Hikvision cameras were used by local police.⁶⁵ Hikvision’s camera networks were identified in a police Work Report from Shufu County in Kashgar, which showed a video management system-controlled vehicle alarm and which identified “海康设备ID” (Ch. *Haiwei shebei* ID) or “Hikvision Device ID” as the camera used to identify a car by its license plate.⁶⁶ A Kashgar police Work Report also showed a “Hikvision Device” being used by border authorities flagging down a vehicle, supposedly on suspicion of terrorist activities.⁶⁷ Both the Shufu and Kashgar instances reportedly used an “anti-terrorism big data platform” to analyze facial recognition and license plate data in the Uyghur Region to alert local authorities of “high-risk” people or vehicles.⁶⁸ The system would then flag those Uyghurs with ties abroad for “immediate arrest.”⁶⁹

V. Hikvision’s Statements

Human rights researchers and activists have repeatedly condemned Hikvision for knowingly providing surveillance technology that facilitates human rights violations in the Uyghur Region. In addition to supplying surveillance technology, Hikvision is abetting the genocide by actively operating systems and giving police data that target and incriminate Uyghurs.

Hikvision has consistently denied these claims, repeatedly stating it “takes global human rights very seriously”⁷⁰ and denying “any inappropriate actions in Xinjiang.”⁷¹ Hikvision has stated it does not “know where and how our products are being sold or being used,” particularly technology sold by third parties.⁷² In response to governments’ concerns about security threats, Hikvision stated it does not pose a threat and complies with regulations.⁷³

After the US added it to the Entity List in August 2019, Hikvision released a statement saying it “respects human rights and takes our responsibility to protect people in the US and the world seriously. Hikvision has been engaging with Administration officials to clarify misunderstandings about the company and address their concerns.”⁷⁴ In July 2021, when the UK Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee called on the UK government to blacklist and ban the use of equipment from Hikvision, the company responded by denying “knowingly engag[ing] in human rights abuses” when deciding to take on projects in the region.⁷⁵

In 2023, in response to media coverage of its internal review, Hikvision referred to its statement in its latest Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) report, claiming it did not enter into the five contracts with police agencies in the Uyghur Region with the intent to commit human rights abuses.⁷⁶

VI. Government Sanctions

Governments felt compelled to act given the prevailing human rights and security concerns associated with Hikvision. Multiple governments have imposed trade restrictions on Hikvision, starting with the US.⁷⁷

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In August 2018, the US Congress imposed conditions on federal contracting, blocking agencies from purchasing equipment from Hikvision and four other Chinese companies (Huawei, ZTE, Hytera and Dahua), and requiring the removal of all such equipment by August 2019, although this has been slow to happen.⁷⁸

In October 2019, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) under the US Commerce Department added Hikvision to the Entity List of companies restricted from receiving US exports, along with seven other major surveillance tech companies. They were added to the list for being “implicated in human rights

HIKVISION SANCTIONS TIMELINE

October 2019—Entity List additions

U.S. Commerce Department Bureau of Industry and Security adds Hikvision (and seven other companies) to Entity List of companies restricted from receiving U.S. exports for their role in human rights violations in the Uyghur region.

April 2021—EU removes cameras

The European Union Parliament removes Hikvision's fever cameras (used for thermal imaging), accusing the company of "contributing to serious human rights abuses" in the Uyghur Region.

July 2021—U.K. Committee calls for ban

U.K. Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee called on the UK government to prohibit Hikvision from selling products in the UK due to its links to human rights abuses in the Uyghur region.

June 2022—Denmark regional ban

Denmark's Capital Region officially bans the purchase of Hikvision video cameras for security reasons.

November 2022—Scottish parliament

Scottish Parliament reports phasing out Hikvision devices for national security reasons, and no new cameras have been installed since July 2021.

February 2023—Irish Parliament

Irish Council for Civil Liberties and multiple policymakers call for the immediate removal of Hikvision cameras from the Irish Parliament, Leinster House, due to the company's links to human rights violations and security concerns.

March 2023—Entity List additions

U.S. Commerce Department the Bureau of Industry and Security adds five Hikvision subsidiaries operating in the Uyghur Region to the Entity List.



August 2018—Government procurement

U.S. Congress imposes conditions on federal contracting, blocking agencies from purchasing equipment from Hikvision and four Chinese companies (Huawei, ZTE, Hytera, Dahua), and requiring removal of all such equipment by August 2019.



January 2020—Norway Oil Fund

Norwegian Council on Ethics recommends the Government Pension Fund of Norway divest from Hikvision due to its links to "serious human rights violations," leading Norges Bank to remove Hikvision from its investment portfolio.



June 2021—Biden Executive Order

U.S. President Biden issues executive order restricting outbound investment prohibiting U.S. persons from investing in Hikvision or Huawei, citing their role in abuses in East Turkistan.



February 2022—Parliamentarian requests

Dutch parliamentarians Kathalijne Buitenweg and Kees Verhoeven ask the government to investigate how widely Hikvision surveillance equipment has been rolled out in the Netherlands.



