

# MAINSTREAM MEDIA SURROUNDING THE UIGHURS IN A POST 9/11 HISTORICAL CONTEXT: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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# ABSTRACT:

After the Urumqi unrest the Chinese government grew paranoid about dissent and cracked down harshly on Uighur culture. In 2016, the appointment of Chen Quango as Xinjiang Party Secretary led to the institution of “counter-terrorism” measures, including the introduction of internment camps and the use of high-tech surveillance technology in Xinjiang. The framing of many of the victims of genocide and ethnic cleansing as perpetrators of terror may have prompted the U.S. and other nations alike, to let these acts of persecution go unchecked in the past. Did the Chinese media use the language and framework of terrorism, as used in post 9/11 U.S. media, to implicate and persecute the Uighurs? To find out, a content analysis of 36 sources (18 from the U.S. and 18 from China) were thematically analyzed to compare and contrast the U.S. media’s narrative post 9/11 with the Chinese media’s narrative surrounding the Uighur people prior to 2020. The data in this paper shows how the rhetoric in China surrounding the Uighur people is and has been, a precursor - setting the scene for the ethnic cleansing of the Uighurs, and is heavily informed by post 9/11 rhetoric.

When walking through the bustling streets of Zeytinburnu, Turkey, one may mistake it as a regular city, with regular shops, regular restaurants, and regular people with everyday worries. But upon taking another glance, an air of fear and tragedy grows more and more apparent. Signs like the one posted in a popular Zeytinburnu restaurant, saying “Chinese Do Not Enter,” frame the walls of the city (Muller 2021). This is Zeytinburnu, Turkey, where the majority of people are Uighur exiles from China, many of whom narrowly escaped detainment and torture in one of many Chinese “re-education” camps. Many left behind family and almost all the Uighurs in Zeytinburnu know someone who is, or has been, detained by the Chinese government. These are people who have attempted to piece together a new life in Turkey, away from the horrors of Xinjiang, China.

A 2019 interview of Uighur exiles in Turkey sheds light on some of these horrors. One woman explains that prior to being detained she was put through a physical examination, “They recorded my face, even the shape of my nose. Then they did a urine test. If they found you were pregnant they would terminate it right away.” (VICE News 2019). She continues to discuss her time in the camp, saying, “My feet were shackled for one year, three months, and ten days.” (VICE News 2019). Another former detainee describes his life in China, saying “They assigned people to live in my sister's house. In an official Chinese report, they assigned 1.2 million Han Chinese to live in Uighur and Kazakhs’ homes. Some of the women who couldn’t take the humiliation committed suicide.” (VICE News 2019). When the reporter asks about the crimes they were detained for, one woman explains, “Because I studied the Quran and learned Arabic, they said I’d tried to corrupt others’ ideology and divide the country.” (VICE News 2019). Another ex-detainee says, “I opened a Uighur language school, a kindergarten. So they took me.” (VICE News 2019). One man explains that he was “[forced] to confess to ... serious crimes like

organizing terrorists and sheltering terrorists.” (VICE News 2019). When asked about any shared experiences the group had of being taken by the government, one man responds, “They arrested people at night. They want people to disappear and be untrackable.”(VICE News 2019). He continues to explain his own experience being detained, saying, “before every meal we had to sing three songs in order to get permission to eat... because I refused to sing, I was tortured five different ways. They tied my arms and legs on a thing called the ‘Tiger chair...’ because I didn’t speak their language, I didn’t eat pork, and I didn’t follow their orders, I was in [solitary] for one month. (VICE News 2019).” Why has the suffering and persecution of these individuals been allowed to occur? Could it be because they were framed as terrorists by the Chinese government?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Uighur Historical Background*

In the 19th century the Turkic people to the East of China lost their political power and authority in the land and China and Russia saw this as an opportunity to assume power and control over the region. Subsequently, the region was split into two - West & East Turkestan (Kasim 2022). West Turkestan was occupied by Russian forces whereas East Turkestan was occupied by China, the latter today called Xinjiang. Xinjiang translates to “New Frontier” or “New Territory” in Chinese, a name given to the region by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Çaksu 2020:176). Though sources outline that the Uighurs have been living in East Turkestan, or Xinjiang, since as early as 206 B.C, the Uighurs aren’t the only group to have originated and resided in the region (Kurlantzick 2003; Çaksu 2020:176). Rather, people of several ethnic groups have lived in the region for centuries including the Uighurs, the Kazakhs, the Kyrges, and the Tatars. The current people of the region favor the term East Turkestan over Xinjiang, which

signifies the political power of the CCP who coined the term Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR) after bringing East Turkestan under Chinese rule (Çaksu 2020). The East Turkestan region is an autonomous region in China almost three times the size of France, accounting for one sixth of China's landmass (Dillon 2020:92; Kasim 2022:62). As laid out by Michael Dillon (2020), the Uighurs are not ethnically or culturally Chinese but Turkic and their language mirrors Uzbek of neighboring Uzbekistan as well as Turkish. Dillon (2020) explains that the Uighurs, a minority in China, were previously the majority population in Xinjiang. Out of the 11 million Uighurs in Xinjiang, just less than half are historically and culturally Muslim, obvious through their choice of dress and building style, and they live alongside some smaller ethnic groups in the region such as the Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and the Chinese speaking Hui (Dillon 2020).

