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Islamophobia, Chinese Style: Total Internment of Uyghur Muslims by the People's Republic of China

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ABSTRACT: Since 2016 the mistreatment of Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim minority living in their homeland in northwest China, by the People's Republic of China has been taken to extreme levels. Uyghurs now are clearly victims of genocidal policies through internment of all types. The total internment of Uyghurs involves physical, psychological and virtual internments. In this article, I discuss the issue in three parts, namely internment camps for Uyghurs, urban internment and virtual internment. While all of them have both physical and psychological aspects, the last two are based on an Orwellian use of surveillance technologies for the purpose of large-scale persecution and suppression of Uyghurs with the intention of achieving a China with one homogenous culture. The total internment which is currently being carried out has two main motives: Islamophobia and the crucial geo-strategical position of the Uyghur homeland.

Keywords: Uyghurs, China, Islamophobia, internment, surveillance capitalism, terror capitalism, genocide

One man's imagined community is another man's political prison.

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*

People of various ethnic groups (mostly Turkic), such as Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyzes and Tatars have been living for centuries in the Uyghur Region. While the region was subjected Chinese invasions from time to time in history, since 1949 it has been under Chinese rule. The name Xinjiang, which was first used in 1884 during the Qing Dynasty, means "New Frontier" or "New Territory" in Chinese, showing the Chinese are not native to that land. People of the region traditionally call their land East Turkestan or Uyghuristan. The region is officially called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). For convenience, in this article I will call the XUAR the Uyghur Region and all the Turkic-Muslim people from this region as Uyghurs (regardless of their ethnic origins).

The ethnic composition of the Uyghur Region has shifted in the past half century. According to the 1953 government census, Han Chinese constituted 6% of the region's population of 4.87 million, while Uyghurs made up 75%. The 2000 census found out the Han population at 40.57% and Uyghurs at 45.21% of a total population of 18.46 million (Toops, 2004). According to latest Chinese census, Muslims in the Uygur Region number over 11 million, while Uyghur sources claim the Muslim population to be around 15 million. There is a growing Sinicization due to intense Han immigration. Recently the percentage of Han reached more than 50% in the region for the first time. So the Uyghurs have become a minority in their homeland.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution until the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 the region had a relatively calm and conflict-free period. But after the Tiananmen Massacre the

Chinese regime became bolder in its treatment of its citizens, including the Uyghurs. For instance, the 9/11 attacks in the USA were an excuse for the Chinese regime that claimed that it too was a victim of Islamic terrorism.

The region has many problems: it is one of China's poorest areas. Uyghurs suffer from discrimination in employment (Fischer, 2014) and education (Hann, 2014), widespread corruption and restrictions on their freedoms, religious practice and culture. Yet any criticism is portrayed by the state as a sign of separatism and extremism. From time to time, the region saw violence such as the violent protests against Han Chinese in July 2009 stemming from the Uyghurs' desperation after decades of discrimination and persecution.

Since 2014 things have changed drastically in the Uyghur Region. The central leadership declared in 2014 the "People's War on Terror," which had tremendously negative impacts on the lives of Uyghurs. In August 2016, Chen Quanguo became Xinjiang's new Communist Party secretary and mass detention and surveillance of Uyghurs followed. Before that he was the party secretary of Tibet, where he pacified the region through intense securitization and widespread social control mechanisms. The internment of Uyghurs increased after "Regulations on De-extremification" were adopted in March 2017. Byler (2018b) suggests that "Chen, with the support of the Xi administration, made the decision to move from simply a police state security approach to a mass human re-engineering approach in managing the Uyghur population."

Chen Quanguo, a key ally of President Xi Jinping, is known for ruthless crackdowns and zero tolerance. What he did in Tibet foretold what he would do in Xinjiang. And what he did in Tibet might be summed up by the expression "Copper Ramparts, Iron Walls" (Human Rights Watch, 2017):

The term refers to an impenetrable "public security defense network" (zhi'an lianfang wangluo) consisting of citizen patrols, border security posts, police checkpoints, surveillance systems, internet controls, identity card monitoring, travel restrictions, management of "focus personnel," grid unit offices, informant networks, and other mechanisms that aim to control or monitor movement of people and ideas into, out of, or within a region or society. It describes the ideal of "stability maintenance" work, where authorities have successfully sealed off a region or society from people or ideas they regard as threatening or problematic.

INTERNMENT CAMPS FOR UYGHURS

In the last decade the Chinese government has built a network of internment camps for ethnic Turkic Muslim minorities in the Uyghur Region and since 2017 the number of camps has increased tremendously. The government has been sending to those camps a lot of people, including women of various ages, teenagers and old people. Initially, the Chinese state officially denied the existence of such camps (until October 2018), but due to overwhelming evidence, including satellite photographs and leaked photographs and videos, the acceptance came. Nevertheless, initially the authorities called them "vocational schools" which people willingly attend. Later they were called "vocational schools for criminals." Yet when many camps held academics, intellectuals, artists and even elderly people, this label obviously sounded ridiculous. Then the authorities labeled the camps as "re-education" camps for terrorists or extremists. One should note that they had to add the term "extremists," as common people of the Uyghur Region, including teenagers and elderly people who ended up in the camps had

nothing to do with terrorism and hardly any of them were charged with any terrorist attack or event. People are simply locked up without trial and they do not even know what their crimes are. Some authorities also called these internment camps “hospitals for ideological illness” because, as I will discuss below, they consider Islam as a mental disease. In brief, the camps are definitely internment or concentration camps with daily forced indoctrination, forced labor, torture and rape.

