

# Repression Across Borders:

## The CCP's Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans



*Uyghur Americans hold a human rights demonstration despite Chinese government intimidation and harassment in the United States, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2019 © Bitter Winter*

- The Chinese regime is implementing a systematic, ambitious, multi-year, well-resourced, relentless and cruel policy to inflict pain and suffering on Uyghurs abroad, preventing the Uyghur American community from enjoying their constitutionally protected rights and freedoms.
- Since its campaign of mass detention began, the Chinese government has been escalating its tactics of intimidation, including threatening Uyghur Americans with placing their family members in the camps.
- UHRP calls upon the United States government to use appropriate powers to bring an end to this illegal behavior, including through legislation and law enforcement authorities' investigation of harassment, threats and coercion.

**August 2019**

A call via WeChat to a Uyghur man from an unknown contact who identified himself as a police officer in China:

*The alleged police officer knew certain information about the carpenter's career, who he worked with, and even his salary in the U.S. The police officer assured the carpenter that his parents were safe but threatened that there were others who would imprison them, unless the carpenter provided information to the Chinese authorities.*

A text message to a Uyghur living abroad from a police officer:

*Please don't be a disaster for your loved ones. You better think more about your family members*

A voicemail received by a camp survivor from her brother:

*How could you do this to your parents, to us? What kind of daughter are you? You should go to the Chinese Embassy right away and denounce all the things you said about the Chinese government in the interviews you gave to the Radio Free Asia and tell them you love China. Tell them you were pressured by the Uyghur organizations in the U.S. to lie about your detention and torture in the camps and take back everything you said. Otherwise China can get you wherever you hide.*

Messages received by a Uyghur Canadian:

*I'm getting continuous harassing calls from police in China. Today I got a message threatening me, to detain all my relatives and asking me to cooperate instead of harming them by my activities. It's very frustrating, leading to suicide thoughts.*

A student on the pressure to stay quiet:

*All I wanted was to get my degree and go back to my homeland. My parents are suffering because of me. By breaking the silence, I am risking the life of my family members.*

A Uyghur American student on overseas Uyghurs' fear of being reported to Chinese officials:

*They are afraid of being reported by informants who could either be Uyghur or Chinese and they essentially send their names back to the Chinese government, and the Chinese government questions their family members and then detains them or sends them to camps.*

A Uyghur American on being contacted by Chinese State Security agents:

*They are just telling us, "We are watching you. Wherever you go, still you are a Chinese." Even though abroad, it doesn't mean they can't do something to you. Because they have your friends, your relatives.*

## Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary.....	3
II.	Methodology.....	5
III.	Government Framework in the U.S. to Protect Uyghurs.....	7
	A. Legal Framework.....	7
	B. State Department.....	7
	C. Congressional Action.....	9
IV.	Chinese Government Aggression Against Uyghurs.....	13
	A. Police Harassment Through Family in East Turkestan.....	13
	B. Pressure to Inform to Chinese Authorities and Fears of Being Informed Upon..	17
	C. Uyghurs in the U.S. Increasingly Speak Out .....	19
	D. #MeTooUyghur Campaign.....	23
	E. Barriers to Reporting Harassment in the U.S.....	26
	F. University Students Targeted in the U.S.....	27
	G. Cyber-threats Beyond East Turkestan.....	30
V.	Conclusion.....	35
VI.	Recommendations.....	36
VII.	Acknowledgments.....	38
VIII.	Endnotes.....	39

## I. Executive Summary

There are an estimated 1,500 to 5,000 Uyghur people living in the United States, primarily in northern Virginia, as well as in California and Texas. The Uyghur American community includes many brave journalists, activists and students engaged in raising awareness about the crisis of repression in their homeland, East Turkestan.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is engaged in a campaign of extreme repression against Uyghurs in East Turkestan, in what has become as one of the greatest humanitarian crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The United States has provided a haven and a new home for Uyghur Americans, where they can freely live, study, work and prosper. Yet the Chinese regime is still present for the Uyghur American community, preventing enjoyment of their constitutionally protected rights and freedoms. UHRP concludes that the Chinese government is implementing a systematic, ambitious, multi-year, well-resourced, relentless and cruel policy to inflict pain and suffering on Uyghurs abroad in an attempt to control their speech. The campaign constitutes an ongoing series of crimes committed with impunity on U.S. persons.

The situation confronting the Uyghur diaspora has become increasingly severe since 2017 when the Chinese authorities began a campaign of rounding up Uyghurs and imprisoning them in so-called reeducation camps, which many observers have called concentration

*“the Chinese government is implementing a systematic, ambitious, multi-year, well-resourced, relentless and cruel policy to inflict pain and suffering on Uyghurs abroad in an attempt to control their speech.”*

camps.<sup>1</sup> The prison camps are part of a new Strike Hard campaign, an unprecedented effort by the CCP to stifle the Uyghur identity and control Uyghurs who speak out about the oppressive conditions they experience. Ultimately, these prison camps, and other forms of coercion and forced political indoctrination, aim to eradicate the Uyghur identity itself.

The repression in the Uyghurs’ homeland does not stop at international borders. Virtually all Uyghurs in America have relatives or close family members detained in the prison camps, experience a high level of anxiety about their treatment and wellbeing, and live in daily fear that additional family members may be taken at any time. The Chinese government is engaged in a systematic and widespread campaign to intimidate and silence Uyghur Americans. This campaign of repression not only inflicts severe emotional and psychological pain on every family, but also constitutes a systematic and ongoing violation of Americans’ rights and freedoms by a foreign power on American soil.

Since this campaign of mass detention began, the Chinese government has been using the tactic of threatening Uyghur Americans with placing their family members in the camps. Some of the threats are vague messages to consider the welfare of their families; others are explicit threats to detain family members in the camps. Chinese officials contact Uyghurs in the United States, by

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<sup>1</sup> The Chinese government refers to East Turkestan as Xinjiang or the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. *Xin jiang* in Chinese means new territory, reflecting the relatively recent Chinese colonization of the Uyghur homeland.

text, chat apps, voicemail, email, and via messages delivered by third parties. Some members of the community report receiving such messages on a weekly and at-times even a near-daily basis.

Chinese officials in East Turkestan also coerce Uyghur Americans' families in East Turkestan to contact their relatives in the U.S. to make requests for information about Uyghurs in America, and to ask them to keep silent about what is happening to them. Uyghur Americans must also be wary of possible Chinese government informers among the community in the United States. Many or most of those who turn over this information do so because they themselves have been told that their families will suffer if they do not cooperate. While labor-intensive, this has been a simple and effective strategy to silence Uyghur critics and regulate the behavior of all Uyghurs, including U.S. citizens, legal residents, and students enrolled in American universities.

This campaign of harassment, surveillance and coercion is a brazen assault on the rights and freedoms of American citizens, permanent residents, and foreign students enrolled in American universities. These actions by Chinese government agents inflict severe emotional and psychological distress and pain on the targets and the entire Uyghur American community. These actions constitute crimes under federal and state law. Despite coverage of this campaign in Western media since early 2018, and attention called to it by Congressional hearings and provisions of pending legislation, the campaign continues unabated.

*This campaign of harassment, surveillance and coercion is a brazen assault on the rights and freedoms of American citizens, permanent residents, and foreign students enrolled in American universities.*

UHRP calls upon the United States government to use the appropriate powers and authorities to bring an end to this illegal and unacceptable pattern of crimes on American soil and take measures to bring the perpetrators to account. UHRP also calls upon the governments of other countries to take the same actions to deter and punish these crimes perpetrated against their citizens.

To prepare this report, UHRP conducted ten interviews with Uyghur Americans who have provided insight into the machinery of Chinese harassment, surveillance and coercion. In the report, these interviews are interwoven with media coverage spotlighting the voices of Uyghur Americans who have spoken publicly about their treatment by Chinese officials. In addition, the report analyzes American legislation that attempts to protect this vulnerable community.

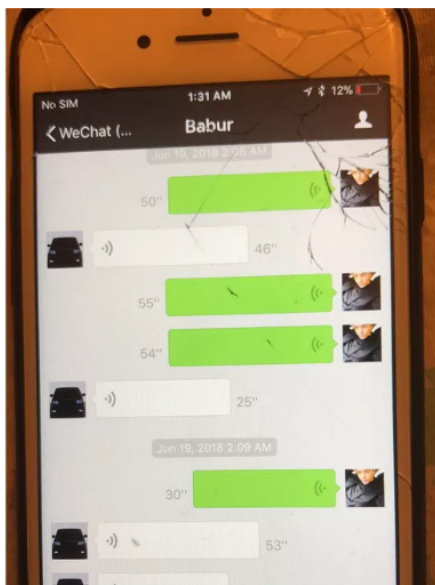
The report details specific threats, including those received on the Chinese messaging app, WeChat; pressure on Uyghur Americans to inform on their families; the #MeTooUyghur movement online; and reprisals the Chinese government has carried out against those who have spoken out about the imprisonment of their family members in the camps. The report also covers harassment in the university context and cyberattacks on Uyghur Americans. Finally, the report outlines the legal and government framework in the U.S. defining the harassment as a crime under federal law, examines barriers to Uyghur Americans reporting these crimes, and makes concrete recommendations to the United States government, including specific recommendations for law enforcement agencies confronting harassment of local Uyghurs.

## II. Methodology

The primary means by which UHRP researched this report was through telephone interviews with Uyghur Americans. UHRP conducted ten interviews for the report, with Uyghurs primarily based in Virginia, as well as one individual located in Canada whose experiences shed light on conditions broadly in North America. From these individuals, UHRP obtained five screenshots of messages sent by police officers in China to Uyghurs via WeChat, the Chinese messaging app. UHRP also obtained a three-and-a-half minute recording of two Uyghurs in Canada discussing harassment, and a number of journal entries by a Uyghur American documenting the painful experience of being targeted by Chinese security in the U.S.

Even as this report details reprisals that Uyghur Americans face for speaking out about human rights, every individual who agreed to an interview put themselves and their families at risk for the very type of reprisal this report documents. As is standard practice in UHRP's reporting, the interview subjects have been anonymized, with any identifying information about them changed or redacted. However, because only four of the interview subjects had not already spoken out in the media, only these four interviews will be cited anonymously. The report includes UHRP's interviews with Uyghurs whose names have appeared in other media outlets alongside citations to the published media.

The report highlights sample screenshots of harassing WeChat messages, but does not include all the materials reviewed. Because these screenshots are highly identifiable, they have the potential to put the recipients' families at even greater risk of reprisal if Chinese security officials identify the users. UHRP notes that multiple news outlets cited in this report have similarly withheld publication of screenshotted conversations between overseas Uyghurs and Chinese police, including the *Associated Press*,<sup>2</sup> *Foreign Policy*,<sup>3</sup> *Buzzfeed*<sup>4</sup> and the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>5</sup> *Buzzfeed News* has published one of the only un-redacted screenshots of WeChat harassment, depicting a conversation between Uyghur American activist, Tahir Imin, and a state security agent. UHRP also spoke to Imin and the image is reprinted here:



*Imin's WeChat conversation with an alleged Chinese security official. © BuzzFeed*

UHRP has not published any images that might reveal individuals' identities. The report provides translations of the text of two conversations, one from the Uyghur language and another from Chinese, with all identifying details redacted. Section III provides screenshots of online harassment committed by alleged Chinese agents on YouTube.

This report builds on “The Fifth Poison: China’s Harassment of Uyghurs Overseas,”<sup>6</sup> a 45-page UHRP report published in November 2017, which documents harassment of Uyghurs globally. “The Fifth Poison” detailed a concerted campaign by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not only to monitor and harass Uyghurs overseas, but also to recruit members of the community to “carry out espionage against others, replicating the system of control that exists in their homeland.” UHRP described how the Chinese government achieved this coercion: by threatening retaliation against family members still within China. Since 2017, the Chinese government has intensified its use of these tactics even as it has instituted a mass incarceration of Uyghurs in prison camps.