The Chinese problem with the Uighurs began as early as the 1950's as Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China (PRC) on behalf of the Communist party post civil-war (Dillon 2020:92). Soon enough, resistance sprouted, specifically in Southern Xinjiang. In 1955, the XUAR was formed as a concession to the non-Han population who resided there, but things took a turn in 1991 following the collapse of Soviet power (Dillon 2020:93). The collapse meant independence for Turkic people who then formed independent Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, yet, no similar independence was gained for the Uighurs (Dillon 2020). Frustration from lack of Uighur sovereignty led to a surge of militant clandestine groups in Xinjiang, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan (Dillon 2020). And in 1995, demonstrations in Yining, an area central to the Second East Turkestan Republic of the 1940's led to the issuance of *Document No.7*, which positioned Xinjiang as the greatest threat to the Chinese government, subsequently, a *Strike Hard* campaign was launched to squash dissent and opposition to the Chinese government (Dillon 2020:93). In adherence to this campaign, a mirror uprising in

Yining in 1997 was violently suppressed by the Chinese government; *Strike Hard* was here to stay and anyone suspected of advocating for an independent Uighur state, suspected of having separatist sympathies, or involved in “illegal religious activities,” such as wearing certain types of clothing or growing beards, among other acts, was fair game for the Chinese government and could be detained and held without trial (Dillon 2020:93). In this way, after losing sovereignty, the Uighur people have been under the oppressive foot of the CCP, who work to strip the Uighur population of their political rights granted to them by the Chinese constitution. To add to this, the Chinese government is simultaneously working to strip the Uighur population of their basic human rights of autonomy in their personal lives to freely practice their faith, which is completely suppressed in lieu of forced assimilation and conformity to Chinese communist ideals.

### *Ethnic Cleansing in Xinjiang*

The article “Among the Uighurs,” discusses how as Beijing has grown more paranoid about dissent against the Chinese government, they have cracked down harshly on Uighur culture (Kurlantzick 2003). Kurlantzick (2003) discusses the government pressure on the Uighur community to assimilate by incentivising Han Chinese migration into Xinjiang. Some of the forms this “crackdown” takes include instructing prominent universities to stop instruction in Uighur, keeping tight government control on mosques and religious texts, burning religious books, forcing imams to attend “political education sessions,” and closing religious schools, making it nearly impossible for imams to educate younger Uighurs on their faith (Kurlantzick 2003). The crackdown was exacerbated with the 2016 appointment of Chen Quango as Xinjiang Party Secretary as “he rapidly introduced draconian measures of repression” into Xinjiang. These measures were coined, “counter-terrorism” and included the introduction of internment camps

and the use of high-tech surveillance technology (Dillon 2020:93). Soon afterward, in 2018, reports of China building a widespread network of compounds in Xinjiang arose (Dillon 2020:90). These compounds were used to detain over one million Uighurs and other Turkic Muslim populations without due process, criminal charges, trials, or sentences (Lynch 2022). Though the world has been well aware of these camps since 2017 through media reports, academic studies, and witness testimony, the Chinese government only began acknowledging their existence in 2019, and even then, only by the name “vocational education and training centers” (Lynch 2022:12). The government claimed that these “centers” were used to “train Uighurs and redeploy them into productive work” (Dillon 2020:90).

Kasim (2022) explains that according to *Human Rights Watch’s* 2019 World Report, Chinese authorities had dramatically stepped up repression and systematic abuses against 13 million Turkic Muslims, including those of the Uighur and Kazakh ethnic group in the Northwestern region of Xinjiang. This “repression and systematic [abuse]” includes mass detention in internment camps which are known to hold up to 50 individuals in a cell as small as 250 square feet (Lynch 2022:12). The horrors don’t end there, as detainees are forced to relieve themselves publicly in buckets, forbidden to talk to each other, and encouraged to report those who fail to speak Mandarin, who practice their religion, or who fail to sufficiently “criticize” themselves. Torture is rampant in the camps in the form of beatings, sleep deprivation, being forced to “perform” for food by guards, as well as accounts of rape, sexual violence, and forced sterilization (Lynch 2022:13). Forced labor is commonplace and because there are no legal proceedings, detainees are held indefinitely, not knowing whether they will be released in days, months, years, or ever (Lynch 2022).

The repression continues outside the camps as well. The Chinese government uses surveillance technologies such as collection of biometric data, facial recognition, and cell phone tracking programs that keep constant tabs on the Uighur population. Algorithms known as the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJUP) parse out all the collected data to look for any sign of “untrustworthy” behavior, which can include rather commonplace occurrences like following certain social media accounts or receiving phone calls from abroad (Lynch 2022).

A common rationale for the detainment of Uighur women is “excess births,” which the government labels a form of extremism (Lynch 2022). In 2017 and 2018, sterilization procedures soared in Xinjiang while simultaneously dropping in the rest of China. Removal of surgically implanted IUD’s require state approval and if not complied with, this measure would be reason enough to detain Uighur women (Lynch 2022). These measures have been effective in decreasing the birth rate in the Uighur population, as birth rates dropped 48.7 percent in Xinjiang from 2017 to 2019, while dropping over 70 percent in regions like Hotan, which has a primarily Uighur population (Lynch 2022:13). The opposite can be said for areas of Xinjiang which have a primarily Han-Chinese population wherein birth rates actually increased or stayed the same during the same time period.

### *Genocide*

The 20th century has been labeled the “century of genocide” (Lee & Ducci 2020). In it alone, over 250 million lives have been claimed by the institution. When thinking of genocide, many commonly think of the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Bosnian Genocide, but Asian genocides may not come to mind. This is possible due to the fact that the international community has not interveded in Asian genocides in the same way, even prior to China emerging as a more assertive actor on the international stage (Lee & Ducci 2020). This lack of intervention



occurred in four of the major genocides that occurred in Asia in the second-half of twentieth century (excluding Rohingya) including “Indonesia in 1965-66, East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971, Cambodia in 1975-79 and East Timor in 1975-99.” (Lee & Ducci 2020:1576).

Since the post-Cold War era the U.S. has kept this attitude of non-interference as it failed to take any coercive action in the humanitarian crises in Sri Lanka in 2009 and in Myanmar since 2017 (Lee & Ducci 2020:1578). Humanitarian intervention is defined by Lee & Ducci (2020:1579) as “the deployment of military force by a state, or group of states, or an international organization across borders for the purpose of protecting foreign civilians from egregious violations of human rights.” They explain that after the 2005 World Summit, the scope of “humanitarian intervention” was broadened to include “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity” (Lee & Ducci 2020:1579). Humanitarian intervention, therefore, is meant to be applied in cases of extreme, ongoing, human rights violations when a state is failing in its basic responsibility to protect its population (Lee & Ducci 2020).

As stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all humans are entitled to human rights protections - why then, one may wonder, do human rights violations and genocide in Asia go unchecked? (Lee & Ducci 2020). In practice, actions taken in the name of human rights are contingent on whether or not ruling powers deem a population as worth the trouble of protecting. In the case of many of the past human rights crises of Asia, the framing of many of the victims of genocide as perpetrators of terror or “radicals” may prompt the U.S., and other nations, to let acts of genocide or ethnic cleansing go unchecked (Lee & Ducci 2020:1581). We can look to the Sri Lankan case to better grasp this. The Sri Lankan government backed the use of its “legitimate force” against the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by framing them as terrorists, and framing the measures taken by the government as

counter-terrorism (Lee & Ducci 2020). This framing by the government worked to position them as defenders against terror, mirroring the role of the U.S. in the War on Terror of the time. This tactic won the approval of then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the U.S. Senate committee on Foreign Relations who “praised Sri Lanka for its efforts in ‘defeating terrorism’,” a common aim between the U.S., China, and India - countries who also aided the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE (Lee & Ducci 2020:1582). This framing not only garners a shared support from global actors, but it also works to reduce the likelihood of humanitarian intervention, as it positions any who choose to intervene as actors who are aiding the enemy.

Similarly, Myanmar framed the Rohingya population as “terrorists” after the 2017 attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). This framing was supported by a large portion of the Buddhist population of the region, who make up the majority there, as well as China, a situation which quickly spiraled into the Rohingya Genocide as we know it today (Lee & Ducci 2020). A similar thing is occurring in present day Xinjiang. *Genocide Watch*’s approach to predicting “risk of mass [atrocities]” is by assessing each situation using Stanton’s (1996) model of the *Ten Stages of Genocide*, which are as follows: “classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination, and denial.” (Mayersen 2021:7). Despite clear cut signs of the first eight stages being carried out in Xinjiang, the world remains motionless. Could living in a post War on Terror context be desensitizing us to such human atrocity and causing us to turn a blind eye to genocide? What of Lee and Ducci’s (2020) understanding of the lack of international intervention in Asian genocides being a consequence of the framing of those being persecuted as “terrorists?” Are there clues in Post 9/11 mainstream media rhetoric and Chinese rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs that show this occurrence? What are the similarities and differences, if

they exist, between the justifications for the War on Terror and the current day persecution of the Uighur people by the Chinese government?

## METHODS

To compare and contrast the U.S. media's narrative post 9/11 with the Chinese media's narrative surrounding the Uighur people prior to 2020, a content analysis was conducted. In order to have a manageable amount of sources the *New York Times* "Week in Review" was analyzed between 09/11/01-09/11/02. All sources that included the word "terror" in either the title or the first paragraph were included. These 22 sources were then transferred to a medium in which a thematic analysis could be conducted. Sources that included "terror" in the first sentence or paragraph, but were wholly unrelated to the topic of 9/11 terrorism, were removed. Inductive coding was used in order to minimize bias and create a set of codes that stemmed from the text itself. The articles were then open-coded for preliminary themes. In a second read through, excerpts that fell into the themes were labeled accordingly, and any themes that came up more than once in the text were added. This process consisted of a read through of each sentence of all 18 articles in light of the codes, the addition of any necessary codes, and the labeling of sections of the articles that would fall into these themes. A flat coding frame was used throughout, which assigned the same level of specificity and importance to each code.

Once the U.S. sourced articles were fully coded, articles about the Uighur people from a comparable mainstream Chinese news outlet in English called *China Daily USA* were found. *China Daily USA*, established in 1981, is owned by the publicity department of the Chinese Communist Party and is the widest print circulation of any English language newspaper in China. Without a restriction to any timeline in particular, articles with the word "terror" in the title or first paragraph on the *China Daily USA* site were included. This wider time frame made it

less likely that any important information would be missed, and since media coverage surrounding Uighurs in a post 9/11 context was needed in order to look for similarities and differences, articles written any time after 9/11/01 were sufficient. Because Chinese news coverage covering the Uighurs wasn't as plentiful as coverage of terrorism post 9/11, which received an immense amount of coverage, a wider time frame was necessary to obtain a similar number of articles to be analyzed side by side. A total of 18 articles were collected, the same number of articles as from the U.S. sources, and added to a medium where they could be thematically analyzed. A limitation encountered during this process was that the length of the Chinese sources were typically half as long as the U.S. sources. There was no real way to alleviate this problem since there weren't enough sources to duplicate the amount of text necessary, and even if there were, it wouldn't be possible to make sure the sources were the same length.

Regarding the Chinese articles, the process of open-coding that was applied to the U.S. sources was repeated, and any necessary codes were added to the list. With this updated code list, all 18 articles were thoroughly re-coded. The U.S. articles were then also re-coded with any new codes that appeared in the Chinese sources in order to keep the coding consistent throughout the text. Once all 36 articles were fully and thoroughly coded, the codes were compiled onto two separate sheets, one for the U.S. sources and one for the Chinese sources. From there, the codes were cleaned, and any unnecessary information such as codes without enough data, or repetitive excerpts which were unrelated to the theme were removed. After this process, the data stemming from the coding process were collected by counting the number of articles using a certain code, and the number of times they used the codes, as well as the frequency of use for one code in

particular. These data were then converted into percentages and organized into a table that highlighted the most important patterns.

## FINDINGS

### *Implicating Islam*

The data point which showed the closest similarity between the U.S. and Chinese sources was the code *Implicating Islam*, used to code excerpts that mentioned the word “Islam,” related words, or words which imply a connection to Islam in its subject matter. Of the U.S. articles analyzed, 61.1 percent included this code and, of the Chinese articles analyzed, 50 percent included this code. This included sentences like this one found in a U.S. article saying, “the war also requires an appreciation of the complexity of Islamic militancies and the governments that sponsor them,” as well as sentences in U.S. sources which implied that Islam played a role in the terrorism being discussed. This included sentences such as “...if the perpetrator is identified, a military response [must be taken],’ argued Jessica Stern, a lecturer at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government who has conducted extensive studies among the soldiers of various holy wars.” This kind of news coverage implicates Islam in the rise of terrorist activity, and was common to both data sets.

