No Space Left to Run

China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs

UHRP
UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT
ئۇيغۇر كىشىلىك ھوقۇق قورۇلۇشى

THE OXUS SOCIETY
FOR CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

About the Uyghur Human Rights Project

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghur people through research-based advocacy. We publish reports and analysis in English and Chinese to defend Uyghurs' civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights according to international human rights standards.

About the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs

The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs is a DC-based non-profit organization dedicated to fostering academic exchange between Central Asia and the rest of the world.

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"No Space Left to Run" was researched and written Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall.

Acknowledgements

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I. Executive Summary

This report is the product of an effort to understand the means by which China targets Uyghurs beyond its borders to silence dissent. In partnership with the Uyghur Human Rights Project, the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs gathered cases of China's transnational repression of Uyghurs from public sources, including government documents, human rights reports, and reporting by credible news agencies to establish a detailed analysis of how the scale and scope of China's global repression are expanding.

Since 1997, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has engaged in an unprecedented scale of transnational repression that has reached 28 countries worldwide. The China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Dataset examines 1,546 cases of detention and deportation from 1997 until March 2021 and offers critical insight into the scope and evolution of the Chinese government's efforts to control and repress Uyghurs across sovereign boundaries. Our data finds instances of at least 28 countries across the world complicit in China's harassment and intimidation of Uyghurs, most notably in much of the Middle East and North Africa with 647 cases, and in South Asia with 665 cases. The dataset contains 1,151 cases of Uyghurs being detained in their host country and 395 cases of Uyghurs being deported, extradited, or rendered back to China.

China's transnational repression of Uyghurs has been consistently on the rise and has accelerated dramatically with the onset of its system of mass surveillance in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) from 2017, showing a correlation between repression at home and abroad. In the first stage of China's evolving system of transnational repression, from 1997 to 2007, a total of 89 Uyghurs from 9 countries, mostly in South and Central Asia, were detained or sent to China. In the second phase (2008–2013), 130 individuals from 15 countries were repressed. In the ongoing third phase (2014 to the end of our data collection in March 2021), a total of 1,327 individuals were detained or rendered from 20 countries. Unreported cases would likely raise these figures substantially, with our database presenting just the tip of the iceberg due to our reliance on publicly reported instances of repression.

International organizations and host governments, particularly those with close political and economic ties to the PRC, can often be complicit in China's use of transnational repression against Uyghurs, many of whom have sought refuge abroad. China's transnational repression exists as part of a wider trend of global authoritarianism that threatens to erode democratic norms worldwide. Stopping China's transnational repression is a moral imperative and crucial to maintaining state sovereignty and the integrity of international organizations like Interpol and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

States that host Uyghur diaspora communities can take concrete steps to combat China's transnational repression and protect Uyghurs and other vulnerable populations. Governments can refuse to extradite Uyghurs, increase refugee and emigration quotas, and restrict networks of enablers, including tech companies, as well as diaspora groups and organizations acting as fronts for the Chinese government.

This report describes transnational repression and the key actors and methods used by the Chinese government. It then traces the evolution of China's campaign of repression, showing how that campaign has shifted in emphasis from Central and South Asia, to Southeast Asia, to the Middle East, following the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative.

To counteract China's global repression, the Oxus Society and UHRP recommend the following:

- **Strengthen refugee resettlement programs** by increasing quotas and streamlining procedures to allow Uyghurs to leave third countries collaborating with China.

- **Restrict the export of surveillance technology** that can be used to monitor vulnerable communities without due process of law.

- **Increase accountability** by raising the costs of embarking on campaigns of transnational repression.

II. Introduction

In March 2019, Kazakhstan security services dragged Serikhzhan Bilash from his hotel room. An ethnic Kazakh activist, Bilash had been providing the world with a window into China's mass internment of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples in the Uyghur Region through his work with Atajurt, a human rights organization in Almaty.[1] Such activism poses nothing short of a major inconvenience for Kazakhstan and the PRC, which are in the midst of deepening their economic, security, and political relations.

Accused of "inciting racial strife" against the Chinese people, Bilash was released in August 2019. After his release, he told his supporters gathered outside a courthouse in Almaty that his freedom was a "victory for the people." Beijing seems to have been the real victor, however. In order to secure his freedom, Bilash had to accept guilt for politically motivated charges and cease his activism.[2] He and his organization continued to face threats and harassment until he was blacklisted as a "terrorist." Once blacklisted, he faced continuous harassment including the freezing of his bank accounts and impoundment of his car. He later temporarily immigrated to Turkey,[3] and then to the United States, where he is living as of June 2021. The case of Bilash signifies China's growing influence around the world and offers insight into how it manages discourse. Bilash's case also speaks to the degree to which China has been exerting influence on members of Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups from the Uyghur Region overseas.

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[1] In this report, we refer to this region interchangeably as "the Uyghur Region" and "the XUAR" (short for "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region"). Uyghurs around the world see "Xinjiang," the shortened form of "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" preferred by the authorities in China, as a colonial term. In addition to "Uyghur Region," many Uyghurs also refer to their homeland as "East Turkistan."

[2] Catherine Putz, "UN Working Group Finds Serikzhan Bilash's Detention Arbitrary," *The Diplomat,* November 26, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/un-working-group-finds-serikzhan-bilashs-detention-by-kazakhstan-arbitrary/.

[3] Bruce Pannier, "Activist Defending Ethnic Kazakhs in China Explains Why He Had to Flee Kazakhstan," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 18, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/31051495.html.

Since 1997, when the first cases of rendition of Uyghurs to China were recorded in Pakistan, China's transnational repression has expanded to include a full gamut of activities from espionage, cyberattacks, and physical assaults, to the issuance of Red Notices via Interpol, an organization that coordinates police activities around the world. Between 1997 and December 2016, China was involved in the detention or deportation back to China of over 851 Uyghurs across 23 countries. Since 2017, China's actions against overseas Uyghurs have expanded dramatically as part of the broader security sweep taking place in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) under the framework of the so-called People's War on Terror and Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism. Since 2017, at least 695 Uyghurs have been detained or deported to China from 15 separate countries.

The Middle East has played a particularly alarming role in China's transnational repression. Beginning in early July 2017, more than 200 Uyghurs, many of them students of religion at Al-Azhar, were detained in Egypt after being rounded up in Uyghur restaurants.[4] In many of the cases we identified, relatives in the Uyghur Region had been forced to place calls to these students abroad, demanding their return to China.[5] As part of the new measures, Chinese security services had adopted a blacklist of 26 countries deemed "suspicious" for XUAR residents to have connections with. The blacklist consists of countries across Central Asia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, escalating Beijing's campaign of external pressure on these countries to comply with its demands.

This report draws from a comprehensive new database, the China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Dataset, a joint initiative by the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs and the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), which documents cases worldwide in which governments have cooperated with China to arrest, detain, intimidate, and even extradite Uyghurs and other

Between 1997 and December 2016, China was involved in the detention or deportation back to China of over 851 Uyghurs across 23 countries.

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[4] "Uyghur Students in Egypt Detained, Sent Back to China," *Radio Free Asia*, July 7, 2017, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/students-07072017155035.html.

[5] "Five Uyghurs From One Family Imprisoned for Egypt Study, Another Believed to Have Died in Camp," *Radio Free Asia*, March 5, 2021, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/egypt-03052021184200.html.

peoples who have fled the XUAR.[6] The database contains detailed information on 300 cases of transnational repression in 27 countries, and an upper estimate of 1,546 cases in 28 countries, based on supplementary data in which we have found only limited biographical information for targeted individuals. Of the more detailed cases, 96 are cases of a Uyghur being detained in their host country by their host government and 204 are cases of a Uyghur being deported, extradited, or rendered back to China. Of the 1,546 upper-estimate cases, 1,151 are cases of Uyghurs being detained in their host country, and 395 are cases of Uyghurs being deported, extradited, or rendered back to China. The database and this report present the most complete account of China's global campaign against XUAR peoples yet published.

III. Transnational Repression and Uyghurs

In 2019, there were an estimated 272 million migrants worldwide, 12 million of whom came from China, the world's third-largest sender of migrants.[7] While sending states stand to benefit from migrants who bolster the economy with remittances or who gain education abroad, which can be used in the service of society, authoritarian states in particular tend to view emigrants as a potential threat. Beyond borders, citizens may have more freedom to voice criticisms of their home government, form links with like-minded individuals, and advocate for change at home. A number of studies have examined how authoritarian states operate transnationally to quell such criticism and advocacy by targeting citizens living abroad, a process that Dana Moss has termed

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[6] To access the China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Dataset, please see https://oxussociety.org/viz/transnational-repression.

[7] Charlotte Edmond, "Global migration by the numbers: who migrates, where they go and why," *World Economic Forum,* January 10, 2020, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/.

"transnational repression" and Yossi Shain labeled as "counter-exile strategies."[8]

Repression is "any action by another group which raises the contender's cost of collective action," encouraging the contender to change their behavior.[9] State repression is usually defined in territorial terms. Christian Davenport, for example, defines repression as "actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state."[10] But transnational repression forces us to look beyond this domestic focus toward how governments target their citizens abroad.

The literature on transnational repression has proliferated over the past five years, with authors examining how authoritarian regimes in Syria,[11] China,[12] Eritrea,[13] Central Asia,[14] and Iran[15] have targeted their populations abroad. Scholars have developed "repertoires" of practices for transnational repression, ranging from everyday surveillance and intimidation to more exceptional

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[8] Dana M. Moss, "Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of The Arab Spring," *Social Problems* 63, no. 4 (2016): 480–98; Yossi Shain, "The War of Governments against Their Opposition in Exile," *Government and Opposition* 24, no. 3 (1989): 341–56.

[9] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA.: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 100.

[10] Charles Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 2.

[11] Moss, "Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization and the Case of The Arab Spring"; Dana M. Moss, "The Ties that Bind: Internet Communication Technologies, Networked Authoritarianism, and 'Voice' in the Syrian Diaspora," *Globalizations* 15, no. 2 (2016): 265–82; Emma Lundgren Jorüm, "Repression across borders: homeland response to anti-regime mobilization among Syrians in Sweden," *Diaspora Studies* 8, no.2 (2015): 104–19; Laurie A. Brand, *Citizens Abroad: Emigration and the State in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[12] James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2014).

[13] Nicole Hirt and Abdulkader Saleh Mohammed, "By way of patriotism, coercion, or instrumentalization: how the Eritrean regime makes use of the diaspora to stabilize its rule," *Globalizations* 15, no. 2 (2018): 232–47.

[14] David Lewis, "'Illiberal Spaces': Uzbekistan's extraterritorial security practices and the spatial politics of contemporary authoritarianism," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 140–59; Edward Lemon, "From Moscow to Madrid: Governing Security Threats Beyond Tajikistan's Borders," in *Tajikistan on the Move: State-building and Societal Transformations,* ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018); Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw, *Dictators Without Borders* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

[15] Marcus Michaelsen, "Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state," *Globalizations* 15, no. 2 (2018): 248–64.

practices of assassination and rendition.[16] Some scholars have attempted to map the scale of transnational repression and the mechanisms through which states use repression. These include a regional dataset, the Central Asian Political Exiles Database, and two global datasets, the Authoritarian Actions Abroad Database (AAAD) and Freedom House.[17] But, while China features prominently in the latter two databases, no study has yet compiled a comprehensive dataset charting how China has targeted Uyghurs abroad.

The practice of the extraterritorial targeting of dissidents and opposition groups is not a new phenomenon. In the 20th century, many non-democratic countries used strategies of infiltration, secret policing, and assassination to control opposition movements and individuals in exile.[18] Prominent examples included the assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico in 1940 and the murder of Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov by a poisoned umbrella in London in 1978. Yet there is evidence that states are using transnational repression to silence critics abroad and target the diaspora with increasing frequency. This is due to three factors: (1) the globalization of activism due to migration; (2) the development of digital communications; and (3) the proliferation of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms of cooperation to target opponents abroad, such as Interpol and regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Combined, these developments have increased regimes' perception of the threat that exiles pose and provided greater opportunities for governments to target citizens abroad. Importantly, the normative costs of using transnational repression have gone down, with authoritarian regimes able to commit acts like the murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamaal

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[16] Ahmet Öztürk, "The Repertoire of Extraterritorial Repression: Diasporas and Home States," *Migration Letters*, 17, no. 1 (2020), 59–69; Dana Moss, "Transnational Repression"; Gerasimos Tsourapas, "Strategies of Transnational Repression, Legitimation, and Co-Optation in World Politics," *International Studies Review*, 2020; Nate Schenkkan and Isabelle Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," Freedom House, January 2021, freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev012521_web.pdf.

[17] Central Asia Political Exiles Database, University of Exeter, https://excas.net/exiles/; Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach"; Alexander Dukalskis, "AAAD Data & Codebook," April 2021, https://alexdukalskis.wordpress.com/data/.

[18] Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Khashoggi in Istanbul and the poisoning of the Skripals in the United Kingdom with minimal negative repercussions.

In a recent report on transnational repression, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," Freedom House documented 608 incidents of transnational repression globally since 2018. The report identified China as the most prolific user of transnational repression in the world, having perpetrated 214 incidents in 36 countries.[19] The global population of "overseas citizens" from China is between 10 million and 50 million.[20] The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still considers those overseas members of non-Han ethnic groups to be "Chinese," based on the concept of the Chinese nation (中华民族) and official discourse of "unity of the nationalities" (民族团结). Even as China views these overseas Chinese as potential allies in strengthening Chinese soft power efforts and developing trade and investment links, it also views them as a potential threat that needs to be controlled and suppressed.

In recent years, China's overseas reach has grown in lock-step with its anti-corruption campaign. "Operation Foxhunt" (猎狐行动) was unveiled in 2014 as the international counterpart to Xi's domestic pursuit of "tigers and flies," or corrupt officials at the highest and lowest ranks of CCP leadership. The operation reportedly involved the coordinated efforts of 2,000 personnel, sending over seventy police teams abroad to hunt down "economic fugitives." A second campaign, dubbed "Operation Skynet" (天网行), was launched in April 2015. By the end of 2017, Skynet and Foxhunt had resulted in the capture of some 4,058 fugitives from over 70 countries.[21] Skynet and Foxhunt allowed the Chinese government to further develop its capacity to target citizens abroad. These experiences have in turn helped it refine its targeting of members of "problematic" ethnic groups, including Uyghurs, living abroad.[22]

Importantly, the normative costs of using transnational repression have gone down, with authoritarian regimes able to commit acts like the murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamaal Khashoggi in Istanbul and the poisoning of the Skripals in the United Kingdom with minimal negative repercussions.