### **III. Government Framework in the U.S. to Protect Uyghurs**

#### **A. Legal Framework**

Harassment is illegal in the United States. Under federal law, 47 U.S. Code section 443(a)(1)(C) makes it a crime when an individual “makes a telephone call or utilizes a telecommunications device, whether or not conversation or communication ensues, without disclosing his identity and with intent to abuse, threaten, or harass any specific person.” In Virginia, where the U.S.-based Uyghurs interviewed for this report are situated, state law similarly criminalizes “threatening” over public airways or other methods including by “any electronically transmitted communication producing a visual or electronic message that is received or transmitted by cellular telephone or other wireless telecommunications device.” While harassment by telephone is less common, this report documents some calls and many text messages sent via the Chinese messaging app WeChat to Uyghur Americans.

However, the U.S. government is unable to exercise criminal jurisdiction over most of the perpetrators of harassment against Uyghur American citizens, since individuals based in China conduct the majority of Chinese government-sponsored harassment. In addition, the retribution exacted in connection with the threats—arbitrary imprisonment or worse of an individual’s family members in China—is not necessarily an actionable crime against the U.S. citizen, though it is both a crime against humanity and a violation of internationally recognized human rights of the targeted individual.

Under 18 U.S. Code Section 241, called “Conspiracy against rights,” it is unlawful for “two or more persons to agree to injure, threaten, or intimidate any individual anywhere in the U.S. in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him or her by the Constitution or the laws of the United States, (or because of his/her having exercised the same).” This section also applies to the behaviors of Chinese government agents who threaten Uyghur Americans to prevent them from engaging in constitutionally protected behaviors, particularly exercising their freedom of speech.

#### **B. State Department**

One of the most egregious examples of China targeting a Uyghur American for exercising constitutionally protected rights in the U.S. was the arrest of the aunt and uncle of U.S. activist Ferkat Jawdat days after he met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on March 27, 2019.<sup>7</sup> UHRP spoke to Mr. Jawdat in February 2019; and he described his ordeal at that time. Jawdat’s mother had been unsuccessful in trying to leave East Turkestan, as she was unable to obtain a passport after Jawdat and his father fled the country. Mr. Jawdat had learned about harassment of his mother and aunt in East Turkestan as family members begged him over WeChat to stop speaking publicly, and eventually, his family stopped contacting him altogether. When he spoke to UHRP in February, Mr. Jawdat said he had plans to speak to U.S. lawmakers, although not to law enforcement, to seek protection.<sup>8</sup> After Mr. Jawdat’s family members were detained in reprisal for his meeting with Secretary Pompeo, the State Department posted a picture of Jawdat on its Facebook page in April<sup>9</sup> detailing his mother's detainment since February 2018.





Ferkat Jawdat  
@ferkat\_jawdat

Follow

China tried to silence me by using my mother as a hostage, but instead it made my voice much stronger & louder than before. Many other #Uyghurs have got retaliated for their actions against #CHINA. We ask the @StateDept @FBI @WhiteHouse @SecPompeo @VP @POTUS to stand up for us!

*Ferkat Jawdat calls for help from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Twitter on May 25, 2019<sup>10</sup>*

On May 17, Mr. Jawdat received a phone call out of the blue from his mother for the first time in fifteen months. During the call, lasting over an hour, she told him that she was fine and that the Chinese government was making life for Uyghurs very good. She asked him repeatedly to stop speaking with the U.S. government and media about her situation and the conditions of Uyghurs in China. A few days later, he learned indirectly that she had been taken back into detention the day after the phone call.<sup>11</sup> This call demonstrates the cruel and barbaric manipulation of family members and emotional torture inflicted on Uyghur family members both in China and in the U.S. The State Department told *Newsweek* that “this account of them releasing his mother for one day to try to convince him to be silent is especially troubling and exposes China's duplicity on this issue.”<sup>12</sup> The State Department stated: “We call on the Chinese government to reverse its policies in Xinjiang and immediately release Jawdat's family members and the over one million other people arbitrarily detained in this campaign.” On June 28, Mr. Jawdat announced on Twitter his mother was released at last.<sup>13</sup>

U.S. permanent residents have also been targeted in East Turkestan. In March 2019, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, announced at a State Department briefing that he had just received a report of a Uyghur American permanent U.S. resident was being detained in one of the camps.<sup>14</sup> UHRP also has direct knowledge of this case. Ambassador Brownback stated:

“He had legal status being here, traveled back to Xinjiang after being here with his son in California. And then has not been heard from since. And he’s deeply concerned about whether, what his treatment is. He has a number of chronic illnesses, he's a 75-year-old man and an intellectual.”

These incidents are neither isolated nor unknown to the State Department. The State Department’s media website, [share.america.gov](http://share.america.gov), has reported on the targeting of Uyghur Americans, including threatening calls and texts.<sup>15</sup> And at a July 2018 Congressional hearing, Acting United States Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Currie testified about attacks on Uyghur Americans:

“The detention and persecution of Uighur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang has compelled them to stop communicating with their family and friends based abroad, including in the United States, for fear of retribution by authorities. We have received reports that U.S. lawful permanent residents and family members of

U.S. citizens have been detained in these detention centers for indefinite periods. We have also received reports that U.S. citizens have been detained and interrogated while visiting Xinjiang.... This treatment of U.S. citizens, U.S. LPRs [editor's note: Lawful Permanent Residents, or green card holders], and their family members is unacceptable, and we unequivocally condemn these actions by the Chinese government."<sup>16</sup>

UHRP has also documented instances where Chinese police have demanded Uyghur Americans return to China by threatening to hurt their families. For these Uyghurs, return to China spells a high risk of imprisonment, and even torture. Uyghurs fear that just visiting the U.S. may lead to detention, and the *South China Morning Post* recently reported on the case of Jurat Nizamidin, whose wife, Zulpiya Jaleleddin, was detained in January shortly after visiting the United States.<sup>17</sup>

Arbitrary detention and torture violate international human rights obligations, and this report's recommendations address the obligation of the U.S. government to take effective policy measures to deter violations and to protect the rights of U.S. citizens and to ensure the enjoyment of Constitutionally protected rights of all those living or staying in the U.S.

### **C. Congressional Action**

The U.S. Congress has also initiated action to highlight the imperative to protect Uyghur Americans' rights, through the Uyghur Human Rights and Policy Act (UHRPA). First introduced in November 2018, the UHRPA<sup>18</sup> was re-introduced by Senators Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) on January 17, 2019. One of the key provisions of the Act addresses the protection of Uyghur people living in the United States. Section 4 of the bill notes that "Uyghurs and Kazakhs, who have now obtained permanent residence or citizenship in other countries, attest to receiving threats and harassment from Chinese officials."

As a remedy, the bill would task the FBI and "appropriate United States law enforcement entities" to "track and take steps to hold accountable officials from China who harass, threaten, or intimidate United States citizens and legal permanent residents, including Turkic Muslims, Uyghur-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Chinese nationals legally studying or working in the United States." The Act mandates that within 90 days of its passing, "the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall provide a report to the appropriate congressional committees that outline efforts to provide information to and protect United States citizens and residents, including ethnic Uyghurs and Chinese nationals legally studying or working temporarily in the United States who have experienced harassment."

The UHRPA directs the FBI to protect Uyghur Americans. In fact, only one of the Uyghur Americans who spoke to UHRP for this report had ever spoken to the FBI about harassment they had faced. The bill highlights the need to conduct outreach that would raise awareness among Uyghurs in the United States about why and how to report to federal authorities the illegal threats and coercion they experience directly from agents of a foreign government. Senator Rubio and New Jersey Representative Chris Smith sent a letter to the FBI Chief in October 2018 urging the FBI to also consider establishing an anonymous tip line so that the agency could facilitate reporting by Uyghur Americans facing harassment from Chinese authorities.<sup>19</sup>

The Act also commends *Radio Free Asia's* Uyghur service reporters for working in spite of the CCP's efforts to "intimidate their reporting through threats and detention of family members

living in China.” *Radio Free Asia* is a media group funded by the United States Congress through an independent federal agency, the U.S. Agency for Global Media. RFA has been at the forefront of delivering news from East Turkestan. A March 2019 report in the *Atlantic* stated:

“The full scope and severity of the situation in Xinjiang are still unknown. But from the day China’s detention campaign began in earnest, RFA’s Uighur Service—the only Uighur-language news outlet in the world that is independent of Chinese government influence—has frequently been at the tip of the spear of coverage. From the RFA offices in Washington, D.C., its team of 12 journalists has broken hundreds of stories, sometimes bearing sole witness to China’s alarming and escalating crackdown on Uighurs and other Muslim minority groups in the country.”<sup>20</sup>

Another important way that Congress has supported Uyghurs has been by holding formal Congressional hearings to provide a platform for targeted Uyghurs to speak about harassment they face. In May 2016, the year before China began the massive roundup of 1-3 million Uyghur citizens into prison camps and other coercive forms of political indoctrination and forced labor, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) held a hearing at which Uyghur American activists spoke out about the targeting of family members in reprisal for their work. Current Uyghur American Association (UAA) President Ilshat Hassan Kokbore, a Uyghur American residing in Virginia, testified: “I hope the U.S. government and U.S. Congress can understand the Chinese government’s long arm, which stretches beyond China’s borders to overseas, to threaten and harass overseas human rights activists.”

Mr. Kokbore testified about the Chinese government’s actions against his family. Chinese authorities denied Mr. Kokbore’s wife and son passports, which ultimately resulted in Kokbore and his wife divorcing, and separated Kokbore from his son for ten years. Even after the divorce, Kokbore’s ex-wife was “continually under surveillance and threats.” Police also harassed his sister, breaking into her home in the middle of the night, and detaining her for 8 to 10 months without charge.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Kokbore has continued to serve not only as the leader of UAA, but also as a frequent public speaker and prolific writer, publishing essays in a variety of outlets including the UHRP and UAA blogs, and on social media, tirelessly raising awareness about the Uyghur human rights crisis. He appealed directly to Congress at the hearing, “If China isn’t pressured to stop this kind of harassment, no one will be safe, regardless of where we live.”



*Ishat Hassan Kokbore testifies before CECC Chair and Co-chair Senator Marco Rubio and Congressman Chris Smith on May 24, 2016. ©UHRP*

Another Uyghur American who testified before Congress at the May 2016 CECC hearing was Shohret Hoshur, a journalist with the *Radio Free Asia* Uyghur language service. Prior to testifying, Hoshur had been featured across media when his brother, Tudaxun Hoshur, was sentenced to five years in prison in June 2014, in reprisal for Shohret’s reporting for RFA. Slate reported, “As far as anyone can tell, China became the first government to persecute a family member of an American journalist in retaliation for his reporting.”<sup>22</sup> Shohret Hoshur testified that Chinese agents had taped his conversations with his other brothers in East Turkestan, Rexim and Shawket. Rexim and Shawket were subsequently imprisoned for speaking with him.<sup>23</sup>

In February 2018, the *Washington Post* reported that Rexim and Shawket had been briefly released in 2015 because of US pressure, but they were detained again in the prison camps in September 2017. Several RFA Uyghur staff were being targeted by 2017. “We’re very concerned about the well-being and safety of our journalists’ family members, especially those in need of medical treatment,” said Rohit Mahajan, director of public affairs at *Radio Free Asia* in Washington. “We’re also particularly concerned about the use of detentions as a tactic by Chinese authorities to silence and intimidate independent media, as well as to inhibit RFA’s mission of bringing free press to closed societies.”