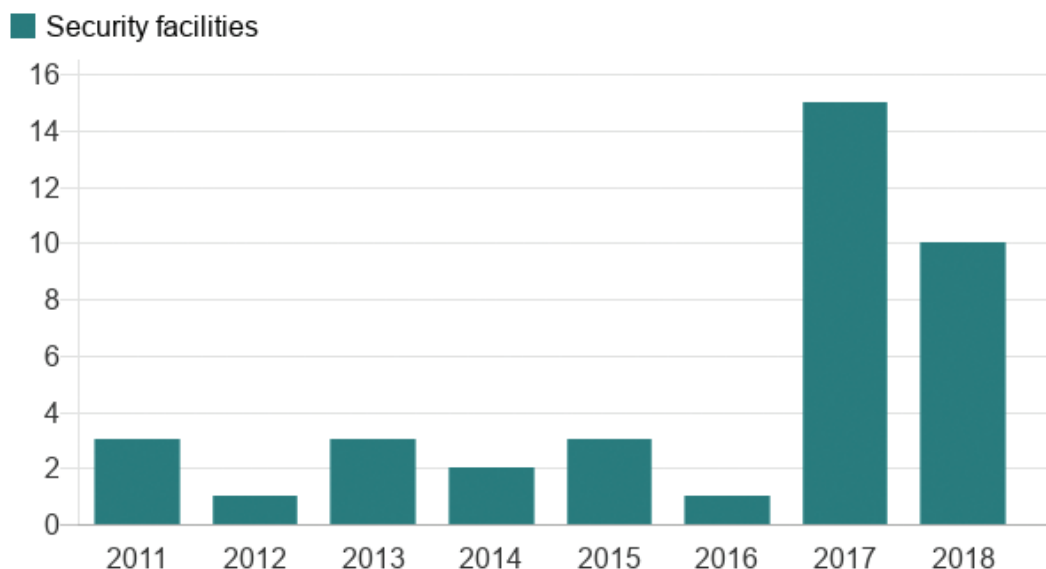
In fact, the concept of “re-education” has a long history in Communist China: in the 1950s, the state established the practices of “reform through labor” and “re-education through labor” (Fu, 2005; Yu, 2010). Later, in the early 2000s, the government initiated “transformation through education” classes for Falun Gong followers. The current application of such concepts to Uyghurs is presented as “de-extremification campaigns” and it seems that the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) methods for that purpose have not changed much. This time the CCP is allegedly fighting “the three evils,” namely separatism, extremism and terrorism. For instance, businessman Yu Ming, who was imprisoned for 12 years and tortured nearly to death in labor camps in China for his beliefs in Falun Gong, said that from the reports of what has been happening in the “re-education camps” in Uyghur Region, he could tell that the Chinese state is employing the same methods it has been using against Falun Gong followers to force them to give up their faith. According to him, even “the lies, slogans, and propaganda are the same” (Zeng, 2019).

As for the number of the detainees in the internment camps, Gay McDougall, a member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, stated in August 2018 that more than one million Uyghurs and Muslim minorities were forced into the camps (UN Human Rights, 2018). Since then the number has definitely increased, since we know that internment of Uyghurs is continued by the Chinese state. Indeed, a testimony given at the US Senate on 4 December 2018 by Scott Busby from Senate Foreign Relations Committee claimed that “possibly more than 2 million” Uyghurs were detained (Busby, 2019). Finally, various Uyghur human rights organizations claim that number to be around three million detainees.

Most of the internment camps were until recently scattered throughout the Uyghur Region. By obtaining satellite images from applications like Google Earth Pro, some Chinese and Western activists discover, list and display information on China’s growing network of internment camps in the region. For example, Shawn Zhang (2018), an online activist has listed (as of 29 May 2019) 94 internment camps with their satellite images, locations and GPS coordinates. Likewise, Adrian Zenz (2019) has provided very valuable information on internment camps by making use of publicly available evidence from official sources, including government websites, media reports and other Chinese internet sources. Similarly, a report by Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s (ASPI) International Cyber Policy Centre provides open-source research into the province. The results are added into a single database which gives valuable and more detailed information on various camps, including official documents and media articles. The research shows that the listed facilities are “punitive in nature and more akin to prison camps” than transformation through education centers (Ryan, Cave and Ruser, 2018). The database also identifies and gives information on some of the camps discovered by Shawn Zhang and Adrian Zenz, as shown in Figure 1.

One should note that in China there are also internment camps for Uyghurs outside the Uyghur Region. This is primarily because the authorities try to hide the numbers of internees from the world due to avoid a negative international reaction. As we have seen, even satellite imagery can give us an approximate idea of the number of detainees in a certain camp, especially a newly built one. Besides, due to huge numbers of Uyghurs kept in internment camps

Number of new security facilities detected in Xinjiang province, 2011-2018



Source: GMV

Figure 1. Number of New Security Facilities Detected in Xinjiang Province, 2011–2018

in the Uyghur Region, the network of camps there does not have enough space for newcomers, hence the need to send some of the inmates elsewhere. For example, according to sources in the CCP, the provinces of Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Heilongjiang and others have been assigned quotas of internees to take. Currently, sources report that Shaanxi Province in central China has a quota of about 25,000 people and nearly 500,000 Uyghurs will be dispersed to the internment camps throughout China (Zaili, 2018).

In spite of the official denials and hindrances, we have detailed information about physical situation of the internment camps. Some of it comes from the reports of former inmates or former Uyghur teachers who were forced to teach in the camps, while some comes from secret video recordings. Satellite photographs too provide significant information, especially on the locations, size and number of the camps. Even some propaganda photographs published by the Chinese state too give us reliable information about some aspects of the camps or situation of the inmates. All the internment camps have definitely been built for the purpose of internment. They have walls and watchtowers just like prisons. The inmates are monitored 24 hours a day and deprived of any freedom and privacy. The rooms have iron gates and the windows are sealed with iron bars and wire netting. It is nearly impossible to escape from the camps. For instance, one can see a video clip of the newly built Yingye-er Re-education Camp, in Yining city in Xinjiang (Bitter Winter, 2018a). As understood from satellite images, the camp site was an empty space in October 2017 and by August 2018 most of the construction was completed. The camp already had several thousand inmates in September 2018. It has four building complexes with a floor space area of about 110,000 m² and can accommodate several thousand people. As the Bitter Winter video shows in detail and tells us, “inside the buildings, the interior constructions is just like the cells of a prison or detention center.” There are hundreds of surveillance cameras inside the buildings, including the dormitories, washrooms and toilets.

As for the activities in the camps, according to official information released by video (Made in China, 2018), the inmates learn the Chinese language (Mandarin), receive legal education (i.e. learn laws and regulations, national security, anti-terrorism) and vocational education. I believe that the “legal education” forms the indoctrination and brainwashing part of the re-education, as we know that the inmates are often asked to memorize and recite policy documents and speeches delivered by Xi Jinping, the current president of China. Also, as far as I gather from the video, the vocational education might include forced labor, as the camp produces and sells equipment to other parts of China. It seems that others who have watched similar official videos have the same impression (Buckley and Ramzy, 2018). In fact, contrary to the official information on the activities in the camps, the testimonies of many former inmates present a completely different picture: the camp work centered on military style training and denunciations of Islam. In the camps, the inmates have to repudiate their Islamic beliefs, criticize themselves and their loved ones and thank the ruling Communist Party. They are frequently lectured about the dangers of Islam (Shih, 2018). A video (Bitter Winter, 2018b) shot secretly in the newly built Yingye-er Re-education Camp (mentioned above) shows various signboards with rules and regulations written in Chinese and comments on some of them. For instance, article one of the “Heart-to-Heart Regulations” states that “anti-extremism should be incorporated within the content of heart-to-heart chats” and explains how this should be done. This is apparently the official name for the brainwashing process and the ideological indoctrination.