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[19] Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach."

[20] Daniel Goodkind, "The Chinese Diaspora: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Trends," U.S. Census Bureau, August 2019, https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/Chinese_Diaspora.pdf.

[21] "China's 'Sky Net' campaign nabs more than 4,000 fugitives since 2015," CGTN, April 24, 2018, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414e3559444d77457a6333566d54/index.html.

[22] For previous UHRP reporting on the topic of China's transnational repression of Uyghurs, see UHRP, "They Can't Send Me Back: Uyghur Asylum Seekers in Europe," September 20, 2011, https://uhrp.org/report/they-cant-send-me-back-uyghur-asylum-seekers-europe/; UHRP, "The

IV. Methodology

The China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs Dataset contains incidents of transnational repression conducted by the PRC to target Uyghurs from the Uyghur Region since 1997, when the first cases of rendition were publicly recorded.[23] We compiled our dataset based on published material, rather than revealing private information based on interviews with targeted individuals. This methodology is ethically appropriate and feasible given the difficulties conducting research on authoritarian settings, where governments go to great lengths to hide and manipulate truth.[24]

We adopted a multi-stage methodology to identify relevant cases. First, we compiled existing reports on the targeting of Uyghurs and others from the Uyghur Region beyond China's borders, including reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), World Uyghur Congress (WUC), and UHRP. Second, we supplemented these with keyword searches on local news services including Radio Free Asia (RFA) and newswires such as Factiva, ProQuest, and BBC Monitoring. Third, we verified and filled

Fifth Poison: The Harassment of Uyghurs Overseas," November 28, 2017, https://uhrp.org/report/fifth-poison-harassment-uyghurs-overseas-html/; UHRP, "Repression Across Borders: The CCP's Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans," August 28, 2019, https://uhrp.org/report/new-uyghur-human-rights-project-uhrp-report-details-how-chinese-government-engaged/; UHRP, "Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness," April 1, 2020, https://uhrp.org/report/weaponized-passports-the-crisis-of-uyghur-statelessness/; UHRP, "'The Government Never Oppresses Us': China's proof-of-life videos as intimidation and a violation of Uyghur family unity," February 2, 2021, https://uhrp.org/report/the-government-never-oppresses-us-chinas-proof-of-life-videos-as-intimidation-and-a-violation-of-uyghur-family-unity/.

[23] The forms of transnational repression discussed in this report have largely targeted Uyghur former citizens of the Uyghur Region. While non-Uyghurs from the region have also been the targets of this repression, the cases in our dataset overwhelmingly suggest that Uyghurs abroad are a special target of the Chinese state.

[24] Natalie Koch, "Introduction – Field Methods in 'Closed Contexts': Undertaking Research in Authoritarian States and Places," *Area* 45, no. 4 (2013): 390–95; Marlies Glasius, Meta De Lange, Jos Bartman, Emauela Dalmaso, Adele Del Sordi, LV Aoefei, Marcus Michaelsen, and Kris Ruijgrok, *Research, Ethics and Risk in the Authoritarian Field* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Nurbek Bekmurzaev, Philipp Lottholz, and Joshua Meyer, "Navigating the safety implications of doing research and being researched in Kyrgyzstan: cooperation, networks and framing," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (2018): 100–18.

missing gaps in our dataset based on an existing dataset of transnational repression globally compiled by Freedom House. Lastly, we worked with diaspora and advocacy groups to verify the information in the cases.

To establish the reliability of the data collection we have used the triangulation method, involving the use of multiple independent sources of data to establish the truth and accuracy of the information. Our reliance on open sources means that while we do present a relatively exhaustive representation of the public record, we do not claim that the dataset is comprehensive. As reports of mass arrests of XUAR residents living beyond China's borders indicate, the cases in our dataset constitute merely the tip of the iceberg of China's transnational repression.

Inclusion Criteria[25]

- Located outside the territory of the PRC when targeted;

- A member of a non-Han ethnic group from the XUAR, including Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks;

- Targeted by the government of China or its agents.

Exclusion Criterium

- Those accused of terrorism and extremism in countries, including China, classified as Not Free by Freedom House, where legal processes with regard to terrorism offenses cannot be considered as upholding a high standard of the rule of law.[26]

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[25] Adapted from Saipira Furstenberg, John Heathershaw, Edward Lemon, David Lewis, and Alexander Cooley, "The Central Asia Political Exiles Codebook," CAPE Project, University of Exeter, September 2020, https://excas.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CAPE_Codebook.pdf.

[26] For example, the database includes cases from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia in which Uyghurs were arrested for allegedly plotting terror attacks. Inconsistencies in the narratives and the politicized nature of the judicial system in each country led us to include these cases in our dataset. However, we did not include the 22 Uyghur detainees who were held in Guantanamo Bay due to a lack of clear information about China's role in their detention.

We also use a three-stage model of transnational repression adopted by the Central Asia Political Exiles (CAPE) database in order to evaluate the different cases recorded in our database:

Stage 1

Put on notice, including warnings and threats to individuals and family members and arrest requests issued bilaterally or through international organizations such as INTERPOL.

Stage 2

Arrest/detention, including long and short detention, imprisonment and conviction overseas associated with suspected activities at home.

Stage 3

End game, including formal extradition, informal rendition, disappearance, serious attack and assassination.

Image 1: Three-stage model of transnational repression adopted by the Central Asia Political Exiles (CAPE) database. Image by UHRP.

Following CAPE, we measured the degree of transnational repression on a 3-point ordinal scale according to these three stages. We then assigned each case a score between 1 and 3, with 3 representing the most severe form of transnational repression. Many individual cases include forms of repression across different stages. The stage we have assigned to cases in the dataset is the most severe the targeted individual has reportedly experienced (rather than a full representation of every stage of repression they have experienced). Not all cases proceed in a linear fashion through the three stages, as some skip directly to Stage 2 or Stage 3.

We have not included Stage-1 incidents in this report, as we are still collecting data on these numerous and often unreported cases. Since 2017, China has embarked on an unprecedented campaign of mass repression, detaining an estimated 1.8 million Uyghurs and

others in internment camps, the prison system, or labor camps.[27] The campaign is so widespread that almost every Uyghur diaspora member now has family in police custody, with it being difficult to determine whether family members in the Uyghur Region were rounded up as a targeted act of transnational repression (e.g., in retaliation for the actions of a family member abroad), or as part of the rapidly-expanding dragnet.[28] Many diaspora members who would be far from traditional "exile" criteria, or even linked with opposition members, are now forced to advocate on behalf of detained relatives, escalating the cycle of surveillance and intimidation. We did, however, opt to include cases of "voluntary" return, where citizens were encouraged to return home by the government via messages on WeChat or phone calls from relatives, only to be arrested upon arrival.

V. Mechanisms of Transnational Repression

China's transnational repression is comprehensive and wide-ranging, encompassing espionage, cyberattacks, and threats, as well as physical assaults and rendition. According to Amnesty International, China's campaign of transnational repression has extended to Uyghurs living overseas. The advocacy group interviewed 400 Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and members of other non-Han populations from China living in 22 countries to understand the intimidation and harassment they face every day. Of these 400 interviewees, 21 people reported facing intimidation using apps and malware, 39 people reported receiving threatening or intimidating phone calls from Chinese government officials, 181 people reported having been threatened for speaking out about human rights in the Uyghur Region, and 26 people reported

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[27] "Expert Says 1.8 Million Uyghurs, Muslim Minorities Held in Xinjiang's Internment Camps," *Radio Free Asia*, November 24, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/detainees-11232019223242.html.

[28] Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, "Watched, Judged, Detained: Leaked Chinese Government Documents Reveal Detailed Surveillance Reports on Uyghur Families and Beijing's Justification for Mass Detentions," *CNN*, February 2, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/02/asia/xinjiang-china-karakax-document-intl-hnk/.

receiving demands to spy on their diaspora community on behalf of the Party-state.[29] The Amnesty International survey illustrates the variety of techniques and strategies employed by the Chinese government to harass, intimidate, and ultimately control Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim populations living outside the Uyghur Region, as well as how widespread these efforts to coerce and control are.

This report, limited to Stage-2 and Stage-3 cases of transnational repression, aims to give a more comprehensive account of China's overseas repression. We describe the full spectrum of Beijing's global campaign, providing important context for trends brought to light by the data. China's global campaign against the Uyghurs involves five types of perpetrating actors: 1) Chinese state agencies, 2) diaspora groups, 3) individual citizens, 4) international organizations, and 5) foreign governments.

China's Security Apparatus

The primary agencies involved in perpetrating transnational repression are the powerful internal security services linked to the CCP, including the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and even the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As noted by Freedom House, overseas persecution of Uyghurs is often orchestrated by the MSS, with the MPS more active in intimidating PRC-based family members of non-Han individuals living overseas.[30] In addition, China also operates its sprawling system of transnational repression by working through the legal and political systems of foreign countries—including detentions, extraditions, and joint border patrols—and often through the use of diplomatic staff at embassies and consulates, run through China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In November 2019, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists released a series of leaked Chinese government documents. Called "the China Cables," the documents detail the operations of the reeducation camps, the use of mass

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[29] Amnesty International, "Nowhere Feels Safe," February 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/02/china-uyghurs-abroad-living-in-fear/.

[30] Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach."

surveillance, and state-led efforts to control Uyghurs and other non-Han communities abroad. Students in particular face the risk of being arrested upon their return: "For those still outside the country for whom suspected terrorism cannot be ruled out, the border control reading will be carried out by hand to ensure that they are arrested the moment they cross the border."[31]

This policy has had devastating consequences. In May 2017, China's government issued orders to Uyghurs studying in Egypt to return to the Uyghur Region. While some students refused and were later arrested by the Egyptian government, others willingly returned and were subsequently arrested. In the winter of 2017, 54 students and professors from numerous Kyrgyz universities travelled to the XUAR from Kyrgyzstan for the winter holidays. All 54 were unable to return due to imprisonment or confinement, with at least 20 expelled from Kyrgyz National University for not paying their tuition or not completing their coursework, due to their inability to return to Kyrgyzstan.[32]

United Front Work

China regularly coordinates its overseas repression as part of the united-front system used to gather intelligence and influence individuals and organizations both within and outside its borders. United-front work outside of China—partly coordinated by the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD)—includes regional diaspora associations, student groups, and scholarly bodies, among others. Organizations that have played a role in suppressing Uyghur activities overseas include (but are not limited to) the Overseas Chinese Association, the Xinjiang Overseas Exchange Association, and the Chinese Islamic Association, working in tandem with thousands of civil society organizations across target countries.

In Pakistan, the Overseas Chinese Association has taken a leading role in monitoring the country's Uyghurs. Across

China regularly coordinates its overseas repression as part of the united front system used to gather intelligence and influence individuals and organizations both within and outside its borders.

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[31] "Read the China Cables documents," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 24, 2019, https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/read-the-china-cables-documents/.

[32] Eugene Bunin, "Kyrgyz Students Vanish into Xinjiang's Maw," *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/31/963451-kyrgyz-xinjiang-students-camps/.

Rawalpindi, where most of the country's small Uyghur population resides, the Overseas Chinese Association has been distributing registration forms supposedly implemented to allow Pakistani Uyghurs to attend Chinese embassy-run schools and activities.[33] Activists in Pakistan, a country where we have recorded 50 cases of illegal renditions or detentions, say the lists are a tool for enhanced Chinese coercion. The Chinese Islamic Association has also courted controversy in its organizing of religious pilgrimages for XUAR residents. In 2018, reports emerged of *Hajj* pilgrims wearing Chinese government-provided trackers around their necks.[34] The Chinese Islamic Association issued a statement saying that the trackers were entirely for the safety of pilgrims.[35] Student organizations have also captured international attention, with many reported examples around the world of Uyghur speakers being harassed during talks, or events focused on human rights in the XUAR being forced to shut down or interrupted by activists.[36]

Diaspora Spies and Informants

A key component of China's transnational repression is fear and intimidation through the recruitment of Uyghurs living abroad to spy on their local Uyghur diaspora communities. This is a practice that has been in place around the world for decades. In 2009, Pakistani citizen Kamirdin Abdurahman, 41, a second-generation Uyghur Pakistani, was asked to spy on Uyghur activist networks in Rawalpindi after traveling to the Uyghur Region and having his passport confiscated.[37] Such activities have also been reported in the

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[33] Zuha Siddiqui, "China is Trying to Spy on Pakistan's Uyghurs," *Buzzfeed News*, June 20, 2019, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/zuhasiddiqui/china-pakistan-uighur-surveillance-ex-chinese-association.

[34] Sigal Samuel, "China is Going to Outrageous Lengths to Surveil its Own Citizens," *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/china-surveillance-technology-muslims/567443/.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Lin Yang, "China-Sensitive Topics at US Universities Draw More Online Harassment," *Voice of America*, November 20, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/usa/china-sensitive-topics-us-universities-draw-more-online-harassment; "US: China harassing families of Uighur activists in Xinjiang," *Al Jazeera*, November 6, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/6/us-china-harassing-families-of-uighur-activists-in-xinjiang.

[37] "Uyghur Pressed to Spy," *Radio Free Asia*, December 2, 2009, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/spy-for-china-12022009093045.html.

West.[38] In 2010, Swedish police charged a 61-year-old Uyghur man with spying on the country's sizable Uyghur community on behalf of Chinese intelligence.[39] In 2011, a Chinese citizen living in Germany faced similar charges of espionage related to Munich's Uyghur community.[40] Munich was a strategic choice given that it is home to the WUC.

In early 2019, a Uyghur man named Yusupjan Amet[41] claimed that the Chinese government had recruited him to spy on the Uyghur exile community in Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan beginning in 2012.[42] Amet claimed that his spy work, which he agreed to after authorities threatened his family back in the Uyghur Region, resulted in the imprisonment and rendition of members of those diaspora communities. In fall 2020, he was shot in the back by an unknown assailant in Turkey, whom Amet told Radio Free Asia he believed was working on behalf of the PRC.[43]

Beijing has also shown signs that it is starting to adopt new methodologies, including elaborate subterfuge to ensnare Uyghurs abroad. In December 2020 in Kabul, Aakriti Sharma reported that Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security, had arrested ten Chinese nationals for allegedly trying to build an artificial Uyghur cell to draw in potential militant Uyghurs of concern to China in Afghanistan.[44]

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[38] Paul Mooney and David Lague, "Holding the Fate of Families in its Hands, China Controls Refugees Abroad," *Reuters*, December 30, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-uighur/.