In the excerpts coded for *Implicating Islam*, the Chinese sources framed Islam as a source of division for China. Some of this can be seen in the way Islam is discussed, when it is described as religious extremism working to rip the country apart. One article discusses the way in which religious extremists “will keep attempting to separate Xinjiang from China, and...they will never get what they want...,” framing Islam as extremist and a source of division for China. Another article mirrors this sentiment and discusses the way in which the “three forces” of

extremism, terrorism, and separatism are “making use of the [Urumqi unrest] to sabotage the country...”

A similar sentiment was expressed in an article that pointed out that these same three forces “cheated the people to participate in the so-called ‘jihad’...” referring to the Urumqi unrest. When the articles didn’t frame Islam in this manner, they took a more subtle approach in implicating Islam. One article outlines a statement given by the Chinese bureau saying, “The bureau's statement said that more than 200 people gathered at the Id Kah Mosque, the largest mosque in China, and created a ‘disturbance’ at approximately 5:15 pm on Monday.” In this way, Islam isn’t directly framed as the issue, but is implicated as problematic in a more indirect manner. A similar method of indirect implication is used in two articles which, alongside excerpts discussing religious extremism, say “most people of Xinjiang's 10 major ethnic minority groups, with a total population of over 11.3 million, believe in Islam now...” and “the number of Islamic mosques has soared from 2,000 ... to 24,300... the body of clergy from 3,000 to over 28,000...”

On the other hand, the excerpts coded for *Implicating Islam* in the U.S. articles are often more direct in their implication of Islam. One U.S. article discussed the ways in which “the virulent form of Islamic fundamentalism” used by those who carried out the 9/11 attacks was the driving force in their actions. The other excerpts are similar and discuss how many of those in custody after the attacks “embrace a radical form of Islam...” and discuss things such as “Muslim fanaticism” and “militant Muslims.” The data suggest that the linkage formed in the U.S. sources between Islam and terrorism seems to have paved the way for the Chinese sources to discuss terrorism without making the connection between Islam and terrorism as directly. This

may be due to the way the Chinese articles are working in a post 9/11 rhetoric framework, where the words “extremism” & “terrorism” have already been linked to Islam in a direct manner.

There is little overlap in the way these sources discuss Islam in relation to terrorism, except for the words “terrorism” and “extremism.” These words are frequently repeated in the U.S. sources which have been coded for *Implicating Islam*. A main difference between the U.S. and Chinese sources in this matter is that the U.S. sources coded for *Implicating Islam* always mention Islam outright, while the Chinese sources don’t. For example, one article makes a reference to China’s situation, saying “at the C.I.A., there is actually some Chinese intelligence floating around about Muslim extremists ...,” as well as another which discusses Israel's stance saying, “the war... requires an appreciation of the complexity of Islamic militancy and the governments that sponsor them.” The Chinese sources aren’t as explicit in implicating Islam as the U.S. sources because of the way in which the latter has already linked the terms “Islam,” and “terrorism” in our shared political memory. In this way, the data from the theme *Implicating Islam* has shown how rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs in Chinese media draws heavily from post 9/11 notions utilized in U.S. sources about terrorism and whom the word implicates.

**Table 1.** Percentage(n)s of codes found in U.S. and Chinese News Sources.

Codes	U.S. (N=18)	Chinese (N=18)
“Terrorist”	94.4 (17)	55.5 (10)
Implicating Islam	61.1 (11)	50.0 (9)
Hidden enemy	33.3 (6)	0.0 (0)
Anti-U.S./China rhetoric	22.2 (4)	66.6 (12)
Economics of terrorism	22.2 (4)	16.6 (3)
Terrorism as endless threat	22.2 (4)	11.1 (2)
Otherness	16.6 (3)	27.7 (5)
US/China as antithesis of enemy	16.6 (3)	11.1 (2)
Diseased/crazy discourse	16.6 (3)	11.1 (2)
Good vs. evil	22.2 (4)	0.0 (0)
Tools of terrorism	0.0 (0)	27.7 (5)
National security	27.7 (5)	38.8 (7)
International unity against terrorism	27.7 (5)	16.6 (3)
Politics as root of issue	27.7 (5)	11.1 (2)
State of fear/uncertainty	27.7 (5)	11.1 (2)
Talk of war	27.7 (5)	5.5 (1)
Military action	22.2 (4)	5.5 (1)
Increased/advocating for increased surveillance	16.6 (3)	16.6 (3)
Talk of retaliation	16.6 (3)	11.1 (2)
Need to “wake up”	11.1 (2)	5.5 (1)
Terrorism as leverage	27.7 (5)	16.6 (3)
Terrorism as positive for international relations	27.7 (5)	0.0 (0)
Economic repercussions of terrorism	22.2 (4)	5.5 (1)
Terrorism for political clout	11.1 (2)	0.0 (0)



## *Terrorist*

The data including the word *Terrorist*, as shown in Table 1, showed a strong link between post 9/11 rhetoric – which paved the way to the War on Terror – and post Urumqi unrest rhetoric by the Chinese government. This is the code used by the largest number of U.S. sources, used in 94.4 (N=17) percent of the U.S. articles and in 55.5 (N=10) percent of Chinese articles. Despite the code *Terrorist* being used by fewer Chinese than U.S. articles, the Chinese articles used the terminology at a higher frequency than the U.S. articles did. Out of the 21,665 words that made up the 18 U.S. sources analyzed, the word *Terrorist* made up only 65 of those words, or .30 percent of the article. On the other hand, out of the 4,891 words that made up the 18 Chinese sources, the word *Terrorist* appeared 46 times, making up a frequency of .94 percent– more than double the frequency of use of the U.S. sources.

