“We know you better than you know yourself”: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora

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Acknowledgements

The research for this report was funded by the "China Network's International Programme (Open Societies) Fund 2022/23 (£68k). The report and all contents reflect the independent work and conclusions of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the funders, the British Embassy Beijing, or the U.K. government.

The authors wish to extend their gratitude to the individuals and organisations who supported this research by providing concrete feedback for revisions on the report, offering suggestions and advice at the planning stages, and offering ongoing collaborative and moral support while conducting this research: Elise Anderson, Campaign for Uyghurs, Freedom House, Tim Grose, Ondřej Klimeš, Julie Millsap, David O'Brien, the Rights Practice, Radio Free Asia, Isabella Rodriguez, David Stroup, Hannah Theaker, Emily Upson, the Uyghur Human Rights Project, the Uyghur Transitional Justice Database, the World Uyghur Congress, the Xinjiang Documentation Project, the Xinjiang Victims' Database, and Adrian Zenz.

Lastly and most importantly, the authors extend their utmost respect to those who participated in the research but must remain anonymous due to the threat of transnational repression to their lives. The authors were deeply privileged to hear your stories. We hope that our research is respectful of your lived experiences and that it fulfils our duty to recount them accurately, while including the needs you identify as the key to protecting people across the world from transnational repression.

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Glossary of terms

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Communist Party of China (CCP)

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)

Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

National People's Congress (NPC)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

People's Armed Police (PAP)

People's Liberation Army (PLA)

People's Republic of China (PRC)

Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC)

Public Security Bureau (PSB)

Transnational repression (TNR)

United Front Working Department (UFWD)

Uyghur Human Right Project (UHRP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

World Uyghur Congress (WUC)

Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) (*Bingtuan*)

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)

Executive Summary

This report finds that the scale of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is universal, and its impact severely restricts their rights to free speech and associations, and the capacity to maintain their culture. Transnational repression has expanded in Xi Jinping's "new era," but its tactics have gradually changed since 2017, with increased use of Uyghur informants to gather intelligence while backing off from harassing those who resist pressure. These tactics have evolved to avoid international attention by harassing isolated individuals, placing community figures under surveillance, quietly intimidating Uyghurs from speaking publicly and even enlisting them to create positive images of China.

The U.K.'s democratic political environment gives Uyghurs space to exercise their civil rights though many request support to assist with integration and information on their rights when facing transnational repression. However, in Turkey, there are growing dangers of deportations of Uyghurs with humanitarian visas, surveillance, and restrictions on civil rights. Transnational repression is less visible in Thailand because it is used as a transit stop for Uyghurs escaping persecution through human trafficking routes from southwest China.

The PRC claims that its approach to international relations is guided by principles of state sovereignty and non-interference but its governance practices consider all citizens, former citizens, and their family members, regardless of location, to be under its legal and moral jurisdiction. The PRC's transnational repression globally exports its domestic model of governance and genocidal oppression to target all Uyghurs and their family members through enforced family separation, mobility restrictions, and

surveillance. The party-state's transnational repression, therefore, undermines both human rights and the organising principle of sovereignty in international relations.

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Introduction

When Aynür received the phone call from a Chinese police officer ordering her to take photographs and collect information on the social activities of her Uyghur friends in Turkey, she offered to answer any questions but firmly stated, "I cannot report on others." The policeman responded that "China is getting stronger," and "*we know you better than you know yourself*," reminding her that although she was a Turkish citizen, living in Istanbul, thousands of miles from her homeland, she was under constant surveillance and always governed by the PRC.[1] This form of harassment and surveillance is an everyday story in the Uyghur diaspora, in which transnational repression (TNR) is universal and people navigate the impact of state violence, family separation, and the infiltration of spies in their everyday lives while attempting to build lives in new societies.

The Communist Party of China's (CCP) practices of TNR have a longer history than the current human rights crisis in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), including passport confiscation, [2] online monitoring,[3] threats to family members who remain in the region,[4] and human surveillance at home and

[1] This conversation is from recorded phone calls obtained during fieldwork in Turkey, 2023. The risks for Uyghurs when publicly speaking about China are so great that only the details of those who expressed informed consent and have permanent residence outside China are revealed.

[2] BBC (2016) 'China Confiscates Passports of Xinjiang People,' 24 November; Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) (2020) 'Weaponized Passports: the Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness,' April.

[3] Balaam, Kristina et al (2022) 'Lookout Discovers Long-Running Campaigns Targeting Uyghurs,' Lookout, 10 November; The Intercept (2021) 'Revealed: Massive Chinese Police Database,' 29 January.

[4] Amnesty International (2021) 'Hearts and Lives Broken: the Nightmare of Uyghur Families Separated by Repression,' Report.

abroad.[5] Dolkun Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) testified at the London-based Uyghur Tribunal to his own personal experiences of passport confiscation, physical and electronic monitoring, and the party-state's misuse of Interpol "red notice" alert systems to restrict his mobility and prevent him from speaking about his personal experiences of repression inside and outside China since the 1980s. [6] However, this report will show how the scope of the party-state's practices of TNR has expanded to affect all Uyghurs today, and their intensification has deeply impacted their communities.

Since the establishment of the mass detention system for Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslim groups inside the PRC around 2017,[7] Uyghurs abroad have been routinely threatened and offered benefits by Chinese authorities to be allowed to return home or to speak with their families. Since then, transnational repression has become a standard component of scholarly and media enquiry into the politics of China's party-state and everyday lives of PRC citizens and former citizens abroad. Rigorous research reports by the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) and Oxus Society, describe TNR as a "systematic and widespread campaign to intimidate," Uyghurs, which has "accelerated dramatically with the onset of its system of mass surveillance" since 2017.[8]

[5] Tobin, David (2021) 'The Xinjiang Papers: How Xi Jinping Commands Policy in the People's Republic of China,' Univ. of Sheffield, School of East Asian Studies, Research Report, p.45-47.

[6] Dolkun, Isa (2021) 'Full Statement,' 4 June, the Uyghur Tribunal.

[7] See: Byler, Darren (2021) *In the camps: China's hi-tech penal colony*. Columbia global reports; Zenz, Adrian (2021) 'End the dominance of the Uyghur ethnic group': an analysis of Beijing's population optimization strategy in southern Xinjiang', *Central Asian Survey*, 40(3), pp. 291–312.

[8] Jardine, Bradley (2021) 'No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs,' Joint Report, UHRP and the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, p.1; Fay, Greg (2019) 'Repression Across Borders: the CCP's Illegal Harassment and

Freedom House identifies urgent rights issues related to TNR, including "passport confiscation, surveillance, and coercion by proxy" in the U.K.,[9] harassment of protestors at the Chinese embassy in Turkey including being "arbitrarily detained and threatened with deportation,"[10] and in Thailand, deportations of over 100 Uyghurs to China in 2015.[11] The NGO, Safeguard Defenders, describe how Chinese "overseas police service stations," based in over 30 countries including the U.K. (London and Glasgow), monitor Chinese citizens outside their jurisdiction.[12]

Controversial incidents of transnational repression that transgress human rights and interfere with other states' internal affairs have captured significant media attention, leading elected representatives from across the political spectrum in the U.K. to raise concerns about the treatment of Hong Kong protestors at the PRC consulate in Manchester,[13] police stations acting according to PRC law outside its sovereign jurisdiction,[14] and surveillance of the Uyghur diaspora.[15] This report will show how the scale of TNR in the Uyghur diaspora is universal and its impact deeply affects individuals'

Coercion of Uyghur Americans,' Report, UHRP, p.3.

[9] Gorokhovskaia, Yana and Linzer, Isabel (2022) 'Case Study: United Kingdom,' in *Defending Democracy in Exile: Policy Responses to Transnational Repression,* Freedom House, p.7.

[10] Gorokhovskaia, Yana and Linzer, Isabel (2022) 'Case Study: Turkey,' in *Defending Democracy in Exile: Policy Responses to Transnational Repression,* Freedom House, p.3.

[11] Han, Bochen (2022) 'Case Study: Thailand,' in *Defending Democracy in Exile: Policy Responses to Transnational Repression,* Freedom House, p.2.

[12] Safeguard Defenders (2022) '110 Overseas: Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild,' 12 September, Investigation Report.

[13] Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2022) 'Chinese Consulate: Attack on Hong Kong Protestors,' 18 October, Hansard.

[14] Alicia Kearns MP (2022) 'Overseas Chinese Police Stations in the U.K.: Legal Status,' 1 November, Hansard.

[15] Layla Moran MP (2021) & Stephen Kinnock MP (2021) in Sir Ian Duncan Smith, 'Uyghur Tribunal: London,' 14 June, Hansard.

capacity to exercise their rights to free speech, association, and assembly, and their ability as a group to maintain their culture.

What is Transnational Repression?

The UHRP definition of repression draws from literature on domestic repression as "actual or threatened use of physical sanctions," which is applicable to how the party-state governs. However, this definition should be broadened to capture key forms of repression that impacts lives but are overlooked if we only look for dramatic violence and threats, namely the psychological stress induced by family separation, using Uyghur spies to monitor the community's everyday behaviour, and co-option by offering rewards, including money, the right to return home, or conversations with their families for changes in behaviour. The daily activities of all Uyghurs who leave their homeland and their family members are monitored as targets of transnational repression, to restrict the maintenance of their identity and to control all flows of communication and information in and out of the region.

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Co-option, or rewarding potential enemies to pacify their ability to resist the party,[16] is an essential component of the party-state's economic management, political governance, and everyday surveillance inside China.[17]

[16] For example, some of the most notable Uyghur rights advocates, including Ilham Tohti and Rebiya Kadeer, worked in party-state institutions, often being asked to provide advice to government but encountered political trouble when they refused to provide information on Uyghurs' activities and associations, or when they offered critical assessments of policy.

[17] Political science literature on China uses the terms, "managed pluralism" or "non-democratic pluralisation," to describe this co-option as it ensures compliance by drawing potential opponents into the state with material benefits, before turning to

The party-state's co-option methods have gradually become more widely practiced outside China as part of the United Front's strategy. Co-option is materially cheaper for maintaining political legitimacy than violence but can be just as repressive in its capacity to prevent collective resistance and control individual behaviour. It is also less clear how this 'benevolence' transgresses international law, and it requires long-term fieldwork on governance and building relationships in the PRC to uncover.

Freedom House recognises the threat of co-option of institutions to support TNR,[18] yet there is a widespread lack of awareness of how ordinary diaspora members are targeted and their lives impacted in ways that undermine human rights and national security. Uyghurs continue to face TNR in democracies but regime type matters because authoritarian states often collaborate in these practices and are more economically dependent on China, with lower capacity than democracies to withstand political pressure.

This report defines transnational repression as practices by any state to repress or control the behaviour, thought, or identity of citizens outside its sovereign jurisdiction. This includes threats of violence, deportations, and harm to people's families but also offering benefits, including money or family contact, in return for conducting surveillance of their own community or changes in behaviour and personal associations. TNR is not restricted to monitoring and controlling transnational mobility or communications but aims to control

repression and state violence if needed. For example, see: Balzer, Harley (2004) 'State and society in transitions from Communism: China in comparative perspective,' in Gries, Peter Hays & Rosen, Stanley (eds) *State and society in 21st century China*. London: Routledge; Mertha, Andrew (2010) 'Society in the state: China's non-democratic pluralisation,' in Gries & Rosen (eds) *Chinese Politics: State, Society and the Market*. London: Routledge.

[18] Schenkkan, Nate & Linzer, Isabel (2021) *Out of Sight, Not out of Reach: the Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression*, Freedom House, p.13.

the speech, associations, assembly, and intergenerational transmission of identity in the Uyghur diaspora, regardless of whether they travel or communicate across borders. TNR is interference, not influence. For example, a Confucius Institute that holds cultural events represents influence but if representatives of the party-state were to threaten or entice diaspora members to participate, this would constitute interference.

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TNR includes serious and physical violations of rights, including the UHRP's (2021) focus on "harassment, surveillance, detention, and rendition," as will be shown in chapters on Turkey and Thailand. Transnational repression also includes everyday experiences of family separation, offers of family contact in return for behavioural changes, and the widespread psychological harm caused by using Uyghurs to conduct surveillance of their own community. These issues are less publicly reported by Uyghurs, partly because these are taken-for-granted, everyday experiences. Family separation, either by direct threats to end communication or forcing people to sever contact to protect their family, is the central tactic of the party-state's transnational repression of Uyghurs and its attempts to globalise its governance over individuals born in PRC territory.

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The report considers physically non-violent co-option of Uyghur diaspora to conduct surveillance or end their advocacy activities as forms of repressive human rights abuses. It also takes the realist position that not all political violence necessarily constitutes TNR. For example, monitoring ISIS volunteers or assassinating political opponents who seek to overthrow the state, often considered forms of TNR, does not repress the rights of individuals as established in international law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the PRC is a bound signatory. Additionally, the elimination of terrorists or genuine sources of alternative, formal political organisation that span a states' sovereign territory, as opposed to separatist movements and rights activism, cannot logically be included as TNR alongside the harassment of individuals who travel abroad for education or business, or the monitoring of ordinary people's family communications for signs of pride in Uyghur identity. China's model of transnational repression is designed to prevent the maintenance of Uyghur culture by restricting their civil rights in democratic societies and controlling global flows of information in and out of their homeland.

Research Methods

The methods used in the research report are human-centred and focused on capturing the lived experiences of Uyghurs facing transnational repression. The authors engaged with Uyghur diaspora in three field sites (U.K., Turkey, and Thailand), asking them directly how they have experienced transnational repression and how it has affected their lives, particularly their ability to exercise rights to free speech, associations, and assembly. The principle of all-data-is-good-data was applied. The research did not seek out extreme human rights abuses but explores when and why people do and do *not* face TNR. This approach establishes clearer patterns of why TNR is used, what it does, and how Uyghurs can be better supported to exercise their rights.

The three fieldwork sites (U.K., Turkey, and Thailand) were selected as states with different political systems, varying levels of economic development, and geographical proximity to the PRC. This enables comparison of the scale and impact of TNR in the Uyghur diaspora based on the security approach, national interests, and international relations of the host states, and captures the contrasting opportunities for Uyghur communities to exercise their rights and build lives in new societies depending on the conditions in those societies.

The key question explored in the research is what is the scale and impact of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora? In other words, how widespread is TNR and how does it affect people's lives? The scale is measured by asking straightforward questions in a small survey and then in follow up interviews: "have you ever been threatened by the Chinese authorities? How often? When did this start and stop?" It also asked, "have you ever been offered material

incentives to alter online behaviour? Or to end associations with colleagues or friends?" to explore how many Uyghurs are offered family contact or the right to return home in return for ending advocacy activities or collecting information for the Chinese authorities.

The survey was distributed in the selected communities by drawing on established networks in the field sites who have offered support to further distribute the survey in those communities. The survey was entirely anonymised, and no names or personal details were recorded. It establishes broad patterns of transnational repression to assess its scale, asking straightforward questions on first hand experiences of threats or surveillance by Chinese officials or police via phone, messaging apps, or in-person. The survey was highly successful in Turkey with more than 120 responses. However, it could not be effectively distributed in Thailand because most Uyghurs are being held in Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). The Uyghur community in the U.K. were reluctant to engage with the survey, which in interviews was explained as a lack of faith that government would act on their experiences or recommendations. However, 30 survey responses were obtained which is highly useful data to establish initial patterns to explore in the interviews.