[39] "Uyghur sentenced for spying," *Radio Free Asia*, March 9, 2010, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/spying-03092010132203.html.

[40] "Germany charges alleged Chinese agent for spying on Uighur exiles," *Associated Press* via World Uyghur Congress, March 31, 2011, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/germany-charges-alleged-chinese-agent-for-spying-on-uighur-exiles/.

[41] Yusupjan Amet's name also appears as "Yusupjan Amat" and "Yusufjan Amet," according to some sources.

[42] Steve Chao, "Exposed: China's surveillance of Muslim Uighurs," *Al Jazeera*, February 1, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/2/1/exposed-chinas-surveillance-of-muslim-uighurs.

[43] "Self-Proclaimed Uyghur Former Spy Shot by Unknown Assailant in Turkey," *Radio Free Asia*, November 3, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/spy-11032020175523.html.

[44] Aakriti Sharma, "'China-Pakistan' Spy Ring Busted in Afghanistan; 10 Chinese Nationals Held on Espionage Charge," *The Eurasian Times*, December 25, 2020, https://eurasiantimes.com/china-pakistan-spy-ring-busted-in-afghanistan-10-chinese-nationals-held-on-espionage-charge/.

Digital Surveillance

Around the world, Uyghurs face intense coercion and digital surveillance. Family members in the XUAR are used to punish supposed dissidents overseas and to force the return of Uyghurs living abroad to the region, where they are often subject to additional surveillance, harassment, and imprisonment.[45] Chinese police and security services reportedly force family members to call their relatives abroad on WeChat in order to warn them against engaging in human rights advocacy, or to demand their return to the region.

China has used some of its most powerful spyware tools against Uyghurs, including developing malware to infect iPhones via WhatsApp messages and employing hackers to set up dummy accounts on Facebook, which were then used to infiltrate Uyghur diaspora community pages. Once there, they developed relationships, established trust, and then deployed malware through links. Anyone who clicked on the links could then be tracked by the Chinese government. Facebook only recently put an end to these operations. As a part of their investigation, Facebook further noted that these same hackers infiltrated legitimate news organizations and created authentic-looking news sites with links leading to malware and apps that, once downloaded, could be used to track users.[46]

China has also hacked into telecommunications networks across Asia in order to track Uyghurs and their activities abroad.[47] In Central Asia, a region with a sizable Uyghur diaspora, Chinese companies active in creating the systems of surveillance in the Uyghur Region have supplied technology, including facial recognition technology, to Central Asian security services. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan have all purchased cameras from Chinese corporations to monitor traffic and their

> **Family members in the XUAR are used to punish supposed dissidents overseas, and to force the return of Uyghurs living abroad to the region, where they are often subject to additional surveillance, harassment, and imprisonment.**

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[45] UHRP, "The Government Never Oppresses Us."

[46] "China-based Hackers use Facebook to Target Uighurs Abroad With Malware," *Reuters*, March 24, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-china-cyber/chinese-hackers-used-facebook-to-target-uighurs-abroad-company-says-idUSKBN2BG2UU.

[47] Jack Stubbs, "China Hacked Asian Telecoms to Spy on Uyghur travelers: Source," *Reuters*, September 5, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-cyber-uighurs/china-hacked-asian-telcos-to-spy-on-uighur-travelers-sources-idUSKCN1VQ1A5.

citizens, in a bid to create "smart cities." This technology, already used to track the movements of Uyghurs in their homeland, is proliferating worldwide.[48]

Coercion-by-Proxy

When authoritarian states encounter challenges directly targeting opponents abroad, they often resort to more indirect tactics, including targeting those opponents' relatives back home.[49] Given that these individuals are within the territorial jurisdiction of the home state, the costs of repression are lower than they are abroad. These indirect efforts involve a range of more visible tactics, including imprisonment, attack, and torture, along with less visible tactics, such as harassment, surveillance, and intimidation.[50] Given the strength of the police state in the XUAR, many Uyghurs living abroad face pressure from their relatives, who are presumably coerced to return home or cease their political activities abroad. Well-documented examples include Rebiya Kadeer (U.S.),[51] Samira Imin (U.S.),[52] Ferkat Jawdat (U.S.),[53] Kayum Masimov (Canada),[54]

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[48] Bradley Jardine, "China's Surveillance State Has Eyes on Central Asia," *Foreign Policy*, November 15, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/15/huawei-xinjiang-kazakhstan-uzbekistan-china-surveillance-state-eyes-central-asia/.

[49] Fiona Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, "At Home and Abroad: Coercion-by-Proxy as a Tool of Transnational Repression," Freedom House, 2020, https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/home-and-abroad-coercion-proxy-tool-transnational-repression.

[50] Edward Lemon, Saipira Furstenberg, and John Heathershaw, "Tajikistan: Placing pressure on political exiles by targeting relatives," The Foreign Policy Centre, December 4, 2017, https://fpc.org.uk/tajikistan-placing-pressure-political-exiles-targeting-relatives/.

[51] Paul Mooney and David Lague, "Holding the Fate of Families in its Hands, China Controls Refugees Abroad," *Reuters*, December 30, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-uighur/.

[52] UHRP, "The Government Never Oppresses Us": China's Proof-of-life Videos as Intimidation and a Violation of Uyghur Family Unity," February 2, 2021, https://uhrp.org/report/the-government-never-oppresses-us-chinas-proof-of-life-videos-as-intimidation-and-a-violation-of-uyghur-family-unity/.

[53] "How China Intimidates Uighurs Abroad by Threatening Their Families," *Deutsche Welle*, July 11, 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/how-china-intimidates-uighurs-abroad-by-threatening-their-families/a-49554977.

[54] Paul Mooney and David Lague, "Holding the Fate of Families in its Hands, China Controls Refugees Abroad," *Reuters*, December 30, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-uighur/.

Mehmet Tohti (Canada),[55] Abdujelil Emet (Germany),[56] and Gulhumar Haitiwaji (France),[57] among many others.

The Chinese government has also taken active measures to sever ties between Uyghurs abroad and their relatives at home. In 2019, *The Washington Post* reported that family members of Uyghurs living abroad were being arrested in the XUAR and jailed on suspicion of financing terrorism after sending money to relatives overseas.[58] Relatives have also had their savings and assets confiscated by the state and their phones tapped to monitor contact with their relatives residing outside China's borders.[59]

Extradition Treaties and Legal Agreements

A critical element of this hunt for fugitives abroad has been China's drive to conclude extradition treaties, particularly with developed nations that are the most frequent destinations for fugitives and refugees seeking to elude China's grasp. International extradition is the practice of one country formally surrendering an alleged criminal to another country with jurisdiction over the crime charged. China has successfully concluded 34 such treaties around the world, eleven of them with countries featuring in the database of transnational repression.[60]

The Chinese government has also made concerted efforts to signal that it has tacit approval from other governments for its policies in the XUAR. In response to a letter sent to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in December 2019 criticizing China for

> **China has successfully concluded 34 [extradition] treaties around the world, eleven of them with countries featuring in the database of transnational repression.**

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[55] Rachel Gilmore, "'We're Coming to Get You': China's Critics Facing Threats, Retaliation for Activism in Canada," *Global News*, April 2, 2021, https://globalnews.ca/news/7734158/china-pressure-activists-canada-uyghur-hong-kong-tibet-spying/.

[56] Benjamin Haas, "'Think of Your Family': China Threatens European Citizens over Xinjiang Protests," *The Guardian*, October 16, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/17/think-of-your-family-china-threatens-european-citizens-over-xinjiang-protests.

[57] UNPO, "East Turkestan: China Uses Intimidation Tactics to Silence European Uyghur Citizens," October 18, 2019, https://unpo.org/article/21692.

[58] Anna Fifield, "For China's Embattled Uyghurs, a Bank Transfer Abroad Can Become a Terrorism Ordeal," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/for-chinas-embattled-uighurs-a-bank-transfer-abroad-can-become-a-terrorism-ordeal/2019/09/19/eb6a8b1e-c3dd-11e9-b5e4-54aa56d5b7ce_story.html.

[59] Ibid.

[60] For more on countries that have extradition treaties with China, see Appendix I.

"credible reports of arbitrary detention in large scale places of detention" and "widespread surveillance and restrictions" targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, 37 states signed a response praising "China's remarkable achievements" in "protecting and promoting human rights through development."[61] In a reprise in October 2020, 39 countries signed a letter criticizing China, with 45 Chinese allies signing the response this time.[62] Our database contains cases that occurred in nine countries that signed both letters, and five that signed one of them.

Multilateral Organizations

China has also used Interpol, the world's police cooperation organization, to target its citizens (and former citizens) overseas, including Uyghurs. Interpol is supposed to be politically neutral: according to Article 2 of its constitution, it is committed to work "in the spirit of the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'"[63] Article 3 of the Interpol Constitution states that member states are "strictly prohibited" from using the system to pursue criminals facing charges of a "political, racial, religious or military character." However, increasingly authoritarian regimes such as the PRC are using Interpol to pursue, harass, and attempt to return opponents living abroad.[64] Interpol does not issue arrest warrants itself or employ its own agents to conduct arrests, but it distributes arrest requests, in the form of Red Notices or more informal diffusions, issued by member states among 194 national law enforcement bodies worldwide. Individuals on Interpol lists can be detained abroad and sent home. Even if detention and rendition do not occur, those on Interpol wanted lists can face difficulties opening bank accounts, applying for asylum, and traveling internationally.

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[61] Roie Yellinek and Elizabeth Chen, "The '22 vs. 50' Diplomatic Split Between the West and China on Human Rights in Xinjiang," *China Brief* 19, no. 22, Jamestown Foundation, December 21, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/.

[62] Catherine Putz, "2020 Edition: Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?" *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/.

[63] Interpol, "The Constitution," accessed 14 June 2019, https://www.interpol.int/en/Who-we-are/Legal-framework/Legal-documents.

[64] Edward Lemon, "Weaponizing Interpol," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 2 (2019): 15–29.

China has actively used Interpol to pursue "economic fugitives" as part of its global anti-corruption campaign. Ironically, one of its targets included China's former public-security vice-minister Meng Hongwei, president of Interpol from 2016 to 2018, who was jailed for 13 years on bribery charges in January 2020.[65] China has also used Interpol to target prominent members of the Uyghur diaspora. The organization issued a Red Notice for "terrorism" against Dolkun Isa, president of the WUC, in 1997. As a result, Isa encountered problems entering the U.S. and Turkey, was briefly detained in South Korea in 2009 and Italy in 2017, and was denied a visa to attend a conference in India in 2016.[66] Following advocacy by Fair Trials International, he was removed from the Red Notice list in 2018.[67]

China also uses its own international structures, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), to pursue Uyghur minorities. Originating from efforts to demarcate the borders of China and the newly-independent post-Soviet republics in the 1990s, the SCO was established in 2001. Initially the organization brought together China, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, with Pakistan and India joining in 2017. The organization's primary mandate is to fight the "three evils" of terrorism, extremism, and separatism,[68] and its core principle is mutual recognition. The organization's 2005 Concept of Cooperation requires members to mutually recognize terrorist, extremist, and separatist acts, all defined in a broad way in line with China's domestic legislation, regardless of whether their country's own laws would classify them as such.

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[65] "Former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei jailed for bribery," *Agence France-Presse in Beijing* via *The Guardian*, January 21, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/21/former-interpol-chief-meng-hongwei-jailed-for-bribery.

[66] World Uyghur Congress, "Press Release: After 20 Years WUC President Dolkun Isa Has INTERPOL Red Notice Removed," February 25, 2018, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/after-20-years-wuc-president-dolkun-isa-has-interpol-red-notice-removed/.

[67] "INTERPOL deletes Red Notice against persecuted Uyghur dissident Dolkun Isa," Fair Trials, February 23, 2018, https://www.fairtrials.org/news/interpol-deletes-red-notice-against-persecuted-uyghur-dissident-dolkun-isa.

[68] Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

Given that many member states offer amorphous definitions of these acts and that Article 2 of the SCO Convention on Counter-terrorism of 2009 merely defines terrorism as an "ideology of violence," the SCO framework opens space for its member states to take advantage of the system to pursue political opponents abroad. Mutual recognition prevents those formally accused or merely suspected of committing one of the three "evils" to seek asylum in another member state. Under the SCO Convention on Counter-Terrorism of 2009, a state's jurisdiction is not confined to its own territory, facilities, or citizens. Rather, the Convention permits member states to claim jurisdiction whenever the alleged offense is "aimed at or resulted in the commission of a terrorist act for the purpose of compelling that Party to do or abstain from doing any act" (Article 5, par 2.3). In other words, states can pursue their citizens within the entire SCO region. The 2005 Declaration of the Heads of SCO Member States commits governments to deny asylum to all those accused or even merely suspected of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. These vague definitions have had lethal consequences. In 2014, for example, a group of 11 Uyghur refugees were fleeing into Kyrgyzstan when local border guards shot and killed nine of them, declaring them to be members of an "Uyghur separatist organization," though they never provided any compelling evidence for the claim.[69]

The SCO works through two administrative bodies: the Secretariat based in Beijing and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which was established in Bishkek in 2002 and moved to Tashkent in 2004. RATS keeps a consolidated list of "extremist," "terrorist," and "separatist" individuals and groups. Established in January 2016, the list reportedly grew to include 2,500 individuals and 69 groups by September 2016.[70] For Thomas Ambrosio, "the RATS serves as the central locus of the process of 'sharing worst practices' amongst the SCO member states."[71] As a

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[69] "11 Uyghurs Killed At Kyrgyzstan Border, Triggering Call For Probe," *Radio Free Asia*, January 24, 2014, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/kyrgyzstan-01242014175848.html.

[70] "Shanghai Pact Anti-Terror Database Lists 2,500 Suicide Bombers, 69 Groups," *Sputnik*, September 13, 2016, https://sputniknews.com/asia/201609131045248480-sco-rats-terrorism/.

[71] Thomas Ambrosio, "The Legal Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: An Architecture of Authoritarianism," in *Sharing Worst Practice: How Countries and Institutions in the*

Russian journalist summarized, the "main objective [of RATS] is helping special services of the states-members to bypass the obstacles presented by national legislation and by the norms of international law on giving up suspects."[72] The European Court of Human Rights has described these practices as "an absolute negation of the rule of law."[73]

In 2010, UHRP Executive Director Omer Kanat attempted to travel to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as a representative of the WUC. In advance of his trip, Kanat learned that he would not be allowed to enter Kyrgyzstan due to his presence on a list of people banned from entering the country and decided to continue to Kazakhstan, where he was detained upon his arrival. After being interrogated in the airport in Almaty, he was informed that he would "not be allowed to enter Kazakhstan or any other SCO member countries, including Russia." He was then deported to Turkey.[74]

VI. The Evolution of China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs

China's transnational repression of Uyghurs has been steadily evolving since the collapse of the Soviet Union and has rapidly expanded its geographic scope from Central and South Asia to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe. According to our upper estimate, if we were to include bulk cases with limited details of particular individuals, or where individuals were reported with pseudonyms or anonymously, there may be as many as 1,546 cases

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Former Soviet Union Help Create Legal Tools of Repression, ed. Adam Hug (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2016), 56.