The code *Terrorist* was used in several different ways throughout these sources, from discussing incidents of terrorism and how to stop terrorists, to discussing other issues surrounding terrorism. The Chinese articles mirrored the U.S. articles in this way. For instance one U.S. article focused on finances of terrorism saying, “...Al Qaeda was as organized as even the shakiest start-up... another terrorist expert... disagreed with the image of Al Qaeda as a new economy firm.” Similarly a Chinese article discusses terrorist finances, saying “Lin Ping... said the government should cut terrorist finance channels by establishing a comprehensive mechanism involving financial organizations, enterprises and other organizations.” In this way, both the U.S. and Chinese sources which used the word *Terrorist*, discussed the financing of terrorism. Similarly a U.S. article discusses terrorist threats in the context of the internet, saying, “virtually no one argues with the need... to bolster disciplines... like foiling internet attacks...” This statement is mirrored by the Chinese source, which says, “Now the battle against terror has

extended to the virtual world as the terrorists use the Internet as their tool to spread their radical ideas.”

Another spot in which this mirroring is evident is in the discussion of the conditions which lead to terrorism. A U.S. article discusses these conditions saying, “dealing with terrorism rather than just terrorists... requires not only stamping out cells, but understanding the poverty and hopelessness in which recruits are found...” This sentiment is echoed by another U.S. article – “...only economic engagement will transform the environment in which terrorists thrive... military action may take out individual terrorists, but won't alter the conditions that help to produce them.” Similarly, on the other end, one Chinese source discusses the ways in which the Chinese government is addressing the conditions in which terrorism is found through economic assistance, saying “Now the rural residents of Kashi [have] free healthcare funded by the government and their farming income is not taxed. ‘I really couldn't ask for more, I just hope they (the terrorists) won't ruin it,’ said Alimire, a 56-year-old [Uighur] farmer.” Excerpts like this mirror the U.S. excerpts which similarly discuss the context of economic deprivation in which terrorism may thrive.

Another example of the similar nature of the excerpts coded for *Terrorist* is the way in which one U.S. article discussed action being taken on the national level against terrorists, saying, “Customs agents were ordered to put their hunt for drug smugglers on a back burner; they were to look for terrorists now.” Parallel to this, a Chinese article discussed suggested action to be taken on a national level against terrorists, saying “Gunaratna also suggested that member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should share terrorism intelligence and make a common terrorist database.” Another point of overlap is the topic of Al-Qaeda, despite Al-Qaeda being completely absent in the Chinese context. A U.S. source says, “For Al Qaeda

terrorists, the officials warned, the opium trade might also be a way to move money or fund attacks.” A Chinese article brings up Al-Qaeda as well, saying, “With explosions targeting civilians, assassinations, arson attacks, poisonings and al-Qaeda style video footages threatening dire actions, the ‘East Turkestan’ separatists have long been terrorists.” The rest of the excerpts coded for the word “Terrorist” show similar overlap as the examples provided.

The uncanny overlap between the use of the code *Terrorist* in the U.S. sources and the Chinese sources suggests that the Chinese mainstream media rhetoric is, in some meaningful way, built upon post 9/11 rhetoric—the same rhetoric that that served to justify the War on Terror in the eyes of many. Stanton’s (1996) *Ten Stages of Genocide* outline how the political and social rhetoric preceding a genocide works to inform public sentiment towards the targeted group, making genocidal actions towards that group seem warranted, and at times even necessary. With this in mind we can gather, through these data, that the rhetoric in China surrounding the Uighur people is and has been, a precursor - setting the scene for the ethnic cleansing of the Uighurs, and is heavily informed by post 9-11 rhetoric.

To add to this textual overlap, the code *Terrorist* being used at more than double the frequency in the Chinese sources than the U.S. sources shows the extent to which the Chinese mainstream may be relying on post 9/11 rhetoric in order to implicate the Uighurs by putting them in the same context as the 9/11 hijackers. This action falls into stage IV of Stanton’s (1996) *Ten Stages of Genocide*, dehumanization, where “...hate propaganda in print, on hate radios, and in social media is used to vilify the victim group.” (Genocide Watch 1996). In this way, the information gathered and analyzed for the code *Terrorist* is not only important, it is critical. It provides an understanding on how seemingly isolated occurrences, such as the persecution of the Uighur people in China, may use a larger historical and social context, in this case, post 9/11

mainstream U.S. rhetoric, to help build their argument. It also sheds light on how social and political actors may use other incidents as building blocks, through which their argument seems valid and their actions of persecution against their own citizens, justified.

### *Lack of Overlap*

Despite the similarities and the plethora of instances of overlap between the data from the U.S. and Chinese sources that directly show the way in which post 9/11 rhetoric seems to have heavily influenced Chinese mainstream media/government rhetoric regarding the Uighur ethnic group, there are also data that don't show this connection as clearly. First, there are data regarding codes that have an overlap of half, or less than half, which could be used against the hypothesis that Chinese rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs draws heavily on post 9/11 rhetoric to make its argument against the Uighurs. At times though, this lack of overlap shows the clear opposite – that in fact, Chinese narratives surrounding the Uighurs draw more heavily on post 9/11 rhetoric than one might think.

The code *Anti-U.S./China Rhetoric*, as shown in Table 1, is an example of this. This is a code which indicates instances where the enemy is framed as using either anti-U.S. or anti-China rhetoric, such as in this U.S. source:

The terrorists who organized and carried out the attack on Tuesday, at the twin towers and at the Pentagon, issued no demands, no ultimatums. They did it solely out of grievance and hatred -- hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage, but abhorred by religious fundamentalists (and not only Muslim fundamentalists) as licentiousness, corruption, greed and apostasy.

Or this one found in a Chinese source: “She called on the international community and media to have a clear understanding of the terrorist nature of the ‘East [Turkestan]’ forces and their attempts to split China.” This code was found in only 22.2 (N=4) percent of U.S. sources, but in 66.6 (N=12) percent of Chinese Sources – the Chinese sources using it more than twice as often.

