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UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN NORTHWEST CHINA

Section 1: Overview

Based on mounting evidence it is clear that the Chinese state is engaging in the extrajudicial systematic mass detention of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Muslim minorities. This process resonates with the most horrific moments in modern history. In the past such processes have resulted in generational trauma and social elimination. They shattered families, destroyed native forms of knowledge and, at times, resulted in mass death.

Since 2017, hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and Kazakhs have been “disappeared” into a widespread system of “education transformation centers” in Northwest China (Xinjiang) (Philips 2018; Zenz 2018). Nearly all Uyghurs and Kazakhs in China have an immediate family member who is interned in this re-education camp system. This human engineering project affects every aspect of their lives. As the scholar Gene Bunin has noted recently (Bunin 2018), Uyghurs now refer to themselves as a “people destroyed.” As I observed during a research visit in April 2018, the phrase “everyone is gone” or “disappeared” (Uy: *adem yoq*) is something that Uyghurs repeat on a regular basis. Many Uyghur-owned businesses have closed across the country. Whole streets have been abandoned in Uyghur towns and villages in their homeland.

The mass detention of Muslims was accelerated in 2017 when the Party Secretary of the region Chen Quanguo, with the encouragement of the Xi Jinping administration, instituted a mass evaluation of Uyghur and Kazakh society (Chin 2017). Chen asked security personnel and civil servants to determine who had studied or taught unauthorized forms of Islam, traveled internationally or had international contacts (See Figure 1). Through this process the state determined, without due process, that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Uyghurs and Kazakhs were “unsafe” and their worldview needed to be “eradicated” from society (Dooley 2018).

As a result of this categorization the police sent these men and women into the reeducation detention system. Hundreds of thousands more were formally arrested and sentenced using China’s broadly defined anti-terrorism laws. In 2017, 21 percent of all who were arrested came from the Uyghur and Kazakh homelands in China (CHRD 2018). In addition, the Xi and Chen administration has also forced hundreds of thousands of others to attend day or night schools (Nebhay 2018). In addition, Uyghurs and Kazakhs who were determined to be “safe” were often pressed into service as instructors, guards and low-level police officers in the reeducation and prison systems. Tens of thousands of the children of those detained have become wards of the state and are being raised in state-run facilities that center around Chinese-language education and Han cultural values and practices (Feng 2018).

Population Data Collection Form

人口信息采集表

基本信息	房屋地址			Key Data: Age group? Uighur? Unemployed? Passport holder? Prays daily? Religious training? Visited one of 26 countries?*	<input type="checkbox"/> 商户/务工 <input type="checkbox"/> 访客	重点标签
	房屋性质	<input type="checkbox"/> 自购房 <input type="checkbox"/> 自建房 <input type="checkbox"/> 出租房 <input type="checkbox"/> 公租房	居住性质		<input type="checkbox"/> 业主 <input type="checkbox"/> 雇工	
	姓名		性别			
	身份证号		出生日期			
	户号		与户主关系			
	户籍	<input type="checkbox"/> 本地 <input type="checkbox"/> 外地 <input type="checkbox"/> 国外	户籍详址			
	文化程度		婚姻状况			
	职业		务工地址			
	流动人口婚育证明号		儿童是否预防接种		<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	
	是否为学龄儿童	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	是否就学		<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	
是否有医社保	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	医社保所在地				
联系方式		在				
活动轨迹	来乌日期		来乌事由		流动轨迹	
	宗教信仰	<input type="checkbox"/> 无 <input type="checkbox"/> 伊斯兰教 <input type="checkbox"/> 佛教 <input type="checkbox"/> 基督教 <input type="checkbox"/> 其他	是否礼拜	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否		
宗教信仰	每日礼拜次数	<input type="checkbox"/> 1次 <input type="checkbox"/> 2-4次 <input type="checkbox"/> 5次	礼拜地点	<input type="checkbox"/> 家 <input type="checkbox"/> 清真寺 <input type="checkbox"/> 其他	是否主麻	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否
	常去清真寺名称		是否有宗教学识	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	学经	
	是否有宗教学识	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	学经		教经人	
护照持有情况	是否持有护照	<input type="checkbox"/> 自持 <input type="checkbox"/> 统管 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	护照编号		护照种类	<input type="checkbox"/> 因公 <input type="checkbox"/> 因私
	是否出过国	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	年内出境次数	___次	近一次出境时间和国家	
	出境事由	<input type="checkbox"/> 公务 <input type="checkbox"/> 探亲 <input type="checkbox"/> 求学 <input type="checkbox"/> 其他	是否有境外关系人	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否		
	境外关系人姓名		与境外关系人关系			
	前往26国次数	___次	国家名称		最近一次回国时间	
涉稳情况	是否为重点人员、特殊群体	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	被列类别	1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 特 <input type="checkbox"/>	Type of Person:	
	是否被打击处理人员亲属	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	是否被收押人员亲属	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	与被打处理收押人员关系	
	是否参加过集中教育转化	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	参加集中教育时间、地点		集	
驾照车辆情况	是否持有驾照	<input type="checkbox"/> 是 <input type="checkbox"/> 否	驾照类别		驾	
	是否及		车 <input type="checkbox"/> 货车		车辆用途	
备注						