In some camps, washing of hands and feet is not allowed, as it is equated with Islamic ablution. Women are forced to apologize for wearing long clothes in Muslim style, praying or teaching the Quran to their children. As part of “de-extremification” campaigns, the inmates are often forced to eat pork and drink alcohol (both of which are forbidden in Islam), as we learn from the reports by former inmates (Shih and Kang, 2018). The detainees are not allowed to use the toilet for long periods of time, are not allowed to see a doctor when they are ill and are forced to perform drills like soldiers. If an inmate does not comply, he/she is sent to solitary confinement, deprived of food and/or sleep for a long time, beaten or tortured physically and/or psychologically. Such treatment is done regardless of the gender or age of the inmates. A Uyghur woman, Mihrigul Tursun (aged 29) told reporters in Washington that she was interrogated for four days in a row without sleep, had her hair shaved, was electrocuted and was subjected to an intrusive medical examination. “I thought that I would rather die than go through this torture and begged them to kill me,” she told the journalists (Cockburn, 2018).

Who are taken to the internment camps? According to Eldost, who was a Uyghur reporter for Xinjiang TV and was in mid-2017 forced to teach Chinese history and culture in an internment camp because he spoke excellent Mandarin, the internment system classified the inmates into three levels of security and duration of sentences. The first group in general consisted of illiterate Uyghur farmers who did not commit any crimes other than not speaking Chinese. The second class had people who were caught at home or on their smartphones with religious content or so-called separatist materials. And the final group was made up of those who had studied religion abroad and came back or were thought to be affiliated with foreign elements. In the latter cases, the inmates were often sentenced to prison terms of 10–15 years (Shih, 2018). Also, one can see thousands of individual profiles of the detainees on a website: Xinjiang Victims Database, which is run by an activist named Gene A. Bunin, who records testimonies of or about the Uyghur victims who were/are kept in concentration camps. The database provides, as much as possible, detailed information about each detainee including name, age, gender, ethnicity, profession, location, health status and reason for detention. The database also records people who are missing.

For interment camps, in addition to the ordinary people just listed, China targets prominent Uyghur intellectuals, academics and artists to erase the Uyghur ethnic identity. As of 25 March 2019, the Uyghur Human Rights Project had identified at least 386 Uyghur intellectuals detained and disappeared since early 2017. For instance, Rahile Dawut, an anthropologist at Xinjiang University who studied Muslim shrines, traditional songs and folklore was detained in December 2017 and has not been heard from since. Similarly, former Xinjiang University President Tashpolat Teyip, writer and critic Yalqun Rozi and former director of the Xinjiang Education Supervision Bureau Satar Sawut disappeared in 2017, as they perhaps criticized China's increasingly hardline policies in the Uyghur Region. Again, China sentenced Ilham Tohti, a Beijing-based Uyghur economics professor, to life in prison and he was charged with various crimes like criticizing the government, advocating separatism, inciting ethnic hatred and voicing support for terrorism. Tohti is, in fact, widely respected internationally as a moderate voice within the Uyghur community. Throughout his two-day trial in Urumqi, he asserted that he always has opposed separatism and that he had spent his life trying to promote better relations between Uyghurs and the Han majority. The Chinese state has targeted many other "moderate" Uyghur scholars and intellectuals. According to Rune Steenberg, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Copenhagen, such scholars offered a moderate path, where Uyghurs could continue with their religious and cultural practices without resorting to extreme and isolationist ideas: "This is the really big tragedy about the clampdown . . . They were actually bridge builders of integration of broader Uighur society into modern Chinese society and economy" (Ramzy, 2019). Professor Bruce Jacobs from Monash University sees Tohti's life imprisonment for doing nothing more than criticize Beijing's strategies as a deliberate attempt by the Communist Party to push Uyghurs towards radicalism and extremism:

The Uighurs have no options. By throwing Tohti into jail for the rest of his life—or even just sentencing him—they're showing that moderate action has no future. The only actions which have the option, or the potential for success, are the radical actions, because the Chinese colonial state is so violent and very vigorous in pushing down any sort of Uighur self consciousness. (McDonnell, 2014)

Fergus Ryan, an analyst and China expert at ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre is of the same opinion: "By detaining such a huge amount of people for no legal reason China is really running the risk of radicalising these people and creating the perfect conditions for violent extremism to happen in the future." Likewise, Soliev (2019, p. 75) believes that "[w]ithout treating the grievances of the Uyghur and other minority grievances sensitively, it will be impossible to effectively curb the potential for ethnic riots and the public support for terrorism." In 2006 Panda (2006) conjectured that China would not follow such a policy: "China will not be interested in directly confronting the Uygurs in Xinjiang through a heavy hand, which in turn will inflame their passion and political desire" (p. 42), but this view has proved to be completely wrong. While such observations come from common sense, then why does the Chinese state provoke radicalization and extremism? In my opinion, it is a deliberate policy, since the top authorities of the regime, who suffer from an intoxication of power, will use radicalism, extremism and separatism as excuses for furthering their genocidal policies, which will be used to annihilate Uyghur ethno-religious identity.

I will end the discussion about the interment camps with a final note on the kind of "crimes" that may lead a Uyghur in China to end up in an interment camp. Tanner Greer, a researcher on East Asian strategic thought, has summarized 48 ways to get detained in an internment camp, from reports, interviews with ex-detainees and governmental documents.

Owning a tent	Telling others not to swear	Speaking with someone who has traveled abroad
Owning welding equipment	Telling others not to sin	Having traveled abroad yourself
Owning extra food	Eating breakfast before the sun comes up	Merely knowing someone who has traveled abroad
Owning a compass	Arguing with an official	Publicly stating that China is inferior to some other country
Owning multiple knives	Sending a petition that complains about local officials	Having too many children
Abstaining from alcohol	Not allowing officials to sleep in your bed, eat your food and live in your house	Having a VPN (virtual private network)
Abstaining from cigarettes	Not having your government ID on your person	Having WhatsApp
Wailing, publicly grieving, or otherwise acting sad when your parents die	Not letting officials take your DNA	Watching a video filmed abroad
Wearing a scarf in the presence of the Chinese flag	Wearing a hijab (if you are under 45)	Going to a mosque
Praying	Fasting	Listening to a religious lecture
Not letting officials scan your irises	Not letting officials download everything you have on your phone	Not making voice recordings to give to officials
Speaking your native language in school	Speaking your native language in government work groups	Speaking with someone abroad (via Skype, WeChat, etc.)
Wearing a shirt with Arabic lettered writing on it	Having a full beard	Wearing any clothes with religious iconography
Not attending mandatory propaganda classes	Not attending mandatory flag-raising ceremonies	Not attending public struggle sessions
Refusing to denounce your family members or yourself in public struggle sessions	Trying to kill yourself when detained by the police	Trying to kill yourself when in the education camps
Performing a traditional funeral	Inviting multiple families to your house without registering with the police department	Being related to anyone who has done any of the above

Table 1. Red Flags for Detainment in Xinjiang

Source: Greer (2018)

Note that most of these “48 ways” are what people in most of the world would consider human, normal or even trivial (Greer, 2018). Table 1 lists all of them (although there are many other additional “crimes” which I myself have come across while reading testimonies of the victims such as stopping watching television, not using a smartphone, using an “abnormal” amount of electricity, not socializing with neighbors, complaining about working

conditions, speaking Arabic or Turkish and following the Muslim custom of washing the body of a deceased person).