The scale represents the extent of transnational repression, while the impact refers to how individual lives are affected, which is shaped by politics in their host states but also by their individual material circumstances and personalities. Some people are silenced in fear of harm to their person or family from online surveillance or anonymous communications from officials. Some experiencing severe repression, including violent threats, are emboldened and speak publicly or become activists.

Over 50 semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with Uyghur diaspora members regarding their experiences of TNR in the three

states: 18 in the U.K., 28 in Turkey, and 12 in Thailand. All interviewing was conducted in private or in locations selected as safe by participants, using coded notes, and communicating using encrypted apps. These interviews were designed with set questions to probe into the initial conclusions from the survey and assess the impact of transnational repression. They used open set questions to illicit further information on the survey topics (e.g., "tell us more about your experience of 'x'"). However, the researchers also enabled a more conversational interaction to develop, devoting significant time to listening to their long-term personal experiences of fleeing China and transnational repression to assess the impact on their lives, where they choose to live, who they associate with, and their cultural expression online.

Key interviews for the report were hours in length, with some spread over several days, asking direct questions on TNR but also enabling participants to tell the story of their life backgrounds, how and why they left China, and how their experiences of TNR have changed over time. This provides greater depth on the underlying thinking and changing tactics of TNR deployed by the party-state and their impact on Uyghurs ability to exercise their rights and maintain their culture. This time-consuming method collects significant amounts of data not presented in the report. However, it built relationships of trust that snowballed into a broader network of participants, while enabling the researchers to build a much deeper picture of the real-life impact of TNR as presented in the individual case studies for each country.

Several participants positively commented that they had never been asked so many detailed questions and felt previous interviews with journalists were focused on extracting information. Except in several instances where participants requested to be interviewed alone, all interviews were conducted by both authors in Uyghur language. The researchers

were frequently asked "can you help us?" and were entirely transparent that they do not make the law or policy but will share these findings with those who do. The combination of time spent with individual participants and the transparency of the research aims built trust in those communities and enabled more detailed and more useful research results. Participants responded particularly well to questions on policy recommendations (e.g., "what would make you safer?") and expressed appreciation that their needs were being considered and their answers would be analysed to form the policy recommendations in this report.

Report Findings

The report's core argument is that the scale of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is universal, and its impact severely restricts the exercise of their rights to free speech, associations, and assembly, and threatens their capacity to maintain their culture. The report finds that while the democratic political environment in the U.K. gives Uyghurs greater opportunities to exercise those rights, the low population numbers mean the support of the community to assist in settling into a new society is largely absent. Turkey remains a desirable location in the Uyghur diaspora due to its historic ties and cultural connections but there are growing dangers of deportation, surveillance by Uyghur informants, and restrictions on civil rights, particularly for those granted temporary humanitarian visas. Thailand is no longer a viable site of migration for Uyghurs and is primarily used as a transit stop when escaping persecution on human trafficking routes that begin in Kunming and Guangxi in southwest China. TNR is less visible in Thailand as most Uyghurs are either hidden from authorities by human traffickers or are held incommunicado in Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs).

The scale of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is universal, and its impact severely restricts the exercise of their rights to free speech, associations, and assembly, and threatens their capacity to maintain their culture.

The key fieldwork was conducted in 2023 with interview trips to London, northern England, Istanbul (Zeytinburnu and Sefakoy), and Kayseri. The research therefore updates the vital work of the Uyghur Human Rights Project and tracks changes in TNR since 2017, most notably the party-state's increased use of Uyghur informants and how it

backs off those who resist pressure. TNR, if defined narrowly as threats, has been scaled back in many individual cases since the PRC's high period of mass detention in 2017.[19] However, this is because the party-state has given up on attempting to co-opt or employ those who continue to speak publicly on behalf of their families or their people. The impact of TNR is intensifying and creates pressure on individuals facing increased human surveillance and the trauma of family separation. The party-state's TNR tactics are evolving to avoid international attention by harassing isolated individuals, quietly intimidating Uyghurs from speaking publicly, and even enlisting them in creating positive images of China for global audiences.

[19] On the "high period" of mass detention, see: Tobin (2021) 'The Xinjiang Papers,' p.38, 41, 55.

1. China's Official Policy of Transnational Repression

Like other authoritarian state's modes of transnational repression, the Chinese party-state's surveillance and harassment of the Uyghur diaspora is designed to monitor perceived threats abroad and increase influence. However, the CCP's focus on monitoring and transforming everyday thought does not fit into a straightforward model of authoritarian transnational repression. [20] The CCP's tactics of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora focus on surveillance of their everyday thought and daily activities to prevent the maintenance of Uyghur culture and enhance China's capacity to control global public opinion by intimidating rights advocates and researchers.

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PSB party secretary and Counterterrorism leading group chair, Zhao Kezhi, cited Xi Jinping's speech from the third Xinjiang Central Work meetings during his 2021 tour of Xinjiang and 2022 meetings in Beijing, to explain the success of Xinjiang Policy domestically, including grid-style management, one-minute response times, and prison stability standards. [21] However, Zhao Kezhi

[20] For example, see: Grose, Timothy (2019) 'Once their mental state is healthy, they will be able to live in society,' 2 August, *Chinafile*; Grose (2020) 'If you don't know how, just learn: Chinese housing and the transformation of Uyghur domestic space,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(11): 2052-2073; Klimeš, Ondřej & Smith, Finley, Jo (2020) 'China's Neo-Totalitarian turn and genocide in Xinjiang,' 7 December, *Society and Space*; Tobin (2021) 'The Xinjiang Papers,' p.46.

[21] PRC Central Government (2022) 'Zhao Kezhi: effectively implement anti-terrorism

and deputy, Jiang Liyun, explain that the new central focus of Xinjiang policy has shifted from domestic to international, to "resolutely thwart attempts to 'control China with Xinjiang'," specifically, to prevent Uyghur connections with democratic and Islamic societies, and to restrict academic research on these subjects.[22]

Documents obtained for this report provide new evidence of how transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora is official party-state policy. These documents ('Urumqi Police Notes') include police notes from an Urumqi Police station (派出所; *paichusuo*) on individual cases of Uyghurs and their family members who are monitored due to travelling abroad. These were shared by Gene Bunin of the Xinjiang Victims Database, whose work remains vital in this area. They also include the Ili Public Security Handbook,[23] used by security personnel and cadres to study policy and daily work procedures, which explains how to monitor all Uyghurs who travel abroad and their family members as potential threats to national security.[24]

tasks and measures to create a safe and stable environment for the successful holding of the 20th National Congress of the CCP' (赵克志：扎实抓好反恐怖工作任务措施的落实 为党的二十大胜利召开创造安全稳定环境; '*Zhao Kezhi: Zhashi zhua hao fan kongbu gongzuo renwu cuoshi de luoshi wei dang de ershi da shengli zhaokai chuangzao Anquan wending huanjing*'). 27 January. Available: https://archive.fo/UgtIy; Guancha (2021) 'Public Security Minister investigates Xinjiang resolutely defeat the plot of "using Xinjiang to control China"' (公安部部长调研新疆：坚决挫败"以疆制华"的图谋; '*Gong'anbu buzhang diaoyan Xinjiang: Jianjiue cuobai "yi jiang zhi hua" de tumou*') 25 March. Available: https://archive.fo/cCAYi#selection-175.0-175.23.

[22] Guibipei (2022) 'Public Security Ministry: Resolutely thwart plots of "containing China with terror" and "containing China with Xinjiang"' (公安部：坚决挫败"以恐遏华""以疆制华"图谋; '*Gong'an bu: Jianjue cuobai "yi kong e hua" "yi jiang zhi hua" tumou*'), 17 January. Available: https://archive.ph/84OZt#selection-141.0-141.22.

[23] Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (*year unknown*) Handbook on "Preventing Backflows": National Security Branch, Xinjiang Police Files.

[24] This document has been verified by the authors of this report and is now included on the Xinjiang Police Files website. It was

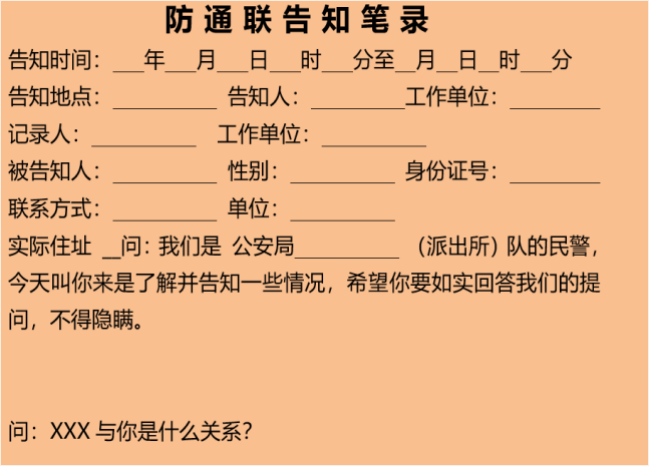
Figure 1: An official manual used by security personnel to monitor Uyghurs who travel abroad or return to China. Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (*year unknown*) Handbook on "Preventing Backflows": National Security Branch, Xinjiang Police Files.

originally authenticated with a detailed explanation of these methods by Zenz, Adrian (2002) 'The Xinjiang Police Files: Re-Education Camp Security and Political Paranoia in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,' the Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies, 3, p.266-268.

Goals

The document's policy direction and specific tactics demonstrate the globalised thinking in the CCP's governance that considers its sovereignty to extend over all citizens and former citizens of the PRC, no matter where they reside.

All citizens who leave the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region are to be monitored as risks related to "backflow prevention" (反回流; fanghuiliu),[25] namely the 'dangers' of the communication and connections that come with free flows of people across borders. It includes set interview questions for police to interrogate those who go abroad regarding their activities and associations (see figure 2).[26] It also contains a contract or "reminder list" (see figure 3) for all citizens going abroad to be co-signed with their local police station (派出所; *paichusuo*), that binds them to Chinese law and regulations, and forbids them from participating in any organisations of any kind, with a phone number to report "special circumstances" encountered while outside China.[27]


防通联告知笔录

告知时间：___年___月___日___时___分至___月___日___时___分

告知地点：_____ 告知人：_____工作单位：_____

记录人：_____ 工作单位：_____

被告知人：_____ 性别：_____ 身份证号：_____

联系方式：_____ 单位：_____

实际住址 _问：我们是 公安局_____ （派出所）队的民警，今天叫你来是了解并告知一些情况，希望你要如实回答我们的提问，不得隐瞒。

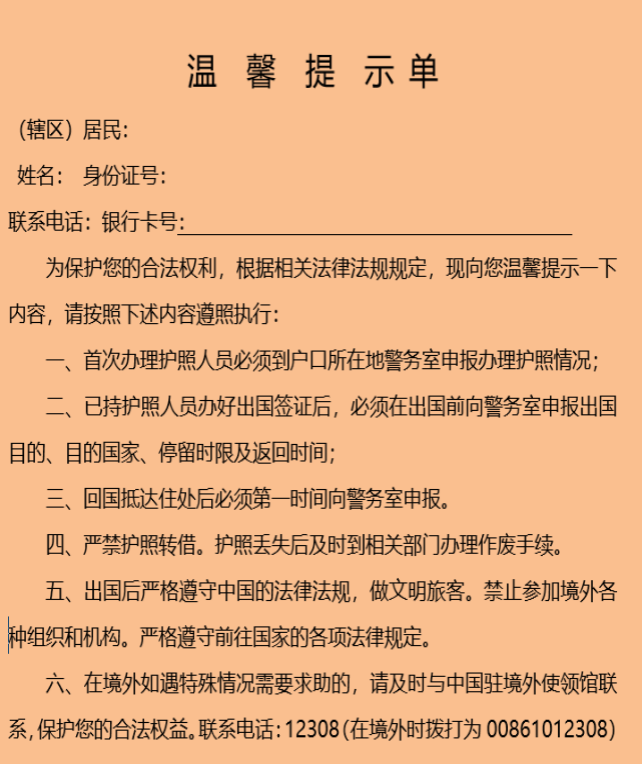
问：XXX 与你是什么关系？

Figure 2: Set interview questions for Police to question Uyghurs who have been abroad focus on assessing their daily activities and associations. The first question asks, "what type of relationship do you have with 'x'?"

[25] Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (*year unknown*) Handbook on "Preventing Backflows": National Security Branch, Xinjiang Police Files, p.6.

[26] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.23-25.

[27] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.20.



温 馨 提 示单

(辖区) 居民:

姓名: 身份证号:

联系电话: 银行卡号:

为保护您的合法权利，根据相关法律法规规定，现向您温馨提示一下内容，请按照下述内容遵照执行:

一、首次办理护照人员必须到户口所在地警务室申报办理护照情况;

二、已持护照人员办好出国签证后，必须在出国前向警务室申报出国目的、目的国家、停留时限及返回时间;

三、回国抵达住处后必须第一时间向警务室申报。

四、严禁护照转借。护照丢失后及时到相关部门办理作废手续。

五、出国后严格遵守中国的法律法规，做文明旅客。禁止参加境外各种组织和机构。严格遵守前往国家的各项法律规定。

六、在境外如遇特殊情况需要求助的，请及时与中国驻境外使领馆联系，保护您的合法权益。联系电话: 12308 (在境外时拨打为 00861012308)

Figure 3: A "reminder list," to be co-signed by Uyghurs who go abroad and their local police station, which includes commitments to follow party-state regulations and a phone number to report "special circumstances" encountered outside the PRC.

The security handbook also shows how the party-state's governance and security practices focus less on individuals and more on the family unit, targeting people from "sensitive family backgrounds" as key dangers in "backflow prevention,"[28] tracking and monitoring what means of communication families use to maintain contact,[29] and listing families of Uyghurs who apply for asylum or have contact with foreign institutions as banned from leaving the country.[30] This tracks with Uyghur experiences of family separation and the interviews that show how the party-state uses their families as hostages in its transnational repression.

The specific goals of the CCP's TNR are clarified in the public security handbook and will be further demonstrated in the report's interview analysis (Chapters 2-4), namely, to monitor the movements, thoughts, daily activities, and associations of all Uyghurs who travel abroad and their families. The handbook provides a formal "List of 26 key countries involved in terrorism," [31] including Turkey and Thailand, to be monitored.

[28] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.6.

[29] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.8.

[30] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p. 12.

[31] Ili Prefecture Public Security Agencies (*year unknown*) Handbook on "Preventing

Those Uyghurs who visit any of these countries are to be identified for questioning and surveillance. There are also at least 35 types of people listed within the scope of these surveillance targets, [32] including those from "sensitive ethnic groups, sensitive age groups, and sensitive family backgrounds," [33] or who collaborate with foreign organisations. [34] It also contains specific monitoring instructions for those who have visited any of the 26 "dangerous" countries.[35] Uyghurs who visit the "dangerous" countries or join organisations will gain more police attention but all who go abroad are monitored as TNR targets along with their families. However, all Uyghurs who go abroad are documented and to be monitored when they return to the PRC.[36]

Backflows": National Security Branch, Xinjiang Police Files, p.14. The full country list is Algeria, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Libya, South Sudan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates.

