

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION:

A Global Problem



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Preface

The words ‘never again’ were solemnly said after the Holocaust and again half a century later following the atrocities in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. Today’s genocide of the Uyghurs, an ethno-religious minority population in western China, illustrates that genocides continue to occur even in the 21st century, despite the global promises, the warning signs, and the mechanisms to prevent such atrocities.

It has been a privilege and an honor for us to speak with Uyghur people about their experiences before they fled from China; their often-fruitless efforts to contact loved ones who remain behind, perhaps in detention and perhaps no longer even alive; and to hear from them about policies and practices that can ease some of the torment of their lives in the United States, their new home.

As human rights scholars and advocates, we believe in the words recently said by Karim Khan, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court: “If we don’t stand up for justice now, who will stand up for justice for any of us?”

In a small way, this report is our opportunity to stand up for justice for them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen J. Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Transnational Repression: A Global Problem

Persecution of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic Muslim people in China. Since 2014, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have embarked on a campaign of mass repression and internment on an unprecedented scale, targeting Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic Muslim minorities in the northwestern region of Xinjiang (which the Uyghurs often refer to as East Turkestan).¹ Over a million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims have reportedly been held in mass detention camps where they are subjected to various physical and psychological abuses, including political indoctrination, torture, and rape.² The Chinese state created a pervasive system of surveillance that uses advanced facial and voice recognition technology, artificial intelligence, forced DNA collection, phone spyware, and the deployment of over a million government officials and security personnel throughout the region to spy on every aspect of Uyghur life.³ Most perniciously, the Chinese government has sought to artificially reduce Uyghur births by forcing Uyghur women to take birth control medications or by sterilizing them against their will.⁴

Around the world, an increasing number of scholars, activists, human rights advocates, legal experts, and politicians have labeled China's persecution of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang an act of genocide.⁵ In the United States, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his predecessor, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, designated the CCP's treatment of the Uyghurs as genocide.⁶

On August 31, 2022, the UN issued a report by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, "Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China."⁷ Although this report labels China's activities against the Uyghurs as 'crimes against humanity,' it fell short of naming the persecution as genocide. Michelle Bachelet, former Chilean president and the Human Rights Commissioner, had visited Xinjiang in May 2022 and prepared the report. She was excoriated for being 'too soft' on China and for bending under China's pressure not to release the

¹ *BBC News*, "BBC News - Xinjiang Profile - Full Overview," November 17, 2016, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16913494>.

² "China: Massive Crackdown in Muslim Region," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/09/china-massive-crackdown-muslim-region>.

³ Human Rights Watch.

⁴ *Associated Press*, "Associated Press - China Cuts Uighur Births with IUDs, Abortion, Sterilization," April 20, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>.

⁵ Joanne Smith Finley, "Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2021).

⁶ Bill Bostock, "Blinken: Pompeo Right to Say China Committing Genocide of Uighurs," *Insider*, January 28, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/antony-blinken-agrees-china-uighur-genocide-pompeo-designation-2021-1>.

⁷ OHCHR, *Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China*, accessed October 22, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>.

report, pressure she acknowledged receiving in a letter that was signed by forty states.⁸ She ultimately resigned her UN position in response to her harsh critique from civil society.

Following the release of this report, several Western countries, including the US, UK, and Canada, proposed a debate to take place in the UN Human Rights Council on China's treatment of the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities. On Oct. 6, 2022, the Council rejected the motion to hold the debate, on a vote of 19 no, 17 yes, and 11 abstentions. Pakistan, one of the 19 countries voting no, said it did not wish to alienate China. It is only the second time that a motion has been rejected by the Council since it was established in 2006. A report noted, "This is seen by observers as a setback to both accountability efforts, the West's moral authority on human rights, and the credibility of the United Nations itself."⁹

Persecution of Uyghurs outside of China. China's persecution of the Uyghurs does not stop at China's borders. An estimated 1-1.6 million Uyghurs reside outside of China, with major population centers across Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America.¹⁰ Through surveillance, infiltration, intimidation, harassment, extradition, and rendition, the CCP seeks to terrorize overseas Uyghurs into political silence.