In 2018, the *Washington Post* reported detentions of family members of Shohret Hoshur, Gulchehra Hoja, Mamatjan Juma and Kurban Niyaz—four ethnic Uyghur journalists with *Radio Free Asia* in Washington, who are all US citizens or green card holders.<sup>24</sup> Hoja testified to Congress in July 2018 that Chinese authorities targeted her family in East Turkestan. She stated:

“I first heard that my brother Kaisar Keyum was detained at the end of September last year. Police had taken him when he was driving my mother to a doctor’s appointment, leaving her alone in a car without explanation as she waited for her son who’d never return. In February, my parents, both elderly and suffering from

life-threatening ailments, went missing. Not being able to talk with my mother and father, or to learn how they were doing, was almost too much to bear. Being almost 7,000 miles away, I felt helpless—even more than when my brother was taken. I tried contacting other family but could not reach them. I learned in February that my aunts, cousins, their children -- more than 20 people had been swept up by authorities. I found out later that all had been detained on the same day. No one has confirmed their whereabouts... My parents, whom I later discovered were held in medical facilities in detention camps, were allowed to leave in March -- probably because of their poor health. Authorities had questioned my parents about me, my whereabouts, and my working for an organization they alleged is ‘anti-China.’”<sup>25</sup>

Uyghur Human Rights Project Board Chair Nury Turkel gave a grim update before Congress in September 2018. He testified:

“In total, 24 of Gulchehra Hoja’s relatives in Urumchi and Ghulja have been detained in internment camps, including her brother Kaisar Abduqeyum who was detained in October 2017 and has since disappeared. At least nine of Shohret Hoshur’s relatives are in one of four camps located in Qorghas county.... Two of Mamatjan Juma’s brothers are in internment camps, one in Kashgar and the other in Urumchi. Seven of Jilil Kashgary’s family members are in internment camps. His nephew Nurmemet, who had studied in Egypt for two years, was detained in Ghulja. Both Kurban Niyaz, and Eset Sulaiman have lost touch with their families.”<sup>26</sup>

Another bill introduced in Congress to protect the Uyghur diaspora is called the UIGHUR Act of 2019.<sup>27</sup> Introduced by Rep Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), Section 12 of the Act is titled, “Protections for Diaspora.” It would commit the US to “forcefully oppose and protest all unlawful efforts by the Government of the People’s Republic of China to censor, monitor, or otherwise exert pressure against” Uyghurs present in the United States. Among the specific mechanisms described in the Act are creation of a confidential and encrypted website to anonymously report incidents of harassment; a plan to publicize the website; a plan for cooperation between federal agencies to prevent harassment; and development of an overall strategy to prevent harassment and surveillance. In addition, the Act would require universities report harassment to the Secretary of State.

The Global Magnitsky Human Rights and Accountability Act of 2016 should also be used to deter human rights violations and hold to account the perpetrators of human rights abuses against Uyghurs. The violations encompass targeted punishment of relatives of Uyghur Americans who exercise their free-speech rights. Under an Executive Order issued by President Trump in December 2017, the Act could be used to freeze assets, prohibit any financial dealings with, and bar or revoke visas of officials implicated in human rights abuses, which includes Chinese government officials responsible for human rights abuses against Uyghurs in East Turkestan.<sup>28</sup> The UIGHUR Act of 2019 also devotes a section to mandating application of the Magnitsky Act to perpetrators of abuses against Uyghurs. Taken as a whole, these legislative measures present a strategy the U.S. must vigorously pursue to protect Uyghurs in the United States.

## IV. Chinese Government Aggression Against Uyghurs

### A. Police Harassment Through Family Members in East Turkestan

The practice of imprisoning the family members of Uyghurs who themselves are safe in the United States is extremely widespread and has only grown more common since China began the mass imprisonment of Uyghurs in prison camps. Almost always, these threats are made by voice call or text message through the Chinese messaging app, WeChat. Often, the messages calls are highly coded and frequently the harassers neither identify themselves nor their threats in explicit detail. At times they come from family members or acquaintances, instead of police directly, and often in such messages, the family members will alert their overseas relatives that the police are nearby or would like to follow up shortly. The threat is clear that if the person does not talk to the police, the family member will be in danger.

In an interview with UHRP, a Uyghur man who worked as a carpenter said he received a call via WeChat from an unknown contact who identified himself as a police officer in China and had known the carpenter before he left East Turkestan for the United States. The alleged police officer knew certain information about the carpenter’s career, who he worked with, and even his salary in the U.S. The police officer assured the carpenter that his parents were safe but threatened that there were others who would imprison them, *unless* the carpenter provided information to the Chinese authorities. The agent repeatedly assured him that he could keep his parents safe.<sup>29</sup>



*Uyghur Canadian Guly Mahsut tweets about police harassment on May 20, 2019<sup>30</sup>*

UHRP interviewed Guly Mahsut, a Uyghur Canadian woman who explained that authorities had continuously threatened her through her family, driving her to the point of extreme mental stress. Mahsut's family had become non-responsive on WeChat when after several months, suddenly her whole family had reached out to her and asked her to speak to a police officer in China, Kaysar.<sup>31</sup> She posted on Twitter a record of his calls, which showed that he called every day and sometimes twice daily. She also posted a text message from the police officer, Kaysar, in which he threatened her family's safety:

“We are good. We should support each other well so your family and your relatives in Toqsu won't suffer because of you. Please don't be a disaster for your loved ones. You better think more about your family members.”<sup>32</sup>

A camp survivor, Mihrigul Tursun, also describes a family member calling her to pressure her to be silent. In her November 2018 Congressional testimony, she stated:

“The Chinese government must have also forced my brother to reach out to me. He left a voicemail on the cell phone I brought from China. My brother said: How could you do this to your parents, to us? What kind of daughter are you? You should go to the Chinese Embassy right away and denounce all the things you said about the Chinese government in the interviews you gave to the Radio Free Asia and tell them you love China. Tell them you were pressured by the Uyghur organizations in the U.S. to lie about your detention and torture in the camps, and take back everything you said. Otherwise China can get you wherever you hide.”<sup>33</sup>

These messages illustrate the way Chinese authorities apply pressure against Uyghurs abroad through their family members at home, adding to the extreme and intense emotional distress for all involved. In addition, UHRP obtained a recording of another Uyghur describing the types of information Chinese officials requested from her. The recording illustrates the demands levied against diaspora Uyghurs by Chinese authorities—widespread requests that are effective in creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

In the recording, the Uyghur Canadian states that Chinese officials asked her to provide “8 or 9 types” of photographic proof, an almost absurdly vague phrase that has been used frequently by Chinese officials to surveil diaspora Uyghurs. She describes the “8 or 9 types” of proof as follows: “take a picture in front of a well-known building; take a picture in front of your house; take a picture with your classmates; take a picture when you are alone having fun outside; take a picture in front of your school.” The authorities would not accept selfies, and they also required her to remove her headscarf in the photos – though she noted that luckily the weather was cold enough she was still able to wear a beanie. She was most terrified when the agents asked her to take pictures of her classmates and share information about them with the Chinese authorities.

UHRP obtained a WeChat conversation, reprinted here, between a Uyghur American woman and an individual claiming to be a Chinese security agent. Here is the conversation:

**Officer:** Hi, I'm the worker introduced by your father.

**Officer:** What's your name?

**Aynura:** Aynura. What about yours?

**Officer:** I'm with the police. Let's videochat when you have time. I'd like to see your office.

**Aynura:** Okay. What's your name?

**Officer:** Are you not at your office now? When were you hired?

**Aynura:** It's been nearly a year.

U.S. media have documented similar requests of Uyghur Americans since 2018. The *Daily Beast* reported in August 2018 that a Uyghur American woman, whose identity was kept anonymous, was asked by her mother to send photos of “her U.S. car license plate number, her phone number, her U.S. bank card number, and a photo of her ID card. [Her] mother said that China is creating a new ID card system that includes all Chinese, even those who are abroad.”<sup>34</sup> Foreign Policy has reported a similar pattern in France.<sup>35</sup> The *Daily Beast* reported on another Uyghur American whose family requested she send pictures of a university employment contract, and a letter from an academic supervisor. “If they don't comply, these Uighurs know that their relatives may be detained,” the *Daily Beast* reported.<sup>36</sup> *DCist* also reported that DC-area Uyghurs had been asked to provide information to Chinese authorities including their address, phone numbers and passport numbers, and were asked to report about future protests and organizing activities as well as the names of other Uyghurs who had attended. Authorities making the requests reminded participants their families were safe – for now.<sup>37</sup>

A July 2018 *BuzzFeed* report found that “one requirement for Uighurs going abroad was to provide contact information for every living family member as well as contacts abroad and a letter from their employer stating the person would not misbehave while overseas.” A Uyghur American told *Buzzfeed* that Chinese state security operatives began contacting him after he landed in the United States.<sup>38</sup> The *Independent* interviewed a Uyghur American who said:

“They are just telling us, ‘We are watching you. Wherever you go, still you are a Chinese. Even though abroad, it doesn't mean they can't do something to you. Because they have your friends, your relatives.’”<sup>39</sup>

Based on UHRP's research, Uyghur Americans are frequently kept in the dark as to who is harassing them, what their objective is, and how best to respond to keep their families safe. A recent Human Rights Watch report on a Chinese surveillance app, called IJOP or the Integrated Joint Operations Platform, may at least shed some light on why police ask Uyghur Americans for the type of information they seek.<sup>40</sup> IJOP is an app that “prompts government officials to collect detailed personal data from people in Xinjiang.” HRW reports that IJOP is used by police officers as part of a massive surveillance system and the amount of personal information about Uyghurs in East Turkestan that officials must report is “a grueling task.” HRW writes:

“One official lamented that many colleagues have “worked so hard” to meet the IJOP's appetite that “their eyes are so tired and reddened.” These officials are under tremendous pressure to carry out the Strike Hard Campaign. Failure to fulfill its requirements can be dangerous, especially for cadres from ethnic minorities, because the Strike Hard Campaign also targets and detains officials thought to be disloyal. It is unclear how long Xinjiang authorities can sustain this high volume of labor-intensive investigations, though presumably authorities may be able to collect some of the personal information in a more automated manner in the future.”<sup>41</sup>

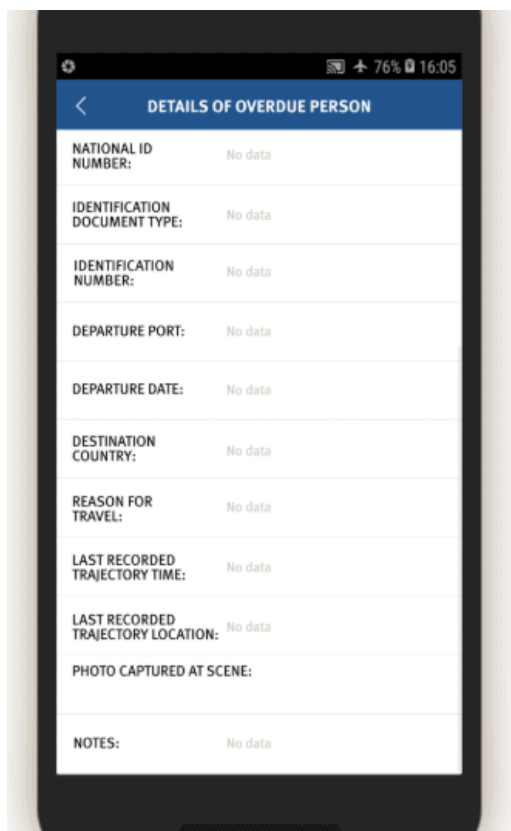
The IJOP app requires police in East Turkestan to monitor Uyghurs' personal relationships, some of which are categorized as “inherently suspicious,” and “demands that police officers file reports about several categories of individuals who have overseas connections.” Not limited to



domestic surveillance, HRW notes that “use of mass surveillance extends beyond Xinjiang and into the Turkic Muslim diaspora as authorities pressure them to provide detailed information about themselves, including their address, phone number, and school or workplace.”