While Uyghur adults are being sent to the internment camps, many Uyghur children face a similar fate. Chinese authorities have been putting the children of Muslims in Xinjiang into dozens of state-run orphanages across the region. When the parents of the children are taken into internment camps, the authorities often do not allow their close relatives like grandparents and aunts to take care of them; instead the children are moved to orphanages where they are allegedly “re-educated” in accordance with the Chinese culture and the values of the Communist Party (Zaili, 2019).

As far as can be ascertained, there are various reasons for establishing Uyghur orphanages. Of course, as expected, the main reason is brainwashing children and training them to be “proper Chinese,” without any tie to Uyghur culture and Islam, thus erasing their ethnic and religious identity. A second reason is tearing Uyghur families apart by distancing children systematically from their families and culture and thus causing trauma for the Uyghurs in China as well as abroad. This is part of the Chinese genocidal policies in the region. A third reason is blackmailing the Uyghurs abroad to return to China, if they have children in the country. If the blackmail does not work and the parents do not return to China, then they have to bear the punishment in the form of not knowing anything about the fate of their children, let alone being together with them. Finally, it seems that some Chinese authorities even use Uyghur children in orphanages as blackmail. For instance, someone claiming to be a police officer in Xinjiang added a Uyghur family living in Turkey on a Chinese messaging application. “For nearly three years now, the man has sporadically sent them photos or updates about their son, promising to continue sharing information if the couple helps him spy on Uyghurs in Turkey” (Wang and Kang, 2018).

Unfortunately, orphanages for Uyghur children as a result of the new Chinese policies are not limited to those in China. It seems that Chinese government policies have indirectly created orphanages abroad too. In fact, in Istanbul currently there is an orphanage for Uyghur children whose parents have been arrested, put into internment camps or killed when they visited China and I am afraid that there might be other such orphanages in cities where Uyghurs have taken refuge in great numbers. Some of those parents might have already left the camps and be alive, but are not permitted to leave China. However, it is almost impossible to find and contact them. I visited the orphanage in Istanbul on 17 May 2019, together with a colleague who is a professor of law, and some of the information I provide here is based on what the administrators of the orphanage told us. The reasons those parents visited China while leaving their children in Turkey differ: when the situation in Xinjiang was more tolerable and these parents did not know about the internment camps, some went there to close down their businesses or sell their properties; some visited their homeland to see their parents who were dying; some went there to pick up their other children. Later, even when the internment camps started, some parents were afraid of the official blackmail threatening the lives of their parents, if they did not return to China immediately. In addition, there are also some children in the orphanage whose parents sent them to Turkey when the situation in Uyghur Region deteriorated badly. Their parents just wanted to get their children out of China, which had become like a hell for them, lest they end up in orphanages in case parents are taken to internment camps. Those children were mostly sent to Turkey together with some close relatives when the international movement of Uyghurs was not yet completely restricted.

One should note that many Uyghurs have joined the police force as low-level officers in order to protect themselves and their family members from being interned in re-education

camps and their children in orphanages. So some members of the police, internment camp guards and the local officials are actually Uyghurs who found themselves in such a situation. As far as I gather from the testimonies of the Uyghurs who are victims of the state aggression, some of these Uyghur officials actually help their fellow Uyghurs in some ways, such as giving positive grades for the “students” in the internment camps, which prevents worse treatment at least. Of course, such help by the Uyghur officials is very risky for them, because if they are suspected of disloyalty towards Chinese polices, they would be declared “two-faced” and probably face conditions worse than those in the interment camps. Chinese authorities often accuse and punish “two-faced” Uyghur cadres (including some at higher levels) who are suspected of paying lip service to Communist Party rule while secretly passing over state policies.

URBAN INTERNMENT: UYGHUR CITIES AS OPEN-AIR PRISONS

Chinese campaigns for re-education are not limited to the internment camps, but practiced almost everywhere. One can say without exaggeration that Uyghur cities and villages too function like interment camps. As mentioned above, in the Uyghur Region individuals caught praying, fasting, growing a beard or wearing a hijab are arrested and sent to interment camps, as they are considered extremists or even terrorists. Nevertheless, avoiding such “extremist” or “terrorist” actions is not enough; those Uyghurs outside internment camps too must show their sincerity in distancing themselves from Islamic injunctions like avoiding eating pork and drinking alcohol. Thus, Uyghurs are forced to eat pork and drink alcohol in internment camps, in some festivals that they are forced to celebrate (Sharman, 2019) as well as their homes, which are often visited by authorities who stay with Uyghurs for some days or weeks, as I explain below. In addition, the Chinese authorities carry out anti-halal campaigns in Uyghur as well as Hui (Chinese Muslim) regions “to safeguard ethnic unity,” as a pro-government Chinese daily informs us (Li, 2018). We also learn from notices on government websites that any Uyghur restaurant that closes during Ramadan loses its license (Shelton and Zhao, 2019).

Official harassment for re-education is also carried out in some unusual ways on the streets of Uyghur cities. For example, sometimes officials stop Uyghur women on the street and cut off parts of their dresses with scissors, if they are found to be a bit long. One should note that in the authentic photographs depicting such events, Uyghur women wear jeans and shorts or dresses and no hijab, headscarf or veil (Smith, 2018). Like most of its inhuman practices, officials have again a slogan for this one: “Wear civilized, good-looking clothes, be beautiful Urumqi people, resolutely oppose abnormal clothing and behavior!”

Urban internment in the Uyghur Region can declare anyone a terrorist for anything that is not accepted or liked by the state and one can come across even a “terrorist” of time. According to Human Rights Watch (2018), China detained a man on terror charges after he set his watch two hours behind Beijing time (perhaps to follow Muslim prayer times accurately). Mao Zedong merged China’s time zones into one to enhance “national unity” but some still use unofficial Xinjiang/Urumchi time. Setting clocks to “Urumchi time” is therefore seen as a form of resistance against the CCP.

Chinese officials have taken urban internment to unbelievable levels, annihilated any sort of privacy and violated human dignity. Now re-education is being practiced inside Uyghur homes. Officials often visit Uyghur homes and stay there for weeks as uninvited guests. This practice is not denied by the authorities at all, but even openly propagated. According to the ruling Communist Party’s official newspaper, 1.1 million local government officials have been deployed to spend about a week every two months living in the home of

a Uyghur host family. The official name for this practice is the “cultural exchange” program. And the childish Chinese slogan for this is the “Pair Up and Become Family” campaign. Teaching of Chinese culture, singing patriotic songs together, attending at night various classes on Xi’s vision for a New China are among the activities. Of course, the Chinese “relatives” watch the Uyghurs all the time, take notes and assess their loyalty to the country as well as their level of Chinese language. They ask questions of the hosts as well as their children in order to collect as much information as possible. In the homestay program, Chinese officials also offer the Uyghurs alcohol and non-halal food and see the reaction of the hosts and report accordingly. Those who are reported for acting negatively end up in internment camps. Such a policy is a human engineering project that is about power, domination and exploitation and shows the arrogance and facelessness of the CCP in demonizing Uyghurs and having no limits to its project. For Uyghurs, their families and faith are the last space of refuge and security, but they are now under Chinese attack and invasion. This is a well-planned policy in order to break the spirits of Uyghurs and traumatize them. In fact, one Uyghur man in Istanbul told me in May 2019 as follows: “Not only our homeland, but also our homes are invaded.” Byler (2018a) provides significant and detailed information on the homestay program, which started in 2014, as he managed to interview both his Uyghur and Chinese friends who participated in them.