采集人: _____ 社区(村)民警 审核签字: _____ 社区(村)领导 审核签字: _____ 15岁以上 被采集人签字: _____

Annotations in red added by The Wall Street Journal. Notes: * Xinjiang considers it suspicious for Uighurs to visit a list of 26 mostly Muslim countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. ** "Persons of interest" refers to people on the police watch list; "special population" is a common euphemism for Uighurs seen as separatists risks. Sources: Tahir Hamut (provided the form), Uighur Istiqlal TV and Adrian Zenz (confirmation of 26-country list).

Figure 1. Form used in mass assessment of Uyghur and Kazakh Population; Source Wall Street Journal

This process has also explicitly targeted Uyghurs in positions of social and cultural influence. The Xi and Chen administration has arrested or disappeared hundreds of prominent Uyghur public intellectuals. These public figures include the widely-recognized pop star Ablajan Awut Ayup, the expert on Uyghur folklore and human geography Rahile Dawut, the former president of the Xinjiang University Hospital Halmurat Ghopur, the first translator of the Quran into Uyghur Muhammad Salih Hajim, the world-class dutar player Abdurehim Heyt, the soccer player Erfan Hezim, the translator and widely-read commentator Abdulqadir Jalaleddin, and Xinjiang University president Tashpolat Teyip. Several of these figures have received death sentences for alleged “extremist” tendencies.

Conditions in the detention centers are often quite poor. Many reports have noted malnourishment and severe psychological distress among the detainees (Shih 2018). In some cases, shoelaces and belts are confiscated, due to the prevalence of self-harm and suicide. Those who do not fully participate in political reeducation are often subjected to beatings, isolation, and forms of religious and psychological violation. There have been numerous reports of deaths in the centers, particularly among the elderly and infirm, but also of younger people who were in good health when they were taken.

Section 2: Historical and Economic Context

The region in which this violence is occurring is officially named the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This region in far Northwest China comprises one-sixth of China’s total landmass and is the source of 20-25 percent of Chinese coal, natural gas and oil reserves (see Figure 2). It also supplies approximately 40 percent of Chinese domestically-sourced cotton and a large proportion of the world’s supply of tomatoes (Teague 2009). Most recently it has become an incubator for techno-security development, receiving more than 8 billion dollars in direct state investment to deploy AI-enabled computer-vision projects in the region (Zhang 2017).

The name “Xinjiang” is a colonial term meaning “new frontier” or “new dominion” in Chinese. Because of this, most Uyghurs who are free to choose how they refer to their homelands prefer not to use this name. Nearly all of what is referred to as “Xinjiang” today is the native lands of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Mongols, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Tatars, and other minority groups. In 1949, only around 4 percent of the population of “Xinjiang” was Han. Today, Han make up over 40 percent of the total population.