The app “instructs officers to investigate people” who have suspicious connections including foreign links. HRW explains that one suspicious category of connections is called the “Four Associations,” which refers to people with overseas contacts (the other three categories are people “linked to clues of cases,” people on the run, and people who are being especially watched). HRW writes:

“The IJOP app suggests the IJOP center sends alerts to officials about people with these problematic relationships, and prompts officials to further investigate and provide feedback on these relationships along with details about the person. The officer is also prompted to note the person’s behavior, and whether the person seems suspicious and needs to be investigated further.”<sup>42</sup>



*HRW’s screenshot of IJOP “Details of Overdue [i.e. Abroad too long] Person.” © Human Rights Watch*

Another category subject to scrutiny are Uyghurs who have been abroad for “too long.” HRW describes a more specific procedure to report on foreign connections, which is also displayed in the screenshot of their report.

“Officials are prompted to investigate such cases by interrogating the person in question or their family members and other social relations. The app prompts the official to investigate whether this person has gone abroad, and if so, which country they went to and the reasons for the trip . . . The app then prompts officials to add the person’s contacts abroad by opening a related page. Finally, the app asks

officials to note if they think this person's activities abroad are suspicious, and to describe the reasons for their suspicion."<sup>43</sup>

HRW's research sheds light on some of the more bizarre-seeming requests for photographs, though it does not explain Chinese authorities' exact intention nor even the process by which the app was created.

UHRP's interviews capture some of the psychological effects of this program on Uyghur Americans, and demonstrate that by investigating Uyghurs abroad and pressuring their family members to inform on each other, the Chinese government has created an environment of fear to prevent Uyghurs from enjoying their rights under the U.S. constitution, including to speak about human rights abuses perpetrated by the CCP. By forcing Uyghurs to provide information about friends and family members, the CCP also undermines trust within the community.

The *New York Times* reports that IJOP is only one piece of an extreme high-tech surveillance campaign targeting the Uyghur people in East Turkestan.<sup>44</sup> This campaign is data-intensive and intrusive. The Chinese government sends the message to Uyghurs even in the free world that it can and will track down and find them. The government knows who they are, finds them on WeChat, knows their family details, and uses high tech programs to get them. The local surveillance and Orwellian tech in China are tied to the rights of Uyghur Americans.

## **B. Pressure to Inform to Chinese Authorities and Fears of Being Informed Upon**

UHRP interviewed a working-age Uyghur man who expressed concern that other Uyghurs would be forced to inform on him. Although he said no Uyghur could be certain who might inform, he felt especially suspicious if Chinese authorities allowed someone to travel freely to China. The interviewee was also suspicious of Uyghurs who are able to freely use the WeChat messaging app, because the chat app is heavily censored and Chinese authorities surveil and restrict Uyghurs using the site.<sup>45</sup> Even the exercise of basic freedom in the U.S.—chatting online with family or visiting your hometown from overseas—are suspicious because of IJOP and the Strike Hard investigations.

In January 2019, *Al Jazeera* reported that in 2012 Amat, a Uyghur man, succumbed to Chinese pressure in Turkey and informed on those around him after officials arrested and tortured his mother, “threatening to keep her in detention unless he agreed to work for them.”<sup>46</sup>

“Amat says China is getting bolder on the international front, claiming government operatives have abducted Uyghurs abroad. Once back in China, he says, many disappear into the reeducation centres... It was while he was serving his sentence [in a reeducation camp] that he says authorities recruited him... Amat confesses he's been consumed with guilt for informing on fellow Uyghurs. ‘It's like a painful needle stabbing into me every time.’ I asked him why he's decided to share this information now. Amat says he no longer has much to lose. Most of his family have been placed in centres, in part, he says, because of his spying.”<sup>47</sup>

Over a decade before the latest Strike Hard campaign, China pressured Uyghurs overseas to inform. In 2006, *Radio Free Asia* reported on a Uyghur American who refused to provide information to Chinese authorities. Parhat Yasin had been in the U.S. since the 1990s. In 2004 he received several phone calls from State Security Bureau officers in his hometown of Ghulja. The officials told him that they would give his wife and children passports in exchange for his passing information to Chinese officials about the identities and activities of other Uyghurs he knew, including the affairs of the Uyghur American Association. He refused. He told RFA:

“In the last 10 years, my children have been living under house arrest... and the government did not issue them passports. The secret police of the State Security Bureau have phoned me many times to work for them. They said they would let my children go if I work for them.”<sup>48</sup>

China’s extensive use of surveillance sows distrust among the Uyghur community in the United States. “There’s a high-level sense of fear and paranoia among the exile communities,” said Maya Wang, senior China researcher at Human Rights Watch. “There’s a lot of distrust among each other...It’s much more than the Han community abroad.”<sup>49</sup> *DCist* reported that this uncertainty about the situation in China is a major source of stress for the Uyghur American community. “The stress among the community is insane,” said U.S.-based Uyghur Irade Kashgary to *DCist*. Other community members told *DCist* that this was the most common discussion topic among the Uyghur American community.

This widespread fear can prevent Uyghurs from participating in political activities in the U.S. In an interview with UHRP, the Uyghur carpenter stated, “There are protests, and I want to go. My soul is there. I want to go. But I can’t because I know there are spies.” When he went to the UHRP office to pick up a friend, he said he would hide his face: “I wear a hat, get glasses, I cover my face. I’m in a free country but when I go to my people’s office, I cover my face. I didn’t even cover my face in China, but I cover my face here.”

A Uyghur woman who works as a musician told UHRP that police would visit her family in China and threaten them. Her family members would then tell her, “If you go to a protest, we will never call you again.” She knew they didn’t want to say threaten her, but someone was pushing them, without revealing their identity. Nevertheless, their message was clear: “If you do this, your mother and father are in danger, so shut your mouth, don’t go to demonstrations. That’s the message that we got.”<sup>50</sup>

UHRP Director Omer Kanat told *Buzzfeed*: “Some Uighurs choose not to live in the DC area to try to avoid the notice of the authorities. Some Uighurs in the diaspora avoid even visiting the DC area. The Chinese police ask Uighurs if they have ever traveled to Washington, DC, and they receive more questioning if they answer yes.”<sup>51</sup> *DCist* reported that many Uyghurs wear masks or sunglasses to the Uyghur American protests to try to maintain anonymity.<sup>52</sup>

Although UHRP’s research has uncovered the effects of forcing Uyghurs to inform, the internal mechanism within the CCP remain opaque. As UHRP wrote in *The Fifth Poison*:

Because espionage work is inherently obscure it is not always clear which department is conducting the work of monitoring the Uyghur community overseas. The Ministry of State Security is China’s principle civilian intelligence agency, carrying out intelligence gathering both overseas and domestically, especially concerning “security cases and issues ‘linked to foreign factors’ or ‘foreign organizations,’ including those operating inside China, or those trying to enter China.” However, it is likely not the only ministry responsible for monitoring of Uyghurs abroad.<sup>53</sup>

UHRP concluded that the Ministry of Public Security is likely also involved in overseas harassment. The harassment reported here is carried out by individual Chinese police officers who target both Uyghurs overseas and their family members in East Turkestan.

### C. Uyghurs in the U.S. Increasingly Speak Out

Despite China's efforts to silence the Uyghur community, more individuals are speaking out as the mass incarceration of Uyghurs in concentration camps becomes more severe. In 2018, UHRP collected testimonies from 27 North American based Uyghurs regarding 180 friends and relatives detained, sentenced, or missing in East Turkestan. UHRP documented these testimonies in the August 2018 report, "The Mass Internment of Uyghurs."<sup>54</sup> On November 28, 2018, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China organized a hearing on Capitol Hill in which Mihrigul Tursun spoke to Congress about her experience in detention in the internment campaign, including witnessing terrible conditions and the deaths of other Uyghur detainees.<sup>55</sup> A Chinese minister responded for the CCP by formally denouncing Tursun's testimony.<sup>56</sup>



Tahir Hamut @HamutTahir · Feb 11  
China, Free my brother Adil Hamut! #SaveUyghur



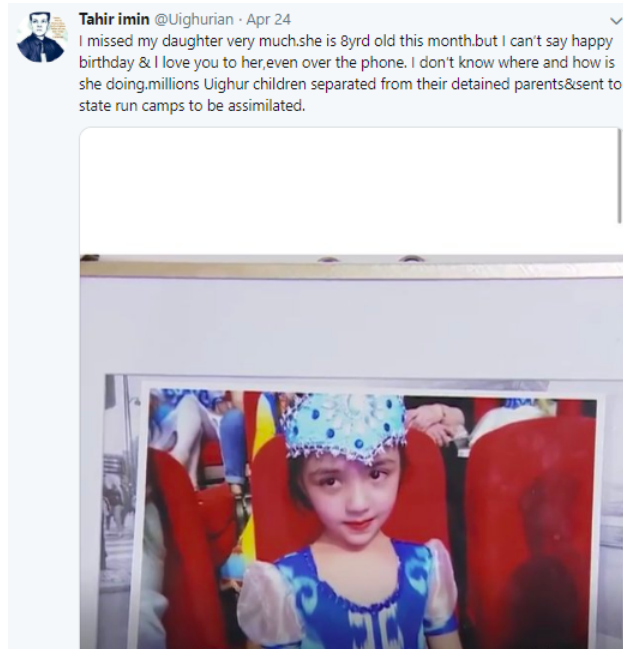
*Tahir Hamut posts an image of his detained brother, Adil Hamut, on Twitter on Feb. 11, 2019<sup>57</sup>*

UHRP spoke with a number of Uyghurs who have shared their stories publicly with the media. China's attempt to limit and counteract international media coverage of the Uyghur human-rights crisis has extended beyond Uyghur journalists, to Uyghur activists who speak to the media. Tahir Hamut had had no direct contact with his family since October 2017 when he was approached by the *Wall Street Journal* for an interview in December 2017. His wife's two brothers had been sent to a reeducation camp in November. Nevertheless, Hamut accepted the interview, and the article was published in December 2017.<sup>58</sup> Soon afterward, Hamut's younger brother disappeared, on December 25, 2017.<sup>59</sup>

Hamut told UHRP that when he first came to the United States in August 2017, Chinese government informants among the members of the Uyghur American community were already a major concern. He described this pattern of Chinese official behavior as widespread and said while Chinese authorities often don't explicitly vocalize threats, many Uyghur Americans are afraid to participate in human rights activities, for fear that Chinese authorities would hurt their families.<sup>60</sup> He told the *South China Morning Post* in September 2018 that he decided to speak to the U.S. State Department about Uyghur human rights, even though he feared that the very act of speaking may potentially put his family members back in East Turkestan in danger. He said:

“Morally, we felt awful, guilty, and burdened. But other Uyghurs, even without relatives in the US, are getting arrested all the time. So in the end, my wife and I decided that we would pass all our relatives in Xinjiang into the hands of God.”<sup>61</sup>

UHRP also spoke to Tahir Imin, a Uyghur activist who has shared his story publicly with the *New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, *Buzzfeed* and the *Atlantic*. Mr. Imin told UHRP that he feared for his safety because he had spoken to media outlets in the US about China’s harassment of his family.<sup>62</sup> Mr. Imin fled to the U.S. after spending two years in prison for writing an article titled “Uyghur Culture in Danger.” Mr. Imin reported that Chinese police officers contacted him after he arrived in the United States.