The campaign “Pairing Up and Becoming Family” is also taken to a further level by the Chinese authorities and practiced in the form of forced marriages. While Uyghur men are put in concentration camps, a lot of Uyghur girls are forced to marry Chinese men in order to rescue their relatives from the camps, to denounce their Islamic tradition and to show their loyalty to China (Everington, 2018). One can say that such marriages are state-sponsored rape and contribute to ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The urban internment of Uyghurs also takes the form of a well-planned urbanicide or urbicide by Chinese authorities. One might describe urbicide as a deliberate wrecking or “killing” of a city. Urbicide can be done by razing historical quarters of a city or demolishing buildings of great symbolic value. By demolishing the urban spaces that are an essential part of a culture, one also destroys that culture itself. In fact, this is what Chinese authorities have exactly been doing recently.

China has been continuing with cultural cleansing and has recently increased its demolition of historic mosques and buildings. A reporter visited the Yizhou District of Xinjiang’s city of Hami where he witnessed a lot of demolished mosques. He learned from local officials that over 200 of the region’s 800 mosques had already been destroyed, with over 500 scheduled for demolition in 2018. Residents said that often their local mosques had disappeared overnight without any warning (Bitter Winter, 2018c). A recent *Guardian* and Bellingcat investigation confirmed that more than two dozen Islamic religious sites have been partly or completely demolished since 2016 (Kuo 2019). Among the partly destroyed buildings, one witnesses that especially minarets or domes are demolished.

Mosques are not the only targets in the urban internment. Whole cities are being redesigned, allegedly to facilitate maximum security and surveillance of the Uyghurs. The courtyard houses are often being replaced with five-story concrete block apartment buildings. Even sites of architectural interest have been demolished and rebuilt as the government wanted. In addition the authorities “have recreated their own concrete Disney version of Old Kashgar in a small section, shorn of character and peopled with show Uighurs” (Cecil, 2018). As Harris (2019) expresses, this is part of an attempt to destroy an entire society. Again, according to James Millward, a China historian at Georgetown University, “[c]ultural cleansing is Beijing’s attempt to find a final solution to the Xinjiang problem” (cited in Shih, 2018).

VIRTUAL INTERNMENT

The total internment of Uyghurs would not be complete without virtual internment; in fact, it is the essential part of it. Bazian who coined the term virtual internment defines it in the context of the US “War on Terror” as “a quasi-visible but repressive, intimidating, and confining structure employed by the U.S. administration and its allies on a global scale against individuals, communities, and organizations deemed unsupportive, and possibly hostile, in their worldview toward American and ‘global’ interests” (Bazian, 2004, pp. 5–6). One should note here the adjective “quasi-visible” does not really suit the Chinese case as the internment in China (i.e. all the three types I discuss) is done on a massive scale and defended openly by the state and it is “proven or directly observable” (unlike the second meaning of the term “virtual” mentioned by Bazian). Most other aspects of virtual internment by the USA are common with China: virtual internment includes all members of the targeted communities. It focuses on forced behavioral change through a mentally induced state of control that aims to shape future generations. I should admit that Bazian’s virtual internment includes also detention, renditions and prisons, but these are individual cases, some of which are not even easy to prove, while in the case of China, more than a million Uyghurs are kept in internment camps openly and the practice is officially advocated. That is why (and also for the sake of easier analysis) in this article I use “virtual internment” more in the sense of internment by surveillance technologies. The word internment fits well, since

virtual refers to a total structure directly employed against and experienced by the targeted group even when they are not physically held in prisons or subject to legal sanctions. Such a virtual state induces in the individual and the community a mode of behavior that is more reflective of that of prisoners than of free men and women. (Bazian, 2004, p. 9)

China is building a high-tech authoritarian country and wants to create a vast and unprecedented national surveillance system to crush dissent. It invests billions of dollars into surveillance technologies. Thousands of companies in China offer smartphone surveillance equipment, facial-recognition technology, deep-packet inspection gear and application filtering. The government also supports research and technologies that track faces, clothing and even a person’s gait. Almost all these companies provide data to the government. For instance, Eyecool Shenzhen Technology is said to be adding two million facial images each day to a flourishing big-data police system called Skynet, which is China’s massive video surveillance network (Mozur, 2018). Companies like Beijing Hisign Technology compile data gathered from smartphones and cameras into an online database of China’s near 1.4 billion people. Hisign Technology states that its desktop and portable phone scanners can retrieve even deleted data from nearly 100 mobile applications on smart phones, including platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The company also has software that analyzes audio files, converts voice messages into text and translates minority languages and dialects like Uyghur into Mandarin Chinese (Li and Cadell, 2018).

While all these surveillance technologies are used for all the citizens of China, the Uyghur Region has extras. China has recently turned the region into a laboratory for new surveillance technology. Since early 2017, Uyghurs have been living under an increasingly strict security regime. Uyghur cities have now armed checkpoints in city centers and streets that are full of security cameras and facial recognition-equipped CCTV (closed circuit TV). It is reported that hi-tech drones that look and move like real birds fly over the Uyghur region (Chen, 2018). The Chinese government has also forced Uyghurs to download and install an application called

Jingwang Weishi (Clean Net Guard) that scans photos, videos, audio files, ebooks and other documents. Also, sometimes police officers stop Uyghurs in the street and plug unidentified electronic devices into their cellphones to scan them without explanation. Therefore, a simple trip to the market or to see friends can take hours because of the unpredictable and intrusive nature of the police checks. In addition, Human Rights Watch says authorities in the Uyghur Region have forced locals to submit to the collection of biometric data, including voices, blood groups, DNA samples, face scans and iris scans. For example, Tahir Imin, a 38-year-old Uighur, had his blood drawn, his face scanned and his voice recorded by the authorities who called it a “free health check,” about which he had doubts (Wee, 2019).

China uses DNA to track its people, benefitting from the help of American expertise. Various technology firms in the United States are providing expertise, reputational credence and even technology to Chinese surveillance companies, deliberately or otherwise. For instance, the Chinese authorities received help from biotech giant Thermo Fisher (a Massachusetts company) and Kenneth Kidd (a prominent Yale University geneticist) as they built an enormous system of surveillance and control. After this situation became clear, Thermo Fisher stopped selling DNA sequencers in the Uyghur Region, but apparently not elsewhere in China (Gorman and Schrader, 2019). So this means that Chinese companies in charge can easily buy DNA sequencers outside the Uyghur Region and use them in the region as usual. Apparently, some other US universities like Princeton University and private foundations have helped fund Chinese startups whose technologies are used by the Chinese government to survey and profile its own citizens (Mac, Adams and Rajagopalan, 2019).

