At a forum on Capitol Hill on January 31st, four China experts sharply questioned the widespread assumption in the news that the newly-installed, younger leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, who now run China, will truly be “reformers,” at least when it comes to human rights abuse, as opposed to economic policy and the Party machinery.

The Forum, entitled “Ticking Time Bomb: The Ethnic Crisis Facing China’s New Leadership,” was held by Citizens Power for China, a grassroots pro-democracy group. The audience from dozens of congressional offices, heard representatives of different ethnic minorities repressed by the Chinese Communist Party: Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians. The speakers described the brutal coercion and unlawful detention that each of those peoples have endured and continue to suffer.

Mr. Enghebatu Togochog, the Director of the Southern Mongolian, explained that regarding China’s recent leadership change, expectation should not be too high, because a regime’s internal personal reshuffle does not guarantee that the regime will become a benign one.

Mr. Bhuchung K. Tsering, Vice President of the International Campaign for Tibet, urged that the self-immolations by Tibetans are certainly one of the severe challenges that the new Chinese leadership is facing. They are clear indications of the depth of feelings among the Tibetan people at their current state of affairs. China’s hope of the issue of self-immolations by Tibetans fading away—as a result of a combination of threats, suppression and increased control—is not happening.

Alim Seytioff, President of the Uyghur American Association, called on Congress to pass legislation denying visas to Chinese officials involved in the violation of Uyghur human rights to enter the U.S. and requiring the Treasury Department to freeze their assets.

Dr. Yang, Jianli, President, Citizen Power for China (AKA, Initiatives for China), argued that the Tibetan issue, the Uyghur issue and the Mongolian issue are posing a serious test to China’s rise which I think is approaching a crossroads. The CCP does no longer have the only say about China’s future; after all, we are the most important factors in the equation of our own future. “Now it is not the time to despair. It is the time to take action and tip the scales of history toward freedom.”