*Tahir Imin Tweeted about his separation from his daughter on April 24, 2019*<sup>63</sup>

In a video for the *Atlantic*, Imin described what the officers said to him:

“You make up stories to get yourself out of here and over there you go and make a big scene. It’s because there are so many two-faced people like you that Uyghurs have come to this. They don’t trust one another; they gossip behind one another’s backs. Are you not ashamed to speak like that, Tahir? But your daughter will not turn out to be a treacherous bastard like you, that’s for sure.”<sup>64</sup>

To *BuzzFeed*, Imin described a separate call with his daughter. She said: “Father, you’ve brought a lot of troubles to my mother and me, and you are a bad person. The police are the good people and they are helping us. You shouldn’t talk to us.” After that, Imin’s family deleted his contact on WeChat. He has not spoken to his family since April 2018 and has heard that his extended family members have been sent to the camps.<sup>65</sup> Imin told UHRP that he continues to check WeChat for news of his family, but he is generally reluctant to use the app.

Another Uyghur who has faced harsh reprisal for speaking out is Uyghur American activist Rushan Abbas, whose aunt and sister were detained just six days after she spoke about Uyghur human rights at the Hudson Institute in Washington in 2018.<sup>66</sup> Ms. Abbas published an Op-ed in the *Washington Post* describing what had taken place:



*Rushan Abbas with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at a Tiananmen anniversary protest, June 4, 2019<sup>67</sup>*

“My 56-year-old sister, Gulshan Abbas, lives in Urumqi ... [and h]er two daughters live in the United States. They kept in touch with their mother using WeChat, calling every few days, but starting on Sept. 11, they couldn’t get through. At first they thought her phone was broken or that she was sick. Days passed by without news. Then they started to imagine the worst: Could she have been taken to the camps? As I spoke with relatives, I learned that my aunt Mayinur Abliz, a 64-year-old housewife in Artush, about 900 miles away from Urumqi, had disappeared the same day. Six days earlier, I had participated in a panel at the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank, in which I had spoken about the situation in East Turkestan. Now two of my closest relatives back home had vanished.”<sup>68</sup>

In an interview this year, Abbas described additional family members who have been targeted:

“My in-laws in Hotan city vanished: a 69- and 71-year-old farmer and his wife, three of their daughters and one daughter-in-law plus their husbands disappeared. My husband, Abdulhakim Idris, and I have not been able to find their whereabouts since April 2017. We fear that they were all taken to the infamous camps. We have no idea where my husband’s 14 nieces and nephews, aged 3 to 22, are today. They may have been sent to orphanages in inner China. We also heard that Abdurehim Idris, my brother-in-law, was sentenced to 20 years in jail.”<sup>69</sup>

Even as Uyghurs speak out, a main objective is to identify what has happened to their family members. Uyghurs often report that their family members block them on WeChat. With this communication cut, Uyghurs have no idea whether family members are detained or even alive.

UHRP interviewed a Uyghur woman, a scientist, who said that China interrupts communication between Uyghurs on WeChat. After leaving China for Turkey six years ago, she

was able to message her family freely until 2017. After October 2017, her communication with her family was cut and she barely had access to information from them. Then one day, her mother wrote on WeChat and said the neighborhood police were going to add her and ask some questions, advising her daughter to answer. She did so, adding the alleged CCP agent on WeChat and sending pictures of her passport and other documents. Then, upon her arrival in the U.S., a new user who explicitly identified himself as police, added her immediately on WeChat, and began asking her to do the same. “I am not able to talk to my family,” she said. She would check WeChat twice weekly, in spite of the threatening government presence, for any family updates posted online.<sup>70</sup>

In an interview with *Business Insider*, Virginia-based Bahram Sintash explained that his mother and sister blocked him on WeChat in February 2018. “Before, WeChat was the only tool that we [used to] communicate with each other,” Mr. Sintash told *BI*.<sup>71</sup> “Almost once every two or three days we sent messages and pictures. I often sent my son’s pictures.” Seven months after his mother blocked him, Mr. Sintash heard from a contact on the ground — whom he declined to name — that his father Qurban Mamut, a 68-year-old retired editor, had gone missing. “I tried to find out the exact news, but I couldn’t get any news out because people can’t talk to outsiders,” Sintash said.<sup>72</sup>

The pattern that has emerged of targeting Uyghur Americans’ family members is not new. The Chinese authorities have targeted Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer since she first arrived in the United States in 2005 to prevent her from engaging in human rights activities. An entrepreneur, Rebiya Kadeer was the fifth richest person in China before Chinese authorities arrested her in 1999 after she spoke critically of the Chinese government and collected documentation of human rights abuses against Uyghurs during the 1997 Ghulja massacre. Thanks to concerted international and diplomatic efforts on her behalf, Ms. Kadeer was released in 2005 to the U.S. on medical parole. In the U.S. she immediately began speaking out against the Chinese government’s mistreatment of Uyghurs in East Turkestan, drawing the ire of the Chinese government.<sup>73</sup>



*Ms. Kadeer (2nd from right), standing alongside RFA reporter Gulchehra Hoja (far right), as Sen. Marco Rubio (2nd from left), and Rep. Chris Smith (far left) release the 2018 CECC annual report (YouTube Screengrab)*

Suraya Ablimit served as Ms. Kadeer's assistant from 2005 to 2006. Ablimit told UHRP that her family in East Turkestan experienced harassment as a result of her involvement with Ms. Kadeer. Her sister was denied a passport — a frequent punishment at that time for Uyghur citizens with relatives overseas. In the years since 2006, Uyghurs' passports began to be systematically confiscated, as UHRP documented in a February 2013 briefing.<sup>74</sup> Authorities would frequently ask Ablimit's sister in East Turkestan about Ms. Kadeer. In addition to restrictions on mobility, Ablimit's family feared for their safety and could not get jobs. Eventually, after her mother's death in 2016, her family asked her to cut off contact altogether. Now, she has no idea what has happened to them. Her family deleted her from WeChat and cut her out of their lives.<sup>75</sup> Losing contact with family represents a common fate for Uyghur Americans who speak up about human rights.

Ms. Kadeer's family has been targeted in shocking numbers as a means of silencing her activism. Ambassador Currie testified to Congress that “more than thirty relatives of Ms. Rebiya Kadeer have been detained or disappeared.”<sup>76</sup> Two of Ms. Kadeer's sons, Alim Abdureyim and Kahar Abdureyim, were jailed in 2006, and her son Ablikim Abdureyim was sentenced to 9 years in prison.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Chinese authorities forced her family members to make false accusations against her.<sup>78</sup> Even Uyghurs who do not share such close proximity to Ms. Kadeer have been targeted. In 2015, the *Washington Post* reported that Chinese officials repeatedly asked Erkin Kurban, a Canada-based long-distance trucker, about Ms. Kadeer's activities in the United States.<sup>79</sup>

Ms. Kadeer was the victim of a traffic accident while she was riding as a passenger in January 2006, just months after her release to the U.S. Both Ms. Kadeer and the vehicle's driver, Suraya Ablimit, found certain details of the accident to be extremely suspicious. Ablimit told UHRP that she was turning left, when an oncoming driver hit her vehicle. What was most suspicious was what happened next: following the collision, the driver of the oncoming vehicle looked directly at Ms. Kadeer and Ablimit, then rammed their vehicle again. After the second hit, the driver ran on foot, abandoning his vehicle.<sup>80</sup>

Although the Fairfax County Police Department investigated the crash, they concluded it was a drunk driver. They discovered that the car's owner had lent the vehicle to an employee who did not have lawful status in the United States. Ablimit told UHRP that she was asked by the police to look through a lineup of suspects, but that the man responsible was never caught, and police told her the suspect had fled the country to Mexico. Ms. Kadeer was severely injured by the car accident, and both she and Ablimit had strong suspicions the Chinese government had masterminded this attack, especially given the driver's suspicious behavior, staring at the women, and ramming their vehicle a second time. No evidence confirms Chinese involvement and Ablimit was not aware of any further investigation; after the police lineup, no additional law enforcement agents in the U.S. spoke to her further about the collision.<sup>81</sup>

#### **D. #MeTooUyghur Campaign**

As China restricts information about who exactly is imprisoned and limits communication between East Turkestan and Uyghurs overseas, Uyghurs have gone online to publicly seek answers. Using US-based technology platforms including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Uyghurs have spoken out using the hashtag #MeTooUyghur since February 2019, a nod to the anti-sexual harassment hashtag coined by US civil rights activist Tarana Burke. The purpose of the campaign is to request that the Chinese government inform Uyghur Americans whether their family members are healthy and if they are detained.



The hashtag #MeTooUyghur was created by Halmurat Harri Uyghur, a Finnish Uyghur, in response to the Chinese government’s release of a video of the singer Abdurehim Heyit as proof that he was alive.<sup>82</sup> Uyghurs abroad began scrutinizing the video, finding slight timing differences in the audio and video components that seemed to indicate the video had been tampered with.<sup>83</sup> Harri Uyghur stated that he started the #MeTooUyghur hashtag to “highlight the point that millions of people are detained,” and raise awareness. He hoped to engage Chinese authorities and apply pressure on them to prove that Uyghurs who had been detained were still living. He said this type of “communication gives hope to my fellow Uyghurs.” Murat’s own mother was detained in April 2017, followed by his father, and they were since released.<sup>84</sup> He first posted a clip on Facebook in May 2018 about his family’s situation, and it was one of the earliest public accounts of the concentration camp program.

Hundreds of Uyghurs have used the hashtag #MeTooUyghur. In addition, Uyghurs from around the world are uploading information about specific missing individuals suspected of being detained to an online database called the Xinjiang Victims Database.<sup>85</sup> UHRP identified dozens of US-based Uyghurs who used the hashtag to report family members in the camps. Here are a few examples:

**Tumaris Almas**  
@Uyghur18169522

China’s government, show my husband’s sister Engineer Halida Yasin’s video too the way you did with #AbdurihimHeyit You’ve cut our connection for more than two year! I worry about her well-being.

#CCPSHOWVideoOfMyLovedOneToo  
#SaveUyghur  
#MeTooUyghur



8:06 AM - 12 Feb 2019

**Bahram K. Sintash**  
@BSintash

China’s government, show my father Kurban Mamut’s video too the way you did with #AbdurihimHeyit You’ve cut our connection for more than one year! I worry about his well-being.

#CCPSHOWVideoOfMyLovedOneToo  
#MeTooUyghur



7:07 AM - 11 Feb 2019

**Alfred Uyghur**  
@Alfred\_Uyghur

Other than my parents, I have AT LEAST 11 of my relatives are DETAINED in concentration camps. China, release their video too! prove that they are still alive !!!