[32] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.10-12.

[33] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.6.

[34] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.12.

[35] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.8-9.

[36] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.6.

Tactics

The party-state's TNR tactics revolve around "backflow prevention,"[37] a term used to describe the surveillance, questioning, and detention techniques for those who travel abroad as potential threats influenced by "extremism." These monitoring and surveillance techniques are not designed to target professional intelligence agents or political opponents but to assess the daily activities of ordinary people.

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All Uyghurs who travel abroad are to be documented and assessed within 90 days of returning to China to establish their social interactions, travel intentions, and their "speech, behaviour, and activities" for "abnormalities" that must be monitored, reported, and follow-up inspection work conducted.[38]

Regular risk assessments are then to be conducted on a "weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual" basis, focused on people's "performance, activity direction, and travel intentions." [39] Checklists are included for security personnel to gather detailed information on Uyghurs who leave or return to China, including their communication methods and bank payments, and how to hold discussions with family members inside China to

[37] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.7-8.

[38] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.7.

[39] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.8.

monitor their everyday activities and thought.[40] Repression for Uyghurs who go abroad and their family members is universal, arbitrarily applied, and total in its attempts to control their daily activities and associations.

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The party-state's transnational repression tactics are designed to break the family connections of Uyghurs to prevent the maintenance of their culture and all flows of information in and out of the region. The Urumqi Police Notes obtained for this report include two documents, each over 50,000 pages of official, internal communications between police stations (派出所; *paichusuo*) in Urumqi and national security organs (国保; *guobao*). The notes include information updates on weekly work, individual cases to monitor, and the use of "secret forces" (机密势力; *jimi shili*) to uncover Uyghurs who return to the PRC but have obtained foreign citizenship.

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"Backflow prevention" is a standardised term used in police work and targets people as serious security threats for no reasons other than travelling abroad, gaining Turkish citizenship,[41] or having a family member who studied in Turkey.[42] The Police Notes confirm how families are governed as units and targeted for

[40] "Preventing Backflows," Xinjiang Police Files, p.8-9.

[41] Urumqi Police Notes (2017/2018), p 11,139.

[42] Urumqi Police Notes (2017/2018), p 26,854.

transnational repression, including listings of families being monitored because their daughter studies in Turkey[43] and even tracking individuals whose ID cards set off alarms in public buildings because their family members "have not returned from Turkey."[44]

The Police Notes reveal how the families of all Uyghurs who travel abroad are targeted as security threats. They list how people are detained in "vocational training centres" [45] or "were transformed by re-education"[46] simply for visiting one of the "dangerous countries," including Turkey. People with business links are also monitored as specific potential threats. [47] However, one family was monitored and the father sent to a "training centre because he received a call from Turkey."[48]

Uyghurs who are photographed at "anti-China demonstrations," specifically those organised by the World Uyghur Congress are monitored with full family details and addresses noted.[49] It is clear from the notes that a key method of surveillance is monitoring online images and using paid agents or pressurised diaspora members to take photographs of all Uyghur activities to record and punish them and their families based on their associations with other Uyghurs.[50]

Uyghurs abroad and their families are monitored for signs of "abnormal thought," with regular reports including "his father's thoughts are

[43] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p16,244.
[44] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p33,367.
[45] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.18,078
[46] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.12,851.
[47] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.39,830.
[48] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.26,686.
[49] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.28,474.
[50] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.19,896-19,897.

stable and there is no abnormality,"[51] and "she recently communicated abnormally with her family! It is necessary to take timely border control measures and investigate her family and domestic relations."[52]

The Police Notes also show how police monitor everyday behaviour not simply for signs of potential threat but to assess levels of active support for party policy and participation in propaganda so as to conceal transnational repression. These include positive notes on one father who made a pennant and expressed "gratitude" to security and detention centre personnel for transformation of his daughter while in detention for studying abroad.[53] Most relevant notes focus on Uyghurs who visit Turkey, however, there are also records of those who flee to Thailand[54] or are detained in Thai Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs).[55] There are also detailed notes on how the health, daily activities, and associations of the mother of a British citizen are being monitored but "no abnormalities have been found for the time being," whilst observing her daily contacts and exercise routines.[56]

Interviews in Turkey also demonstrated that local Xinjiang police display awareness of and leverage the international dimensions of Uyghur human rights issues in their harassment. In ongoing conversations with her local police station between 2018-2019,[57] one woman was offered information on her detained family in return for conducting surveillance of Uyghur diaspora activities but refused.

[51] Urumqi Police Notes (2017/2018), p.7,386.

[52] Urumqi Police Notes (2017/2018), p.7,553.

[53] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.12,851.

[54] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.19,897.

[55] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.19,896.

[56] Urumqi Police Notes (2018/2019) p.8,153.

[57] These recorded conversations between research participant and two separate Xinjiang police officers were obtained by the authors during fieldwork in Turkey in February, 2023.

The police office attempted to persuade her, "the UN would visit and report on this if genocide was real." After he said that he would visit her family and take photographs in their home, he told her to "go seek justice because there is no evidence." Another interviewee who sought specific information on the health and safety of detained family members was told by a police officer to give up because "lots of foreigners are reporting on this and calling but not for your family," and that "China is getting stronger. We know everything."

The party-state is acutely aware of how the international context sets limits on the goals of its Xinjiang policy but can also be utilised to threaten and intimidate Uyghurs both inside and outside the region. The goal of the CCP's transnational repression of Uyghurs is to prevent the maintenance of Uyghur culture and shape global public opinion on China. Its tactics are to monitor the everyday thought, activities, and associations of Uyghurs and families, and to threaten them if they pursue media or advocacy activities that would influence global opinion on China.

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2. The United Kingdom

The U.K.'s democratic political environment offers Uyghur diaspora members greater opportunities to exercise their rights to free speech, association, and assembly than in Turkey and Thailand. The U.K. government is highly aware of "transnational state threats," particularly in threat to life warnings.[58] U.K. universities produce world-leading research on TNR.[59] The U.K.'s Security Minister Tom Tugendhat, has addressed the "emerging threat" of transnational repression, highlighting issues of electoral interference, surveillance, and activities that "stifle free expression in diaspora communities."[60] There are, nevertheless, limitations to this awareness because the available expertise in PRC propaganda, human surveillance, and ethnic politics that is needed to deepen knowledge of the goals and tactics of China's TNR is limited.

High-profile Russian assassination attempts of political opponents, including Sergei Skripal, has led to generalisations bracketing all TNR as "authoritarian" in popular media without the specificity required for policymakers to understand its goals or to effectively act upon. The potential threat of interference in British political life by China's party-state is clear but the security implications of the Uyghur community's absence of awareness of their civil rights must be addressed, namely their vulnerability to pressure and abuse from the CCP. The U.K. case shows that democracies

[58] Schenkkan & Linzer (2021), p.23; Gorokhovskaia and Linzer (2022), p.2.

[59] See: Furstenberg, Saipira, Lemon, Edward, & Heathershaw, John (2021) 'Spatialising State Practices through Transnational Repression,' *European Journal of Security*, 6(3): 358-378.

[60] Tugendhat, Tom (2022) 'Defending Democracy in an era of State Threats,' Gov.uk, 13 December.

are highly aware of TNR but not always equipped to recognise its tactics, such as mobility controls and passport confiscation, [61] let alone the monitoring of Uyghurs' everyday speech and social activities.

Uyghur Community in the U.K.

The U.K.'s Uyghur population only numbers around 500-600. Very few asylum seekers can reach the country and most arrive with Skilled Work visas for employment or study in industry and education. The Uyghur diaspora is concentrated in London with some families scattered for employment or refugee settlement programmes in smaller cities and towns in northern England. The low population numbers mean that the community support which assists in settling into a new society is often absent and new arrivals can be isolated if living outside London. All interviewees noted that the lack of "community" hindered both their ability to settle into British society and their awareness of how to respond to transnational repression.

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The theme of absence of community was raised in every interview when discussing their lives and how policy could enhance the safety of Uyghurs. Community was a stated need to deal with homesickness and 'culture shock' but also related to security. One long-term London resident highlighted that absence of community is an "integration" issue because Uyghurs could provide support through English language learning and community activities, alongside advice about transnational repression to

[61] Schenkkan & Linzer (2021), p.23.

support the exercise of their rights and help protect national security.

When interviewees were asked if they knew who to contact or how to respond if they experienced threats or harassment from Chinese police or security officials, they did not know. Community is therefore needed to help Uyghurs adapt more quickly adapt British life, integrate over the longer-term, and protect themselves from transnational repression. Another interviewee, a new arrival, specifically stated that "we don't want handouts, we just want to be free," but that "even though we are in England, we know in our hearts we are not free." They explained that they did not worry about being deported but they feared their family in China would be harmed and experience harassment by the Chinese authorities while they lived in Britain. Another London-based interviewee explicitly stated that most Uyghurs do not know their civil rights and require information outreach to explain how they can be protected and when harassment should be reported to the authorities.

Transnational repression in the U.K.

Compared to Uyghurs interviewed in Turkey, relatively few people discussed their experience of direct threats saying they ignore this harassment, though the survey responses indicate around two thirds report experiencing some form of threats to themselves and their family via phone or messaging apps (chart 1). For example, one young male student said he had no contact from China while in the U.K. and a young female interviewee showed the pictures of her family that were sent via WhatsApp by Xinjiang Police but they gave up this harassment after several attempts when she did not respond. One elderly male said he "he had no issues in the U.K. though I cannot speak publicly," but both he and his family in China were severely harassed during and after

visits to Turkey in 2019 and the Middle East in 2020 onwards.

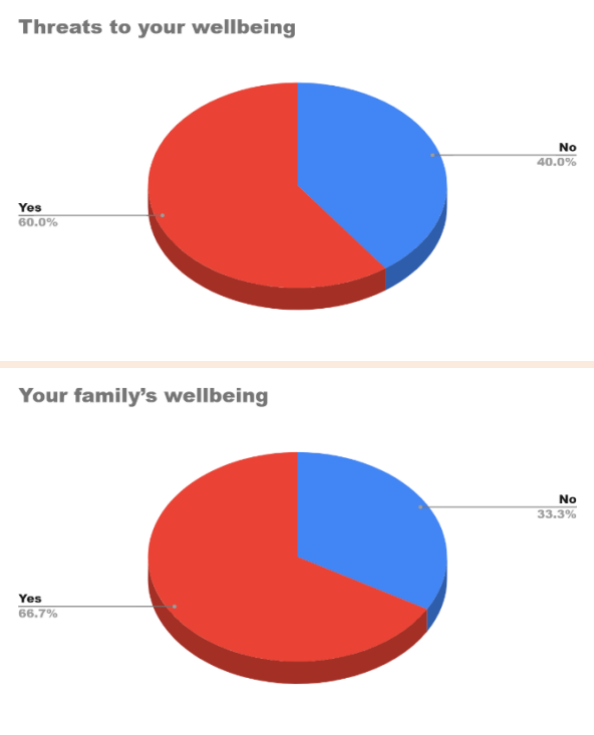


Chart 1: Around 2/3 of Uyghurs who responded to the survey have been directly threatened and experienced threats to their family while living in the UK.

Every single Uyghur interviewed and around 87% who responded to the survey had experienced family separation, ordinarily by being disconnected on social media and regular phone calls ending. One middle-aged male was asked to stop his advocacy activities in exchange for family contact, but the harassment ended when he explained to his own family calling from a Xinjiang police station that "this is not normal contact." The use of these family members as hostages to alter the behaviour and restrict the rights of Uyghurs abroad is near universal in the Uyghur diaspora and is designed to entice and imprison people deemed untrustworthy and to prevent the inter-generational transmission of Uyghur culture by breaking family contact.

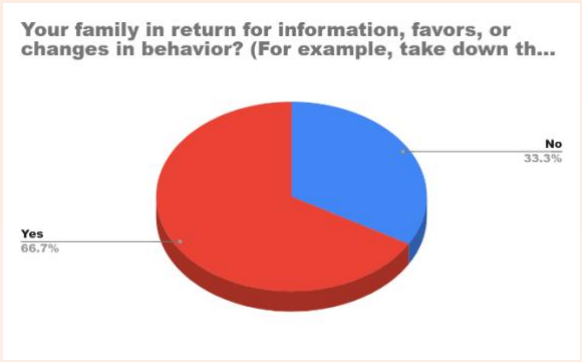


Chart 2: 2/3 of Uyghurs based in the U.K. report being offered family contact in return of changes in their rights activism or collecting information on other Uyghurs.

Each interviewee expressed trust in government and Britain's democratic institutions that, unlike in Turkey and Thailand, collaboration with China was not a concern. However, they also stressed that the government would not actively support them in their

exercise of rights in the U.K. or prevent harassment by Chinese authorities. This lack of faith was also specifically raised by several anonymous interviewees and numerous associates who refused to complete the survey for this research, one saying "this will make no difference to Uyghurs," and another, "the government won't do anything."

This absence of faith in the U.K. government to actively protect their interests is an obstacle to the exercise and protection of those rights but also to countering the security threat of human surveillance and interference with the U.K.'s internal affairs. Trust-building is a low-cost, high-benefit necessity to tackle the under-reporting of TNR, so that it can be more effectively documented, tracked, and prevented. The rights of the Uyghur diaspora should be protected and protecting those rights enhances the U.K.'s ability to sustain pressure from the PRC. Additionally, the Uyghur diaspora is a source of policy-relevant intelligence and knowledge of the everyday operations of Chinese politics that policymakers should utilise.

Surveillance of the Uyghur diaspora in the U.K.

On February 5th, 2023, the researchers observed a Uyghur-organised memorial rally to commemorate the 1997 Ghulja massacre [62] in front of the Chinese Embassy in London (figures 4 and 5). The event saw the well-known Uyghur community leader, Rahima Mahmut, recount her experiences of fleeing China in 1997 and how she has campaigned for her people's rights ever since. Younger advocates compared this to their contemporary experiences of family separation and

[62] Shamseden, Zubayra (2023) 'The Ghulja massacre of 1997 and the face of Uyghur genocide today,' *the Diplomat*, 5 February; Uyghur, Abdurehim Gheni (2023) 'After 26 years, Uyghurs remember the Ghulja massacre,' *Bitter Winter*, 3 February.