[72] Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*. (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106.

[73] Amnesty International, "Eurasia: Return to Torture: Extradition, Forcible Returns and Removals to Central Asia," July 3, 2013, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR04/001/2013/en/.

[74] Omer Kanat, first-hand account, May 2021.

of Stage-2 and Stage-3 transnational repression involving Uyghur and Turkic communities worldwide since 1997. According to our upper estimate, 28 countries have detained or extradited Uyghur refugees to China. In the early phase (1991–2007), a total of 89 Uyghurs from 9 countries had been detained or sent to China; in the second phase (2008–2013), a total of 130 were detained or returned to China from 15 countries; and in the third phase (2014–March 2021), a total of 1,327 were detained in or rendered from 20 countries. Our more detailed data on 300 of these cases suggest that 27 countries have detained or extradited named individuals to China. In the early phase (1991–2007), a total of 47 individuals from 6 countries, primarily in Central Asia, were detained or sent to China; in the second phase (2008–2013), a total of 70 individuals were repressed from 13 countries; and in the third phase (2014–March 2021), a total of 183 were detained in or rendered from 17 countries.

Phase 1: The Emergence of China's Transnational Repression (1991–2007)

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 fundamentally altered China's security calculations in Central Asia, including in the Uyghur Region. Fearing the rise of nationalist sentiments with the emergence of post-Soviet ethnic kin states across the border, Chinese authorities began taking a harder line on expressions of cultural distinction within its borders. In 1996, "Document No. 7" was leaked, which provided insights into the CCP Politburo's early efforts to counter Uyghur dissent. The directive also ordered XUAR officials to use "all means available" to thwart Uyghur organizations' attempts to gain international attention, revealing early strategies to control discourse beyond the PRC's borders. Further, Document No. 7 focused heavily on Central Asia, with explicit instructions to "take full advantage of our political superiority," and "always maintain pressure" on that region using economic statecraft.

According to census data, Central Asia had a large Uyghur diaspora of some 300,000 people who had been arriving since the 1880s, when the Russian Empire ceded the Uyghur-populated region of Ghulja to the Qing Dynasty.[75] Other waves of refugees arrived from the 1950s, when thousands of Uyghurs fled from famine, until 1962, when the Sino-Soviet border was closed amid rising tensions between the two powers. Throughout the 1990s, a number of secular organizations dedicated to promoting Uyghur culture, human rights, or in some cases, statehood, were established in the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Some organizations, such as Yusupbek Mukhlisi's United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan (URFET), were relics of the 1970s, likely funded by Soviet intelligence to put
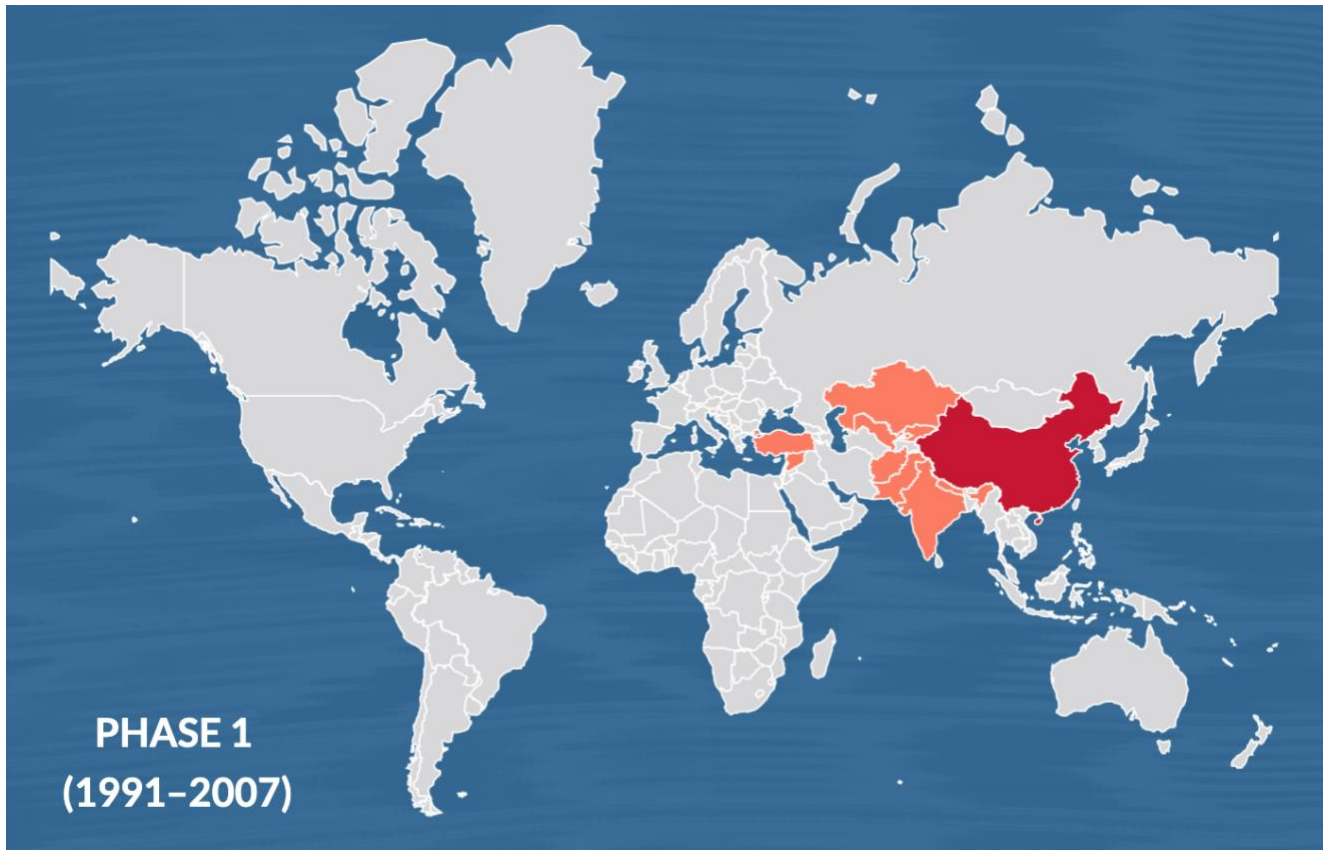

Image 2: Countries represented in the upper estimate for Phase 1 (1991–2007). Image by UHRP.

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[75] This figure is based on the census from Kazakhstan (2014) with 246,777 self-reported ethnic Uyghurs and Kyrgyzstan 2020 with 59,367. The population in the rest of Central Asia is minimal.

pressure on China at the height of the Sino-Soviet split.[76] Mukhlisi himself was a marginal figure in Uyghur politics, with most activists distancing themselves from his tall tales and radical commitment to armed struggle.

The other prominent organization active in the region in the late 1990s, which was originally based in Turkey, was the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), headed by Mehmet Emin Hazret. The ELTO became more widely known for a series of assassinations and kidnappings than for promoting Uyghur rights. The similarly named Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO), founded by Soviet-Uyghur dissident Hashir Wahidi, was also active during this time and advocated for the XUAR's independence. Despite the organizations' marginal influence, Chinese authorities viewed their activities with suspicion.

In 1994, China began using economic statecraft according to the instructions that would be leaked two years later in Document No. 7, after Chinese officials toured the region to promote trade deals in exchange for cooperation in silencing the Uyghur diaspora. By April 1996, Kazakhstan's then-Foreign Minister Kassym-Jomart Tokayev warned the Uyghurs in his country that Almaty would not tolerate agitation for self-determination, and condemned separatism as the "political AIDS" of the late-twentieth century.[77] The following June, Kazakhstan closed *Uyghuristan*, a newspaper that the ULO had been publishing illegally for three years with minimal government attention. Kyrgyzstan also began to pressure local Uyghur groups. In March 1996, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice banned the political activities of the organization "Ittipak" (Unity), including the publication of its paper of the same name, stating that Ittipak's activities went against "the interests of the Chinese people."[78] Uzbekistan closed the majority of Uyghur-connected organizations within its border, even those that were purely cultural in nature.

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[76] James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment," *Policy Studies* 6 (2004), East-West Center, https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/violent-separatism-xinjiang-critical-assessment.

[77] Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (Columbia University Press: New York, NY, 2010).

[78] Ibid.

In the Uyghur Region, China's crackdowns fueled unrest. In February 1997 in the frontier trading town of Ghulja (Yining), near the Kazakh border, mass protests erupted after police began arresting activists who were working to reduce alcoholism and drug abuse.[79] In the resulting crackdown, the ratio of death sentences to population size was several times higher in the XUAR than in other parts of China, with Amnesty International recording 190 executions between 1997 and 1999.[80] The events also drove refugees to flee the region, with Chinese security services pursuing them overseas and accusing them of being involved in the uprising. Our database contains at least eight individuals targeted for their alleged links to these events. According to the World Uyghur Congress, in 1999, Kazakhstan extradited three Uyghurs who had fled Ghulja: Hemit Memet (AKA Hemet Memet), Ilyas Zordun (AKA Ilyas Zordon), and Kasim Mapir (AKA Kasim Mahpir). They accused all three men of assisting terrorists but with no serious evidence to back these assertions. Sayadakhmet Memet and Zulfikar Memet, brothers of Hemit Memet, were reportedly arrested in the Uyghur Region. Zulfikar Memet was allegedly tortured to death, while Saydakhmet Memet was sentenced to six years in prison.[81]

The severity of the crackdowns also inspired some notable developments among Central Asia's increasingly embattled Uyghur community. In 1997, Yusupbek Mukhlisi flew to Washington, DC to

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[79] Nick Holdstock, *The Tree That Bleeds: A Uighur Town on the Edge* (Luath Press: Edinburgh, 2011).

[80] Ibid.

[81] World Uyghur Congress, "Seeking a Place to Breathe Freely: Current Challenges Faced by Uyghur Refugees and Asylum Seekers," June 2017, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2017/06/WUC-Refugee-Report-Updated-June-2017.pdf, p. 28. Personal communication with UHRP Executive Director Omer Kanat suggested contrasting details. According to Mr. Kanat, Kazakhstan extradited Hemit Memet, Zulfikar Memet, and Ilyas Zordun, but not Kasim Mapir, to China in 1999. Hemit Memet was later sentenced to death with a two-year suspended sentence, which might have then been commuted to life imprisonment in 2011. He was reportedly in contact with family members until 2017; in 2019, his family reported receiving news that he was alive in prison in Ürümchi. Mr. Kanat also suggested that Zulfikar Memet was sentenced to death in June 2000 and executed immediately, and that there is no available information about Ilyas Zordun. As for the case of Saydakhmat Memet, Kanat noted that he was reportedly released in 2014 after completing a 16-year prison sentence but then re-arrested in 2016, after which there has been no news of his whereabouts and condition. These contrasting details should serve as an indicator of the difficulties in obtaining proper information on Uyghurs in the Uyghur Region, as well as of the need for greater transparency from the Chinese authorities, particularly for the benefit of detainees' family members.

meet with two State Department officials to advocate for raising awareness about Uyghur human rights.[82] The meeting played a minor role in the decision of the U.S. Congress to introduce Uyghur-language broadcasting for Radio Free Asia as the Ghulja conflict and ensuing crackdowns gained international attention.[83]

Fearing regional blowback against its policies, Beijing sought to accelerate its security ties with Central Asia. On June 3, 1998, the Shanghai Five, which had been formed primarily to demarcate post-Soviet borders with China, convened in Kazakhstan to address regional security, with the group's signatories agreeing on the common "evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The following 1999 summit in Kyrgyzstan furthered this theme, with signatories agreeing not to allow their territories to "form a base from which to undermine the sovereignty" of other Shanghai Five member states. The group (later renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 and joined by Uzbekistan) proved the perfect venue for China to press the Central Asian republics to crack down on their minority communities.

As the Shanghai Five began to transition toward its more permanent structure, a series of unexplained attacks took place against prominent Uyghur activists. In 1998, Hashir Wahidi, the founder of the ULO, was attacked by unknown assailants in his home in Kazakhstan and died from his injuries several months later.[84] In Kyrgyzstan in March 2000, President of Ittipak Nigmat Bazakov was assassinated. According to the official story, Bazakov was shot by members of ETLO after he refused to donate money to their organization. Kyrgyz authorities arrested and tried four men for the crime, including four Uyghurs (three PRC citizens and one Turkish citizen).[85] The same men were also accused of an attack on a Chinese government delegation in May 2000, as well as the kidnapping of a Chinese businessman.

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[82] Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang."

[83] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty had previously had a small Uyghur service for several decades, through the late 1970s.

[84] Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang."

[85] Ibid.

According to historian James Millward, some of the details remain inconsistent. For example, one of the accused, Kasarji Jalal, was reportedly in prison at the time of the Bazakov shooting. Later, Chinese official reports would conflate the ULO and ETLO, raising suspicion of the validity of the charges. By 2002, two of the four accused, Mamet Yasin and Mamet Sadik, had been extradited to China to face trial.[86] As a show of appreciation, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security presented Kyrgyz police with twelve police trucks in a televised ceremony on the Sino-Kyrgyz border.[87] Dilbirim Samasakova, the President and founder of the Nazugum Fund, a charitable organization benefiting Uyghur women from China and Central Asia, disappeared in Almaty on May 2, 2001.[88] Her body was found near a reservoir on June 9 of the same year.

While post-Soviet Central Asia emerged as one of the earliest hubs of Chinese transnational repression, Pakistan and Afghanistan followed a similar trajectory with the rise of the Taliban regime in 1996. While most of the world's countries condemned and sanctioned the Taliban government in Afghanistan during the late 1990s, China embarked on an unusual policy of engagement. In 1998, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Lu Shulin met with the secretive Taliban leader Mullah Omar in his stronghold in Kandahar, where he raised concerns about "rumors that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was allegedly assisting the Muslims in Xinjiang."[89] Mullah Omar assured the Chinese ambassador that "Afghanistan never had any interest or wish to interfere in China's domestic issues and affairs, nor would Afghanistan allow any group to use its territory to conduct any such operation or support to that end."