The Muslim population of China is comprised of three main groups. There are a total of approximately 10.5 million Hui, 1.5 million Kazakhs, and 11 million Uyghurs in the country as a whole. The vast majority of all Kazakhs and Uyghurs live in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. Only around 1 million Hui—Chinese-speaking Muslims who are not of Turkic descent—live in Xinjiang. The majority of Hui, around 9.5 million, live outside of the region and are thus not yet affected to the same degree. There are signs that Hui in places outside of Xinjiang, such as Ningxia and Gansu, are beginning to be targeted with “de-extremification” campaigns, but it is too early to tell what effects these campaigns will have. The Uyghurs and Kazakhs have been explicitly targeted, like the Tibetans, because of their land-based claims to autonomy and their linguistic and ethno-racial difference.

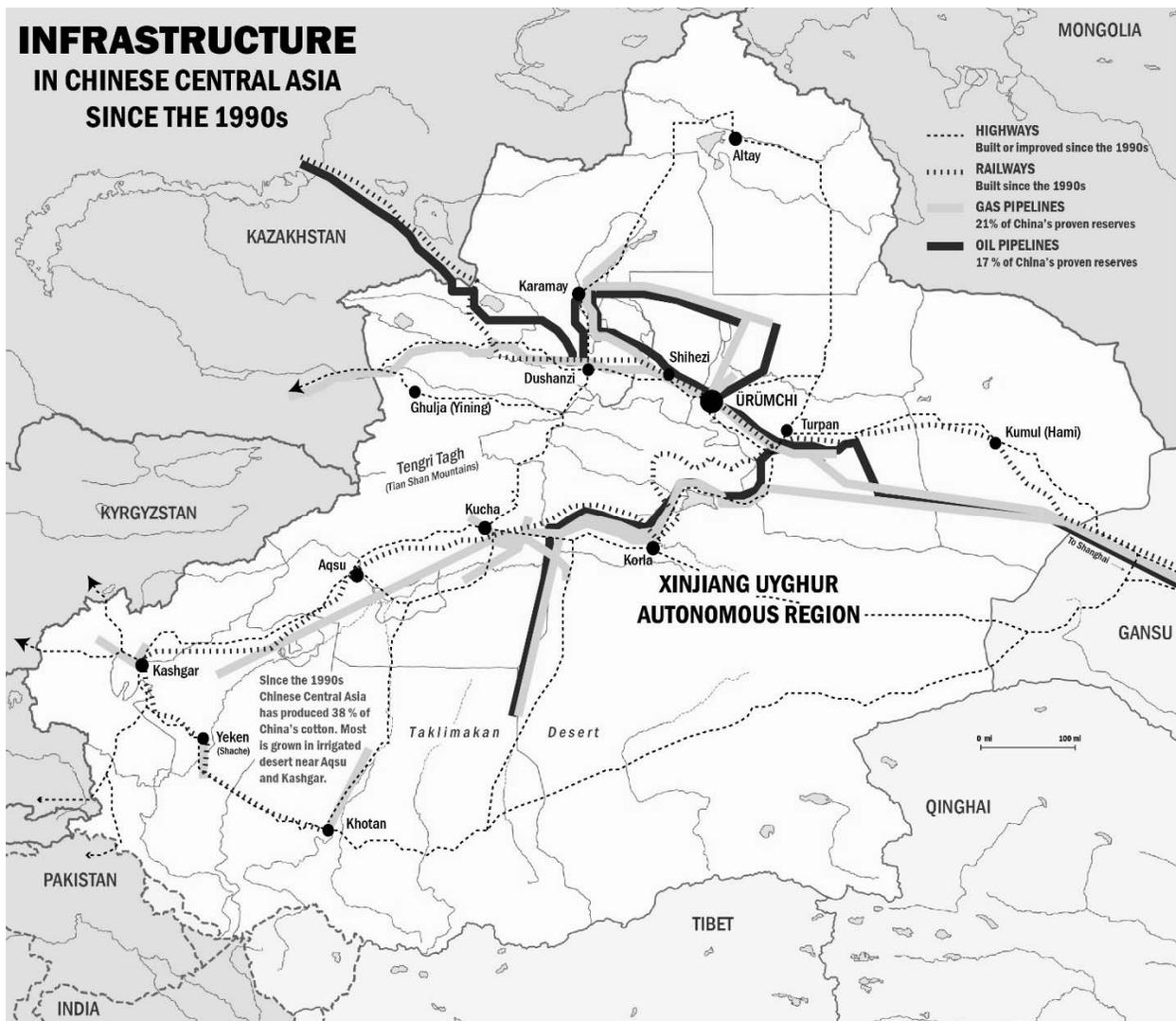


Figure 2. Map of recent development in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Map by Darren Byler; Data Source National Geographic 2009.