#MeTooUyghur



8:16 AM - 12 Feb 2019

**Awzar**  
@Awzar00

My name is Awzar Mahmut, my father name is Mahmut Asanjan, my mother name is Gulnisa Abliz, 2018 January I lost contact with my family 2018 April my mom and my dad were sentenced by Chinese government just because of they are Uyghur each of them for more than ten years! #MeTooUyghur



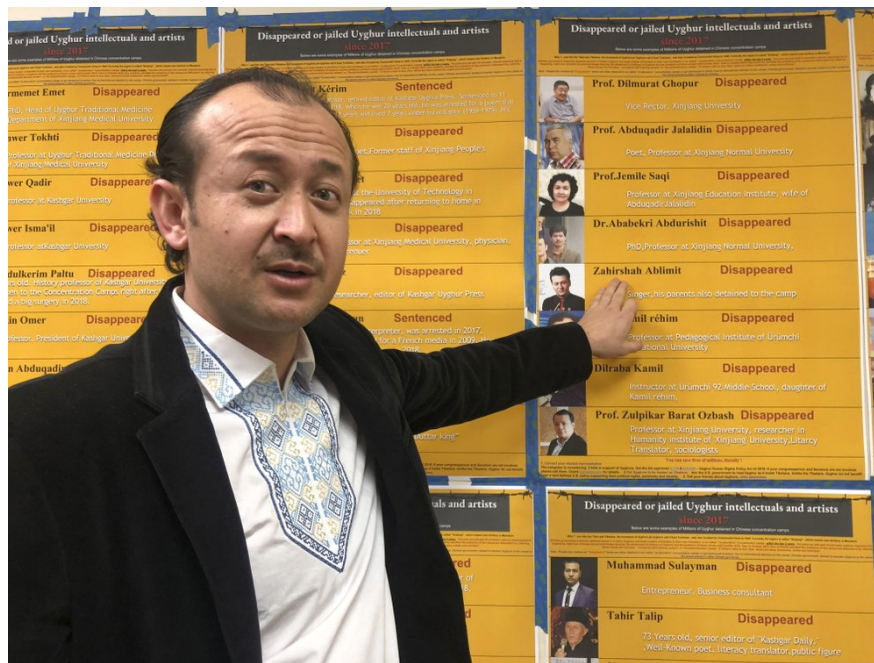
7:54 PM - 19 Feb 2019

In March, the *Epoch Times* reported Uyghurs were beginning to receive proof-of-life videos in response to the online outcry. However, the videos were not pleasant. As Arlsan Hidayat told the *Epoch Times*, “Many people are receiving ‘proof of life’ video calls or videos, and it’s pretty much the same message, where family members are pledging allegiance to the CCP, saying how dare you go to the media and talk about the situation in Xinjiang. We don’t know you, we disown you.”<sup>86</sup>

Ferkat Jawdat, a U.S. citizen and Uyghur American, organized an event at a local public library in Virginia for Uyghur community members to talk about their missing family members, inspired by the #MeTooUyghur campaign. “Personally, I don’t know if my mom is still alive,” he told UHRP. Jawdat planned to submit live testimony from the Uyghur community members about their missing family members to the U.S. State Department and the United Nations. He told UHRP: “We asked if anyone is willing to go public. If not, we ask them to give testimony anonymously.” When asked if people feared Chinese government informants at the event he said:

The people who came are the people who we know. That is one of the reasons we didn’t think the Chinese government infiltrated our event. We feel that because we are in the U.S., in DC, the CCP would not do anything stupid enough to harm our event.<sup>87</sup>

The Associated Press reported that some participants did not know what had happened to their family members who had cut off contact entirely. Jawdat told the AP: “We want to raise awareness about what can happen to American families — many of these people here are American citizens.” Among the participants, stories included not only missing relatives in China, but also sharing threats from Chinese police. Abduwaris Ablimit, another Uyghur present at the event, shared text messages with the Associated Press “from someone who claimed to be a Chinese police officer. The person urged Ablimit to stay quiet about his family’s case.”<sup>88</sup>



Abduwaris Ablimit points to a photo of his missing brother at the Feb. 2019 event. © Associated Press

A new online campaign, started in the wake of #MeTooUyghur, is a response to China's severe criminalization of all ordinary religious practices, such as observance of Ramadan, which began on May 5, 2019 and ended on June 3, 2019. Uyghur activists online called for a boycott of Chinese products as long as the Ramadan crackdown continues.<sup>89</sup> These movements illustrate that although the Chinese governments campaign of extraterritorial intimidation succeeds in terrorizing many Uyghur Americans and forcing them to make the awful choice to keep silent in the hope that this will be better for their families, it is not wholly effective. The courage of those who make a difficult choice despite intense feelings of guilt and doubt.

#### **E. Barriers to Reporting Harassment in the U.S.**

Immigration status in the U.S. is not a shield against harassment by Chinese authorities. UHRP conducted interviews with Uyghurs suffering harassment who were U.S. citizens, green card holders and asylum seekers with claims currently pending before U.S. immigration authorities. James Millward, a professor of Chinese and Central Asian history at Georgetown University, stated: "I've heard about many of these cases of influence and intimidation from Chinese authorities being extended to Uyghurs abroad, whether they are students or journalists or everyday people... In many cases they are permanent residents, green card holders, or even citizens in the United States, Australia, or elsewhere."<sup>90</sup>

In July 2018, a UHRP briefing called "Another Form of Control" documented another form of China's discrimination and persecution of Uyghurs overseas: denying access to official documents. UHRP conducted interviews with U.S.-based Uyghurs in May and June 2018 who told researchers about complications in obtaining documents, such as college transcripts and divorce decrees. "The mass-incarceration of Uyghurs in internment camps has implications that extend beyond East Turkestan. China is locking up Uyghurs because they have family members overseas. As a result, Uyghurs fear to contact their loved ones overseas just for a brief conversation let alone attempt to help them obtain documents to start new lives," said UHRP Director Omer Kanat.<sup>91</sup>

For Uyghurs navigating the American legal system to obtain lawful immigration status, this lack of documentation can prove a major challenge. The immigration process is a stressful and complicated time for Uyghurs who are in the midst of fleeing a brutal crackdown, often affecting their families. America is not the only country where Uyghurs feel this way, and similar reports have been made of Uyghurs navigating the French legal system.<sup>92</sup>

In addition, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment can lead Uyghurs to feel fearful about speaking about their experiences in the United States. Lack of information and misinformation about the protection of civil rights under the law also plays a part. A working-age Uyghur man, who was in the process of applying for asylum, told UHRP:

"I don't feel safe. I'm stressed every day. I'm scared I could get deported... [American immigration officials] haven't given me an answer for four years."

When asked if he would report China's harassment, he replied:

"If I had citizenship, I might raise it. Right now, I have no country. My country is called East Turkestan, but it no longer exists, and people don't know it. I have no country right now. U.S. immigration has said nothing up until now. I'm not Chinese. So now, if I go to the U.S. to report someone has hurt me, they won't care, because I'm not a citizen. People who work for RFA, and people who go to protests have

passports; they are Americans. They feel safe. But if my parents got caught, no one would do anything.”<sup>93</sup>

Tahir Imin also told UHRP that immigration status played a role in his own decision not to report harassment to law enforcement. He said:

I heard no one cares about it. I’m not an American citizen yet, and even if you’re a citizen, if it’s not a national security issue, I heard they will not help.<sup>94</sup>

UHRP spoke with a Uyghur woman, a musician who had been a U.S. citizen for over a decade, who did report an incident of harassment to the FBI [note that all identifying information has been altered]. The woman believed her parents had been placed intermittently in a detention camp. This January, her father asked her to add the username Xiao Li on WeChat. The next day, the musician received a video call from Xiao Li’s cell phone; on the other end were her parents, at home. The musician greeted her parents and asked to see her family’s home, and when they turned the camera, she noticed alongside her parents were four Han Chinese people sitting on the sofa in their living room. Her mom said they were her colleagues but pantomimed that in fact they were not. The call did not last long. Afterwards, Xiao Li began messaging her. He told her he worked for the political branch of law enforcement. Eventually, he told her he would like to come to the U.S. so she could take him on a tour.

The musician feared that if she reported the incident to U.S. law enforcement, the authorities might kill her parents. She also feared they might ask her to choose between her parents’ safety and hurting the Uyghurs’ cause. She told UHRP: “As a Uyghur, it’s very scary, some agent contacting me. It’s an abuse of my rights. I’m a U.S. citizen, and not a Chinese citizen anymore. Someone has to say stop to China.” In April 2019, she reported the incident to the FBI. She shared her messages with Xiao Li and screen shots from her video chat. Even reporting the incident gave her a sense of relief:

I felt like I did the right thing. Every Uyghur who is threatened or has any small amount of evidence should go to the FBI. We live in a great country, with true rule of law. They can protect us. They can protect every Uyghur in the United States. We have to let all people know that in the United States, this country can protect Uyghurs.<sup>95</sup>

These testimonies illustrate the need for more information and outreach among the Uyghur American community to correct misperceptions. They include the idea that the Chinese government will inevitably find out that a Uyghur has reported harassment perception that the Chinese government might find out if Uyghurs report threats, that non-U.S. citizens are not protected from criminal threats, and that there is nothing the U.S. government can do or is willing to do.

#### **F. University Students Targeted in the U.S.**

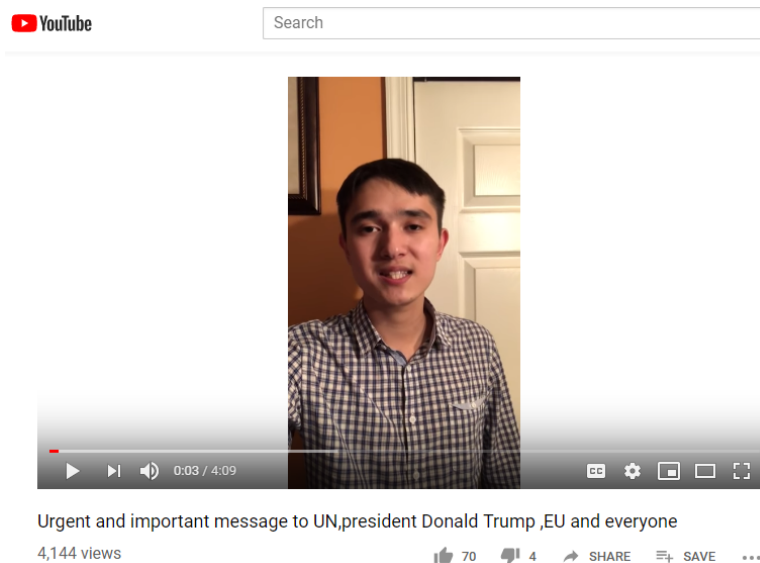
Chinese authorities have doubled down on harassment against Uyghurs in American universities. Authorities explicitly targeted Uyghur students in May 2017, in an official announcement made in early May that required students to return by May 20 from countries including the US, France, Australia, Egypt and Turkey. One student studying in the United States was required to return to East Turkestan but was later allowed to go back to the U.S. after speaking to the police in his hometown of Baren.<sup>96</sup>

A government official was specially assigned to speak to the parents of Uyghur students studying abroad, telling them “to advise their children so that they don’t go astray and don’t take part in any anti-China activities.”<sup>97</sup> UHRP is especially concerned by this pattern, since Uyghurs forced to return risk arbitrary detention by Chinese authorities.