Using QR (quick response) codes on Uyghur houses or even kitchen utensils is another way of surveillance of Uyghurs. We find out that Chinese authorities in the Uyghur Region installed QR codes on many Uyghur homes in order to get instant access to the personal details of people living there (Embury-Dennis, 2018). In comparison, this seems much more than drawing David’s Star on Jews’ homes in Nazi Germany. Further, in the Uyghur Region even kitchen utensils are not spared from surveillance and, for example, kitchen knives too are tracked with QR codes. So any knife bought in the Uyghur Region, even kitchen knives, must now be laser engraved with a QR code unique to the purchaser. Josh Chin, a reporter in China, gives an example together with a photo: “In Aksu, we interviewed a salesman at a knife shop that had to spend thousands of dollars on a machine that turns a customer’s ID card data into a QR code and laser-etches it into every knife they sell” (Chin, 2017). This obviously shows the regime’s suspicions and fear of peaceful Uyghurs, who, according to them, might use kitchen knives and similar utensils when they feel desperate about government atrocities. If someone uses a knife for a crime against government, the QR code on the knife can be spotted by a police investigation and reveal the buyer, i.e. owner of that knife and therefore he/she and probably his/her whole family will be punished.

Uyghurs living abroad too are under surveillance. Chinese embassies keep an eye on Uyghurs living in foreign countries and keep pressuring governments to deport Uyghurs back to China. They blackmail students or workers by holding their families hostage back in the Uyghur Region. Therefore, it is not possible to say that a particular country is safe for Uyghurs. Uyghurs have to keep an eye on their present country’s relationship with China, because if Chinese influence increases, so does the danger.

China tracks abroad other Chinese Muslims as well. Chinese Muslims going on the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca are equipped with “smart cards” which include GPS trackers. The state-run China Islamic Association stated that the purpose of the system is to make the trip safer for the pilgrims required to wear the device (Dou, 2018). However, this is probably part of China’s widespread surveillance program. It can be observed that even the number of

Chinese pilgrims in recent years shows government control and restriction of Chinese Muslims. In a country where there are tens of millions of Muslims, the number of pilgrims attending the pilgrimage in Mecca has been decreasing since 2016. It was 14,500 in 2016, 12,800 in 2017 and 11,500 in 2018.

In addition to Uyghurs and Chinese critics of the Communist Party living abroad, some scholars who write critically about China are under also Chinese surveillance and harassment. For instance, Anne-Marie Brady, a China expert from New Zealand, has been subject to an ongoing harassment and intimidation in her own country, since the publication of her (Brady, 2017) academic paper titled “Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping,” which details the extent of Chinese influence in New Zealand (Roy, 2019). Her home was burgled and her office was broken into twice. She has received anonymous phone calls and threatening letters. In short, the Chinese state knows no boundaries in intimidating and harassing any human being who is critical of it.

Surveillance Capitalism

What is happening in China with respect to virtual internment is not peculiar to that country, but is part of a global phenomenon called “surveillance capitalism.” Surveillance capitalism has meanings around the commodification of personal information. Basically, it is the monetization of data obtained through monitoring people’s behaviors online and in the physical world. It was first discussed by Foster and McChesney (2014) with a different meaning, and later was used and popularized by Zuboff (2019).

Zuboff sees surveillance capitalism as a new variance of capitalism. According to her, it was invented around 2001 by Google Inc. and further developed by Facebook (Zuboff, 2015). As we know, the new capitalists such as Google, Facebook and WhatsApp provide free services which billions of people happily use, and the service providers monitor the behavior of the users in detail, often without their explicit consent. By using tools like machine intelligence, artificial intelligence and algorithms, they analyze our behavioral data and successfully predict our future behaviors. Initially our behavioral data were used for commercial purposes and, for instance, were sold to companies who wanted to sell their products and services to us. But later, things changed drastically. What should be alarming for us is that surveillance capitalism went beyond surveillance and began to change our behaviors too. For instance, in one interview Zuboff conducted with the chief data scientist of a well-known Silicon Valley company that develops applications to improve students’ learning, the scientist told her the following:

The goal of everything we do is to change people’s actual behavior at scale. When people use our app, we can capture their behaviors, identify good and bad behaviors, and develop ways to reward the good and punish the bad. We can test how actionable our cues are for them and how profitable for us. (Zuboff, 2016)

In fact, Facebook made, together with some academics, two massive-scale experiments to see if they could change people’s behavior and the result was positive. In the first experiment, by presenting subliminal cues in people’s News Feed and on Facebook pages, they actually made more people cast real votes in the real world during the 2012 mid-term elections in the USA, so they could affect real-world behavior, while bypassing the users’ awareness. A second experiment was to see if they could manipulate our emotional state with the same kind of methodologies. They found out that they could make us feel either more happy or more sad by again using subliminal cues in the online environment (Mack, 2019).

The surveillance capitalism and surveillance state go together—in fact the two merge (Mosco, 2014, p. 10; Wills, 2017). Surveillance states have complete access to all the data that companies have. The partnership formed between state surveillance and capitalist surveillance is now dividing citizens everywhere into two groups: the watchers (invisible, unknown and unaccountable) and the watched. As expected, this has great impact on democracy, since asymmetries of knowledge turn into asymmetries of power. While in the past there was at least some sort of checks on state surveillance, currently there is hardly any on actors of surveillance, who mostly are unaccountable.

According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalism produces a deeply anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian power that functions as a coup from above. It is a sort of tyranny that feeds on people, although it is paradoxically portrayed and celebrated as “personalization.” It demeans and degrades human dignity by undermining principles and practices of self-determination. Currently, knowledge, authority and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are simply human natural resources. For Zuboff, the goal now is to change actual human behavior to a great extent and in fact to automate us. According to Naughton (2019):

This power to shape behaviour for others' profit or power is entirely self-authorising. It has no foundation in democratic or moral legitimacy, as it usurps decision rights and erodes the processes of individual autonomy that are essential to the function of a democratic society.

As for a solution, for Zuboff, this human-made phenomenon must be confronted in the realm of politics by mobilizing the resources of democratic institutions, including elected officials. Likewise, Richards (2013, p. 1964) believes that surveillance must be constrained by legal as well as social rules.