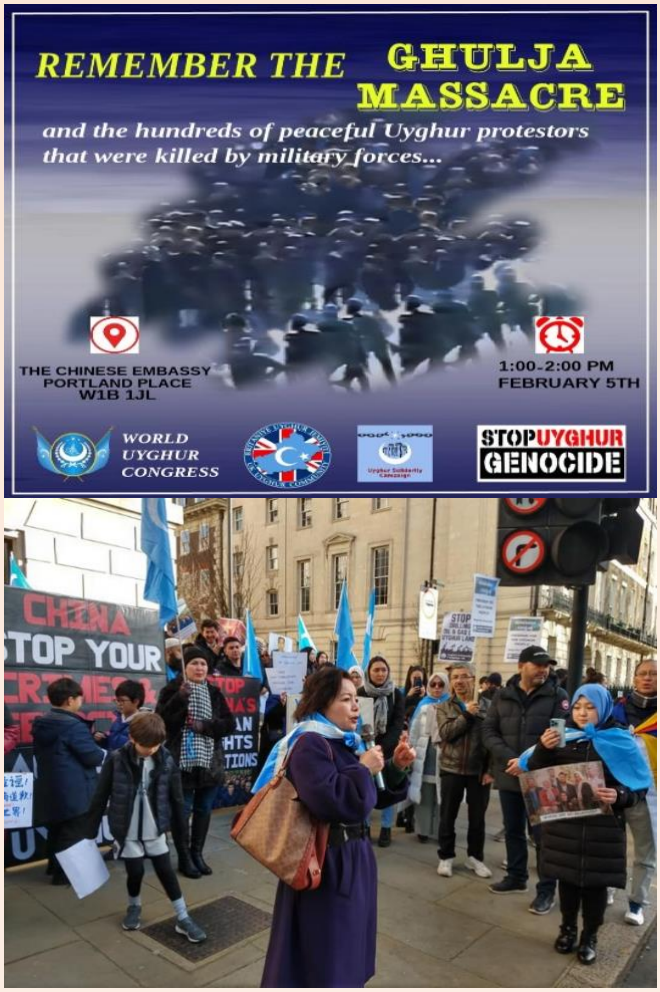


Figure 4 (top): Poster advertising for memorial gathering to commemorate the Ghulja massacre, 1997.

Figure 5 (bottom): Uyghur leader, Rahima Mahmut, tells her story of fleeing China after 1997 to the protestors at the event. Source: Uyghur Solidarity Campaign UK.

harassment by Chinese authorities. Most attendees were families with children holding signs, including "I want to see my grandparents" and "Freedom for Uyghurs."

During a speech by a young advocate on family separation, a British man in his 20s stopped on a bicycle very close to the group to take photographs of her and the attendees' faces while loudly singing the Chinese national anthem, the 'March of the Volunteers,' in toneless Mandarin. The police defused the situation by keeping him a distance from the event and approaching him with humour even when he became frustrated. This incident shows how Uyghurs are relatively free to exercise their civil rights in the U.K.'s democratic political environment but also demonstrates the difficulties in providing active support to protect those rights due to a lack of awareness on the methods and impact of transnational repression. Whether the 'counter-protestor' was paid to send photographs of Uyghurs' activities to

the Chinese authorities or not, their threatening behaviour was filmed by an unknown source at the protest, and it subsequently appeared in Chinese state-affiliated media online. This form of harassment actively contributes to an atmosphere of intimidation and paranoia, on the grounds of racial origin, which prevents many Uyghurs from associating with other Uyghurs, from exercising their rights to free speech by criticising Chinese policy, or from freely assembling to demand protection of those rights.

Encountering surveillance in the U.K. during the research was considerably less frequent than in Turkey but not uncommon. The orders from Chinese police and security institutions to Uyghur diaspora focused on demands to gather information on key community leaders and scholars rather than mass surveillance of all social activities. During interviews for this research, at least two former party-state employees, who choose to remain anonymous, displayed significant knowledge of Chinese institutions and policing. At least one interviewee was under serious pressure to report on leading Uyghur activists and to develop personal relationships with scholars who work with Uyghurs, via threats to his family and material benefits offered by the Xinjiang police and the Public Security Bureau (PSB) (See 'Case Study: Anonymous'). The individual requires immediate legal support to protect their rights in the U.K. and ongoing support in how to report and act upon TNR to aid the protection of national security.

Another anonymous interviewee, whose family members worked reasonably high up in the party-state's hierarchy were punished for visiting Turkey after retirement with several family members sent to unknown detention centres and all family contact severed. The interviewee explained that they had never discussed this pressure or any aspect of his experiences of TNR with anyone, particularly other Uyghurs who they feared could be spies. This isolation must be addressed with outreach

programmes to fill gaps in knowledge on TNR but more urgently to ensure these individuals can integrate into British life and are better prepared to sustain and reject the pressures of TNR. Support in the form of community and practical information on their rights would strengthen the ability of those individuals to reject this pressure and to support the U.K. government in documenting how TNR interferes in British public and political life.

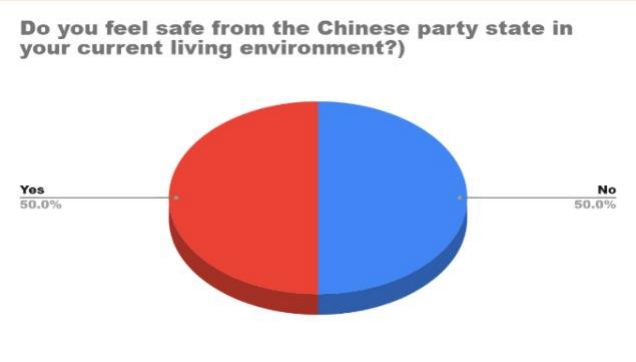
Urgent issues

- **Civil rights protection**. Solution: official outreach programmes.
- **Community building**. Solution: access to publicly funded spaces.
- **Surveillance**. Solution: a) support for isolated diaspora members, b) clear legal information on TNR.

Low-cost solutions proposed by Uyghur diaspora to challenges of community-building and rights-awareness included increased community outreach, with clear and tailored information for Uyghurs on civil rights in the U.K. and on how to protect themselves from TNR. For example, access to lawyers on arrival in the U.K. and information leaflets on their rights, including which government or police department to contact when facing TNR would enhance the protection of Uyghurs' rights and the U.K.'s national security. The Rights Practice, based in London, has produced an informative and comprehensive 'Handbook for the Uyghur Community in the U.K.,' which should be used to draft an official and straightforward one page leaflet on civil rights and responding to TNR in the U.K..

Access to lawyers on arrival in the U.K. and information leaflets on their rights, including which government or police department to contact when facing TNR would enhance the protection of Uyghurs' rights and the U.K.'s national security.

Another low-cost recommendation was access to community halls via local councils to hold regular community events that host information and support services. Increased access to community spaces would enhance Uyghurs' ability to protect their civil rights, integrate in the U.K., and share security-relevant information on transnational repression. Human rights and the U.K.'s national security interests converge in this instance because isolated individuals would be enabled to integrate into society and to share sensitive information on TNR with greater community support. The Uyghur Culture Centre in Washington DC is just one model that provides space and regular community events that could be emulated. Access to an existing space requires minimal government funding but can be a hub for activities that support Uyghur integration, the maintenance of their language and religion, and advice and practical support when facing TNR.



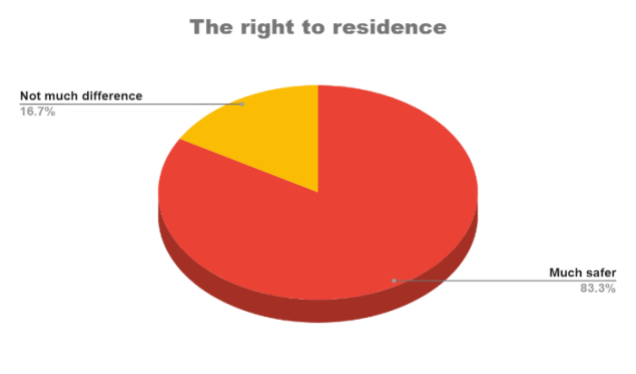


Chart 3: Only half of U.K.-based Uyghurs stated that they felt safe from the party-state while living in Britain. The most obvious source of safety for them is permanent residence with over 83% stating this would make them "much safer."

One London-based interviewee noted that because so few Uyghurs reach the U.K., "fast track asylum and visa applications would help very few people" and instead proposed the need for immigration quotas following the Canadian model to build community and enhance their safety.[63] A specific quota for Uyghur immigration, justified by the same convergence of human rights needs and national security interests as those for Ukrainians, would resolve issues of isolation and community building, enhance civil rights protection, significantly reduce the capacity of spies and those pressured to conduct surveillance, and enable greater information sharing between diaspora and government.

Increased access to community spaces would enhance Uyghurs' ability to protect their civil rights, integrate in the U.K., and share security-relevant information on transnational repression.

[63] Sameer Zuberi – Private Member's Motions (2023) 'M-62 Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims,' 1 February, *Parliament of Canada.*

Case Study: Erbaqyt Otarbay

Erbaqyt Otarbay, an ethnic Kazakh born in Altay, Xinjiang, was taken to an internment camp on July 27, 2017, and released on May 23, 2019. He arrived in the U.K. on September 2, 2021, to provide evidence at the Uyghur Tribunal on September 12 and has since been in the U.K. seeking asylum. When he was released from the camp, he and other detainees who had relatives in Kazakhstan were required to sign a statement promising not to reveal anything about the camp system. The police informed him that he had been released because his wife was in Kazakhstan, and the government considered him "re-educated."

Otarbay explained to us that he had to sign an affidavit promising not to reveal anything, otherwise, the Chinese government would not permit him to leave for Kazakhstan. However, shortly after arriving in Kazakhstan, the Altay police called him, asking him to return because they were upset that he had spoken to the media about his personal experiences. They reminded him of his signed affidavit and warned him not to forget that his family were still in Xinjiang.

Later, police in Kazakhstan also visited him and asked him why he had spoken to journalists. When he explained the importance of sharing his story, the Kazakh police reminded him of his signed affidavit. Despite feeling sick, he firmly told the police that he had only signed an affidavit with the Chinese government and not with the Kazakh authorities. However, the police responded that it does not matter whether it was China or Kazakhstan.

Police: *"we have to guarantee your safety. Kazakhstan and China have very good relations, so it is our duty to warn you."*

The harassment continued, and Otarbay felt he had nowhere else to go. In 2021, Otarbay agreed to testify at the Uyghur Tribunal in the U.K. However, his trip did not go smoothly, and he was stopped at the airport with two other witnesses. Consequently, he had to travel to Bishkek to leave. By the time he arrived in the U.K., he had received several phone calls from the police in Kazakhstan asking him to return. The calls did not stop for days. They even offered him a job and other support if he returned. The harassment peaked before Otarbay testified, but the calls stopped after his testimony. However, the other two witnesses, who were also receiving phone calls from police, eventually returned to Kazakhstan under pressure. Later, Otarbay heard that one of them was beaten in a dark street by an unseen stranger. The situation made him more determined not to go back to Kazakhstan.

Since being in the U.K., Otarbay has spoken to journalists and organizations about his experiences inside the camp. He feels safer in the U.K. than Kazakhstan because the police do not harass him due to China. However, he experienced considerable sadness because his wife divorced him in early 2020 as she felt unsafe and believed that a divorce would protect their children. Although he did not receive direct calls from the Xinjiang police about the Uyghur tribunal, his family deleted him from WeChat, a Chinese instant messaging and social media app, after receiving threats from the Altay police.

He described his situation: "Being threatened by two countries' police; there is no way to breathe."

When asked about his time living in the U.K., Otarbay expressed that he had applied for asylum but had not yet received notification of acceptation. The process is lengthy and living without certainty makes him feel fearful of the consequences of speaking out. However, he has

obtained a work permit, which is a relief and has improved his living conditions because he can work.

Case Study: Anonymous

Anonymous Uyghur man, 40 years old. He arrived in the U.K. in 2022 to seek asylum, and he is currently awaiting the outcome of his application. During the interview, he revealed that he could travel to Turkey and return to Xinjiang without issue between 2011 and 2015. However, in 2017, he began hearing about Uyghurs in Turkey who would disappear after their return to Xinjiang. He confirmed this after a friend was detained upon returning in 2017, prompting him to halt his planned trip back to Xinjiang. Since then, he has been unable to return. Staying in Turkey wasn't easy either, as he received harassment calls from Xinjiang police, which have continued since arriving in the U.K.

He provided several audio recordings of conversations with the Xinjiang Security Bureau that took place while he in the U.K. during 2022. The audio content indicated the Xinjiang police were active in both Xinjiang and Turkey. In the recordings, the police explicitly named four prominent Uyghur activists who were in the U.K. at that time and instructed him to establish contact with them and gain their trust. Two of these individuals are British citizens, while the other two hold European citizenship.

Police of Xinjiang Security Bureau*:* "*Was Rahima (Mahmut, British citizen) in front of Dolkun (Isa, European citizen) in the photo?*

Interviewee*:* "*Where?*"

Police*: "I saw Aziz Isa (British citizen) and Dolkun were in the picture, but not Rahima."*

Interviewee*: "Do you mean during the protest yesterday?"*

Police*: "Yes."*

The audio recordings further revealed that upon learning of the arrival of Dolkun Isa, the president of the World Uyghur Congress, in the U.K. in 2022, the Xinjiang police instructed him to

approach him by inviting him to dinner. He claimed he could not afford such treatment since Dolkun Isa would always have other people accompanying him. To facilitate this, the police informed him that they had arranged funds for him and that the funds would eventually reach his hands. To ensure that he would not miss the opportunity to make friends with the targets of surveillance and collect information, the police instructed him to borrow money from a specified Uyghur restaurant in the U.K.. The police made it clear that if the restaurant owner refused, they would contact the owner's relatives in Xinjiang. The use of Uyghur families in Xinjiang by the police to threaten Uyghurs in the U.K. to assist transnational repression erodes trust within the Uyghur community, a rare and needed commodity in a vulnerable community seeking to exercise their civil rights.

Police: "*I don't know if you'll get the money we prepared before then. So, you'd better borrow fifty to a hundred dollars from somebody. On the day he goes on the 25th, you go there and get to know him by treating him to dinner.*"

During the interview, the anonymous man revealed that the police had taught him manipulation techniques to gain the trust of Uyghurs in the diaspora. The audio recording revealed that the police explicitly directed him to approach a Uyghur individual and initiate the conversation by asking for advice on how to run a small business in Britain. Additionally, he was instructed to share his personal struggles and challenges as a newly arrived refugee to elicit sympathy from others and gain opportunities for communication and information exchange.

The recording also contained a request for him to monitor BBC news for reports on Uyghurs and Xinjiang prior to the Chinese People's Congress. If such news had been reported, he was instructed to identify the Uyghur

individual who had agreed to be interviewed. After the interviewee refused them because the internet in his dormitory was not working well, the police kept convincing him to go to a place with faster internet, leaving him little room for further refusal and living in constant stress.

He was instructed to use various strategies to gain the trust of the Uyghur community, including expressing support for their protests. However, He was strictly forbidden from crossing any "red lines" defined by the police, such as speaking to journalists or drawing international attention to the situation of Uyghurs in China. The police coached him on how to refuse to speak to journalists, such as telling others that talking to journalists would put his family in Xinjiang in danger.