Another concern for Uyghur university students is supporting themselves after detention of family members in East Turkestan. In a March 2019 radio interview, Rushan Abbas stated:

“I know personally several Uyghur young girls that are supposed to be going to school at the ages of 18 and 20, in New York, Boston, California, and many other parts of the US. Because their parents are in the camps, their financial support is cut, and now they can’t pay their education tuition, so they are struggling between surviving in the United States and trying to find out what’s happening to their loved ones, to their parents.”<sup>98</sup>

Such was the circumstances of Alfred Uyghur, a Uyghur American featured in a recent CNN broadcast, who came to the U.S. in 2015 on a student visa.<sup>99</sup> He lost contact with his parents in 2017, on whom he relied for tuition payments, leaving him in financial trouble as he tried to continue pursuing a degree in the United States. He posted on YouTube about his parents being sent to the detention camps. “All I wanted was to get my degree and [go] back to my homeland,” he said. My parents “are suffering because of me,” he says, tears streaming down his face. “By breaking the silence, I am risking the life of my family members.” In a January 2019 news report, an anonymous Uyghur student in Japan also described losing contact with family while studying overseas, leaving the student with an unpleasant choice between not getting to see their loved ones by remaining abroad, or risk arbitrary detention by returning to East Turkestan.<sup>100</sup>



*Screenshot from Alfred Uyghur’s YouTube video about his parents’ detention* <sup>101</sup>

Even absent these pressures, Uyghurs can face hostility on American university campuses motivated by Chinese government aggression. Ferkat Jawdat told UHRP about an incident in which Chinese students disrupted an academic presentation on human rights in East Turkestan at George Mason University in November 2018. He also described a similar response by Chinese students at Indiana University at a previous event.<sup>102</sup>

On January 28, 2019, at Duke University, Aydin Anwar, a Uyghur American student who was president of her school's Muslim Students' Association, organized a talk featuring concentration camp survivor Mihrigul Tursun and Anwar's father, activist Anwar Yusuf Turani, as well as University of Washington lecturer Darren Byler.<sup>103</sup> Radio Free Asia reported on a controversy the event generated when Chinese students in the audience laughed, argued and distributed official Chinese propaganda at the talk.<sup>104</sup>

Speaking in an interview with the Muslim podcast *Mad Mamluks*, Anwar said:

“There were counter protests from Chinese international students who were essentially passing out flyers or articles claiming that everything that [Tursun] was saying was a lie and that she was detained because she was inciting ethnic hatred between ethnic Han and Uyghurs.”<sup>105</sup>

Anwar explained overseas Uyghurs' fear of being reported to Chinese officials:

“They are afraid of being reported by informants who could either be Uyghur or Chinese and they essentially send their names back to the Chinese government, and the Chinese government questions their family members and then detains them or sends them to camps.”<sup>106</sup>

She explained that even elite universities like Duke fear losing valuable cooperation agreements with China. She said:

“So when I organized this event a few weeks ago on the plight of the Uyghurs, that was my attempt to try to break that silence and to shed some light on the situation and make Duke no longer silent and make this a vital conversation. I feel like China really cares about its relationships with especially elite universities.”<sup>107</sup>

*Radio Free Asia* also reported in February 2018 that a Uyghur student who introduced his home country as East Turkestan in an English language class at an American university was threatened by his Han Chinese classmates. The classmates told the Uyghur student they would not allow him to speak about his homeland and said they would report him to the Chinese Embassy. The English teacher threatened to report the Chinese students to school administrators if they did so.<sup>108</sup>

Unlike the events at Duke and George Mason, a recent incident at McMaster University in Canada presented direct evidence of involvement by the Chinese embassy. Chinese students protested when Uyghur Canadian activist, Rukiye Turdush, spoke at McMaster University in February 2019, and even threatened Turdush's son after learning that he was a student there.<sup>109</sup> A Chinese student filmed the lecture, apparently to intimidate Turdush, and questioned Turdush during the Q&A, asking repeatedly why she was speaking there, then left abruptly, cursing.<sup>110</sup> The *Washington Post* noted that the students posted on WeChat that they had reached out to the Chinese Consulate and been given instructions to investigate the speech. “It offers a vivid example of how Chinese students have grown into a vocal and coordinated force on Western campuses, monitoring and pushing back against speech they deem critical of China. It is of particular note because it is unusual to find written evidence of apparent coordination with officials.”<sup>111</sup>

In the U.S., harassment of Uyghur students follows a similar pattern to the treatment of Tibetan students. Chinese students at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) staged protests when the Dalai Lama was invited to speak at the 2017 commencement ceremony.<sup>112</sup> In

2009, North Carolina State University cancelled an appearance by the Dalai Lama, following the direction of its Confucius Institute.<sup>113</sup>

On September 25, 2015, during a meeting at the White House between President Obama and Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping, a coalition of NGOs including UHRP, the International Campaign for Tibet, Initiatives for China, and others organized a protest in front of the White House, and groups of nationalist pro-CCP protesters confronted them.<sup>114</sup> Pictured below are the counter-protestors, confronting Tibetan and Uyghur activists.



*Photo of Chinese protestors confronting Uyghur and Tibetan activists in Washington, DC. ©UHRP*

Another embodiment of CCP authority in the US academic context are Confucius Institutes, Chinese-government funded educational institutes that provide funds in exchange for education, which have been involved in silencing Uyghur issues. Georgetown University professor James Millward said in an interview that he was aware of a Uyghur-American student who had won a scholarship to study in China from her Confucius Institute-sponsored Chinese language class but was denied a visa to study in China, alone among a group of students.<sup>115</sup> In a recently released report, the Government Accountability Office, a U.S. federal agency, reported that some but not all of the Confucius Institutes censored discussions around topics that the Chinese government considered to be “sensitive.”<sup>116</sup>

### **G. Cyber-threats Beyond East Turkestan**

Uyghur Americans have reported harassment on a variety of digital platforms. Tahir Imin told UHRP that he was harassed while doing a Facebook live video last year, with the harasser publicly writing information about Imin’s wife and daughter in East Turkestan and accusing him of being a bad Muslim and of drinking alcohol. No one could identify the online harasser, and Imin and others suspected him of being a Chinese agent. Imin described another tactic to undermine Uyghurs on Facebook. Bots (or machine-generated users) send friend requests from fake accounts to Uyghur pages, up to a hundred each day. He said that once users accept the fake requests their Facebook accounts will be flooded with posts, so they no longer see posts from real friends.<sup>117</sup>

Imin also told UHRP that after he founded the Uighur Times website ([www.uighurtimes.com](http://www.uighurtimes.com)) in May 2018, the website was hacked within a month. When he contacted the service provider, which was based in the US, the provider said the attack came from China.

Hackers have been targeting Uyghurs for many years. In a 2014 report, *Trapped in a Virtual Cage*, UHRP outlined a decade of threats, including DDoS attacks that disabled Ilham Tohti’s website, Uighurbiz, a Chinese-language site hosted on an American server, as well as DDoS attacks on UHRP itself.<sup>118</sup> Since then, online threats have continued to intensify, attracting the attention of cybersecurity researchers worldwide. In 2017, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that Tibetan and Uyghur activists were targeted as part of a larger cyber-espionage campaign.<sup>119</sup>

Imin was also the target of catfishing or mimicking of his identity to target his network. He said that someone on Facebook used his name and photo to create an account and contacted people, asking about their whereabouts and activities. When a friend alerted him to the account, he immediately contacted Facebook, which took down the account.<sup>120</sup> While impersonation can be a criminal offense, the criminality of such behavior online raises complex jurisdictional issues. Facebook, for its part, does have strict policies about impersonation, as well as online harassment and bullying, and a robust system for reporting them.<sup>121</sup> In another instance, Imin himself was catfished; he received a telephone call from an individual claiming to be a Uyghur businessman in Kazakhstan. The individual offered him \$5,000-\$10,000 if he would provide his banking information, but Imin refused. Alfred Uyghur similar discussed being catfished, with individuals copying both his Twitter and YouTube accounts.<sup>122</sup>

A 7-month study released in 2016 by the cybersecurity research firm, Palo Alto Networks, found that a group of attacks labelled the “Scarlet Mimic” specifically targeted Tibetan and Uyghur activists. The researchers wrote: “Attacks from this group have been reported publicly in the past, but mostly as disparate, unconnected incidents. Based on analysis of the data and malware samples we have collected, [security firm] Unit 42 believes the attacks described herein are the work of a group or set of cooperating groups who have a single mission, collecting information on minority groups who reside in and around northwestern China.”<sup>123</sup>

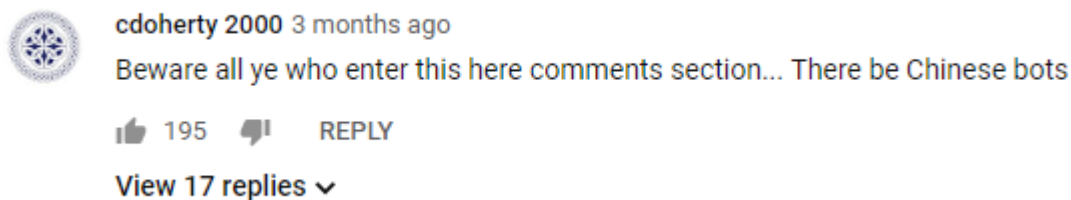


*Zumret Isaac posted about the detention of her parents on Twitter<sup>124</sup>*

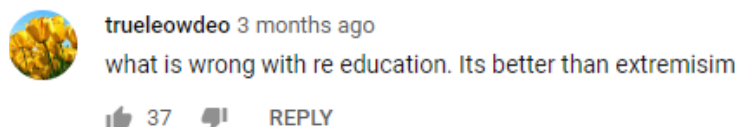
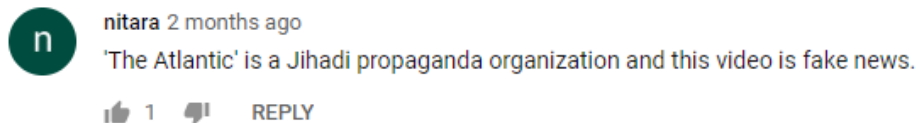
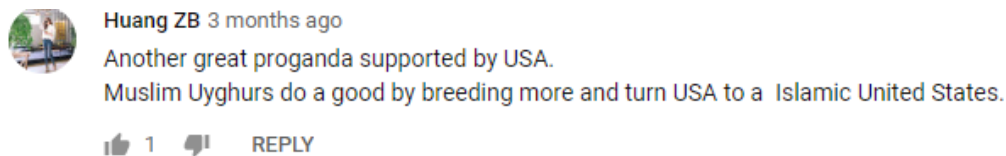
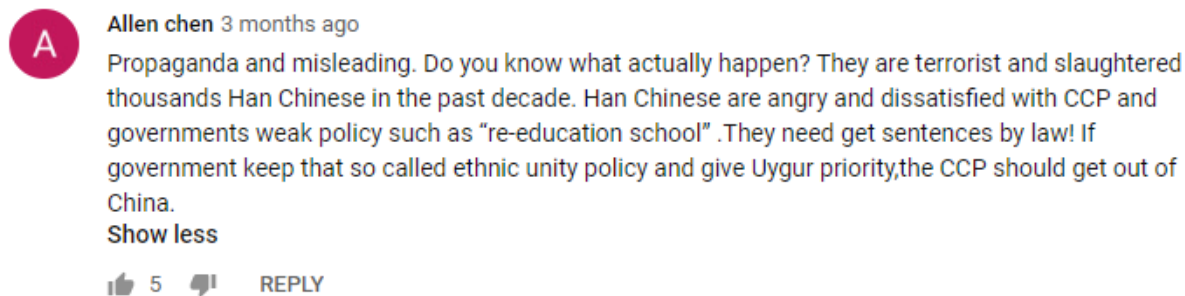


In addition, Uyghurs who have posted testimony online have been contacted by Chinese authorities and ordered to stop sharing their stories.<sup>125</sup> Two Uyghur American sisters, Zumret and Humar Isaac, explained what happened after they posted about their parents' suspected detention in a prison camp in 2019. First, their mother asked them to remove a post from WeChat that indicated concern about their parents after they stopped communicating for four months.<sup>126</sup> Instead of silencing themselves, the sisters spoke out about the incident to *Foreign Policy*.<sup>127</sup> Humar Isaac also published a piece on Medium in which she stated she had "lost some of my Chinese social media accounts after I posted about my parents' disappearance in China's concentration camps."<sup>128</sup>

Online trolls, whose identities are unknown but who are thought to receive payment from the Chinese government, have targeted online initiatives seeking to provide information about Uyghur human rights. In November 2018, the *Atlantic* posted a video on YouTube about Uyghur activists in the United States, which was open to public comments. It had about 1,500 comments as of March 2019. Comments on the videos illustrate the type of pushback Uyghur activists face online. At the top of the comments on YouTube was the warning:



Here are the some of the comments that followed:





TONY MG 1 month ago

I'm a chinese, personally I don't heard any of this from Chinese media or news. If it's true, I feel sorry for it. But after you watched this video, I want you guys know that the reason Chinese gov doing this. The Muslim terrorist which Chinese gov said to people they had support from isis, killed 31 innocent people and wounded 141 in Qunming train station in 2014, total of 8 terrorists were all from Xinjiang. Also there were more terrorist attacks made by them in China, you can research it if u interested like attack on police station etc. Chinese gov gives a lot of advantages to people in Xinjiang, like extra credits on national exam and many more. And they still supporting terrorist activities. I guess re-education is only solution China gov can do now

Show less

6 REPLY



黃達宗 1 month ago

Send all the scumbags to NAZI US!