By 2000, in a gesture of goodwill to China, the Taliban handed over thirteen Uyghur rebels who had previously been given "political asylum."[90] While the Taliban made efforts to assure China that Uyghur militants were not active in its territory, a small band of Uyghur refugees fleeing Pakistan and Central Asia would come

As the Shanghai Five began to transition toward its more permanent structure, a series of unexplained attacks took place against prominent Uyghur activists.

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Sean Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2020).

[90] Ibid.

to form the core of an obscure grouping that would name itself the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). ETIM entered Chinese official reports regularly following the start of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror and its designation of ETIM as a terrorist organization, allowing China to claim involvement in the war and reframe its rhetoric regarding the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism to be focused on the XUAR. Uyghur studies scholar Sean Roberts notes that this community of Uyghurs in northern Afghanistan, led by Hassan Makhsum (the founder of ETIM), was likely politically isolated and operationally ineffective, with no external resources or funding.[91]

Beijing also came to see Pakistan as a potential source of unrest in the XUAR from the early 1990s. It viewed the country as a haven for Uyghurs who had fled there either directly from the XUAR or indirectly via Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the Pakistani consulates often provided them with visas. One center that was singled out for suspicion was "Kashgarabad," a large guest house in Islamabad run by wealthy Uyghur traders.[92]

Over the course of the 1990s, Pakistan grew increasingly cooperative with its "all-weather" ally. While there is no evidence of an official agreement to monitor Uyghur activities, Pakistan's activities in the late 1990s hint that an agreement had likely been reached, formally or otherwise. As early as 1997, for example, Pakistan deported fourteen Uyghurs who were studying at local madrassas after Beijing accused them, without concrete evidence or trial, of being "terrorists intent on splitting Xinjiang from China" in the wake of the Ghulja conflict.[93] They were summarily executed after being driven across the border.[94] According to our database, this case is the first instance of Uyghurs being extradited at China's request, marking a watershed in the evolution of Chinese

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[91] Ibid.

[92] "Kashgarabad" is a reference to Kashgar, the famed Silk Road city in the Uyghur Region that many people see as a cradle of Uyghur history and culture.

[93] Mahesh Ranjan Debata, "Xinjiang in Central Asia's Regional Security Structure," *International Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 53–65.

[94] Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Transfers to US Custody without human rights guarantees," July 2, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20060430122421/http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA330 142002?open&of=ENG-325.

transnational repression. Consequently, Pakistani police shut down Uyghur community centers and hundreds of their Uyghur residents were reportedly evicted.[95] Pakistan would grow even more repressive for Uyghurs as it became a vital front in the Global War on Terror.

Following the U.S. declaration of its Global War on Terror in 2001, China capitalized on the conflict to pursue Uyghur "terrorists," sometimes with the help of the United States following Washington's decision to recognize ETIM as a terrorist organization. In October 2001, 22 Uyghurs who had been fleeing China's transnational repression in Central Asia and Pakistan to seek refuge in Afghanistan at various points the year prior were eventually arrested by U.S. troops and sent to the Guantanamo Bay prison facility. Chinese officials sat in on their interrogations and accused them of having connections to ETIM, which they denied. The U.S. likely recognized ETIM as an international terror outfit as part of a quid-pro-quo with China to support its plans to invade Iraq.[96] The designation, long been a source of controversy, bolstered China's claims that it was facing a terrorist threat at home and abroad and justified the expanding scope of its transnational repression. All 22 men were later declared innocent and released,[97] and the U.S. removed ETIM from its official terror designation in 2020.[98]

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan would also alter the security environment of South Asia. In 2001, ETIM remnants fled to Pakistan, creating an opportunity for China to work with Pakistani intelligence to target them directly rather than rely on the Afghan Taliban.[99] This appeared to be the case in 2003 when the Pakistani military conducted a raid in South Waziristan, resulting in the death of ETIM leader Hassan Makhsum. In 2004, China added Article 4 to

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[95] Debata, "Xinjiang in Central Asia's Regional Security Structure."

[96] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

[97] Richard Bernstein, "When China Convinced the U.S. That Uyghurs Were Waging Jihad," *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/us-uighurs-guantanamo-china-terror/584107/.

[98] Sha Hua, "China Irate After U.S. Removes Terrorist Label From Separatist Group," *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2020, https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-irate-after-u-s-removes-terrorist-label-from-separatist-group-11604661868.

[99] Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, London, 2015).

its dealings with Pakistan, stipulating that neither party would allow the establishment of "any organization or body" that could threaten the "sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other."[100] Despite Islamabad's military activities against groups like ETIM, signs of a new Uyghur grouping would emerge in early 2006 in the form of the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), which would align itself with Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban in Waziristan. This group would rise to notoriety in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and inadvertently help fuel China's drive to control and suppress Uyghurs around the world.

Phase 2: Intensification of China's Transnational Repression (2008–2013)

In 2008, the TIP launched an Arabic-language magazine published by a press associated with Al-Qaeda, as well as several videos threatening the Olympic Games.[101] Pakistan, which had already been coordinating closely with China on security for the Games, made an additional public show of assistance in countering the group. Former Pakistani President Musharraf went so far as to include a stopover in Ürümchi at Beijing's request, to show support for China's new security policies in the XUAR.[102] As the Games approached, China capitalized on the emergence of TIP in Pakistan to justify a domestic and global counter-terror operation that would see a rapid acceleration in activities relating to transnational

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Sean R. Roberts, "The biopolitics of China's 'war on terror' and the exclusion of the Uyghurs," *Critical Asian Studies* vol. 50 no. 2 (2017): 232–58.

[102] Andrew Scobell, "China Ponders Post-2014 Afghanistan," *Asian Survey* 55, no. 2 (2015): 325–45.
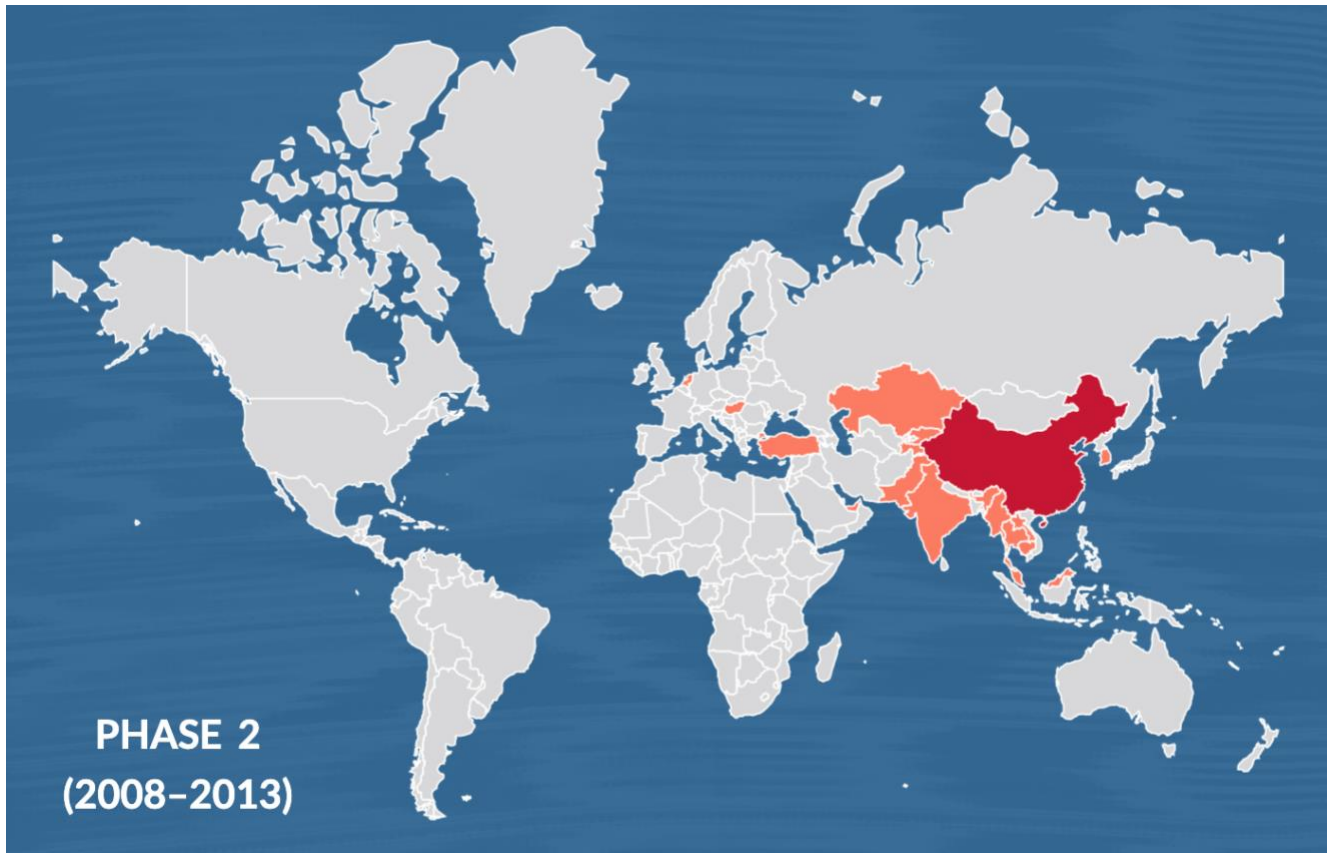
Image 3: Countries represented in the upper estimate for Phase 2 (2008–2013). Image by UHRP.

repression of refugees with no links to international terror, in addition to expanding its domestic security project.[103]

According to official accounts, nearly 1,300 Uyghurs in the XUAR were arrested for "state security crimes" in 2008, including substantially more charges of terrorism than in previous years.[104] In addition, thousands of Uyghurs were evicted from major cities such as Beijing, accused of being potential terrorists.[105] Internationally, China made use of the Games to expand its security dragnet overseas. On July 17, 2008, officials from Turkey's General Security Directorate met with representatives from the Chinese Embassy in Ankara to discuss the security of the Olympic Games.[106] Chinese agents informed Turkish counterparts that they had identified 50 members of ETIM who were living abroad, and claimed that they

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[103] Roberts, "The biopolitics of China's 'war on terror'."

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] European Court of Human Rights, "Case of A.D. and Others Vs. Turkey," July 22, 2014, https://www.refworld.org/cases,ECHR,53d0dbef4.html.

had escaped to Turkey through Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Five Turkish citizens who had claimed asylum were detained by Turkish security services at China's request in relation to these accusations but were later released, according to our data. Two other Uyghurs were reportedly imprisoned in the UAE in 2010 in connection to a plot to allegedly blow up Dubai's Dragon Mart.[107] The details of their case provide room for doubt over the validity of the accusations however. Reports indicate that the Chinese Embassy had tipped authorities about two men, Abdessalam Salim (AKA Mayma Ytiming Shalmo) and Omar Akbar (AKA Wimiyar Ging Kimili).[108] Furthermore, the men's initial confessions had been coerced "through fear," and the translators were provided by China, which also sent representatives to attend the trial.[109]

Growing fear of Uyghurs, heavy-handed securitization, and Han-centric economic policies that failed to provide employment opportunities for the XUAR's Uyghurs all led to the tragic violence in Ürümchi in 2009. On the evening of July 5, 2009, following a peaceful demonstration led by Uyghur university students, the streets of Ürümchi erupted into inter-ethnic violence. For days, sporadic fighting broke out between groups of Uyghur and Han youth armed with steel pipes and nail-studded wooden bats, with the state siding with the ethnic Han.[110] By the end, the streets would be spattered in blood and broken glass. The CCP would utilize these haunting images of "7/5" to devastating effect, widely promoting the idea of the Ürümchi Events as "China's 9/11." But far from a "premeditated act of terror orchestrated by anti-China forces abroad," as government documents later claimed, the events of that period show the hallmarks of an exploding powder-keg of local

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[107] Rafaello Pantucci, "Uyghurs Convicted in ETIM Terror Plot in Dubai," Jamestown Foundation, July 22, 2010, https://jamestown.org/program/uyghurs-convicted-in-east-turkestan-islamic-movement-plot-in-dubai/.

[108] "Universal Periodic Review: United Arab Emirates," Alkarama Foundation, July 16, 2012, https://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session15/AE/ALKAMARA_UPR_ARE_S15_2012_Alkamara_E.pdf.

[109] Pantucci, "Uyghurs Convicted in ETIM Terror Plot."

[110] Amnesty International, "China: 'Justice, justice': The July 2009 protests in Xinjiang, China," July 2, 2010, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA17/027/2010/en/.

grievances that had been mounting in the run up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.[111]

The number of those arrested and jailed in connection with the events remains unknown, but some reports suggested that at least 4,000 Uyghurs had already been detained within two weeks of the events.[112] Additionally, the Chinese government placed tight restrictions on communications throughout the region. Immediately after the conflict began, the government shut down the internet locally, only restoring it incrementally between December 2009 and May 2010.[113] Perhaps most significantly, the events in Ürümchi and the harsher security environment would result in the largest exodus from the XUAR since 1962, with as many as 30,000 Uyghur refugees fleeing for Turkey through Pakistan and Southeast Asia over the next several years.[114]

According to Sean Roberts, a small minority of Uyghurs would remain behind in Pakistan to replenish the ranks of the TIP, raising its capabilities and notoriety.[115] In 2011, the TIP made a credible claim to have connections to an attack inside China. Shortly after a truck of Uyghurs allegedly crashed into a crowded street in Kashgar and subsequently attacked police with knives, TIP released a video of one of the organizers of the carnage allegedly partaking in an Uyghur celebration in Waziristan in 2006. While TIP did not take credit for ordering this 2011 attack, it was the first time an Uyghur militant group in either Afghanistan or Pakistan showed real evidence of a link to an individual involved in an attack within Chinese borders. Five Uyghurs with no connection to international terror were subsequently arrested in Pakistan and deported to China in a bid to ease tensions between the two governments.[116] The group included Manzokra Mamad, two children, and a woman,

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[111] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs*. For more on the Ürümchi unrest, including the many disappearances and information lockdown that followed, see: UHRP, "Can Anyone Hear Us? Voices from the 2009 Unrest in Urumchi," July 1, 2010, http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/Can-Anyone-Hear-Us.pdf.

[112] Holdstock, *The Tree That Bleeds;* UHRP, "Can Anyone Hear Us?"

[113] Edward Wong, "After Long Ban, Western China is Back Online," *New York Times*, May 14, 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/world/asia/15china.html.