Police*: "tell them that if you appear in journalists' reports, it will cause problems for your mother and child back home. Tell them you could protest by standing behind, shouting, or doing something else, but you cannot talk to journalists."*

Since 2017, the interviewee has not been able to contact his family directly. He has only been able to speak to his 80-year-old mother through an arrangement with the police, who have been threatening him and his family for years,

Interviewee: *"Can I see my mother? I want to know how she's doing."*
Police: *"Don't worry, we'll arrange it."*

These experiences of transnational repression show how Uyghurs often feel compelled to co-operate with the Chinese authorities, even in the relative safety of a democratic society. They left the interviewee with a deep sense of fear and distrust of others. Having constantly struggled with suicidal thoughts, he explained that he did not have the courage and confidence to share his ordeal and struggle with other Uyghurs, leading to

his complete isolation from the Uyghur community.

"If they can reach out and threaten me, they can do it to others. It won't take long for them to find out that I hate the people who sent me to hell."

3. Turkey

Turkey is widely considered a culturally familiar, safe haven for the Uyghur diaspora. If applicants can prove their identity with official documents, the Turkish government has the discretion to grant permanent residency permits through the Office for Foreigners with Turkic Origin and Descent.[64] Official estimates of the Uyghur population total around 30,000 but local diaspora organisations consider the population between 50-60,000, given the numbers of unregistered and temporary residents. There are small concentrations of Uyghurs spread across Turkey, including Ankara and Kayseri, though the majority reside in Istanbul's Sefakoy and Zeytinburnu districts, where most of the research interviews were conducted. Most Uyghurs run small businesses, particularly service providers (restaurants, shops, drivers, etc) or work in education or for larger trading companies.

Safe haven for Uyghurs?

Since China's mass detention system of Uyghurs was established in 2017, Turkey's status as safe haven for Uyghur refugees has declined, with growing experiences of detentions or renditions,[65] family separation,[66] and asylum application backlogs.[67] Uyghurs who arrive without official documents are not permitted to apply for refugee status and many are smuggled on routes from Southwest China and destroy their documents to avoid deportation to China. Those without documents are instead offered two-year long humanitarian visas on discretion of the

[64] Gorokhovskaia and Linzer (2022), p.6.

[65] Jardine (2021), p.48-49.

[66] Amnesty International (2021), p.6, 8-9, 12.

[67] Schenkkan & Linzer (2021), p.6.

Turkish government, for the duration of which they must remain in the city in which they are registered as a resident. Several interviewees' renewal applications were declined without explanation or safe passage to a third country given, while their lawyers provided letters that explained the reasons for their rejection were inaccessible to them.

The Turkish government's approach to TNR is inconsistent in its protection of human rights.[68] It is instead driven by protection of perceived national interests as a medium size power balancing against the U.S., while seeking to gain economic benefits from China's rise.[69] Turkey's foreign policy elites are increasingly anti-western and authoritarian, which coupled with tense relations with the U.S. and economic stimulus offered by Chinese investment, have led to joint statements between China and Turkey's foreign ministries that China's security interests in and related to Xinjiang are also Turkey's interests.[70] Issues related to Uyghur diaspora appear as 'sticking points' in this relationship, but a large Uyghur population and NGOs that advocate publicly are sources of intelligence and a bargaining chip in potential co-operation or conflict with the PRC. With clampdowns on social media coverage of the 2023 earthquakes and elections looming in June 2023, Turkey's uncertain political context essentially means that the Uyghur community is being welcomed to Turkey, but individual members become unsafe and at risk of deportation to China if they are not granted citizenship.

[68] Gorokhovskaia and Linzer (2022), p.3.

[69] Onis, Ziya (2021) 'Emerging partnership in a post-Western world? The political-economy of China-Turkey relations,' *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4): 507-529; Özşahin, Mustafa Cüneyt, Donelli, Frederico, & Gasco, Riccardo (2022) 'China-Turkey relations from the perspective of neoclassical realism,' *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 9(2): 218-239.

[70] CGTN (2017) 'Turkish FM: China's security is our security,' 3 August; Sahakyan, Mher D (2021) 'Balancing act: China and Turkey in a changing world order,' *Asia Global Online*, 17 May.

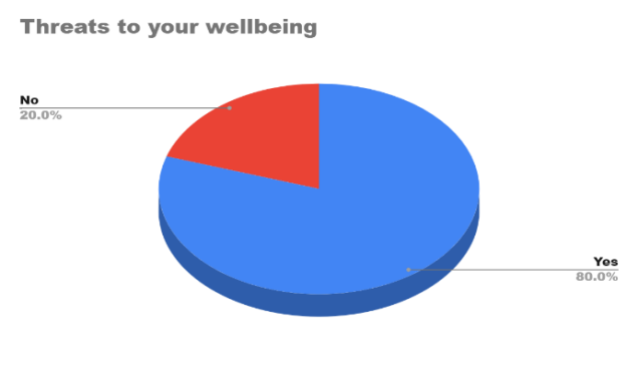
Transnational repression in Turkey

The close relationship between the Turkish security apparatus and migration offices leaves people awaiting resettlement vulnerable and opaque threat categories are often applied to prevent prominent Uyghurs from entering the country. [71] Interviewees with humanitarian visas described how they had to report monthly to their local immigration office without explanation. Several described how their permanent residence applications and humanitarian visa renewals were declined with no reasons given, particularly if they spoke to the media about their lives in China or transnational repression by party-state actors while in Turkey. Numerous Uyghurs interviewed face deportation to China on expiration of their temporary humanitarian residence.

The Turkish government's lack of permanent solutions to the problems associated with a large and growing temporary Uyghur population leaves individuals highly vulnerable to transnational repression, particularly when offered family contact or permission to return home in exchange for conducting surveillance of Uyghur communities. According to the survey results, 80% of Uyghur diaspora in Turkey have been threatened by local XUAR police, national security agents (国保; *guobao*), or officials, while nearly 60% of those surveyed have been offered rights to family contact or return home in return for ending advocacy activities or speaking publicly about China. Every interviewee who had spoken publicly to the media or attended protests at the Chinese Embassy in Ankara had experienced TNR.

[71] Gorokhovskaia and Linzer (2022), p.6.

Many of those interviewed who had not spoken publicly about China or their families did not experience direct threats while in Turkey but some were asked to conduct surveillance of other individuals or attend public events at the Chinese embassy for propaganda purposes.



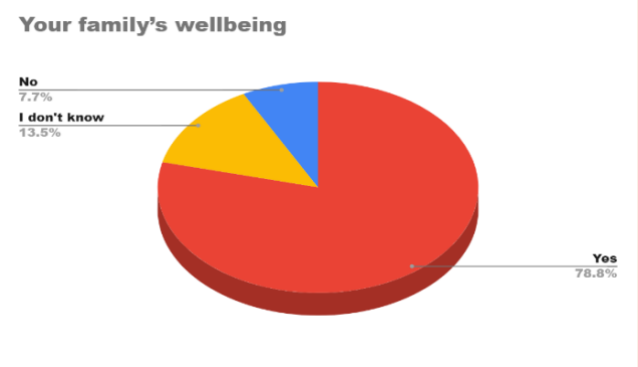


Chart 4: About 4 in 5 Uyghurs report to being directly threatened or having their families threatened by Chinese authorities while living in Turkey.

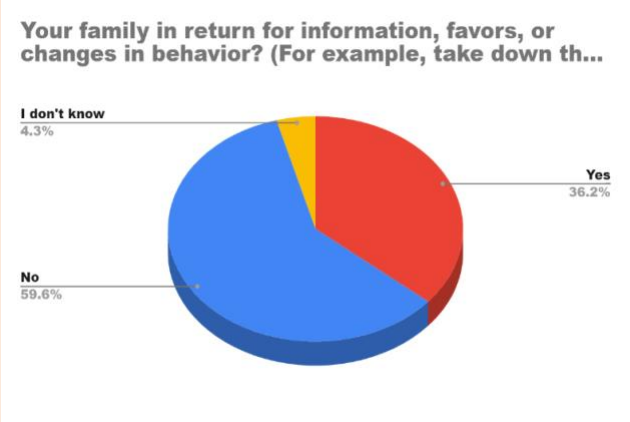


Chart 5: More than a third of Uyghurs report to being offered family contact in return for information on other Uyghurs or changes in their advocacy behaviour.

All interviewees had experienced unusual contact from Xinjiang police calling from unknown or local numbers and had been obliquely, if not directly, threatened with the most common reminder that "we just want to make sure you are on the right road," which would refer to avoiding speaking to the media, advocating for family contact, or associating with Uyghur organisations. Interviewees shared both their text and video message communications to show they were being harassed but were not buckling to pressure. When individuals refused to co-operate either by changing their behaviour, participating in public propaganda events at the

Chinese embassy, or providing information on other Uyghurs, conversations, then threats such as "you'll never see your family" and "you are risking being a traitor" were made.

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One business owner in Istanbul was directly threatened by the Xinjiang police via phone and WeChat after speaking publicly when his brothers and father-in-law disappeared in China.[72] He and his family were told they "must behave" which then escalated to contact from higher ranked police and national security agents (*guobao*) stressing they must stay in contact as "we want to know your thought," and "to make sure you are on the right road." They were told that "if you are on the right track, then you are welcome back" When both the husband and wife refused to help with their surveillance, contact was then ended, illustrating how China's TNR is shifting tactics away from threats to surveillance of those who speak out as it has calculated who will and will not co-operate.

Another business-owner who arrived in Turkey in 2016 with a legal passport and personal wealth was called by his hometown police two weeks later and is still called every two months by police from the National Security Bureau (安全局; *anquanju*) and the local Political Affairs Commission (政委; *Zhengwei*), asking him to return to China and reminding him about his disappeared children. He chooses to "stay out of trouble" and "never socialises with Uyghurs," a common

[72] These messages and the recorded conversations with police were shared with the authors.

survival tactic and distinct impact for isolated individuals facing TNR. The police have given up attempting to entice him home but expect him to conduct surveillance of his own community.

By contrast, one unemployed male in his early 60s said he has no opportunity to re-apply for Turkish citizenship after refusal because he had been imprisoned in China and spoke to the media about his experiences. He was advised not to appeal by his lawyer and he claimed that several diaspora friends had disappeared after their applications were denied. He has never been offered benefits by the party-state, presumably due to having been imprisoned, but like many targeted Uyghurs, he chose to sever contact with his family to protect them from harm. They had been repeatedly harassed when he was imprisoned for "advocating," and he has received no information on their safety since 2017. He was clearly designated a threat and was not asked to conduct surveillance or return home. Another male interviewee, who was persecuted for leaving the Party fled China by being smuggled, even said "I wish I had experienced transnational repression because then I could see pictures of my family."

Another male in his 60s with an expiring humanitarian visa described living in "constant fear of deportation." He had been detained repeatedly between 1992 and 2010, without reasons given and beaten by police in the local station since studying religion ("always beaten first and interrogated later"). All family contact ended in 2016 with no responses from calls or messages. In 2020, he discovered via TikTok that his family home outside Kashgar had been destroyed, his land confiscated (3,000 sq metres), and his wife, two brothers, and three nephews all died in detention after sending him money to survive in Turkey. He received multiple calls from police to entice him home in the build-up to his family's detention in 2016 but after being told "walk on the right track, otherwise you will be in trouble", all

contact ended. This is an example of how the party-state's TNR abroad is evolving with policy inside the region, moving from "rounding up all those who should be rounded up" to an appearance of normality as those who refuse to obey the party's threats are abandoned. However, the impact of TNR is family separation that prevents cultural transmission, social isolation that restricts individuals' ability to integrate in new societies, and fear to exercise their rights, particularly to free speech and association.

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One middle-aged couple paid human traffickers to get to Turkey in 2015, at which time their family members remained in contact but pressed them for photos of their children and GPS co-ordinates. These requests are common and when the couple refused, knowing this was emerging from police pressure, repeated daily calls from Xinjiang police followed with offers to speak to family in return to collect information on everyday activities and associations of ordinary Uyghurs. With all contact on social media severed by his family in 2017, the father participated in a short documentary film about Uyghurs who have left China that gained popularity on YouTube. The Xinjiang police subsequently threatened their parents in Xinjiang and the couple received direct threats that their family would be sent to camps: "you'll never see your family again," and "we have people in Turkey."

By late 2019, Uyghur speaking Chinese police offered family contact and sent multiple videos of their family members via WeChat asking them to come home, while also sharing credible information that the couple's

entire daily social and business activities were under surveillance.[73]

The couple are now isolated and under pressure because their application for Turkish citizenship was rejected because they had to destroy their Chinese documents to stay alive while being smuggled. This case also shows how transnational repression is not accelerating in a straightforward way but is evolving with policy in the region as people are tracked and recorded as trustworthy or untrustworthy. The high period of mass detention in the region is now giving way to more complex and insidious tactics to monitor and punish those who have escaped or refuse to bow to political pressure.

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[73] Many interviewees gave the authors access to these "proof-of-life" videos, which ordinarily consisted of individual family members describing life in the region as normal and asking them to come home because they miss them. In this instance, the elderly family members were visibly in distress whereas the children were less aware and smiling in the hope of seeing their parents again. Of all discussions, this was usually the most difficult for interviewees. Many interviewees chose to show us the videos without being asked but would often stop the interview at this stage as it was so emotional. They considered family separation and these "proof-of-life" videos as hostage-taking.

Surveillance of the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey

The Uyghur diaspora in Turkey has been pressured for some time to co-operate with Chinese authorities and collect information on Uyghurs, particularly by taking photographs of their daily activities and associations.[74] This pressure has intensified since 2017 and is a near-universal form of TNR which every Uyghur interviewee testified to experiencing, except for those whose family members had previously been imprisoned. Interviewees also noted the changing atmosphere in Turkey, particularly Istanbul, with high numbers of new Uyghur arrivals in 2023 with Chinese passports and freely returning home, as China's covid restrictions were lifted. Several interviewees described how this unusually free movement is only possible for those working with Chinese authorities and noted that the new arrivals presence itself was suspicious as "they are not working or doing business," "they just seem to be hanging around," and "they are often seen in all the popular restaurants," to conduct surveillance.

This atmosphere of distrust was palpable with many saying they will simply avoid all Uyghurs and chose to be interviewed in quiet rooms of trusted businesses. At least three Uyghur restaurant owners repeated the concerns about new arrivals and how they rejected pressure from Xinjiang police to monitor and photograph their customers and share all information with the authorities. Almost every interviewee who had not been previously imprisoned was asked to conduct surveillance in exchange for safe passage home or to speak with their family.

Interviewees provided material evidence of harassment by Xinjiang police and authorities in the form of

[74] UHRP (2019) p.17 and 21-22.

calls and message exchanges, including one who had agreed to take photographs of Uyghurs but which did not satisfy the police who then asked them to take closer up shots of faces for verification purposes. When they responded that this could result in them being detected, they were told this was not their concern and they would "face the consequences." Another Uyghur man who had experienced threats to family was found taking photographs of people, with police messages confirming he would be paid 500 Turkish Lira (around 178 RMB) per picture. He was discovered by local Uyghurs who confiscated his phone, notified the 45 people he had photographed, and posted his confession video to social media. We were provided with his photograph and the full phone conversations with Xinjiang Police clearly instructing him to take photographs and videos of Uyghurs' daily activities and associations. He was still living freely in Istanbul and Uyghurs believed his free movement was evidence of Chinese influence.