Though this heightened use of the code *Anti-U.S./China Rhetoric* in Chinese sources indicates less overlap in the data, it serves as a sign that Chinese mainstream media doubled down on the framing of the Uighurs as Anti-Chinese terrorists. This makes sense in the Chinese context, since they are dealing with a “threat” which isn’t foreign, but within their borders. This is quite different from the U.S. situation, where the framing of a foreign threat as anti-U.S. is taken as a given. Therefore, framing the perpetrators of terror as a threat due to their being “separatists” is a framing that would not make sense in the U.S. case.

There are also some codes where the data don’t support the hypothesis, but don’t directly work against it. *Talk of War* was one such code, used in instances where there is any discussion or mention of war. This code was found in 27.7 (N=5) percent of U.S. articles and only 5.5 (N=1) percent of Chinese articles. The lack of overlap between the U.S. and Chinese sources on this code does not support the hypothesis that Chinese rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs pulls heavily from U.S. post 9/11 rhetoric, but it doesn’t work to disprove it either. When thinking about the Uighur situation in China, we are looking at a situation in which a government wants national unity rather than disunity, but is simultaneously faced with the issue of an ethnic group, completely distinct from the mainstream Chinese ethnic group, both phenotypically and culturally, which is looking to be independent of China. This creates a unique context in which war may be against the aims of the government, and might hinder the goal of an ideologically and culturally united China. On the other hand, the U.S. government and mainstream media are responding to a context in which the enemy is foreign and mainly abroad. In this way, the socio-spatial contexts of both the United States and Chinese situations result in unique language and framing throughout the text. In the Chinese context, *Talk of War* is counter-productive and would be detrimental to the nation’s aims of unity, while on the other hand, *Talk of War* in the

U.S. context is in perfect alignment with the aims of ridding the U.S. of a foreign threat through a war that would take place only on foreign soil. Civil war is an option for China, but this option would create a rift in the country, which would work against the ultimate goal of a united China.

Similarly, the code *Military Action* is used much less often in the Chinese context. This code is used in any instances where military action, real or hypothetical, is being discussed. This code was found in 22.4 (N=4) percent of the U.S. sources and 5.5 (N=1) percent of Chinese sources. As in the code *Talk of war*, the difference in this code appropriately represents the differing contexts of the U.S. and Chinese situation. Many of the U.S. excerpts coded for *Military Action* discussed military action overseas, which wouldn't apply to the Chinese case. Although these data do not support the hypothesis because of the lack of overlap, it may instead show the way in which different contexts can bring about different reactions, which require unique vocabularies.

Another code which doesn't support the hypothesis is the code *Economic Repercussions of Terrorism*. This code was found in 22.4 (N=4) percent of U.S. sources and only 5.5 (N=1) percent of Chinese sources. In this way, the U.S. sources focused more on what terrorism meant for the economy than the Chinese sources did, as in this example; "in... the neighborhood just west of ground zero, apartments are now discounted up to 30 percent." This code only came up in one of the Chinese sources, which said, "the incident will cause economic loss to Xinjiang which is [already] underdeveloped..."

In total, these seven codes, out of the total twenty-four codes used, are the only codes that have an overlap of less than half, excluding codes that did not appear at all on one side or the other, which will be discussed below. This lack of overlap, as seen with the codes *Anti-U.S./China Rhetoric*, and *Talk of War*, is situationally specific and doesn't necessarily dispel

the hypothesis that the current persecution of the Uighur people in China is being justified through rhetoric which is highly similar and pulls from post 9/11 rhetoric; rather it goes to show that the answer to this question might be more complex than originally thought.

### *Good vs. Evil*

When looking at the code *Good vs. Evil* used in describing the enemy, the data are surprising; 22.2 (N=4) percent of the U.S. sources used this code while none of the Chinese sources used it. The Chinese sources discussing topics such as terrorism discuss it within the context of a specific population, the Uighurs, who are native to East Turkestan, and a government who doesn't want division within the country. On the other hand, the U.S. is dealing with a foreign threat, and for this reason, has no need to assimilate the perpetrators into the country. Many of the U.S. sources bring up this dichotomy of good vs. evil in instances such as this one, saying,

Russia, bedeviled by its own Islamic terror groups in Chechnya, quickly proclaimed solidarity with the West. Israel anticipated a vindicating blow to all the Hezbollahs, Hamas and sundry jihads that plague its existence. Good and evil were at war, and it seemed improper to doubt which would prevail.

Similarly, one U.S. article says, "...President Bush's battle lines may have seemed clear when he pledged to 'rid the world of evil.'" There is not a similar comparison in any of the Chinese sources. Rather than being drawn as 'evil,' the Uighurs are drawn as "[needing] re-education" because they've been radicalized. This code, *Good vs. Evil* must be looked at alongside the code *Diseased/Crazy Discourse*, to better grasp why certain codes are used in tandem with other codes, and what this usage in specific suggests about the aims of China regarding the Uighurs. Similarly to *Good vs. Evil*, the code, *Diseased/Crazy Discourse* was used in numerous U.S. sources, like in this excerpt, saying, "There was another danger, common to fighting any disease – the threat of infection." The difference between the U.S. and Chinese use of the code

*Diseased/Crazy Discourse* is in the recommended courses of action. In the U.S. sources, because the enemy who was marked as diseased or crazy was also framed as evil, as is seen with the *Good vs. Evil* code, war was seen as necessary; keep in mind this is the exact rhetoric which preceded the War on Terror. Contrary to this, China could not use this same rhetoric because their final goal was not war, but the violent cultural and ideological assimilation of the Uighur population into Chinese mainstream culture. For this reason, the tensions between the Chinese government and the Uighurs needed to be framed as an issue that could be resolved. If the enemy were framed as “evil,” it would be counter-productive to the Chinese objective of unity because it would render the enemy as unable to be meaningfully assimilated into Chinese mainstream culture. This lack of the theme of *Good vs. Evil* is therefore important to note.