[114] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

while a sixth Uyghur, Abduxur Ablmit,[117] was allowed to remain in Pakistan after his detention and near-rendition.[118]

The Chinese government was careful to never fully acknowledge the scale of the exodus of Uyghurs or the reasons for its occurrence in the immediate aftermath of the Ürümchi Events. Instead, CCP officials focused efforts on referring to Uyghur refugee networks as bastions of extremism.[119] The government would use these charges to encourage a number of states to cooperate in detaining and rendering Uyghurs (see below), while also attempting to close off the migration routes following a brutal massacre on China's southeastern border.

According to reports in Chinese media, on March 1, 2014, a group of eight black-clad, knife-wielding Uyghur men and women stabbed dozens of people to death and injured hundreds of others in the railway station in Kunming, Yunnan province. According to RFA reporting, the group was attempting to flee to Southeast Asia when security blocked their route, resulting in the group's desperate decision to commit this act of mass violence.[120] By November of that year, the PRC claimed to have broken up a Turkish-led ring providing Uyghurs with fake passports, accusing the Turkish state of funneling Uyghur fighters to Syria (where evidence of TIP activities emerged at the time).[121] It was clear that by this point, China had thoroughly closed off most routes for Uyghur refugees. International media coverage of the events in Kunming also marked a turning point in media representations of Uyghurs, as some outlets uncritically adopted the official characterization of the events as "Uyghur terrorism."[122]

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[117] Some sources use the Latinized Uyghur spelling of his first name, "Abdushukur" rather than "Abduxukur," which is a spelling influenced by Chinese Pinyin, in which "x" denotes a sound close to the "sh" in English.

[118] "Pakistan Deports Uyghurs," *Radio Free Asia*, August 10, 2011, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/pakistan-08102011175506.html/.

[119] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

[120] "China Train Attackers May Have Acted 'in Desperation,'" *Radio Free Asia*, March 3, 2014, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/desperate-03032014224353.html.

[121] "China Breaks 'Turkish-Uyghur Passport Plot,'" *BBC*, January 14, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30810439.

[122] For example, see Hannah Beech, "Deadly Terrorist Attack in Southwestern China Blamed on Separatist Muslim Uighurs," *Time*, March 1, 2014, https://time.com/11687/deadly-terror-attack-in-southwestern-china-blamed-on-separatist-muslim-uighurs/.

Below is a brief chronology of transnational repression along the Southeast Asian migration routes from 2009 to 2014 following the events in Ürümchi.

Cambodia

Cambodia offers one of the earliest examples of China's use of its economic might in Southeast Asia in exchange for cooperation on repression of Uyghurs. Two days after Cambodia deported a group of 20 Uyghurs in December 2009, China signed 14 trade deals amounting to over $850 million USD. The group had been fleeing China in the immediate aftermath of the Ürümchi Events.[123]

Laos

Laos deported seven Uyghurs in 2010, all from the family of Memet Eli Rozi, one member of a group of 22 Uyghurs who had originally sought asylum in neighboring Cambodia (20 of whom were eventually deported to China). Rozi had fled Cambodia after the other Uyghurs were detained and requested his wife and children meet him in Laos.

Myanmar

Our data shows that 17 Uyghur men were deported from Myanmar in 2010 after being accused of involvement in "criminal activities." The men, along with an additional ethnic Han Chinese man, were reportedly handed over on the Myanmar-China border by security officials of the Shan State Special Region 2.[124] Security at the border with Myanmar was greatly enhanced by China after August 2009 when a state-led military crackdown on rebels in Myanmar's restive Kokang province resulted in 37,000 refugees fleeing into China.[125]

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[123] Seth Mydans, "After Expelling Uyghurs, Cambodia Approves Chinese Investments," *New York Times*, December 22, 2009,
https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/22/world/asia/22cambodia.html.

[124] Human Rights Watch, "China: Accounts for Uyghur Refugees Forcibly Repatriated to China," January 28, 2010, https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/01/28/china-account-uighur-refugees-forcibly-repatriated-china#.

[125] World Uyghur Congress, "Uyghur American Association Condemns Patterns of Refoulement Following Reported Deportations from Myanmar," January 26, 2010, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/uyghur-american-association-condemns-pattern-of-uyghur-refugee-refoulement-following-reported-deportations-from-myanmar/.

The following year, China launched a joint patrol and law enforcement operation in the Mekong River with Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

Malaysia

Malaysia is a large source of detentions and extraditions of Uyghurs. In 2011, the country deported 11 Uyghurs who were immediately charged with separatism and imprisoned on their return to China. The following year, Malaysia sent six Uyghur asylum seekers back to China. The 2012 group were repatriated ahead of a visit to Malaysia by China's top political advisor Jia Qinglin. In 2014, Malaysia detained 155 Uyghurs, more than half of them children, who were found crammed into two apartments in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, carrying suspected fake Turkish passports.[126] We have been unable to confirm details of their fate from publicly available reporting.

Vietnam

In 2014, a group of Uyghur asylum seekers died in a clash with Vietnamese border guards when the guards detained them with the intention of returning them to Chinese authorities.[127] The incident occurred after Chinese border patrols alerted their Vietnamese counterparts that the group would be entering the country illegally by sea. In 2009, Vietnam and China signed a pact on land border management, in which both agreed to cooperate to "prevent and stop illegal migration" across the border.

Thailand

In spring 2014, Thai authorities arrested 424 Uyghur men, women, and children, some 200 of whom were hiding in a single human trafficking camp in Songkhla province.[128] The Uyghurs claimed to

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[126] "Malaysia Discovers 155 Uyghurs Crammed into Two Apartments," *Reuters*, October 4, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-malaysia-china-xinjiang-uighers/malaysia-discovers-155-uighurs-crammed-into-two-apartments-idUKKCN0HT09020141004.

[127] Yun Sun, "Uyghur Refugees in South East Asia Stoke Chinese Worries," Lowy Institute, November 6, 2014, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/uighur-refugees-southeast-asia-stoke-chinese-worries.

[128] "China presses Thailand to return Uighur refugees," *Financial Times*, April 3, 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/35bbf33a-bb1d-11e3-948c-00144feabdc0.

have Turkish citizenship, and Thailand was caught in a diplomatic battle between China and Turkey for the right to have these refugees sent to their country. While Thailand did send approximately 170 of the refugees, almost exclusively women and children, to Turkey, it also extradited 109 men to China in July 2015.[129] Many Uyghur men remain in Thai detention centers today. The fact that Thailand has been the largest source of China's transnational repression in terms of numbers is as much a factor of Thailand's poor record regarding refugees as it is of Chinese influence in the country.[130]

Phase 3: Chinese Transnational Repression Goes Global (2014–March 2021)

The foundations for China's current campaign against the Uyghurs, which many have likened to cultural genocide and genocide,[131] emerged in 2014 after Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to the XUAR in the wake of the Kunming Massacre. That year, China Electronic Technology Group, a PRC military contractor, was in the process of building a large database of every Uyghur in the XUAR to serve in a "preventative policing" program designed to predict one's propensity for "terror," according to Sean Roberts.[132] In a now-leaked internal speech from 2014, Xi Jinping also called for the state to use "the organs of dictatorship" to show "absolutely no mercy" in the "struggle against terrorism, infiltration, and separatism."[133]

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[129] "Thai PM Defends Decision to Send Uyghurs Back to China," *Reuters*, July 9, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-uighurs-turkey/thai-pm-defends-decision-to-send-uighurs-back-to-china-idUSKCN0PJ18620150709.

[130] Amnesty International, "Thailand: Hard Line on Refugees Leaves Thousands Vulnerable and at Risk," September 28, 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/thailand-hard-line-on-refugees-leaves-thousands-vulnerable-and-at-risk/.

[131] As of June 24, 2021, seven governments have called the treatment of Uyghurs a genocide, including those of Belgium, Canada, Czechia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Several studies have come to the same conclusion. For example, see Newlines Institute, "The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention," March 8, 2021, https://newlinesinstitute.org/uyghurs/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/; and James Landale, "Uighurs: 'Credible case' China carrying out genocide," *BBC*, February 8, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55973215.

[132] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

[133] Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "'Absolutely no Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims," *New York Times*, November 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html.

The results have been catastrophic, unleashing a campaign of cultural destruction, extrajudicial mass internment, indoctrination, torture, forced labor camps, and the birth of an unprecedented surveillance state. Since its 2014 launch, the People's War on Terror has seen some 1.8 million people, more than 10 percent of the Uyghur population, interned in so-called re-education centers.[134]
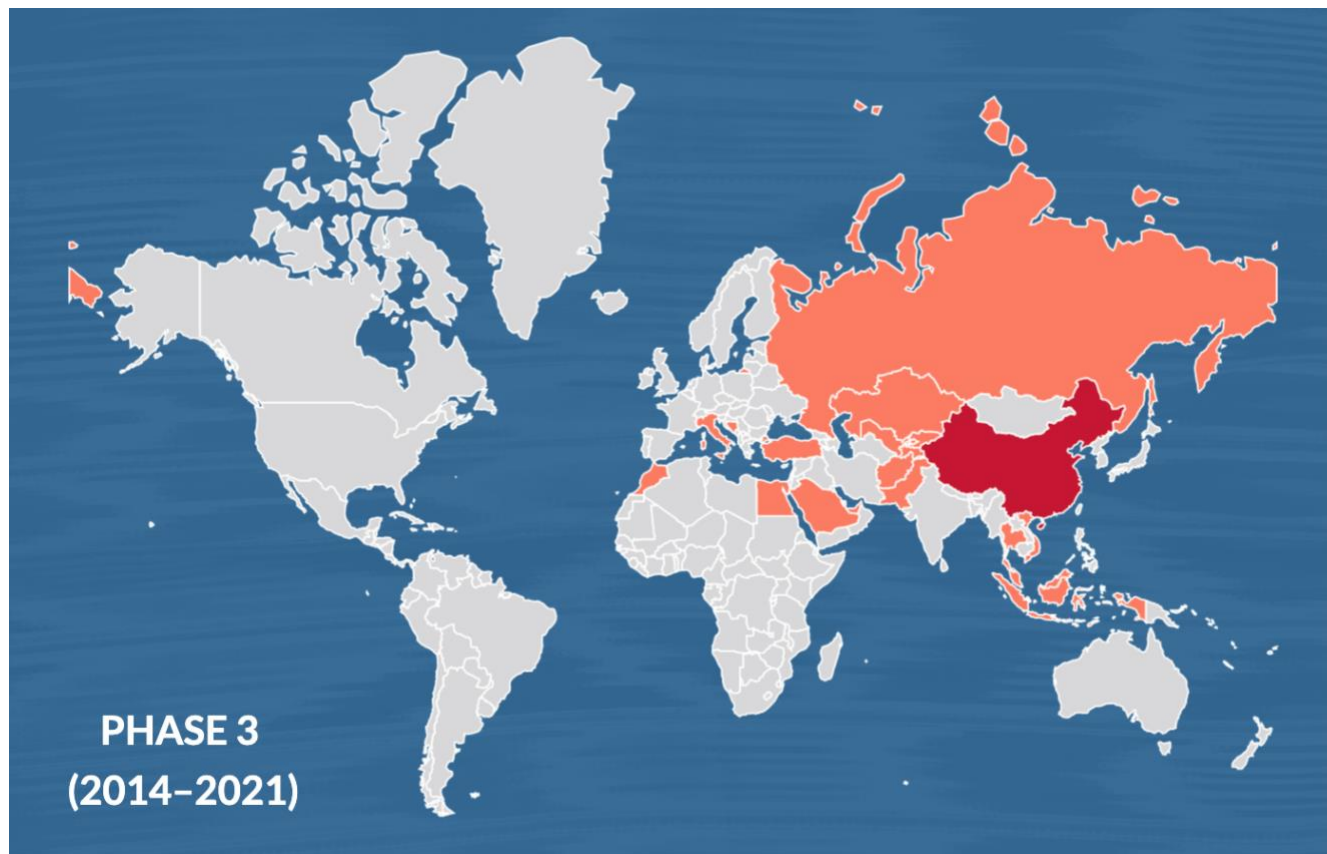

Image 4: Countries represented in the upper estimate for Phase 3 (2014–2021). Image by UHRP.

To aid its campaign, China signed its first comprehensive counterterrorism legislation in 2015, paving the way for further mass surveillance, including compliance laws requiring technology companies to decrypt communications for security officials.[135] According to government figures, 13,000 "terrorists" have been arrested since the legislation was passed, and over 30,000 more have

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[134] "Expert Says 1.8 Million Uyghurs, Muslim Minorities Held in China's Internment Camps," *Radio Free Asia*, November 24, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/detainees-11232019223242.html.

[135] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

been punished for "illegal religious activity."[136] These figures should be heavily scrutinized, however, with subsequent "de-extremification" regulations making it clear that the government has a very vague definition of "terrorist activities."[137] In 2018, *Foreign Policy* published an article called "48 Ways to Get Sent to a Chinese Concentration Camp," outlining the various reasons Uyghurs may be sent into these centers. Supposedly suspicious behavior includes owning a tent, growing a beard, or refusing to smoke cigarettes.[138]

The transnational dimension of China's repressive agenda has largely shifted in scale and orientation due to the introduction of a vast system of algorithmic surveillance that makes some foreign ties a punishable offense. In the XUAR, police stations feed data into a powerful database known as the Integrated Joint Operating System (IJOP).[139] Through the IJOP, vast information flows are automatically fed into an algorithm that evaluates a person's supposed exposure to "extremist" influences, sorting citizens into groups of those deemed "trustworthy" and those deemed "suspicious." The IJOP also categorized people as suspicious for any contact with 26 blacklisted countries.[140] People who have traveled to, who have family members living in, or who otherwise communicate with people in these countries have been interrogated, detained, or imprisoned.

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Tanner Greer, "48 Ways to Get Sent to a Chinese Concentration Camp," *Foreign Policy*, September 13, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/13/48-ways-to-get-sent-to-a-chinese-concentration-camp/.

[139] Human Rights Watch, "China's Algorithms of Repression: Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Police Mass Surveillance App," May 1, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass.

[140] Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Mass Repression in Xinjiang," September 9, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs#.