As we have seen, one key feature of surveillance capitalism is its ability to modify human behavior. Actually, such a power can be traced back to Bentham’s Panopticon, where even the mere existence of surveillance can keep the people in line. For surveillance technology to be effective, it does not even have to work all the time. When people do not know if they are being monitored at a given time, the uncertainty makes them more obedient. This is just like a Panopticon: people will follow the rules exactly because they do not know whether they are being watched. As discussed by Foucault (1995) in his Panopticism, the Panopticon provides self-control of the people in the target group, their change of behavior as well as experimentation with these people and all these are done in a much more sophisticated way by surveillance technologies. These technologies are also able to record and store information about the target people and this enables post-facto punishments of past transgressions, as, for instance, Chinese authorities punish Uyghurs for past “crimes” like texting a friend a congratulatory message for a Muslim religious day.

In brief, surveillance capitalism that aims at changing human behavior suits well the current context of China, where the ruling Communist Party ideology asserts that social harmony can only be achieved with the “standardization of human behavior.” However, China’s ongoing surveillance on Uyghurs goes beyond surveillance capitalism, which is based mostly on the collection and manipulation of the data of people who voluntarily participate in and use the social media. In this context, another term, namely “terror capitalism,” might be helpful.

Terror Capitalism

Byler suggests that we are witnessing in the Uyghur Region a “terror capitalism” and digital dictatorship which are trying to eliminate the Uyghur culture. According to him, this

is a project far more extreme than the Stanford Prison Experiment. For him, terror capitalism refers to the security industrial complex that is now supporting and running much of the economy in the region. In 2009 there was widespread protests, riots and state violence in the region and since then the number of private security companies working there has risen to more than 1400. Many of these companies are sophisticated in artificial intelligence development. From the perspective of Chinese state economic planning, the project to control, suppress and transform the Uyghur population is a venture capitalist experiment with vast potential (Byler, 2018c, p. 328). As to why it should be called terror capitalism, Byler (2018b) thinks as follows:

The reason why it is important to refer to the industrial complex as one marked by “terror,” is because the label “terror” posits that Uyghur and Muslims more generally pose an existential threat to the Chinese nation. As such, Uyghur society can be treated as a space of exception where the normal rules regarding basic human rights no longer apply. In China the term “terrorist” is generally associated only with bodies marked as Muslim, so it allows Chinese leaders, and the Chinese public as a whole, to see it only as a threat associated with a different people in distant borderland. Labeling Uyghur society in this way also provides cover for the Chinese state when confronted with the fact of their crimes against humanity by international institutions such as the United Nations.

China’s policies in the Uyghur Region are “arguably the country’s most intense campaign of coercive social re-engineering since the Cultural Revolution” (Zenz, 2019, p. 124). The state’s “War on Terror” is definitely a euphemism for forced ethnic and cultural assimilation. According to Rian Thum, a professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, China’s re-education system echoes some of the worst human rights violations in history: “The closest analogue is maybe the Cultural Revolution in that this will leave long-term, psychological effects . . . This will create a multigenerational trauma from which many people will never recover” (cited in Shih, 2018). In my opinion, such a trauma is intended by the Chinese state, which is not able to kill Uyghurs in the millions (as the Nazis did in Europe). The trauma aims to break the spirit of the Uyghurs and might be worse than killing, as one Uyghur man in Istanbul told me: “It does not kill; it makes us worse than killed.” The impact of the trauma might also be felt in what another Uyghur man in Istanbul told me: “Sometimes I wonder if what I experience is real or just a nightmare.”

MOTIVES AND REASONS FOR THE TOTAL INTERNMENT

What might be behind the total internment of Uyghur Muslims? Obviously, one factor is Islamophobia: China sees and treats Islam like a mental illness. In fact, in China in general, religious belief is seen as pathology. As we mentioned, the authorities also call the internment camps for Uyghurs, hospitals. The authorities believe that Uyghurs are infected with the disease of Islam. Here is an excerpt from an official Communist Party audio recording, which was transcribed and translated by Radio Free Asia (2018):

Members of the public who have been chosen for reeducation have been infected by an ideological illness. They have been infected with religious extremism and violent terrorist ideology, and therefore they must seek treatment from a hospital as an inpatient . . . The religious extremist ideology is a type of poisonous medicine, which confuses the mind of the people . . . If

we do not eradicate religious extremism at its roots, the violent terrorist incidents will grow and spread all over like an incurable malignant tumor. (Emphasis mine)

The Communist Party audio message also tries to justify even the practice of interning innocent people who have not committed any crime with the risk of illness, because those Uyghur Muslims, just by being Muslims, are already infected with the disease (Radio Free Asia, 2018):

Although a certain number of people who have been indoctrinated with extremist ideology have not committed any crimes, they are already infected by the disease. There is always a risk that the illness will manifest itself at any moment, which would cause serious harm to the public. That is why they must be admitted to a re-education hospital in time to treat and cleanse the virus from their brain and restore their normal mind. We must be clear that going into a re-education hospital for treatment is not a way of forcibly arresting people and locking them up for punishment, it is an act that is part of a comprehensive rescue mission to save them. (Emphasis mine)

The message ends with a warning, which explains the reason why the internment camps are not enough and why the total interment of the Uyghurs must be practiced permanently:

However, we must be cautious about one fact: having gone through re-education and recovered from the ideological disease doesn't mean that one is permanently cured . . . After recovering from an illness, if one doesn't exercise to strengthen the body and the immune system against disease, it could return worse than before.

Žižek likens this “rescue mission” (i.e. civilizing mission) in the form of “medicalization” to the attitude of the “notorious Sherbsky Institute in Moscow which treated dissidence as a form of mental illness” (Žižek, 2019).

Then what is the solution for the mental and ideological disease of Islam in China? Can quarantine or elimination be a solution, as Roberts (2018, p. 21) suggests?

As in many countries engaged in “wars on terror,” in China the terrorist label has come to represent a virtual biological threat to the social order. This is a threat to the health of the organism it imagines as China’s “harmonious society,” a threat that can only be mitigated by quarantine or elimination.

For the Chinese authorities, “Sinicization” of Islam is the final solution and indeed it involves first the quarantine of Uyghurs and then elimination of them as a separate ethnic-religious group. Chinese authorities often mention that Sinicization of religion must be upheld. In fact, the push to “Sinicize religion,” which was introduced by President Xi Jinping in 2015, is an attempt by the officially atheist Communist Party to bring religions under its absolute control and into line with Chinese culture. Sinicization of religion is meant for Muslims as well as Christians, but in the case of Uyghurs it goes much beyond Sinicization, as the Uyghurs are not even allowed to practice the very basic requirements of their religion such as daily prayers, fasting and going to mosques. Moreover, Sinicization is based on the superiority of the Han Chinese and their culture as well as their control of political power and therefore it is “hierarchizing” rather than egalitarian and democratic (Berlie, 2004, p. 140). Thus Sinicization means to Uyghurs total assimilation and religious persecution. The Sinicization of Islam in China is planned to be complete within four years (Baynes, 2019).