September 2022—U.K. Minister for Security

Newly appointed U.K. Minister for Security calls on the U.K. government to "stop buying any technology that facilitates repression" in the Uyghur region.



February 2023—U.K. councils call for removal

Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells councils in the U.K. state that they would stop using Hikvision cameras in council buildings and replace them with cameras from different providers when they next upgrade them.



March 2023—Australian government

Australian officials state that they will review their surveillance system in government buildings and remove cameras made by Hikvision and Dahua due to security risks.



June 2023—U.K. Cabinet

U.K. Cabinet Office announced it would publish a timeline for removing all surveillance technology made by Hikvision and Dahua from sensitive government sites due to security concerns that the companies may share data with China's security services.

China's campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention, and high-technology surveillance against Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups in the [Uyghur Region].”⁷⁹ In March 2023, the BIS further added five Hikvision subsidiaries operating in the Uyghur Region to the Entity List.⁸⁰

Other US export and investment restrictions also apply to Hikvision. In June 2021, US President Biden issued an executive order restricting outbound investment, prohibiting US persons from investing in Hikvision or Huawei, citing the companies as implicated in the security crackdown in East Turkistan. In May 2022, the US Treasury Department reported it may impose new sanctions potentially restricting companies and individuals in the US from conducting business with Hikvision.⁸¹

Human rights groups and policymakers are also concerned that restrictions on the use of Hikvision products only apply at the federal levels and are not enforced at city and state levels.

In January 2020, the Norwegian Council on Ethics recommended the Government Pension Fund Global divest from Hikvision due to its links to “serious human rights violations,” leading the Norges Bank to remove Hikvision from its portfolio.⁸²

In April 2021, the EU Parliament removed Hikvision’s fever cameras (used for thermal imaging), accusing the company of “contributing to serious human rights abuses” in the Uyghur Region.⁸³

In July 2021, the UK Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee called on the UK government to prohibit Hikvision from selling products in the UK due to its links to human rights abuses in the Uyghur Region.

In September 2022, the new UK Minister for Security also called on the UK government to “stop buying any technology that facilitates repression” in the Uyghur Region.⁸⁴ In February 2023, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells councils in the UK

stated they would stop using Hikvision cameras in council buildings and replace them with cameras from different providers when they next upgrade them.⁸⁵

In June 2023, the UK Cabinet Office announced it would publish a timeline for removing all surveillance technology made by Hikvision and Dahua from sensitive government sites due to security concerns that the companies may share data with China’s security services.⁸⁶

In February 2022, Dutch parliamentarians Kathalijne Buitenweg and Kees Verhoeven asked the government to investigate how widely Hikvision surveillance equipment has been rolled out in the Netherlands.⁸⁷ In June 2022, Denmark’s Capital Region officially banned the purchase of Hikvision video cameras for security reasons.⁸⁸

In November 2022, the Scottish Parliament reported phasing out Hikvision devices for national security reasons, and no new cameras have been installed since July 2021.⁸⁹

In February 2023, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and multiple policymakers called for the immediate removal of Hikvision cameras from the Irish Parliament, Leinster House, due to the company’s links to human rights violations and security concerns.⁹⁰ And in February 2023, Australian officials stated they will review their surveillance system in government buildings and remove cameras made by Hikvision and Dahua due to security risks.⁹¹

VII. Conclusion

Hikvision’s extensive operations in the Uyghur Region implicate the company in egregious human rights violations. Those using Hikvision surveillance technology today are at high risk of abetting these violations.

Trade restrictions are having some impact on Hikvision’s sales globally. According to IPVM, in 2022, Hikvision’s sales fell in Europe and North America, and increased in Latin American and Asian markets, which may be in part due to pushback on links to human rights abuses and security concerns.⁹²

However, despite existing sanctions, Hikvision surveillance technology is still being used in government and public spaces in North America and Europe. Nearly 3,000 Hikvision and Dahua cameras were found at US federal government buildings even after they were banned.⁹³ Multiple US federal agencies, including the military, reportedly purchased re-labeled Hikvision and Dahua equipment in 2021.⁹⁴

Hikvision cameras were also found at UK military bases and police departments in early 2023.⁹⁵ Two police forces in England and Wales stated they used body-worn cameras made by Hikvision.⁹⁶ Human rights groups and policymakers are also concerned that restrictions on the use of Hikvision products only apply at the federal levels and are not enforced at city and state levels. International markets with no existing sanctions also risk abetting or being implicated in human rights violations.

VIII. Recommendations

UHRP calls for governments to impose comprehensive human rights sanctions on all surveillance companies operating in the Uyghur Region, including:

- Export bans on components for surveillance systems
- Procurement bans for taxpayer-funded surveillance systems
- Investment bans on capital flows to these companies

IX. About the Author

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X. Acknowledgements

The author thanks Henryk Szadziewski, Louisa Greve, Peter Irwin, Conor Healy, and Ben Carrdus for their feedback and edits to this brief.

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²⁵ Shodan is a search engine designed to retrieve information about devices connected to the Internet by querying the devices for publicly available information. See: <https://www.shodan.io/> for more information.

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