These new country blacklists have also had a devastating impact on Uyghurs studying or residing overseas in regions that had previously seen little evidence of transnational repression. Egypt has offered a particularly stark case. Beginning in early July 2017, the Egyptian police detained some 200 Uyghurs, many of them religious students at Al-Azhar, after rounding the students up from restaurants or private homes.[141] Many students who had earlier gone home on their own in response to a Chinese government order to return for "registration" were also taken into custody. According to our upper estimate, 57 Uyghurs have been reported as imprisoned in China upon their return from Egypt,[142] with some, such as Abdusalam Mamat and Yasinjan Memtimin, reported dead
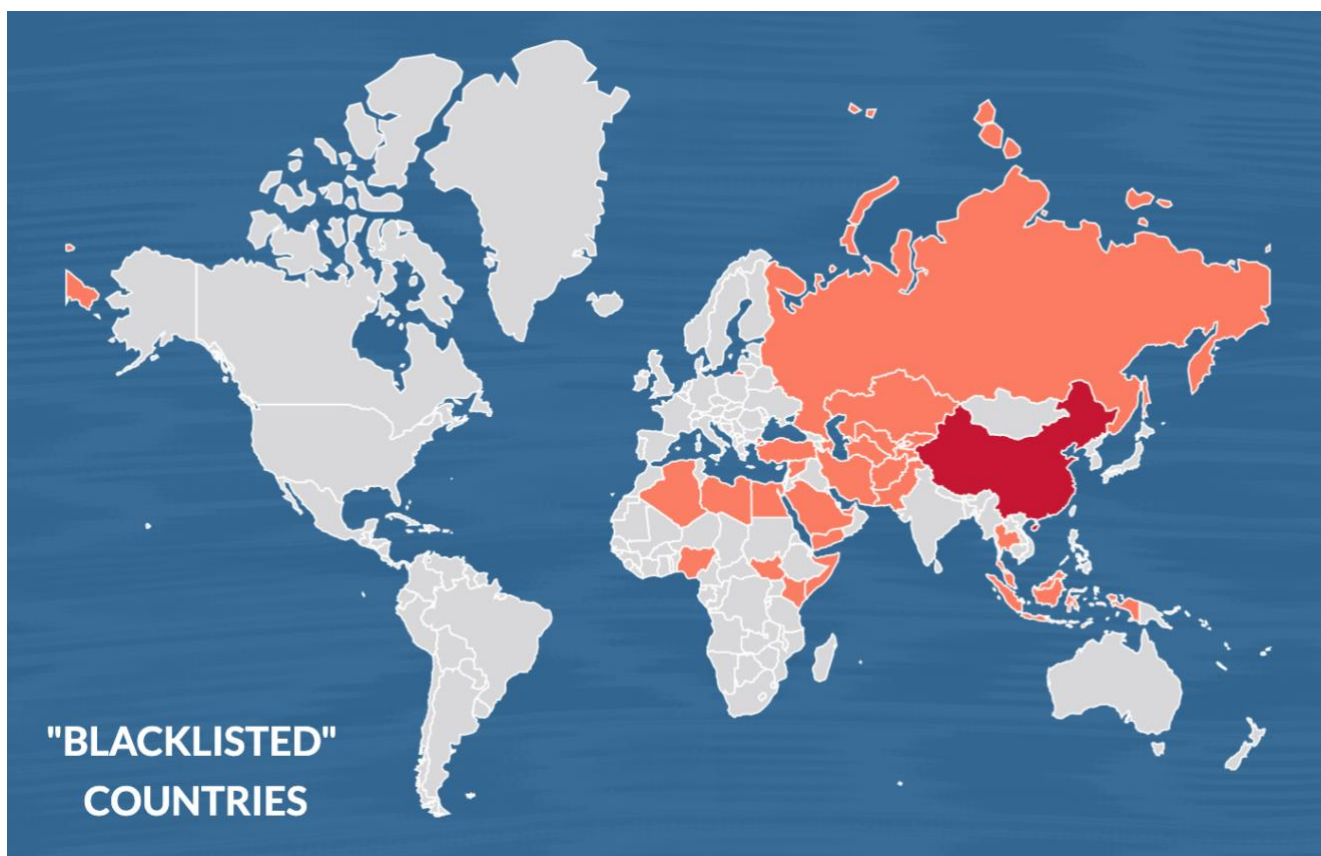
Image 5: Countries listed in the Integrated Joint Operating Platform as being blacklisted. Image by UHRP.

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[141] "'The Price of my Studies Abroad was Very High': Uyghur Former Al Azhar University Student," *Radio Free Asia*, June 26, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/student-06262020141646.html.

[142] "Five Uyghurs From One Family Imprisoned," *Radio Free Asia,* March 5, 2021, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/egypt-03052021184200.html.

in police custody after having left the country "voluntarily."[143] In 2017, Seyit'akhun Abdukerim returned to Atush from Kyrgyzstan, where his family regularly traded Chinese fabrics, after being called home by police. Upon his return, he was forced to call his sons, Ibrahim and Ezimet, and demand that they return to the XUAR from Egypt. All three of them were taken into police custody immediately on arrival. [144]

Saudi Arabia, which also appears on China's list of "suspicious" countries, has similarly shown evidence of growing cooperation with Beijing. Over the past four years, government authorities have deported at least six Uyghurs to China. The deportees were either visiting the country as part of their pilgrimage to Mecca or living in the country legally.[145]

In July 2018, Saudi Arabian authorities arrested Osman Ahmat Tohti, a Uyghur who had been living in Turkey with his family. Prior to his emigration, Tohti had been detained by police in his home city of Hotan in the XUAR in May 2014 and released around two months later, which made him "suspicious." His business subsequently collapsed, leading to his decision to legally immigrate to Turkey the following year with his family. In 2018, he and his family traveled to Saudi Arabia on *Hajj*, where he was detained by Saudi authorities for six months; he was then forcibly repatriated to China in February 2019.

We identified three other Uyghurs who were deported to China from Saudi Arabia over the past four years: Bahtiyar Haji, a trader from Ürümchi; Yaqupjan, originally from Hotan; and Nurullah Ablimit, originally from Kashgar, who was living in Saudi Arabia after initially moving there for studies. Ablimit was detained by Saudi authorities and deported in 2016, likely in connection to his father, Ablimit Damollam, a well-known religious scholar in

These new country blacklists have also had a devastating impact on Uyghurs studying or residing overseas in regions that had previously seen little evidence of transnational repression.

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[143] "Two Uyghur Students Returned From Egypt, Dead in Chinese Police Custody," *Middle East Monitor*, December 22, 2017, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171222-2-uyghur-students-returned-from-egypt-dead-in-china-police-custody/.

[144] "Five Uyghurs From One Family Imprisoned," *Radio Free Asia.*

[145] "Four Uyghurs Facing Persecution After Deportation by Saudi Arabia to China, Identified," *Radio Free Asia*, October 16, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deportation-10162020150910.html.

Kashgar who died in police custody in 2017, and his brothers, both of whom are also imprisoned in the XUAR.[146]

Saudi authorities have expressed explicit approval of China's policies toward the Uyghurs. On a state visit to Beijing in February 2019, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman made a public statement in support of China's treatment of the Uyghurs in the name of counterterrorism. In 2020, the country joined 45 others in signing a letter of support for China's campaign of mass detention in the XUAR.[147]

According to our upper estimate, since 2017, 682 Uyghurs have been detained in Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, the UAE, and Uzbekistan—all of which appear in IJOP country blacklists. The UAE, which announced a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with China in 2018 and signed the 2019 UN letter in support of Beijing's policies in the XUAR, has led to Uyghurs questioning their future safety in the country.[148] Huseyin Imintohti last contacted his wife on October 12, 2017, after applying to the UNHCR in Dubai. His wife, Nigare, contacted his roommates, who confirmed that her husband had been detained. She fears he may have been forcibly deported to China.[149] Ahmad Talip (also known as Ahmetjan Abdulla) had lived in the UAE with his family for six years before he was arrested after going to a police station to pick up some documents for his brother in 2018. While imprisoned, he told his wife that the Dubai police took a blood sample from him at the request of the Chinese government. A Dubai court judged that Mr. Ahmad should be freed, but when his wife went to pick him up, she learned that he had been moved to a different prison and was in Interpol custody. She unsuccessfully appealed to Interpol and the UN to have him released; officials in Dubai threatened to detain her and their entire family and deport them to China if she continued to

On a state visit to Beijing in February 2019, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman made a public statement in support of China's treatment of the Uyghurs in the name of counterterrorism.

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[146] Ibid.

[147] "Saudi Crown Prince Defends China's Right to Fight 'Terrorism,'" *Al Jazeera*, February 23, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/23/saudi-crown-prince-defends-chinas-right-to-fight-terrorism.

[148] See Appendix II for more information on the signatories of the 2019 letter, as well as a letter from 2020.

[149] "Uyghur Asylum Seeker Detained in Dubai Feared Deported to China," *Radio Free Asia*, November 28, 2017, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/dubai-11282017160655.html.

press the case. Talip was transferred again, and she has not heard from him since. She was told that he was deported to China and imprisoned two days after his last transfer.[150]

Morocco has also emerged as a potential source of transnational repression for Uyghurs, though it does not appear on the list of 26 countries deemed "sensitive" for XUAR security officials.[151] In 2019, 22-year-old Ablikim Abla, an ethnic Uyghur and Chinese national, was arrested by police at a Moroccan airport during a trip to Germany. He was informed that he may be deported to China.[152] Abla's father was sentenced to 10 years in prison in China for sending him to study in Turkey, a blacklisted country, in 2016.

A likely explanation for China's growing fixation on the Middle East lies with political developments in Turkey over the past decade. Since the 1950s, thousands of Uyghurs fleeing persecution in China have found sanctuary in Turkey, where they share common cultural heritage. Today, there are an estimated 50,000 Uyghurs currently living there—the largest Uyghur diaspora community in the world outside Central Asia. Turkey has historically advocated on behalf of the Uyghurs, making its relations with China tense. In the aftermath of the 2009 Ürümchi Events, for example, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called China's handling of the incident "an act of genocide."[153] In November 2014, relations further soured when Chinese police claimed to have broken up a Turkish-led ring providing Uyghurs with fake passports and accused Turkish intelligence of helping Uyghurs join militants in Syria.[154] This latter claim has become a difficult subject in bilateral relations between the

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[150] "Uyghur Speaks Out About Husband's 'Deportation' From UAE," *Middle East Eye*, February 8, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uighur-speaks-out-against-husbands-deportation-uae.

[151] For a list of countries, see Image 4.

[152] "Uyghur Exile Safely Returns to Turkey After Facing Deportation to China From Moroccan Authorities," *Radio Free Asia*, October 25, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/return-09252019172016.html.

[153] "Turkish Leader Calls Xinjiang Killings 'Genocide,'" *Reuters*, July 10, 2009, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-china-sb/turkish-leader-calls-xinjiang-killings-genocide-idUSTRE56957D20090710.

[154] "China 'Breaks Turkish-Uighur Passport Plot'" *BBC*, January 14, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-30810439.

two countries and drives China's securitization narrative across the region, putting Uyghur refugees at risk.

As early as October 2012, China's state media was claiming the existence of Uyghur fighters in Syria in groups likely formed by recent migrants to Turkey. By 2015, it was clear that TIP had an active army in Syria, including entire settlements populated by mothers and children. According to Sean Roberts, there is strong anecdotal evidence of Turkish involvement in helping funnel Uyghur refugees there.[155] As many as 30,000 Uyghur refugees arrived in Turkey from 2010 to 2016, both via human trafficking networks across Southeast Asia and via a short-lived Chinese passport scheme from 2015 to 2016 that allowed disaffected Uyghurs to flee to Turkey. According to Roberts, there are plenty of incentives for Uyghurs to settle in Syria. Upon arrival in Turkey, most Uyghurs were granted neither official refugee status nor citizenship, keeping them in a state of political limbo, which makes them more vulnerable to recruiters.[156] Though their total numbers are largely unknown, Syria's ambassador to China claimed in 2017 that there were as many as 5,000 active TIP fighters, while Israeli intelligence put the figure at 3,000. While the existence of these groups is a legitimate concern, it is highly unlikely that they pose a serious threat to China's national security and certainly do not justify the current campaign of mass repression in the XUAR.[157] In addition, it is clear that ordinary Uyghur refugees bear the costs of the existence of these militant groups that strengthen China's terror narrative abroad and provide new sources of pressure on foreign governments to actively cooperate in its transnational repression of Turkic peoples.

In recent years, Turkey has significantly softened its rhetorical support for the Uyghurs, in addition to increasing renditions, detentions, and surveillance of its Uyghur population. In January, after months of protests in front of the Chinese consulate in Istanbul by Turkey-based Uyghurs trying to find information about missing family members, police banned the gatherings over alleged

In recent years, Turkey has significantly softened its rhetorical support for the Uyghurs, in addition to increasing renditions, detentions, and surveillance of its Uyghur population.

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[155] Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs.*

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

concerns about security and Covid-19. More likely, this move was linked to fears of upsetting China. Another protest outside the Chinese Embassy in Ankara was promptly shut down, and its activists were detained after China accused the protesters of spreading fake news.[158] Soon after, Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu warned protesters to "avoid falling prey to a planned international conflict that comes beyond the ocean," strongly implying that claims of mass repression in XUAR are part of a political ploy in the great power competition between the United States and China.[159] The Turkish government has yet to make a statement condemning China's mass detention of Uyghurs.

In addition to expressing alarm over this changing rhetoric, Uyghurs in Turkey are expressing growing concern that China is providing the country with Covid-19 vaccine supplies in exchange for passage of a controversial extradition bill signed by Erdogan in May 2017 after a visit to a BRI forum in Beijing.[160] On December 26, 2020, the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Congress suddenly ratified the 2017 bill, with speculation that the Turkish parliament will be moving to put the bill into law.

Other Turkish government actions over the past three years appear to indicate a shift in the country's approach to its Uyghur minority. In one leaked 2016 extradition request reported by *Axios*, Chinese officials asked for the extradition of an Uyghur cell phone vendor, accusing him of promoting the Islamic State (IS) terror group online. The vendor was arrested but eventually released and cleared of charges.[161] Turkish authorities also detained Abdurehim Parac, a Uyghur poet, twice in the past few years. Rising fears are already prompting many Uyghurs to resettle in Europe. Serikzhan Bilash and his family fled Kazakhstan for Turkey in September 2020,

[158] Asim Kashgarian and Ezel Shahinkaya, "Turkey Cracks Down on Uyghur Protests After China Complains," *Voice of America*, March 5, 2021, https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/turkey-cracks-down-uighur-protesters-after-china-complains.

[159] Ibid.

[160] "Turkey Uyghurs Fear Sellout to China in Exchange for Vaccine," *Associated Press,* February 5, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/turkey-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-ankara-china-c8b714974552c484c501a5784efc117a.