One newly emerging pattern in TNR on the ground is how the party-state has reduced its harassment of those who have refused to co-operate by conducting surveillance. For example, one early 30s male received daily calls from Xinjiang police to conduct surveillance, which then turned to threats to his family who were detained in China when he began advocacy work. The police allowed him to briefly speak with his family and explained this could be a regular exchange if he works for them. However, the authorities have not contacted him since 2021 after he stated twice that "if you release my family, then we can talk." Another young male activist described being repeatedly offered family contact in return for information on the social activities and associates of Uyghurs in Istanbul. The contact ended when he refused and continued to protest for

his family's release from a detention centre.

In phone call recordings obtained for this research, one middle-aged woman explained to the Xinjiang police, "I cannot report on others, only myself," when threatened to conduct surveillance by Xinjiang police using photos of her daily activities and associates. The harassment ended in 2019 with her refusal to co-operate. Similarly, the harassment experienced by one middle-aged male business owner ended when he assertively refused to photograph and collect information on his customers. Since 2017, transnational repression on the ground in Turkey has evolved from harassment into a routinised system of community surveillance as the party-state has ended attempting to persuade people to return home and tracked those who will work for them by conducting surveillance.

The small amounts of money involved in influencing Uyghurs in vulnerable living circumstances due to lack of

Since 2017, transnational repression on the ground in Turkey has evolved from harassment into a routinised system of community surveillance

permanent residence, poverty, and threats to family mean some become perpetrators as well as victims of transnational repression. This extremely cheap form of surveillance is commonly used inside China and creates permanent states of anxiety and paranoia in Uyghur communities. The impact of this under-reported form of TNR is significant changes in behaviour (e.g., reducing associations with Uyghurs and not speaking to the media or participating in protests) and restrictions on cultural maintenance as Uyghurs choose associations, friendships, and relationships with potential threats to life in mind. Many Uyghurs in the most vulnerable situations of potential statelessness opt to live in isolation for their safety. Most interviewees, even those who isolated themselves, used the term "under great pressure" to describe

daily life in Turkey while TNR is conducted freely on the ground.

Uyghur diaspora, particularly in Turkey, are often reluctant to criticise local authorities and solely blame the Chinese government for their experiences. [75] Nevertheless, those who had been pressured by Chinese authorities after speaking publicly on their family cases also claimed that this would mean they will never be given Turkish citizenship, based on their treatment by Turkish police and the pattern in the community of citizenship and visa renewal rejections. One elderly lady explained how her citizenship application was denied in 2021 and she was detained by Turkish police with no charges but was told she was "harming national security" for holding free, informal language classes for young Uyghur students. Another elderly male recently had his citizenship declined without reasons given, though he believed it was due to speaking to the media several years earlier. Both individuals asked the researchers what they can do when their humanitarian visas expire and how we can help them reach Canada to be included in the Uyghur immigration quota.

Most interviewees were very quick to assert that they had encountered no trouble from Turkish police with some providing evidence of having no criminal record both to reassure the researchers and in some instances to ask us to help them gain support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR currently has insufficient outreach in Turkey given the numbers of highly vulnerable people the researchers encountered in a relatively brief fieldwork period. The UNHCR has also ceded responsibility for refugee registration over to the Turkish immigration office, yet many interviewees were frightened to engage with Turkish authorities due to the belief that their associates had been deported or directly threatened to leave the country. The researchers

[75] UHRP (2020), p.3.

emailed the UNHCR's main enquiry line with details of specific urgent cases, which received no reply and the field van contact responsible for investigating cases sent an automatic response explaining our emails were being blocked. The UNHCR must open communication channels with researchers and experts who have vital information to share that could save lives.

One early 60s male businessman chose to speak to us anonymously because he experienced harassment "every time I speak out." He has been called by Chinese authorities every few months since his children and wealth were seized at an airport when attempting to flee China. No legal reasons were given for their detention and despite travelling on a legal passport, he was told "if you want your money, you have to come back." He does not know where his children are being held or if they are safe. After speaking publicly to gain information of their health, he claims that his shop in Istanbul was raided and closed down by Turkish police and he now has no means to support himself. He also explained that in 2018, Turkish police broke into his home and detained him for 35 days with no interrogation or reasons given for the arrest. His Turkish lawyers stressed to him that there was "no chance of compensation because this is led by China." These experiences were always supported with stories of associates who had disappeared or had visa renewals rejected in similar circumstances. These experiences are materially urgent because these isolated individuals face the most serious pressure of TNR and the risk of deportation and torture in China is both imminent and severe. Additionally, these experiences show how TNR is being used to create paranoia, secrecy, and isolation amongst Uyghurs which increase their vulnerability to TNR.

One middle-aged man even reported being followed and Turkish police cars stationed at his doorway as his humanitarian visa approached

expiration. All interviewees on humanitarian visas described how these can be revoked at any point and many say they are "living in constant fear of deportation" as their friends disappear. One described how "Uyghurs are a bargaining chip in negotiations between China and Turkey." Protestors at the Chinese embassy reported how they were urged and agreed to sign written agreements with Turkish police that commit them to end protests during visits by Chinese officials. The raid and closure of the Kutadgu Bilig Uyghur bookstore in Sefakoy, Istanbul by Turkish police on March 14th, 2023 was highlighted by interviewees as an example of collaboration with China. The raid targeted a shop that printed and sold Uyghur language books, which are banned in China but it remains unclear how they contravene Turkish law.

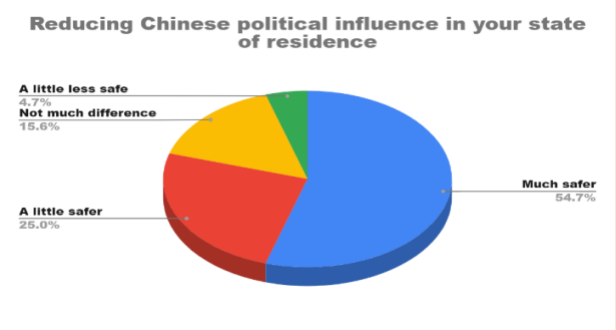
Urgent issues

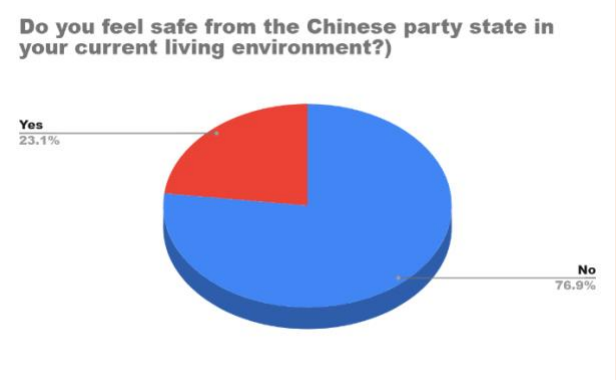
- **Expiring humanitarian visas.** Solution: 1. increased citizenship quotas. 2. safe passage to third countries.
- **Surveillance.** Solution: arrests of paid Chinese surveillance agents.
- **Community isolation.** Solution: outreach and support from the UNHCR.

The survey results (see chart 6) show how only around 23% of Uyghur diaspora in Turkey consider themselves safe and many see permanent residence a desirable outcome for their safety (49.2%). However, given the uncertainty around residency and migration issues in Turkey, the most effective way of protecting Uyghurs from the pressures of transnational repression, which would make them "much safer" is a non-Chinese passport (71.9%) and reduced Chinese political influence in

their host state (54.7%). When asked in interviews what policies could increase their safety, all interviewees with humanitarian visas listed citizenship as their number one need, yet several with citizenship wished to leave for Europe and Canada because "it is not safe here" or "I could still disappear." Although desirable, Turkish citizenship is widely seen as an imperfect form of protection from transnational repression.

Several families asked the researchers for advice and support about how to reach the UN because their humanitarian visas were expiring but they had no information on their rights or how to contact the relevant UN agencies when facing deportation or transnational repression. One successful business owner even explained he was going to give up his successful business and pay human traffickers and smugglers to take his family to Europe.





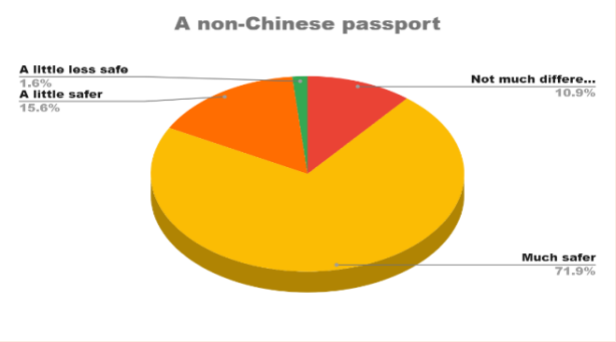


Chart 6: The vast majority of Uyghur diaspora in Turkey feel unsafe from the Chinese party-state and see non-Chinese passports and reduced Chinese political influence as the solution

The Turkish government could significantly reassure its Uyghur diaspora population of its safety by increasing citizenship quotas, guaranteeing safe passage to third countries for those whose permanent residence is declined, and arresting paid Chinese surveillance agents who operate illegally on Turkey's sovereign territory. It is imperative for the UNHCR to increase its outreach by tracking urgent cases and reassure the Uyghur community with information and support to protect their rights. Currently, the Uyghur diaspora are asking researchers to urgently contact the UN, an unsustainable solution to a large-scale problem, but emails to the OHCHR and UNHCR from the researchers were returned and listed as "blocked" for no reason.

Case Study: Najmudin Ablet

Najmudin Ablet arrived in Turkey in 2016 using a legitimate passport issued in his hometown of Aksu. However, since 2017, he has been unable to contact his family, including his wife, two sons, and three brothers, who were all detained and subsequently sentenced. Tragically, Ablet's elder brother passed away after spending seven months in prison, while his younger brother was released from an internment camp but died only two months later. Ablet's wife was detained and sentenced in 2016, five months after he left Xinjiang. Although she was released due to being paralysed, she was taken back to prison once her condition improved. After a home visit in Xinjiang, a police officer called Najmudin in Kayseri, Turkey sent Ablet a picture of his wife and grandchild (see figure 6), confirming that his two sons remained in prison.

Figure 6: The image of Ablet's family sent to him by a police officer.

Ablet's eldest son was detained without any given reason, while his younger son was sentenced to eight years in prison in his hometown after being caught trying to leave the country through a human smuggling ring. He was detained in Vietnam and later deported back to China, where he spent a year in prison in Kunming before being released. However, upon returning to Xinjiang, he was detained again and sentenced to eight years for the same crime.

In 2019, the police located Ablet through WeChat. They requested to speak with him, but Ablet immediately blocked them. However, a few days later, he received a message from a Turkish number, which he realized was from people in Aksu. Knowing there was no way to hide from them, he decided to confront them.

During the conversation, Ablet inquired about his sons, and the police offered him the opportunity to see his son through a camera, which he accepted. Although the police officer did not reveal his face during the meeting, Ablet was able to see his son, who reassured him that he was doing well and promised to behave, confess, and transform into a good citizen. Ablet showed a picture of his son wearing a prison uniform that was sent to him by the police officer (see figure 7). In the picture, a Chinese propaganda slogan on the wall behind his son read, "Your love is his endless motivation to transform." As Ablet shared the picture with us, his mouth twitched.

Figure 7: Najmudin's son speaking from a detention centre with "re-education" propaganda slogan: "Your love is his endless motivation to transform."

The police told Ablet that if he co-operated with them, they would release his sons and even provide him with money and a car if he worked for them. However, when Ablet asked where they worked and how they had such power, the police instructed him not to ask any questions. Ablet explained that most of his family had already been detained, and he knew there was no guarantee they would release them if

he worked for them. When asked what work for them means, Ablet said: "Taking pictures of Uyghurs in Kayseri and sending their information back to them."

Case Study: Yasin Uzturk

Yasin Uzturk is the owner of a barbershop in Istanbul who holds Turkish citizenship through naturalization. He stated that it is commonly understood in the local Uyghur community that the Xinjiang police conduct close surveillance over the Sefakoy district of Istanbul. In February 2023, Uzturk discovered one Uyghur man secretly recording him and photographing his customers. In response, Uzturk and his customers pressured the informant, who later surrendered his mobile phone and password. Uzturk then utilised WhatsApp to transfer all the correspondence between the informant and the police to his own device. The WhatsApp number used by the police was Turkish, but the police officer himself was in his hometown, a small county in Kashagar. Uzturk shared full access to the recordings with us.

In the recording shared by the Uzturk with this project, the police officer, who spoke with a Hotan accent, explicitly directed the informant to attend a Uyghur man's wedding ceremony and record the guests' identities as well as the bride's identity.

Police officer: *"Why didn't you film Abdulsemi when you went to his wedding? Why didn't you film who he was going to marry, who went to his house, and who was invited? Why didn't you film where they met and where they lived? Record the identity of the bride, the guests, and their place of residence."*

The informant: *"I could not film it. I'm surrounded by people."*

When the informant expressed that he could not conduct surveillance because of the presence of other individuals, the police ordered him to undertake another task, to visit Uzturk's barbershop, which included a clear threat of potential physical harm.

Furthermore, the police also requested that the informant send the coordinates of a Uyghur individual's residence. The informant in Istanbul faces constant intimidation and coercion from the law enforcement authorities in a small county in Xinjiang. The informant is immediately sent to the next mission if one is not completed.

Police officer: *"What about the barber? You better go there today and do what I ask. Otherwise, I will tear off your ears. And also film AbuduAliz, that scum, and send the coordinates of his house; send me everything."*
The informant*: I am going to the barber in an hour.*
Police*: No, do it now.*

During the interview, Uzturk provided insights regarding his spouse's experience of facing TNR from 2016 to 2018. The harassment started fifteen days after his wife and daughter joined Uzturk in Istanbul. The local police from Kashgar persistently contacted her via telephone, summoning the couple to return to China. The couple said they came to Turkey to make a living and will return when it is right. As retaliation, the police detained Uzturk's father-in-law. In response, the couple spoke out about their concerns regarding their incarcerated family member. This infuriated two Uyghur police officers, who had been harassing them for years. When asked how often the town police had called them, Uzturk recalled, "*In 2018, three to four phone calls every month.*" To search for their incarcerated family member, the couple ultimately decided to confront the police.

Uzturk's wife*: "It is unlawful you detained my father; he is 77 years old and does not need an education. I will tell the reporter."*
First police officer*: "I was incredibly busy, but I made a concerted effort to carve out time to visit your house, take photographs of your mother and brothers, and send them to you. You still believed in false news and rumours despite my efforts, leading you to confront me."*

When Uyghurs are visited in their homes in Xinjiang by police officers, they face severe risks of detention and sentencing. It could mark them on the police files that they are untrustful and have potential risk to national security risks. Sending pictures of family members by police is a threat code commonly understood by the Uyghur diaspora: "we have your family."