In addition to this, the use of *Diseased/Crazy Discourse* falls into stage four of Stanton’s *10 Stages of Genocide* (1996) wherein “Members of [a group] are equated with animals, vermin, insects or diseases.” In this way, China, through not framing the Uighurs as evil, set the stage for the actions they would take, of placing the Uighurs in “re-education” camps. Identical to the way that the U.S. rhetoric surrounding the enemy after the 9/11 attacks advanced the War on Terror, the rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs after the Urumqi unrest, advanced the persecution of the Uighurs. And though much of the rhetoric in the Chinese sources clearly shows the ways in which the Chinese mainstream relied on and utilized the terminology and ideology previously established in War on Terror, the data aren’t that simple. Rather, some of the comparisons are more nuanced, like the zeroes in Table 1, which could easily be written off as meaning that there is no connection regarding these codes. In reality, these zeroes could seemingly reveal a clearer image of the way in which the rhetoric used cannot simply be copied and pasted from context to context, but in actuality, must be finely tuned to different contexts. Overall, some of the language



regarding the code *Diseased/Crazy Discourse* in the Chinese articles is very similar to that found in the U.S. articles, some of it is different because of the unique contexts of both situations, and some of the language is very different. In this way, the data could also work to suggest that the hypothesis was supported, while simultaneously showing some of the nuance in each context.

### *No Overlap*

Two other codes that fall into the category of codes on only one side are *Hidden Enemy*, and *Tools of Terrorism*. *Hidden Enemy* is a code that was used in 33.3 (N=6) percent of U.S., but not used in any Chinese articles. This might be the case because the Uighurs aren't at all hidden from China as they are fellow citizens, or because they aren't hidden to China because of China's extensive surveillance systems which keep constant tabs on Uighur activity. The code *Tools of Terrorism* was not used in the U.S. Sources, but appeared in 27.7 (N=5) of the Chinese sources. The Chinese sources that used this code were all referring to the use of technology such as access to the internet and mobile phones which ended up "radicalizing" individuals. When thinking about the use of this code in the U.S. context of the 9/11 terror attacks, the articles were from 2001-2002, a time when communication was more limited, unlike the Chinese context of 2009, when communication technology had become much more developed and used by average citizens. Also, the U.S. sources, as established with the code *Good vs. Evil*, saw the enemy as evil rather than simply radicalized. In this way, the source of terrorism is an internal evil rather than an external catalyst. On the other hand, the Chinese sources can discuss *Tools of Terror* because they see terrorists as regular individuals who were radicalized – an assumption necessitating a tool or medium through which said radicalization, and de-radicalization, must take place.

Similarly, the code *Terrorism as Positive for International Relations* was used in 27.7 (N=5) percent of U.S. sources, but not by the Chinese sources. Some of the U.S. articles saw terrorism as a uniting factor for the international community, as outlined by one writer who said:

...this is the first time since Dec. 7, 1941, in which the United States and Russia have in fact had potentially a common enemy, which allows us to band together and overlook those things that divide us. In those days, very fundamental things divided us, and in the end we couldn't sustain the relationship. This may be the first case in which we have what might be called a transcendent common enemy.

The Chinese sources did not express this same sentiment of international unity for their cause. Rather, they framed the international community as hostile to their actions regarding the Uighurs. In this way, the sources don't frame terrorism as positive for international relations in their country because of the international community's disapproval. This is the case despite no tangible action being taken by any international government actors against them. For this reason, the use of this theme in the Chinese articles wouldn't make sense.

As for the code *Terrorism as Political Clout* which was used in instances where terrorism was framed as positively or negatively affecting U.S. political actors, the code was used 11.2 (N=2) percent of the U.S. sources, but not in the Chinese sources. This could be because of the way that in the Chinese political structure the people don't have a direct effect on who is in office, so discussing how terrorism affects political actors wouldn't make sense.

#### *Other Political Differences*

The U.S.'s emphasis on politics being at the root of terrorism is shown in the data gathered for the code *Politics as Root of Issue*. This code was used in 27.7 (N=5) percent of U.S. sources, while only being used in 11.1 (N=2) percent of Chinese sources. This code was applied anytime something political was mentioned as either the root cause of terrorism or as a solution to the problem of terrorism. When looking at one of the main features of the actions being taken

against the Uighurs currently, we can clearly see suppression of religious activity. This fact mixed with the high usage of *Implicating Islam* code above a majority of other codes analyzed for the Chinese sources, we can conclude that Islam is seen as one, if not the main driver, of Uighur “terrorism” in the eyes of China. This would render null the need to focus as severely on other drivers of “terrorism” that are political rather than ideological.

A rather worrisome piece in the data is regarding the code *National Security*, which was used in 38.8 (N=7) percent of the Chinese articles and only 27.7 (N=5) percent of the U.S. articles. The difference in use is alarming considering that the U.S. sources are working in a framework wherein one of the largest, most horrific acts of terror in history was carried out less than a year prior, an incident which led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Yet, more Chinese sources use this code when discussing the Uighurs than the U.S. sources do. In this way, the heightened use of this code in the Chinese articles mirrors and amplifies the U.S. War on Terror rhetoric and indicates the aggressive patrolling and censoring of the Uighur people in China.

### *Summary*

The U.S. excerpts that implicate Islam do so in a direct manner, while the Chinese excerpts are more indirect. This may suggest that the Chinese sources do not need to be as explicit in their implication of Islam because of the way the U.S. sources which preceded them have already been explicit in this framing. In other words, they are working in a context where Islam and terrorism have already been connected through prior mainstream media. Textual overlap of subject matter regarding the word *Terrorist* between the U.S. and Chinese articles suggests that Chinese mainstream rhetoric is, in some meaningful capacity, built upon post 9/11 rhetoric. The way that the word *Terrorist* is used more than twice as often in Chinese sources