2 REPLY



joey sun 3 months ago

fake news

14 REPLY

View 10 replies



丁相程 3 months ago

ANTI-CHINESE PROPAGANDA

9 REPLY

View 8 replies



Youe Fuke 2 months ago

Uighurs will thank us han Chinese in long-term.

Our goal is not to wiping out Uighurs people, but the Islamic in the Uighurs people. As you know, Uighurs' population is still grow fast.

It's a painful process. CCP afraid to declare war to Islam publicly and say the truth that Islam is actually a terrorism. A lot of people around the world actually know this truth, but they afraid of committing it because of the political right.

You can't expect reading Quran and believing in god to bring you a good life. The only way to gain a decent life is clear and simple, get education, learn skills, work hard. That's why China can grow so fast in the past 40 years.

Wipe out Islam just like a person get rid of drugs, you will feel the pain in the beginning and it can't be done over a single night but it is good for health in long-term. Everybody know that Uighur people will hate us for a very very long time. But it still worth to do it even if it takes hundred of years. We should get a long-term plan as we always do.

Show less

12 REPLY

While these messages illustrate some of the types of things that trolls will say, it is difficult to provide summary information on the trolls, because their comments are frequently removed by website moderators, particularly when posting on American technology platforms like Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. YouTube, for example, states that “It’s not ok to post abusive videos and comments on YouTube. If harassment crosses the line into a malicious attack it can be reported and may be removed.”<sup>129</sup> A 2017 Washington Post article looked at the rise of anti-Islamic sentiment on Chinese social media and concluded: “Our research found that most of these posts blame Uyghurs for ethnic unrest and violence in Xinjiang. Posters tend to stereotype Uyghurs as lazy, unreasonable and poor — and potential terrorists.”<sup>130</sup>



This general Islamophobia extends beyond the Uyghur population. After a massacre on March 15, 2019 killed 50 worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, reporter Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian tweeted, “Really horrified by the number of Chinese-language twitter accounts defending the New Zealand terrorist attack in my mentions today.”<sup>131</sup>

Airbnb, an online marketplace that allows users to rent rooms or properties to guests, is another American company that struggles with discrimination against Uyghurs online.<sup>132</sup> In a recent survey, *Wired* found 35 Airbnb posts with discriminatory language in China, mostly targeting Uyghurs and forbidding them from renting on the site, often citing official restrictions on renting rooms to Uyghurs. *Wired* wrote, “Given that almost all the Airbnb China hosts that ban Uyghurs announce the policy in a formulaic manner, and that there’s been no apparent effort from Airbnb to remove such clauses, questions remain as to whether Airbnb China has sanctioned the practice.”

Whereas Airbnb has struggled to define its policy towards Uyghurs, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube all have community guidelines that govern whether any given post is sufficiently harassing to merit being taken down. In a recent case in May 2019, two Uyghur activist Facebook pages, belonging to Talk to East Turkestan and Uyghur World Congress, were inundated with posts attributed to Chinese trolls, with hundreds of postings appearing within hours. The posts were allegedly posted by a secretive group of Chinese hackers known as the Diba group, and not directly by Chinese government officials, but Chinese state media nevertheless praised the cyber-attack in an article titled “Patriotic posts flood East Turkestan pages to fight untrue reports on Xinjiang.”<sup>133</sup> Facebook commented to AFP by email: “In this case, we have removed content and accounts that violate our policies, and will continue to investigate and take action on any abusive behaviour we find. We know our job is never done when it comes to finding and removing abuse, and we’ll continue to invest in the teams, technology, and tools required to reduce abuse on our platform.”<sup>134</sup>

There’s a reason these platforms are targeted by trolls. Online platforms and particularly those hosted outside of the Chinese government’s reach, provide Uyghurs with an opportunity for sharing their stories, building solidarity and providing a source of information. By spreading fear and discrediting Uyghur users on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, trolls work to silence one of very few outlets where Uyghurs can speak publicly and frankly about the human rights situation in East Turkestan.

## V. Conclusion

The Chinese government is implementing a systematic, ambitious, multi-year, well-resourced, relentless and cruel policy to surveil, intimidate and coerce Uyghurs abroad in an attempt to control their speech. The campaign constitutes an ongoing series of crimes committed with impunity on U.S. persons.

UHRP calls upon the United States government to use appropriate powers and authorities to bring an end to this illegal and unacceptable pattern of crimes on American soil. It is time to take action to deter and pursue accountability for these crimes. UHRP also calls upon the governments of other countries that are home to members of the Uyghur diaspora to take immediate action.

The Uyghur diaspora has long suffered Chinese government harassment and intimidation aimed at silencing testimony and criticism of its human-rights violations in the Uyghur homeland of East Turkestan. The government's unprecedented campaign since 2017 to round up Uyghurs and imprison them in so-called reeducation camps, which many observers have called concentration camps.<sup>135</sup>, has been accompanied by an intensive effort to conceal what is happening. Virtually all Uyghurs in America have relatives or close family members detained in the prison camps, and their testimony has proven vital in alerting the world to these mass atrocities. Correspondingly, The Chinese government is engaged in a systematic and widespread campaign to intimidate and silence Uyghur Americans, to prevent them from exposing their family members' fate. This campaign of repression not only inflicts severe emotional and psychological pain on every Uyghur-American family, but also constitutes a systematic and ongoing violation of American rights and freedoms by a foreign power on American soil.

Since this campaign of mass detention began, the Chinese government has been using the tactic of threatening Uyghur Americans with placing additional family members in the camps. Some of the threats are vague messages to consider the welfare of their families; others are explicit threats to detain relatives in the camps. Chinese officials contact Uyghurs in the United States, by text, chat apps, voicemail, email, and via messages delivered by third parties. Some members of the community report receiving such messages on a weekly and at-times even a near-daily basis.

Policing Uyghur behavior abroad through systematic threats and harassment is a labor-intensive campaign that has been devastatingly effective in intimidating Uyghurs who might otherwise speak out publicly. It is only by overcoming intense guilt and fear that some Uyghurs have been able to make the decision to come forward to provide testimony.

The Chinese government's campaign of surveillance, harassment, and coercion is a brazen assault on the rights and freedoms of American citizens, permanent residents, and international students enrolled in American universities. These actions by Chinese government agents are crimes under federal and state law and inflict severe emotional and psychological distress and pain on the entire Uyghur American community. Despite coverage of this campaign by international media since early 2018, and attention called to it by Congressional hearings and the provisions of pending legislation, the campaign continues unabated.

It is time for the United States government to take appropriate measures to end these criminal actions against Americans.

## VI. Recommendations

### *For US entities*

- UHRP urges Congress to pass the Uyghur Human Rights and Policy Act and the UIGHUR Act of 2019. Under the Acts, the United States government commits itself not only to preventing attacks on Uyghur Americans, but also providing other forms of support to the Uyghur American community. This should include compiling a database of Uyghur Americans' family members who have been threatened in East Turkestan and conducting targeted advocacy urging China to release them.
- UHRP urges Congress to request detailed information regarding U.S. government protection of Uyghur Americans' Constitutional rights and freedoms, covering actions by law enforcement agencies and the State Department to investigate, deter and pursue accountability for criminal behavior targeting Uyghur American, by agents of a foreign power on U.S. soil, including efforts under the Justice Department's China Initiative.
- UHRP urges the FBI to thoroughly investigate instances of attacks on Uyghurs, regardless of any legislative changes. The FBI should also consider the proposed anonymous hotline for Uyghurs to report harassing behavior. The FBI should coordinate its response with local law enforcement agencies and with the State Department, particularly regarding protecting high profile Uyghur leaders including Rebiya Kadeer. One priority should be offering protection to individuals being coerced to inform on behalf of Chinese authorities.
- UHRP urges local law enforcement, particularly in northern Virginia where the largest Uyghur community is located, to work toward building a rapport with Uyghur residents. Such agencies should encourage Uyghurs to trust and report any incidents of harassment. Examples could include telephone harassment, or physical intimidation. Law enforcement should make clear to Uyghurs that help is available regardless of immigration status, and both citizen and non-citizen Uyghurs can safely report criminal behavior.
- UHRP urges website hosts to provide support to Uyghurs, particularly Uyghur activists whose websites suffer attacks. UHRP urges tech companies to not allow hate speech, and to employ both Uyghur and Mandarin speaking staff to help monitor aggression online. Tech companies should also work to protect Uyghurs from cyberattacks, including developing tools to identify attackers and making secure communication platforms available.

### *For Chinese entities*

- UHRP urges the Chinese authorities to cease the practice of collecting information about Uyghurs overseas, and to release the family members of Uyghur Americans detained for the sole purpose of controlling their family overseas. China should release all Uyghurs detained without trial or due process.
- UHRP urges China to respond for any and all requests for information about detained Uyghurs and particularly the family members of Uyghur Americans.

- UHRP urges China to allow Chinese citizens to communicate freely with their Uyghur American relatives and to cease all monitoring of private civilian communications. In addition to ceasing surveillance of WeChat, China should allow its citizens to access other online messaging platforms.
- UHRP urges China to grant travel documents to Uyghurs freely and according to the same procedures as all ethnic groups in the country. Uyghur Americans should be offered the freedom to travel both to East Turkestan and the United States, and their families should not be denied passports to visit them overseas.
- UHRP urges China to enforce stronger protections against hate speech and harassment online and educate Chinese citizens not to attack Uyghurs online.

## **VII. Acknowledgments**

UHRP is grateful to all the individuals who contributed to this report, including interviewees Suraya Ablimit, Tahir Hamut, Tahir Imin, Guly Mahsut, and Ferkat Jawdat. UHRP is also grateful to the brave Uyghur individuals who shared their experiences in the wider media despite great risks to themselves and their families.

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Finally, UHRP extends a special appreciation to the National Endowment for Democracy, whose unwavering support for freedom, democracy and human rights in East Turkestan ensures that Uyghurs will always have a forum to voice their concerns and issues.

Greg Fay, Research Associate, [info@uhrp.org](mailto:info@uhrp.org)

August 2019.

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## VIII. Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Assistant Secretary of Defense Randall Schriver used the term concentration camp in May 2019, see: *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Schriver Press Briefing on the 2019 Report on Military and Security Developments in China*. U.S. Department of Defense. May 3, 2019. <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1837011/assistant-secretary-of-defense-for-indo-pacific-security-affairs-schriver-press/>
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The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) was founded by the Uyghur American Association (UAA) in 2004 with a supporting grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). UHRP's mission is to promote human rights and democracy for the Uyghur people. In 2016, UHRP became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

UHRP works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people by:

Researching, writing and publishing commentary and reports in English and Chinese covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights; preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and legislators on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people.

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