Section 3: Why is this happening now?

Since 2014, the Chinese state has engaged in what it describes as a “People’s War on Terror.” In the government’s discourse, only people who look different from Han people, and in most cases, practice forms of Islam, can be described as “terrorists.” This means that what the state is in fact engaging in is a “war” on public expressions of Islam and Turkic minority culture (Byler 2017). There are at least two major reasons for this.

First, since the early 2000s, the state has accelerated Han migration to the Uyghur and Kazakh homelands in China in order to develop natural resource extraction, consolidate control over the border regions, and develop new markets. This had the effect of radically increasing the cost of living in the region as a whole, while permitting widespread job discrimination toward the Muslims who were native to the region (Bequelin 2004; Tohti 2015). To counter these effects the state introduced Chinese language education initiatives and labor transfer programs to integrate Uyghurs and Kazakhs who were displaced or impoverished through this process. This led to violence and competition for jobs in Eastern China, in turn

These two factors, taken together, led state authorities, including new Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, to determine, in 2017, that security was not enough to produce “lasting stability.” Instead, large segments of the minority population needed to be “re-educated.”

There has never been any existential threat to the nation from pious Muslims in China. The Chinese authorities are mostly interested in the land and resources of the Uyghur and Kazakh homelands. They are also interested in leading the world in cyber-security and artificial intelligence development. Uyghurs and Kazakhs offer them an opportunity to experiment with and develop this technology, before they export it elsewhere.

Section 4: Effects of this process

All Muslim groups in what is called the Xinjiang region face the threat of being sent to “re-education camps.” It appears that in many cases local officials are given a mandate to detain a certain percentage of the population in their jurisdiction. In northern parts of the region, where there are fewer Uyghurs and Kazakhs, Hui (Chinese-speaking Muslims) are sometimes sent to the camps because they have practiced so-called extremist forms of Islam or have unauthorized knowledge of international politics.

In the Uyghur and Kazakh homelands in China, most people rely on informal communication or rumors to get a general sense of what is actually happening and what the state intends to do. Since the state purposefully gaslights, or obfuscates, what it is doing through the use of self-valorizing euphemisms such as “ethnic unity” and “re-education,” many people do not have a clear understanding of how Uyghur and Kazakh society is being subjected to human engineering as a whole. Instead, they are mostly aware of what is happening to their immediate friends and relatives. Throughout most segments of Uyghur and Kazakh society, there is a deep fear and paranoia concerning the state’s surveillance power and the trustworthiness of their acquaintances. Uyghurs and Kazakhs nearly universally disbelieve the rhetoric that is posited by state media. Uyghurs and Kazakhs in upper-class or government positions may feel as though they are immune from the “de-extremification” campaign, but all of them now understand that many of their fellow Uyghurs or Kazakhs are being punished.

Most Hui Muslims outside of Xinjiang are still permitted to practice normal forms of Islam, such as praying, fasting, attending mosques, and dressing in a pious manner. However, all Muslims in the Uyghur and Kazakh homelands in China, in Xinjiang, are in effect prohibited from carrying out these practices in public or in private. Although the majority of mosques in the region have been destroyed, the large “Friday” mosques remain open. However, people are forced to scan their IDs, and in some cases their faces, in order to enter mosques. Since one of the reasons people are sent to “re-education camps” is because of regular mosque attendance, most Turkic minorities in China have stopped going to mosques (see Figure 4). Other normal forms of piety, such as praying or fasting, are also considered a sign of “extremism,” so people have likewise ceased these practices. Even saying the names “Allah” or “Khuda” or greeting others by saying “Assalam Alykum” is banned in everyday speech.