First police officer: *"These foreign journalists spread false information with the intention of misleading the world. If Xinjiang is portraying it the way you, other Uyghurs, and the Western media are, why haven't others come forward to make legal claims? The United Nations is a hugely influential and powerful organization, so why haven't they sent an investigative team to Xinjiang? They have the authority to do so, and if the news were true, they would have sent an investigative team long ago. The UN cannot come here because they do not have evidence, and there is no reason for them to come here. You better think clearly before accusing China."*

After the first police officer realised the couple had recorded him, he reported the incident to his superior. The superior then contacted the couple. Unlike his subordinate, who used a subtle threatening tone, the superior clearly stated the consequences that the couple would face.

Second police officer*: "You recorded the conversation between my subordinate and yourself, which contained state secrets. If you give the recording to the journalists, it will be put in your file that you have leaked state secrets. You may spark a heated discussion, but people will soon forget, and you will have to bear the consequences. We are very aware of your real thoughts. Therefore, we need to know your whereabouts to ensure your safety. We will track you down and find you using all means."*

Clearly informing Uyghurs of the consequences of speaking out and cutting off their own avenues for seeking justice and help has the direct

effect of leaving the victims completely isolated and unprotected.

Before we left the barbershop, While Uzturk was cutting the hair of a little Uyghur boy, he asked us, "*I am a Turkish citizen, but they sent a spy to my shop to film my face and my customers. What can I do, and where can I go?*"

4. Thailand

Thailand is a traditional safe haven for people fleeing war but there is limited understanding or political will to address transnational repression. For example, the Thai government's 2019-22 National Security plan discussed the nature of "shifting transnational threats" in detail, describing Thailand as "the key target for the transnational crimes of drug, human and arms trafficking, money laundering, piracy, economic crime, passport fraud trade as well as cybercrime," but does not mention transnational repression.[76]

Thailand's uncertain political context in dealing with domestic instability and its limited capacity to withstand pressure or reject economic inducements from a neighbouring rising China, mean that few Uyghurs permanently reside in Thailand or apply for permanent residence. There is little vetting of foreign government wanted lists or requests and traditionally, the absence of legal procedure mean discretion decides the fate of displaced peoples. For example, the Thai government has supported TNR transnational repression campaigns by Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam with bloggers and activists returned to their states of origin for punishment. [77] High profile Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong was deported from Thailand to the PRC in 2016. [78] "Thailand currently has no national screening mechanism in its asylum procedures, therefore refugees have no means to regularise their status or seek protection from the UNHCR. Due to asylum backlogs, leaving refugees vulnerable to TNR,

[76] Office of the National Security Council & the Office of the Prime Minister (2019) 'The national security policy and plan (2019-2022)', p.6-7.

[77] Schenkkan, Nate & Linzer, Isabel (2021), p.45.

[78] Phillips, Tom & Malkin, Bonnie (2016) 'Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong detained in Thailand at China's request – reports,' *the Guardian*, 4 October.

detention, and deportation.[79] Uyghurs interviewed described the country as a transit stop on human trafficking routes out of China or somewhere to avoid altogether due to the disappearance of Uyghurs in Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs).

Safe haven for refugees?

Thailand retains a reputation for relative safety for those fleeing conflict and persecution. However, the Thai government's 2019 Security Plan called for "developing and promoting collaborative network with immigrants' countries of origin," which means turning to the governments from which people are fleeing.[80] The Thai government has prevented the registration of specific ethnic groups as refugees[81] and the drafting history of the 2019 immigrant-screening regulations in the Security Plan describes refugees and asylum seekers as potential threats, and Uyghurs, Rohingya, and North Koreans having "special security issues" that impact "international relationships."[82]

Freedom House notes deportations to countries in which people are jailed on request of their governments, including China, Cambodia, Laos,

[79] Amnesty International (2017) 'Thailand hard line on refuges leaves thousands vulnerable and at risk,' 28 September; Schenkkan, Nate & Linzer, Isabel (2021), p.6.

[80] Office of the National Security Council & the Office of the Prime Minister (2019) 'The national security policy and plan (2019-2022)', p.21.

[81] Amnesty International (2017) 'Thailand: Between a rock and a hard place,' 28 September. Index Number: ASA 39/7031/2017.

[82] Han, Bochen (2022) 'Case Study: Thailand,' p.5-7; Waritsara, Rungthong & Stover, Caroline (2020) 'Thailand's national screening mechanism: Key issues,' *Opinio Juris*, 28 January.

Myanmar, and Vietnam, leaving forcibly displaced people at risk of detention, disappearance, and deportation.[83] The Thai government finds itself in a difficult situation between its commitments to international law on refugees and non-refoulement and pressure from neighbouring states. However, it is clearly constructing immigration and security policy that goes beyond enabling co-operation with authoritarian states but racially targets specific groups deemed undesirable by their authoritarian states of origin.

Even under vocal pressure from civil society and human rights NGOs, the Thai government deported 109 Uyghur men to China in 2015, violating the non-refoulement principle of international law.[84] New screening mechanisms are due to be introduced in April 2023 to protect exiles but this will not include Uyghurs. The Thai visa application system publicised in January 2023 requires Uyghurs specifically to declare their ethnicity not just their nationality (See figure 8). This racial targeting and the threat of deportation to China means that few Uyghurs will attempt to reside in Thailand. It also shows how China's successful TNR efforts in Thailand are focused on preventing the establishment of community through detention and deportation.

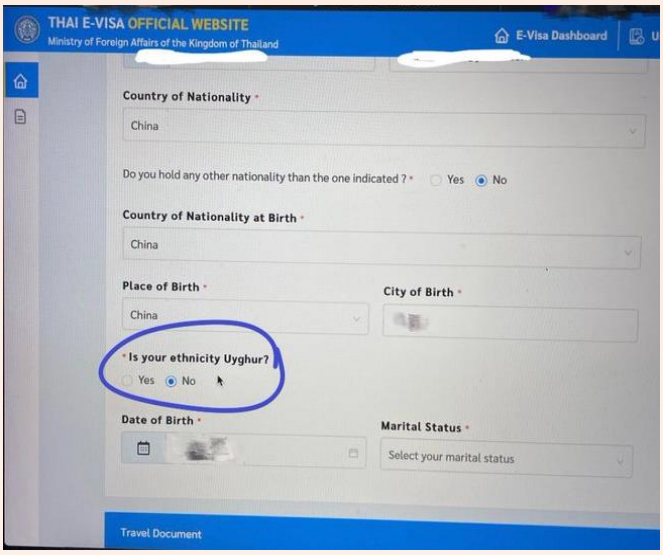


Figure 8: The official website to apply for a visa to visit Thailand requires that those born in China must declare if their ethnicity is Uyghur, with no other ethnicities listed.

[83] Han, Bochen (2022), p.2 & 5.

[84] Han, Bochen (2022), p.2; Schenkkan, Nate & Linzer, Isabel (2021), p.17; Reuters (2015) 'Thai PM defends decision to send Uyghurs back to China,' 9 July; Wong, Edward & Amatatham, Poypiti (2015) 'Ignoring protests, Thailand deports about 100 Uyghurs back to China,' *New York Times*, July 9.

The treatment of Uyghurs in Thailand, particularly the use of detention centres and deportations, is an urgent matter for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Uyghur asylum seekers and refugees are in immediate danger of and deportation and torture due to being targeted and more harshly treated on the grounds of their racial origins.

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Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs)[85]

Little information is publicly available on the Uyghurs being held in Thailand's IDCs. The deportation of 109 Uyghur men to China in 2015 followed the 2014 arrest of approximately 350 Uyghurs hidden by human traffickers in Thailand, 200 of whom were located in isolated camps in Songkhla province. [86] Approximately 170 of the refugees, almost all women and children, were sent to Turkey after claiming Turkic ancestry but the remaining 49 men were placed in IDCs and have never been released.[87]

The Thai government acknowledges the Uyghurs held in IDCs were found in human trafficking camps in southern Thailand and "the group is still now under the custody and care of Thailand" but that it is yet to make a decision "to send this group of people anywhere."[88] The Thai Prime Minister Pran Chan-ocha was clear in 2019 that the deportation of 109 Uyghurs in 2015 was politically inevitable and defended the decision with rhetoric: "do you want us to keep them for ages until they have children for three generations?" The office of the UNHCR described the deportations as "a flagrant violation of international law," [89] but has not commented since or on the ongoing treatment and legal status of the remaining detainees.

[85] Access restrictions and the risks to safety of participants in Thailand restricted field visits to Thailand. Fieldwork interviews were conducted with fifteen Uyghur participants across Turkey who had fled Thailand or had been smuggled through the country. Additionally, interviews to obtain information on the IDCs were conducted with organisations who have been working to gain access.

[86] Financial Times (2014) 'China presses Thailand to return Uighur refugees,' 3 April.

[87] Jardine, Bradley (2021), p.39.

[88] Royal Thai Embassy, Ankara, Turkey (2022) 'Royal Thai Embassy press release: group of people claiming to be Uyghur/Turks in Thailand,' 29 November.

[89] The Scotsman (2019) 'UN hits out at Thailand over Uighur refugees,' 28 February.

Very few Uyghur detainees have been able to register with the UNHCR, the UN agency responsible for documenting their cases and protecting their rights. Since 2015, the Thai authorities have not conducted any refugee status or risk assessment interviews, leaving the detainees stateless and without a national body responsible to guarantee their rights.

Since at least 2016, The UHRP has appealed for information on the health and for the release of Uyghur refugees detained in the IDCs but the Thai government has not formally responded.[90] Up to 49 Uyghur men have been held incommunicado in the IDCs for nearly a decade. The status of Uyghurs held in Thai detention centres is now an urgent humanitarian situation given the risks of deportation to China and the deteriorating health of detainees confined in small spaces with limited nutrition or medical access. The lawyers and NGOs working on these cases interviewed all described how they have no access to the IDCs and channels of communication via mobile phones were not permitted.

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[90] UHRP (2016) 'China: Reveal condition and whereabouts of Uyghur refuges forcibly deported from Thailand to China one year ago,' 7 July; (2019) 'World Refugee Day 2019: Thailand should free Uyghur refugees,' 19 June.

Figure 9: Inside Thailand's Immigration Detention Centres.

The UNHCR needs access to the IDCs and it must publicly report on the health and legal status of the detainees, in order to document these cases and to provide urgent humanitarian care. The conditions depicted in the IDCs by the images obtained do not demonstrate visible signs of torture but do reveal extremely cramped conditions with little space for sanitation or infectious disease control (see figure 9-10). The skinny build of detainees also suggests long-term, severe under-nourishment. The UNHCR has a duty to respond to these images and request access to the IDCs to provide legal support and assess the detainees' needs for medical care and nutrition. Informants on the ground described how several people die in IDCs each year but gaining regular information on the group of Uyghurs is near impossible. They explained how in February 2023 one

detainee was very sick and had been informed by guards that they were dying of a terminal disease but without being given a medical certificate or further information. An IDC detainee, Aziz Abdullah died of pneumonia on February 11th, 2023 in the Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre after almost nine years of detention.[91] The WUC has called for immediate investigations and remaining detainees to be released.[92]

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[91] Head, Jonathan (2023) 'Aziz Abdullah: Uyghur asylum seeker death heaps pressure on Thailand', *BBC News*, 20 February.

[92] World Uyghur Congress (2023) 'Press Release – Investigate the death of Uyghur refugee in Thai immigration detention,' 17 February.

Figure 10: Cramped conditions in a Thai immigration detention centre.

The health of IDC detainees is an urgent humanitarian matter that requires medical support and legal access is needed to support their needs towards safe relocation to third countries. One former detainee interviewed was detained as a minor and held for nearly a decade. He lost all contact with his family after discovering his father back home was being regularly visited by the PSB and village government office, and bribed by Xinjiang police threatening arrest if they did not pay. When his hand became septic from an injury in the IDC, he was given a basic bandage: "Despite my injury, I was still forced to weave net fishing lines. During the weaving my (injured) foot was chained."

The former IDC detainee went on to describe how two Uyghurs died in detention during their time being held and related this to the lack of medical care and poor nutrition with most detainees suffering from stomach problems: "The UNHCR has never seen us. I don't know if they don't

want to see us or if they can't see us. After a group of Uyghurs were deported in 2015, the UN came once and sent some food. Other international organisations would distribute goods and food at the IDC but the IDC would distribute very little to Uyghurs." Another interviewee, the wife of an IDC detainee, who was smuggled through Thailand confirmed these details and that there was no possibility of contact with her husband: "No organisation or country is helping us. I understand countries do not want to intervene but why is the UN not helping us? Who can help my children to see their father?"

Transnational repression in Thailand

For Uyghurs escaping persecution in China, Thailand is primarily a transit stop on human trafficking routes. Interviewees who had been smuggled on these routes would explain they experienced minimal or no TNR because their phones were confiscated and they were hidden by traffickers in isolated jungle camps and buildings designated by bribed officials. A significant proportion of people interviewed in Turkey had arrived via human trafficking routes from Southwest China (Guangzhou and Yunnan) through Southeast Asia, including Thailand. Those who survive make lifesaving decisions to destroy the Chinese documents required to apply for Turkish citizenship to avoid deportation to China. The journey includes hiking through jungle while at the mercy of armed human traffickers and remaining concealed from border guards on well-established and well-known trafficking routes through Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Those interviewed who had been smuggled on these routes were escaping prison, detention, or harassment by the authorities in China and did not have planned destinations. One interviewee described how the group he travelled with while being smuggled to "get out of China" were detained by police in multiple states but freed because they had no documents, and the police were satisfied they were being smuggled. Several interviewees were granted safe travel to Turkey from Malaysia and Indonesia through Turkish consulates, which arranged transport and humanitarian visas. Another two male interviewees who were smuggled to Turkey via Thailand before the deportations in 2015 both described how they experienced no TNR while in Thailand because their phones were confiscated by traffickers who carried

machetes. Both were hidden in jungle camps and then on a bribed official's property. One noted that they travelled with the group detained in 2015, estimating around 500 Uyghurs were smuggled on the journey. They were also joined by Rohingya fleeing persecution in Myanmar who could not eat because they were so malnourished. The Uyghurs in the group would travel miles each day in the jungle to collect water that had to be filtered using banana leaves to keep them all alive.

Transnational repression in the IDCs is impossible to quantify due to access issues but interviewees did provide data on their experiences that demonstrates illegal harassment by Chinese authorities and prejudicial treatment on grounds of racial origin. It must also be noted that the family separation experienced by detainees and their family members is a form of TNR, designed to prevent the maintenance of Uyghur culture and communication between Uyghurs inside and outside PRC territory. One former detainee interviewed described how the IDC immigration staff would laugh and mock them when they requested to be released and free to travel to Turkey: "You want to leave? Do you want to go back to China?" Detainees accuse the Thai authorities of carrying out TNR for China on racial grounds that must be investigated by the UNHCR and CERD: "We don't have the same rights as other people. People of other nationalities can meet with their families or NGOs from other countries but we can't meet with Uyghurs from other countries. They can make phone calls but we can't."

Detainees accuse the Thai authorities of carrying out TNR for China on racial grounds that must be investigated by the UNHCR and CERD.