[161] Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Exclusive: Documents Show China's Secret Extradition Request for Uyghur in Turkey," *Axio*s, May 20, 2020, https://www.axios.com/documents-chinas-secret-extradition-request-uighur-turkey-6d5ba886-c22c-47e8-b970-804fae274e2d.html.

where he established a new human rights organization before eventually resettling in the United States.[162]

It is becoming increasingly clear that Turkey is no longer the safe haven it once was for refugees from the Uyghur Region. Our data indicates that Turkey has detained or rendered an increasing number of people since 2017 (as of publication):

Year	Number of Detentions	Number of Renditions
2017	14	0
2018	5	0
2019	201	6
2020	3	1
2021	57	0

The scale is likely far larger than our detailed dataset suggests, however, and the figure for 2019 is skewed by mass deportations. National Public Radio (NPR) reported in March 2020 that between 200 and 400 Uyghurs had been detained in Turkey in 2019 alone.[163] We have decided to include a conservative figure of 200 from NPR's estimates within our upper estimate. In at least several cases, Turkey has also rendered Uyghurs through third countries. In August 2019, for example, Turkey deported a Uyghur woman and her two children to Tajikistan, from which the family was then transferred to China.[164] There were allegedly five or six other Uyghurs aboard the flight with her, but we have been unable to independently verify this information.

In 2015, the Indonesian government arrested four Uyghurs, Abdul Basit Tuzer, Ahmet Bozoglan, Ahmet Mahmud, and Altinci Bayram, for entering the country on fake passports and attempting to join the Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen, an organization affiliated with IS. The four men were sentenced to six years in prison and

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[162] Pannier, "Activist Explains Why He Had to Leave Kazakhstan."

[163] Joanna Kakissis, "'I Thought I Would be Safe': Uyghurs in Turkey Now Fear China's Long Arm," *NPR*, March 13, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uighurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm.

[164] "Uyghur Mother, Daughters Deported to China From Turkey," *Radio Free Asia*, August 9, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deportation-08092019171834.html.

fined 100 million rupiah ($6,812 USD). In September 2020, the Chinese government paid their fines and extradited them back to the Uyghur Region, where they were detained.[165] Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, has acted as a safe haven for other refugee groups, including Rohingya refugees escaping from Myanmar. However, after a Chinese government campaign to persuade the Indonesian government of its good intentions toward the Uyghurs, the Indonesian government has adopted a policy of non-interference into what it argues is a "domestic affair."

These Indonesia cases may represent the beginning of an intensifying crackdown in Southeast Asia. However, in September 2020, Malaysian minister Mohd Redzuan Md Yusof announced that Malaysia would no longer extradite Uyghurs to China, creating a new point of contention in an already tense relationship.[166] Malaysia has since plotted a more pro-Chinese course, signing a memorandum of understanding with the Chinese government to deepen cooperation between the countries in the post-Covid-19 era.[167]

VII. Conclusion

The government of China's campaign to persecute the Uyghur people is truly global in scale, encompassing a range of practices, including harassment, surveillance, detention, and rendition. Through these practices, the government of China is able to extend its repression and control over the Uyghur people across sovereign boundaries. China's transnational repression of Uyghurs has been consistently on the rise since 1997. From the first stage of China's evolving system of transnational repression (1997–2007), a

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[165] "Indonesia Deports 4 Uyghur Terrorism Suspects, to China," *Radio Free Asia,* October 23, 2020, https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deports-10232020190325.html.

[166] "Malaysia won't extradite Uighurs to China, minister says," *Reuters,* September 4, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-china-uighur/malaysia-wont-extradite-uighurs-to-china-minister-says-idUSKBN25V1KE.

[167] "Malaysia, China get ready for post-Covid-19 cooperation," *The Edge Markets*, April 2, 2021, https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/malaysia-china-agree-mutual-recognition-vaccine-certificates.

total of 89 Uyghurs from 9 countries were detained or sent to China; in the second phase (2008–2013), 130 individuals were repressed from 15 countries; and in the final phase (2014–March 2021), a total of 1,327 were detained or rendered from 20 countries. We want to emphasize again that these figures are limited only to reported figures we were able to verify. Unreported cases would likely raise these figures substantially, with our database presenting just the tip of the iceberg.

Transnational repression forms part of wider patterns of "global authoritarianism," as autocratic regimes like China actively cooperate with one another and repurpose institutions to protect themselves from accountability for human rights abuses. Powerful authoritarian states have sought to dilute the democratic dimensions of various international organizations and implant "rule by law" into these bodies by such means as redefining human rights within the UN Human Rights Council, promoting "cyber sovereignty" at the UN, and seeking to weaken the election-monitoring capacity of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This matters because it erodes democratic norms around the globe. Through these strategies, organizations like Interpol, as well as host governments, can become complicit in enabling China's global campaign against already persecuted individuals—many of whom are seeking refuge abroad. Such practices are becoming normal. Stopping such transnational repression is a moral imperative. Standing idly while the government of China targets its citizens abroad with impunity also undermines the credibility of states to protect those within their borders, including their own citizens.

China's transnational repression violates a number of international treaties. Non-refoulement, or the principle that refugees or asylum seekers should not be forced to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution, torture, or mistreatment, is enshrined in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Yet China has already started to erode this principle through its regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation

Transnational repression forms part of wider patterns of "global authoritarianism," as autocratic regimes like China actively cooperate with one another and repurpose institutions to protect themselves from accountability for human rights abuses.

Organization, which have developed extradition agreements without reference to human rights.

States that host diasporas can help fight transnational repression. They can refuse to extradite Uyghurs back to China, increase quotas and strengthen protections for refugees and asylum seekers, and restrict networks of enablers, such as spyware companies and diaspora groups acting as a front for the Chinese government.

Each of the stages of repression shows a nexus between internal and external relations in the Uyghur Region, with repression following refugee networks to Central and South Asia in the aftermath of the Baren (1990) and Ghulja (1997) unrest. In the second phase, China used the prestige of the Beijing Olympics to expand its dragnet globally and then massively expanded its repression in Southeast Asia to follow Uyghur refugee networks in the aftermath of the 2009 Ürümchi Events. Finally, in the wake of the 2014 Kunming Massacre, China had largely neutralized these networks, turning its attention to Turkey, Syria, and the wider Middle East as part of Chinese President and Party General Secretary Xi Jinping's People's War on Terror. Since 2017, China has embarked on an unprecedented campaign of mass repression, targeting Uyghurs with connections to 26 countries deemed by XUAR security officials to be suspect. We recorded 695 cases of Uyghur deportations or detentions over this period and were able to independently verify 168 of these individuals.

Political and economic links with China also show strong correlations with transnational repression. China's global economic rise and the launch of its colossal global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has created unprecedented scope for transnational repression. Of the 10 countries where China has most frequently used transnational repression against the Uyghurs, China is the largest creditor in four (Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia, and Myanmar), putting pressure on these countries to trade human rights for economic opportunity.[168] In other countries

China's global economic rise and the launch of its colossal global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has created unprecedented scope for transnational repression.

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[168] For more information on the percentage of foreign debt owned by China in countries with the highest numbers of Stage-2 and Stage-3 cases of transnational repression of Uyghurs, see Appendix III.

where repression is growing, such as Egypt, Turkey, and the wider Middle East, China has emerged as a vital economic partner through BRI-related projects and infrastructure. As China expands its role globally through the BRI, more states will likely become locked into relations of dependence, increasing China's ability to coerce or co-opt them to assist in targeting diaspora members and exiles. Unchecked, China's global war on the Uyghurs will continue to expand and accelerate as it has over the past five years.

VIII. Recommendations

B ased on the findings of this report, we recommend that democratic states and international organizations take the following steps to counter China's use of transnational repression and protect Uyghurs and other vulnerable groups from the XUAR.

To National Governments:

- **Strengthen refugee resettlement programs by increasing quotas and streamlining procedures.** Governments should increase their quota of refugees from China and from third countries that are likely to extradite citizens to China, such as Turkey and Thailand. Countries such as Thailand, which account for the vast majority of extraditions, should revise their asylum procedures to protect human rights. A large number of Uyghurs around the world fear applying for asylum in case governments or other bodies alert Chinese officials.

- **Uphold the non-refoulement principle**. Under international law, governments are prohibited from sending individuals back to countries where they would be at risk of persecution, torture, ill-treatment, or other serious human rights violations.

- **Restrict the export of surveillance technology.** The potential for malicious use of technology by Chinese companies active in the campaign of repression in the Uyghur Region should make countries hesitant about allowing them to operate within their borders without scrutiny. The international

community should work to achieve clear standards on transparency for such dual-use technologies.

- **Impose targeted sanctions on Chinese citizens responsible for acts of transnational repression.** The Global Magnitsky Acts which have been adopted around the world provide a mechanism for travel bans and asset freezes for individuals and entities involved in serious human rights violations, such as those perpetrated against the Uyghur diaspora. Governments around the world should continue to apply this framework to key security personnel active in the ongoing campaign of repression.

- **Submit reports on Chinese transnational repression to legislative bodies.** Democratic states should follow the lead of the United States in the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 and require relevant departments and agencies to submit a report to their parliaments listing Chinese officials, entities, and others identified as being responsible for intimidating, harassing, or targeting members of the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Turkic Muslim groups from the XUAR within their territories.

- **Increase outreach to Uyghur communities.** Governments and communities should recognize the unique dangers faced by Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples residing within their borders. Outreach initiatives could include teaching Uyghurs about their legal and political rights or about basic digital security strategies to counteract the growing threat of Chinese malware and hacks.

- **Form a caucus of democratic states within Interpol.** Democracies make up 14 of the 15 top statutory funders of the body.[169] These democracies could caucus together on key general assembly votes, support common candidates for key positions, and adopt policies to insulate Interpol against abuse, such as pushing for abusers to be suspended from

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[169] Ted R. Bromund, "10 Ways the U.S. Can Curb Interpol Abuses," Heritage Foundation, December 13, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/10-ways-the-us-can-curb-interpol-abuses.

accessing Interpol databases, as stipulated by Article 131 of the Rules on the Processing Data.

To the United Nations:

- **Appoint a Special Rapporteur on Transnational Repression.** The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) should appoint an individual to "examine, monitor, advise, and publicly report" on issues of transnational repression globally.[170] This would help raise public awareness and help concerned states to cooperate on countering these practices.

- **Ensure access to UN Convention Travel Documents for Uyghurs and others facing threats from home governments.** The UN High Commissioner for Refugees should ensure effective and secure access to field offices for Uyghurs and other vulnerable groups at risk of detention or refoulement.

- **Investigate and gather information on the current situation in the XUAR.** In order to ensure national governments understand the risk of returning Uyghurs to China, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should make use of her independent monitoring and reporting mandate to investigate and gather information on the current situation and report to the UNHRC with her findings.

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[170] ESCR-Net, "UN Special Procedures and the Special Rapporteurs," undated, last accessed June 2021, https://www.escr-net.org/resources/un-special-procedures-and-special-rapporteurs.

Appendix I: Bilateral Extradition Treaties

The countries in our dataset with cases of Chinese transnational repression of Uyghurs are indicated in italics.

Country	Signed	Effective
Thailand	*1993*	*1999*
Belarus	1995	1998
Russia	*1995*	*1997*
Bulgaria	1996	1997
Romania	1996	1999
Kazakhstan	*1996*	*1998*
Mongolia	1997	1999
Kyrgyzstan	*1998*	*2004*
Ukraine	1998	2000
Cambodia	*1999*	*2000*
Uzbekistan	*1999*	*2000*
South Korea	2000	2002
Philippines	2001	2006
Peru	2001	2003
Tunisia	2001	2005
South Africa	2001	2004
Laos	*2002*	*2003*
United Arab Emirates	*2002*	*2004*

Country	Signed	Effective
Lithuania	2002	2003
Pakistan	*2003*	*2008*
Lesotho	2003	2005
Brazil	2004	2014
Azerbaijan	2005	2010
Spain	2005	2007
Namibia	2005	2009
Angola	2006	2013
Algeria	2006	2009
Portugal	2007	2009
France	2007	2015
Mexico	2008	2012
Bosnia-Herzegovina	*2012*	*2014*
Italy	*2010*	*2015*
Iran	2012	2017
Tajikistan	*2014*	*2017*
Turkey	*2017*	*Pending parliamentary ratification*

Appendix II: Signatories of Two UN Letters Supporting China's Policies in the Uyghur Region

The "2019 letter" refers to a joint letter issued by 22 countries during the 41st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in July 2019. In the letter, these countries expressed support for China's actions in the Uyghur Region. The "2020 letter" refers to a statement supported by 45 countries.[171] This chart shows countries involved in China's transnational repression of Uyghurs who signed either one or both of the 2019 and 2020 letters.

Country	Signed 2019 Letter	Signed 2020 Letter
Cambodia	x	x
Egypt	x	x
Laos	x	x
Myanmar	x	x
Russia	x	x
Pakistan	x	x
Saudi Arabia	x	x
UAE	x	x
Syria	x	x
Morocco		x
Nepal		x
Tajikistan	x	
Qatar	x	

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[171] For more on the 2019 letter, see Roie Yellinek and Elizabeth Chen, "The '22 vs. 50' Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights," Jamestown *China Brief* 19, no. 22, December 31, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/. For more on the 2020 letter, see Catherine Putz, "2020 Edition: Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?" *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2020, https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/.

Appendix III: Countries with Highest Numbers of Stage-2 and Stage-3 Cases of China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs

Country	Stage-2 and -3 Cases	Extradition Treaty with China	Supports China on XUAR[172]	Blacklisted by IJOP	Appx. % Foreign Debt Owned by China[173]	AIIB Member
Thailand	425	Y	N	Y	1	Y
Turkey	399	Y	N	Y	1	Y
Egypt	231	N	Y	Y	5[174]	N
Malaysia	188	N	N	Y	5	Y
Kyrgyzstan	75	Y	N	Y	40[175]	Y
Pakistan	57	Y	Y	Y	25	Y
Afghanistan	40	N	N	Y	1	Y
Kazakhstan	23	Y	N	Y	5	Y
Cambodia	22	Y	Y	N	49[176]	Y
Myanmar	17	N	Y	Y	40[177]	Y

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[172] By "supports," we refer to whether the governments of these countries signed either the 2019 or 2020 UNHRC letter supporting China's policies in Xinjiang.

[173] Figures for Thailand, Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kazakhstan drawn from Sebastian Horn, Carmen M. Reinhart, and Christoph Trebesch, "China's Overseas Lending," NBER Working Paper Series, July 2019, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26050/w26050.pdf.

[174] Hossam Mounir, "Egypt's external debt up 17.3% YoY to $108.7bn in FY19," *Daily News Egypt*, January 19, 2020, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2020/01/19/egypts-external-debt-up-17-3-yoy-to-108-7bn-in-fy19/.

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