Figure 4. Thousands of Uyghur mosques have been closed and had their minarets removed. Here, in April 2018, a Han tourist uses a closed mosque in Kashgar as the backdrop for a photo. Image by Darren Byler

When I was in the Uyghur homeland in April 2018, I did observe one elderly man in the back corner of a Uyghur restaurant performing a blessing after he ate. Otherwise, this formerly commonplace practice had been completely abandoned. Public practice of Islam in general is now quite uncommon.

Section 5: Possibilities for Domestic and International Sanctions of this Process

There is not much discussion of these gross violations of human rights among Han in the Chinese diaspora or in Chinese-language media. The majority of Han, both in China and abroad, believe that the state is acting in their best interests by suppressing the Uyghur “terrorist” threat (Wang 2018). Many of them do not understand that Uyghurs are resisting the erasure of their way of life and being dispossessed of their homeland. They also do not understand the scale and magnitude of what is happening. Instead, they believe the rhetoric of the state, which tells them that Uyghurs are “backward” and “extremists.” Han people do sometimes acknowledge that innocent people are being affected by these processes, but most say that in the end this “re-education” program will produce a net benefit for Uyghurs and the safety of Han people in China.

Unfortunately, world and domestic politics often center on a cost-benefit calculus rather than moral or political will. Since China is an important economic partner for nearly all nations around the world, it is difficult to envision immediate and effective action. At the same time, there is now significant discussion of stopping the spread of the products of Chinese technology corporations who benefit from the mass detention system (though this is primarily because such products are viewed as a potential security threat). A number of countries are discussing economic sanctions and travel restrictions directed at key Chinese leaders. Other countries, Germany and Sweden, grant Uyghurs and Kazakhs asylum if they manage to escape.

The story of what is happening to Turkic Muslims in China is an important not only because it is shattering families and erasing the cultural knowledge of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in China, but also because it signals a change in how Chinese leaders see themselves in relation to the rest of the world. Due to the weakness of the current American administration, Chinese leaders are beginning to see China as an emerging superpower. What they are experimenting with in China may very well be used internationally—particularly in developing countries where there is significant Chinese investment. Leaders in the Chinese techno-security sector speak openly about exporting their population control technologies and systems to countries along China’s One Belt One Road development initiative. The argue that since 60 percent of the world’s Muslim population lives in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa that the market potential for Chinese techno-security is “unlimited” (Zhang 2017).

At the same time, it is important to understand that most Chinese citizens do not understand the ruthlessness with which their government is eliminating Uyghur and Kazakh society in China. Perhaps only 10 to 20 million Han citizens, of China’s entire population of 1.38 billion, truly understand and consent to what is going on in relation to the Turkic Muslim population. Because of this, and because it is important to fight hatred in all forms, it is imperative not to allow the actions of the Chinese state to fuel anti-Chinese bigotry and racism.

It is important for people in every part of the world, non-Muslim Asian-Canadian citizens of in particular, to stand alongside our Uyghur and Kazakh neighbors and support them in this time of crisis.

Section 6: Policy Suggestions

- 1) I recommend that this subcommittee issue a formal statement demanding that Xi Jinping, the President of the People’s Republic of China, and Chen Quanguo, Chinese Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, immediately abolish the “transformation through education” detention system and release all Uyghur and Kazakh detainees and prisoners that have been “disappeared” without due process or legal representation.
 - a) Provide complete and open transparency regarding the location of all detainees and facilitate an immediate process of freeing and reunifying them with their children and their loved ones.
 - b) Release all Uyghur and Kazakh intellectuals and prisoners of conscience.
 - c) Allow Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other minorities the immediate right to obtain passports and travel freely.
 - d) Restore the rights of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other minorities to practice their faith and honor their native traditions without state interference or fear of detention.
- 2) I call on this subcommittee to introduce legislation that places economic sanctions on Chinese authorities responsible for this gross violation of human rights and the technology companies which are benefiting from this process (See ChinaFile 2018).
- 3) I call on this subcommittee to introduce legislation joining Germany and Sweden in granting expedited asylum to Uyghurs and Kazakhs from China and a blanket refusal to deport Uyghurs and Kazakhs to China.

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