Based on the first-hand experiences of detainees, Uyghurs are being illegally detained in Thailand and are treated more harshly than other ethnic groups. They are disconnected from the outside world in accordance with the

demands of the party-state. One former detainee explained how police in the IDC "did not directly harm us, they would incite the cell bullies to beat us." Another explained that when they would ask IDC police why they incite "others to bully us," they would explain, "because you are not good people, that is why China treats you like terrorists." They described how beatings became severe and how "the police would only call a halt when we were beaten down and close to being killed." These claims were repeated by former detainees and must be investigated by the UNHCR and the CERD.

Urgent Issues

- **Health status of IDC detainees.** Solution: Urgent humanitarian and legal access for the UNHCR and NGOs seeking to provide assistance.
- **Detention of refugees.** Solution: secure passage to safe third countries for Uyghurs detained in the IDCs and full access for lawyers who wish to represent the detainees.
- **Human Trafficking.** Solution: immigration quotas.

Every interviewee who had travelled through or had been detained in Thailand described rights to citizenship and permanent residence as the number one factor that would enhance their safety and protect them from TNR. This was also the key recommendation by U.K. and Turkey-based Uyghurs but was the sole recommendation in this case. However, several also stressed that citizenship in Turkey can easily be revoked and that both Turkey and Thailand's relationship with China is too close, so they would not feel safe until they have citizenship in a country

that is "not reliant on and afraid of China."

Enhancing the ability of the Uyghur diaspora to exercise their rights and to protect democracies from interference by the PRC requires material support for medium sized powers to counter pressure by China.

Turkey and Thailand's close relations with China are related to multiple factors, all of which must be addressed by democracies seeking to influence those states: medium levels of economic development and investment opportunities from China, distrust of U.S. intentions in the Asia-Pacific and when raising human rights issues, and greater mutual understanding between their elites as authoritarian states. Enhancing the ability of the Uyghur diaspora to exercise their rights and to protect democracies from interference by the PRC requires material support for medium sized powers to counter pressure by China. For example, the core mission goal of the U.S. Department of State in Thailand is to secure the U.S. as Thailand's "Preferred Defense and Security Partner." [93] Improving security relations with Thailand will require supporting the Thai government to release Uyghurs detained without reason in IDCs and to sustain pressure from China.

[93] The Department of State (2022) 'Integrated country strategy Thailand,' 16 May.

Case Study: Anonymous

In 2014, a pregnant Uyghur woman in her mid-twenties left China with her husband and sons via a human smuggling ring. Unfortunately, they were captured by the Thai authorities in a jungle after the trafficker abandoned them there. Her heart sank when the Thai authorities found her and more than three hundred other Uyghurs. She recalls, "*my feet were too heavy to move as if the weight of my whole body was on my legs.*"

A few weeks later, she and her youngest son were being kept in a women's shelter in Thailand while her husband and eldest son, a two-year-old boy, were detained in an Immigration Detention Centre (IDC). For over a year, she only met her eldest son once.

In 2015, the Turkish government welcomed approximately 170 refugees, including her and her children. However, what was meant to be a joyous day turned out to be heart-breaking. When she arrived at the airport, she only saw her eldest son and her husband was not with them. The agreed quota of 170 Uyghurs that were to be relocated to Turkey was almost only for females and children. Her husband was left behind in an IDC. In addition, she had not seen her son for nearly a year, and when they were reunited, he did not recognize her and refused to go with her. She recalls, "*my heart shattered into pieces when my son didn't recognize me and screamed for his father. Despite telling him repeatedly that I was his mother, he refused to believe me.*"

When asked if she had ever encountered harassment or threats from the party-state on the trafficking route, she replied: "*We were completely isolated from the outside world. Life in the shelter, on the other hand, was hard. If we asked for some basic human rights, the shelter would punish us by withholding food all day, including children.*"

After arriving in Turkey, she had hoped to reunite with her husband. However, her hopes were crushed when she learned that her husband and over a hundred Uyghurs had been deported back to China less than a week after her arrival. Upon hearing the news, she fainted but later discovered that her husband was still detained in a Thai IDC. Sadly, to this day, her husband remains in the IDC, and it has been over nine years.

For over nine years, her husband and more than fifty Uyghur men have still not been registered with UNHCR. Unregistered, she lived in constant fear that her husband would end up sharing the fate of those 109 Uyghurs who were deported back to China without a trace. Today, no one knows anything about their fate. In addition, the recent death of a Uyghur man in IDC after more than nine years of detention added to her concerns.

"*A man recently died in the IDC, and I cannot imagine how hopeless my husband and others must feel. I understand that other countries may not want to intervene because China is strong, but why is the UN not helping us?*"

Case Study: Anonymous

The anonymous Uyghur man, originally from Kashgar, was forced to flee China through a human trafficking network due to the deteriorating rights situation in his hometown. "*Everything had restrictions. We cannot even decide what to plant on our own farm. Village cadres decide for us. And the police would drop in without any reason.*" He left in January 2014. Unfortunately, his journey was halted on March 12, 2014, when he was apprehended in a jungle in Songkhla, Thailand, along with approximately 350 other Uyghurs.

At a very young age, he was detained in various detention facilities in Thailand for nearly a decade. He attempted to escape twice but was caught and sentenced to over two years. After his escape, he finally arrived in Turkey. Years of torture, including being shackled at the ankles for 27 months in prison have left him easily frightened. "*Other ethnic prisoners only had a shackle for five months; other Uyghurs and I had for 27 months, the whole sentences*". Poor conditions in prison and the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) have left him malnourished.

"*There is very little food at the IDC, and many people have stomach problems. The food is also very difficult to eat and smells bad. All these years, Uyghur in the diaspora have donated money for us to have some extra tinned food. We were sick, and there was no doctor to see us. Unfortunately, no medical help was available, and two Uyghurs died during my time there, one was three years old*".

When asked if he had access to the UN, he explained that unlike other ethnic groups, Uyghurs were not able to register with the UN refugee agency. He said: "*When we were in the IDC, we received little help or visits from the UN. We were sent to different IDCs and were not allowed to register with the UN refugee system. Other international organizations would distribute goods and food to the refugees in the IDC, but very little would reach us. We are*

in the same room, but others have more than us."

He never enjoyed the same rights as other ethnic groups in the IDC, such as access to telephones or other friendly visitors: "*People of other nationalities can meet with their families, make phone calls or meet with NGOs from their countries, but we were not allowed to do that. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) never met us. I don't know if they don't want to see us or if they were not allowed to see us. In 2015, after more than a hundred Uyghurs were repatriated, the UN came once and sent some food.*"

When asked whether he faced transnational repression, he said representatives from the Chinese consulate in Thailand would visit them, claiming to be researchers conducting interviews. The Thai government prohibited visitors from other countries but allowed Chinese officials to visit Uyghur detainees. The Chinese visitors would ask them questions like, "*Do you miss your family? Your parents are suffering because of you.*" When the group of smuggled Uyghurs were caught in Thailand, they claimed they were Turkish, and their destination was Turkey. But the Chinese government disagrees and has demanded that the Thai authorities extradite them. The Chinese visitors pressured Uyghur detainees to admit they were Chinese and willing to return to China: "*The Chinese officer said to us all of this will end if you admit you are from China. None of us cooperated. We all know what would wait for us if we admitted we were from China.*"

He also faced TNR from the Thai authorities as well: "*We pleaded with the immigration office to release us, insisting on our innocence and desire to go to Turkey. However, the immigration staff mocked us, laughing and saying, 'You want to leave? Would you like to go back to China?'*"

In late 2014, he had to bribe an immigration officer to be permitted to call his family. His father told him that police, the village government, and the Public Security Bureau had searched the family home and asked about his whereabouts: "*the police fined my parents*

because I left the country without China's permission". After paying the fine, the police repeatedly visited his parents and extorted more money from them, claiming that he had been detained in mainland China and needed money to resolve the situation, threatening them with arrest and imprisonment if they did not pay up. As a result, his family borrowed money from various sources and paid them several times. This phone call was the last time he communicated with his family: "*I wonder if my parents are still alive, or do they know I am still alive?*"

Conclusions

The report has found that the scale of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is universal, and its impact severely restricts the exercise of their rights to free speech, associations, and assembly, and even the capacity to maintain their culture. The PRC's practices of transnational repression go beyond civil rights implications because they racially target all Uyghurs and their family members as potential threats. Transnational repression is a crucial component of the party-state's attempt to prevent the intergenerational transmission of Uyghur culture through enforced family separation, disconnection from their homeland, mobility restrictions, and surveillance and paranoia abroad.

The party-state's transnational repression has significantly expanded in Xi Jinping's "new era," but its tactics have gradually changed since 2017, with increased use of Uyghur informants to gather information on the diaspora while backing off from harassing those who resist pressure. The party-state's TNR tactics are evolving to avoid international attention by harassing isolated individuals, placing key community figures under surveillance, quietly intimidating Uyghurs from speaking publicly, and even enlisting them to create positive images of China for domestic and global audiences. The party-state has ceased its attempts to co-opt or employ those who persist in advocating publicly on behalf of their families or their people's rights. However, the pressure on individuals facing increased human surveillance and the related trauma of family separation, mean the impact of TNR is intensifying and has created fear, paranoia, and self-isolation in the community.

The scale of transnational repression in the Uyghur diaspora is universal, and its impact severely restricts the exercise of their rights to free speech, associations, and assembly, and even the capacity to maintain their culture.

The U.K.'s democratic political environment gives Uyghurs relatively strong opportunities to exercise their civil rights. However, many Uyghurs interviewed note that the low population numbers mean that community support to assist with integration and information on their rights when facing transnational repression was largely absent.

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In Turkey, there are growing dangers of deportations of Uyghurs with humanitarian visas, surveillance by Uyghur informants, and restrictions on civil rights, particularly for those granted temporary visas. There are large Uyghur communities in Istanbul but very few Uyghurs feel safe due to threats from the Chinese authorities and those interviewed see Canada, Europe, and other democracies as destinations that could offer them safety.

Transnational repression is less visible in Thailand because it is primarily used as a transit stop when escaping persecution through human trafficking routes from Kunming and Guangxi in southwest China. Most Uyghurs are either hidden from authorities by human traffickers or are held incommunicado in Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs). However, alarming reports of abuse and threats by IDC staff mean that the situation for Uyghurs in Thailand is an urgent humanitarian matter that requires immediate medical and legal access.

The PRC presents its approach to international relations as guided by principles of state sovereignty and non-interference but its governance practices consider all citizens, former citizens, and their families, regardless of location, under its legal and moral jurisdiction. The party-state's transnational repression, therefore, undermines both human rights and the organising principle of sovereignty in international relations. In the CCP's thought, the transnational repression of the civil rights of citizens and former citizens abroad is an unproblematic protection of China's national security and image. However, the party-state's definition of security in this context is so broad, invasive, and focused on Uyghur identity practices, that transnational repression cannot be considered a legitimate attempt to protect China's national interests. TNR targets everyday behaviour, thought, and identity in the diaspora, even monitoring the daily exercise routines of family members in the PRC.

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The threat of the Chinese party-state's model of transnational repression to rights to free speech, associations, and assembly are clear breeches of international law in the UNCCPR and the CERD. The PRC has undermined the UNCCPR by participating without fulfilling its legal "interim obligation" to move towards ratification and protecting those rights in practice. The CERD has expressed how it is "alarmed" by Xinjiang policy, referring the matter to the Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect. The CERD called for the PRC to "cease all intimidation and reprisals against Uyghur and other ethnic Muslim, communities, *the diaspora* and those

who speak out in their defence, both domestically and abroad." [94] Most governments are highly aware that the party-state's transnational repression targets Uyghurs but undermines human rights and national security in all states. Governments now face the task of preserving sovereignty and their commitments to civil rights in their own territories.

[94] United Nations Media Centre (2022) 'China: CERD calls for probe into Xinjiang right violations,' 24 November.

Recommendations

These recommendations are drawn from the needs specified by Uyghurs interviewed. To establish their needs and how these can be met, the researchers directly asked all participants, "what would make you safer?" and "what government policies would make you safer?". The recommendations below are drawn from those answers and included because they are low-cost and achievable with more idealistic answers excluded (e.g., "independence").

For National Governments

1. **Immigration Quotas** based on the Canada model would enhance national security and human rights by ensuring safe passage, protection for Uyghurs at risk of persecution, and enhanced ability to sustain the pressures of transnational repression. Uyghur diaspora members describe this as the most important issue related to their personal safety and consider democracies that can withstand China's political influence as their only safe location.

2. **Civil rights outreach** from governments with clear and widely disseminated rights information for the Uyghur diaspora would enhance their ability to exercise their civil rights and resist the pressures of transnational repression.

This programme should also include clearer and fuller guidance for immigration and security officials on the transnational repression tactics conducted by individual countries based on up to date, expert research, as recommended by Freedom House and the Uyghur Human Rights Project.

3. **Security hotline**: a transnational repression phone-line integrated into existing security platforms with minimal costs would significantly increase information collection and more effectively prevent interference in states' internal affairs.

4. **Magnitsky sanctions**: sanction individual police officers, security personnel, and cadres who perpetrate transnational repression (e.g., from tourism, financially investments, or sending family to universities in the target states). Sanctioning individuals would serve as a concrete deterrent to low-level officials and would communicate a clear, low-cost signal that transnational repression transgresses national security. Researchers and many Uyghur diaspora members have information and records of individuals conducting transnational repression that should be utilised.

For UN Agencies

1. **UNHCR:** The UNHCR must increase its outreach amongst and support for Uyghurs in Turkey on humanitarian visas and investigate their claims of deportations and harassment. It should arrange safe passage to 3rd countries for those whose visas are not renewed and support applicants to obtain permanent residence wherever possible.

2. **OHCHR**: The OHCHR requires urgent access to the Uyghurs held in Thailand's Immigration Detention Centres and must publicly report its findings. The detainees require urgent medical access and support from lawyers to arrange safe passage to third countries, which should be immediately arranged by the OHCHR and UNHCR.

3. **Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect**: the CERD has referred issues of racial discrimination by the party-state towards Uyghurs to the Special Advisor, including issues of transnational repression of the diaspora and researchers. The Special Advisor must publicly report on how these issues will be practically addressed, specifically how the UN, UNHCR, and OHCHR will tackle the racial targeting of Uyghurs abroad and the de facto apartheid system for Uyghurs inside the PRC.

4. Appointment of a Special Rapporteur for transnational repression. The U.N. is obliged to outline and explain its actions to counter potential crimes against humanity in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region following the publication of Michelle Bachelet's report on Xinjiang policy. This response should include the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on TNR by the UNHRC as recommended by the UHRP. The PRC should be required to officially respond to the evidence in the UN general assembly, which should allow Uyghur victims of the mass detention system to explain their experiences and the impact on their lives directly (e.g., Gulbahar Haiitiwajji, Abduweli Ayup, Qelbinur Siddik, and Omar Bekali). Additionally, the U.N. must consult leading experts on the subject, whose work is essential to understanding these issues but was not utilised in Michelle Bachelet's report: e,g., on racial targeting (David Tobin), forced labour (Nyrola Elimä), the long-term nature of genocide (Sean Roberts), linguistic erasure (Jo Smith Finley), land appropriation (Guldana Salimjan), sterilisation of women (Adrian Zenz), family monitoring (Timothy Grose), religious repression (Rian Thum) and electronic surveillance (Darren Byler).