In addition to the attempts of Sinicization of Islam, as far as I see, there are other pressing elements for Beijing to pursue a definitive solution to the “Uyghur question.” One can discuss at least three economic and geopolitical motives and reasons for the genocidal policies carried out by the Chinese government in the Uyghur Region. I will cite them very briefly: first, the Uyghur Region contains rich coal, natural gas and oil resources and has extensive deposits of silver, copper, lead, nitrates, gold and zinc. All these are very important for the flourishing Chinese economy. Second, the Uyghur Region is China’s key land route to the world and is seen as the core hub of the Belt and Road Initiative, which tries to create trade corridors between Beijing and the rest of the world. For this project, the region is a critical location that will serve as the passage for all economic expansion into Central Asia, South West Asia and Europe. It will connect China to Pakistan, Turkey and Russia. Finally, the US domination of the sea routes makes the Uyghur Region essential for China, which tries to avoid excessive dependence on vulnerable sea routes. Currently, the Chinese economy is fairly dependent on the sea routes that China cannot secure all the time. This is because the US navy controls the world’s oceans and any blockade of the small islands that surround China in the region or of crucial points at the sea routes can cripple the Chinese economy (Clarke, 2018). Therefore, the Belt and Road Initiative can be seen as part of the reason for genocidal policies towards the Uyghurs.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Chinese Islamophobia is a deliberate state policy serving the plans of a would-be global hegemon. It is based on a tradition of Chinese political culture with its ruthless crushing of any dissent as well as the delusions of one man who wishes to rule the most populous country of the earth until he dies. Today Uyghurs are victims of a Chinese blend of an old tradition (Maoism) and new capitalism (surveillance capitalism and terror capitalism). In fact, the current Chinese regime is an anomaly with a capitalist economy run by a so-called Communist Party headed by one man. Obviously, such a rule is neither really capitalist nor communist, but an authoritarian regime moving towards totalitarianism.

As it has been clear in the last 30 years since the Tiananmen Massacre, in the Chinese case, economic growth and technological progress do not bring improvements in human rights, democracy and freedom, but rather consolidate control and authoritarianism (and even have brought totalitarianism to the Uyghurs). Today, the Uyghur Region is the living embodiment of the Orwellian dystopia of 1984. The regime with its inhuman policies is currently carrying out genocide through concentration camps, surveillance capitalism and terror capitalism.

However, China is now subject to sousveillance, i.e. bottom-up surveillance. That is to say, the master of surveillance itself is under surveillance or the watcher is also watched globally. Satellite imagery, by which activists have been discovering and displaying newly constructed internment camps and bulldozed historical quarters and religious buildings, secret photos and videos from inside concentration camps, testimonies and experiences of the Uyghur victims found in the media all over the world expose globally the crimes of the Chinese state. Official denials, propaganda, blackmailing and misinformation do not succeed in covering the atrocities committed by the Chinese state.

As for my conjectures about the fate of the Uyghurs in the near future, I would like to cite them as follows: given the ruthlessness and facelessness of the Chinese state, in the short run, the already awful situation might deteriorate for the Uyghurs. Provocative and genocidal Chinese policies will probably continue, as the authorities aim at an alleged final solution but such policies will further alienate and radicalize many Uyghurs who already feel that they have

nothing to lose. The Chinese state is in fact preparing the groundwork for the very extremism it says it wants to prevent. In addition, Uyghurs might also be further victims of the hegemonic struggle and a prospective clash between the USA and China.

The oppressive Chinese Islamophobic policies are now slowly spreading into Chinese Muslim communities too. The Hui (Muslim Chinese) people are regularly targeted by the CCP in “Sinicization” campaigns that include the destruction of mosques and removal of domes, Islamic decor and Arabic signs in Chinese Muslim areas. As the regime considers Islam a mental disease, sooner or later it will approach Chinese Muslims too for treatment and re-education.

Further, Chinese oppression in the Uyghur region will eventually lead to deteriorate its relations with Muslim countries. With its investments and business partnerships, China has been buying the silence of many Muslim countries, but as various experts assert, business as usual is no longer possible. Reactions are already developing at the popular level in countries like Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia and popular resentment and protests will probably exert impact soon on the governments in those countries. Also, one should remember that from the Uyghur Region to Turkey, almost all the countries and peoples are Turkic Muslims, just like Uyghurs are. So no one in their right mind would attempt to annihilate Uyghurs by declaring a war against Islam at home, while at the same time trying to revive the Silk Road together with those Turkic Muslim countries and also do business with nearly 50 Muslim countries. In my opinion, the current insane Chinese strategy is nothing but a result of the intoxication of power.

China’s attempts to demonize all Uyghur opposition as “terrorism” have already backfired by raising the Uyghur Region and Uyghur issues to an unprecedented level of international prominence (Clarke, 2011, p. 175). Chinese oppression, especially after the proliferation of the internment camps, is now widely noted in the West and the media all over the world have been writing about atrocities, internment camps and surveillance. Although some of this interest in spotting and displaying crimes against humanity committed in China is for political purposes, rather than sincere concern with the fate of the victims, the plight and sufferings of Uyghurs are read almost every day. In brief, China cannot go on any more as if nothing has happened.

Indeed, we have begun to see some official reactions as well. More than a dozen states, including Turkey, Australia, Germany and the United States, have called on China to close down the concentration camps and release the detainees. In early February 2019 Turkey’s Foreign Ministry made the following comment on the camps: “The reintroduction of internment camps in the 21st century and the policy of systematic assimilation against the Uighur Turks carried out by the authorities of China is a great shame for humanity.” In addition, there are some positive developments at the legal level too: Sweden now grants refugee status to all Uyghurs from Xinjiang. The Swedish migration agency said that the minority would be automatically considered at risk of persecution in Xinjiang province.

At the individual level too, we see very positive developments. For instance, an initiative of Concerned Scholars from nearly 45 countries issued a statement on 26 November 2018 condemning China for internment camps and proposed policy suggestions. Some other scholars have started discussing starting a boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against China. In fact some such actions have already started, although for different reasons, for example, the recent US policies and actions against China’s high-tech companies like Huawei and high tariffs for goods imported from China etc. After a few weeks, China had already begun to feel its negative economic impacts.

Last but not least, Uyghurs in general are resisting, in spite of the awful situation they are in and the trauma they have been experiencing. For instance, they are well organized

in Kazakhstan and trying to do the same in Turkey. From Japan to the USA, they are successful in informing the world about their plight and promoting their causes. They do not give up but fight.

In conclusion, in my opinion, a state which puts millions of its citizens into concentration camps in order to brainwash them and blackmails its citizens studying or working abroad by treating their children or parents in Xinjiang as hostages does not have a chance to become a world power. A state that is run like a criminal gang will sooner or later destroy its own image and in fact that process has already started. Financial and political power are not free from one's image and neither Chinese investments abroad nor the Confucius Institutes that China opens abroad are enough to win the hearts and minds of people. As Hann (2014, p. 205) has expressed so well for China,

{t}he evidence of recent decades suggests that the pursuit of the harmonious society, the overt goal of power holders, may be incompatible with the pursuit of the homogeneous society, the covert goal. One or the other objective will eventually have to be abandoned.

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