than U.S. sources, may go to show the extent to which this phenomenon is occurring. The codes *Anti-China Rhetoric*, *Talk of War*, and *Military Action*, show a lack of overlap in the text of half or more. This lack of overlap shows how the unique contexts in which the Chinese and U.S. articles are operating, result in unique themes and language being used throughout the sources. Both the U.S. and Chinese articles show textual overlap when it comes to the theme *Diseased/Crazy Discourse*. Meanwhile, the theme *Good vs. Evil* is only used in U.S. articles. This could be due to the way in which framing the Uighurs as evil could be detrimental to the aims of a united China. *Hidden Enemy* and *Tools of Terrorism* are two codes used in either Chinese articles, or U.S. articles, but never both. These data can hint to the unique contexts of the different situations and the unique languages these contexts require. *Terrorism as Positive for International Relations* and *Terrorism for Political Clout* were codes that, similarly, were used in one case and not the other, reaffirming that the languages and themes used in the articles are unique to their respective contexts. Other interesting findings include the use of the theme *National Security* more often in the Chinese articles than in the U.S. articles. This may hint to the aggressive surveilling of the Uighurs in Xinjiang, China. The use of the theme *Politics as Root of Issue* more often in the U.S. sources than in the Chinese sources suggests that the Chinese sources may attribute the issue of terrorism to sources other than politics, which would be of use when attempting to understand the restrictions being placed on religious freedoms in Xinjiang.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The data compiled provided a good basis for understanding the similarities and differences between War on Terror rhetoric, and Chinese rhetoric surrounding the Uighurs, as well as how the language in the Chinese articles appears to have been informed by U.S. War on Terror rhetoric. It would be ideal to find the Chinese equivalent of the *New York Times*, which

would likely be in Mandarin, and retrieve the Chinese sources from this media outlet. This might provide a more accurate representation of the way in which Chinese mainstream media frame the issue. Another addition which may add value to the comparative analysis is including primary source documents to the analysis, such as speeches of U.S. government officials alongside Chinese government officials addressing their nations on their respective issues. Similarly, analyzing and coding these speeches, the subject matter of them as well as the body language of the representatives while giving the speeches would provide useful additional data.

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## APPENDIX A

### *U.S. and Chinese Media Sources*

Author	Date	Title	Section:Page
Blair, Jason	11/11/01	Word for Word/Weights and Measures; In the Aftermath of Terror, Grab a Calculator and Tally Forth	4:4
Clines, Francis X.	10/21/01	The Nation: Home Front; Adapting to Terror	4:1
Crossette, Barbara	03/03/02	The World; The War on Terror Points a Country Toward Peace	4:4
Dao, James	04/07/02	The World; The War on Terrorism Takes Aim at Crime	4:5
Haberman, Clyde	10/14/01	The Nation: Past Ground Zero; The Distance Traveled in a Month of War	4:1
Kahn, Joseph	09/16/01	Before & After; Awakening to Terror, and Asking the World for Help	4:1
Lewis, Neil A.	07/04/02	Man Charged in Terror Seeks to Meet Reporters	A:10

Lewis, Neil A.	06/26/01	Traces of Terror: The Terror Suspect; Defendant in Sept. 11 Plot Accuses Judge of Trickery	A:18
Lyall, Sarah	10/28/01	The World; The Terror Prompts an Outbreak of Peace	4:3
Marquis, Christopher	09/01/02	Ideas & Trends; Terrorism's Toll On the F.B.I.	4:4
Purdum, Todd S.	04/07/02	The World; What Do You Mean, 'Terrorist'?	4:1
Risen, James	12/27/01	Terror Tape Was Delivered by Express	
Sanger, David E.	10/28/01	The World: Russia, China and the U.S.; In Terror, At Last a Common Enemy For the Big Three	4:1
Schmemman, Serge	09/23/01	Aftermath: The Target; Israel as Flashpoint, not Cause	4:8
Schmemman, Serge	10/28/01	The World; Is There One War Against Terrorism, or Two?	4:3
Schmemman, Serge	09/16/01	War Zone; What Would 'Victory' Mean?	4:1



Shmitt, Eric	01/16/02	A Nation Challenged: Pacific Terror; U.S. and Philippines Setting Up Joint Operations to Fight Terror	
Van Natta Jr., Don.	11/11/01	The World; Running Terrorism as a New Economy Business	4:5
Veale, Scott	10/28/01	Word for Word/Pentagon Science Fair; Wanted: Tools to Fight Terror. All Suggestions Welcome	4:7
Wines, Michael	09/30/01	An Act of Terror Reshapes the Globe	4:1
Cctv.com	07/04/09	Anti-terror efforts Xinjiang's priority.	
Huanxin, Zhao & Xiaohuo, Cui	07/10/09	Separatists 'used Web to promote plot'.	
Huo, Xiao	07/08/09	Govt: Rebiya plotted deadly clash.	
Jia, Cui	06/03/09	7 terror cells uncovered in Kashi: Govt.	
Jia, Cui	07/10/09	Using wrong photo, Kadeer pleads case.	
Jia, Cui	10/09/13	Xinjiang bid to curb terrorist attacks.	

Jia, Cui	12/05/19	Xinjiang's Islamic association slams so-called human rights bill.	
Lei, Hou	07/09/09	Expert: Xinjiang riot an act of terrorism.	
Xiaohuo, Cui	07/19/09	Terror threat being targeted in Beijing.	
Xinhua	07/22/09	China urges US to prevent separatist activities.	
Xinhua	09/21/09	China publishes white paper on Xinjiang.	
Xinhua	11/01/13	China firmly opposes, combats terrorism: FM spokesperson.	
Xinhua	07/06/09	Civilians, officer killed in Urumqi unrest.	
Xinhua	07/08/09	Overseas Chinese condemn violence in Xinjiang.	
Xinhua	07/06/09	Riot a catastrophe for Xinjiang.	
Xinhua	07/23/09	The terrorist nature of 'east Turkestan' separatists.	
Xinhua	07/07/09	Uygur victims of south China toy factory brawl condemn Xinjiang riot.	
Xinhua	07/07/09	World Uyghur Congress behind Xinjiang violence: expert.	
Xinhua	07/18/09	Xinjiang riot hits regional anti-terror nerve.	

I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on  
this thesis.

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Hanan Mohammed

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