China is not the only country engaging in these acts of *transnational repression*, but it is one of the world's leading perpetrators of this practice. In a 2022 report on this phenomenon, the advocacy group Freedom House found that at least 36 countries around the world have committed acts of transnational repression, ranging from surveillance, threats, and assassination, to involuntary repatriation, known as *refoulement*.¹¹ Freedom House also identified China's strategies of transnational repression as "the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive [...] in the world."¹² Millions of ethnic Chinese, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Hongkongers, and Falun Gong practitioners in at least 36 countries have experienced the long arm of Chinese authoritarianism.¹³

This report concerns the problem of China's transnational repression targeting Uyghurs living in the United States. Following Freedom House, we define transnational repression as "the ways a government reaches across national borders to intimidate, silence, or harm an exile, refugee, or member of the

⁸ Emma Farge, "UN Rights Chief under 'Tremendous Pressure' over China Report," August 25, 2022. Accessed October 22, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/un-rights-chief-hopes-publish-xinjiang-report-before-mandate-ends-2022-08-25/>.

⁹Emma Farge, "UN body rejects debate on China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims, in blow to West," October 6, 2022, accessed October 22, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/un-body-rejects-historic-debate-chinas-human-rights-record-2022-10-06/>

¹⁰ *The Guardian*, "The Guardian - Beijing Using Its Financial Muscle to Target Uyghurs Living Abroad – Report," June 25, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/25/beijing-using-its-financial-muscle-to-target-uyghurs-living-abroad-report>.

¹¹ Yana Gorokhovskaia and Isabel Linzer, "Defending Democracy in Exile: Policy Responses to Transnational Repression" (Freedom House, Washington, DC, 2022), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Complete_TransnationalRepressionReport2022_NEW_0.pdf, 1.

¹² Nat Schenkkan and Isabel Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression" (Freedom House, Washington, DC, 2021), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Complete_FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev020221.pdf, 15.

¹³ Schenkkan and Linzer.

diaspora who they perceive as a threat and have a political incentive to control.¹⁴ The primary goal of transnational repression is raising the costs, whether personal, psychological, professional, or social, of political activism to stifle dissent abroad.¹⁵ While research about this phenomenon is relatively recent, states have engaged in practices of transnational or *extraterritorial* repression for as long as transnational activism has existed. A notable instance is the failed attempt in 1896 by agents serving the Qing imperial dynasty of China to abduct and forcibly repatriate Chinese revolutionary leader and future founding father of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen, who resided in London at the time.¹⁶

Transnational repression has become an increasingly common practice in the 21st century due to (1) mass migration and the globalization of political activism; (2) the development of sophisticated communication and surveillance technologies; (3) the proliferation of social media platforms; (4) an increase in the number of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to target political exiles, such as Interpol, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). These factors heighten the perception of the threat posed by transnational activism and enhance these regimes' capacity of authoritarian regimes to target opponents abroad.¹⁷

Global Security and Transnational Repression. The post-9/11 global security landscape also provided fertile ground for transnational repression. States around the world have exploited the 'global war of terror' discourse to commit transnational repression by applying the labels of "terrorist" to exiles whom they target.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, Muslims are particularly vulnerable to this tactic. Freedom House reported that 78% of the cases in which the home countries accused targeted individuals of terrorism involved people of Muslim origins.¹⁹ Lastly, the lack of effective measures to pursue accountability for transnational repression further emboldens authoritarian regimes to pursue increasingly brazen attempts to silence their critics abroad.²⁰ Examples of this trend include the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi Arabian agents in 2018,²¹ the state-sponsored abduction of Rwandan opposition activist Paul Rusesabagina in 2020,²² and the 2021 arrest of journalist Raman Pratasevich by

¹⁴ Yana Gorokhovskaia and Isabel Linzer, "Unsafe in America: Transnational Repression in the United States" (Freedom House, Washington, DC, 2022), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/TransnationalRepressionReport2022_CaseStudy_United_States_NEW.pdf, 13.

¹⁵ Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall, "No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of the Uyghurs" (Uyghur Human Rights Project; The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, 2021), https://uhrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transnational-Repression_FINAL_2021-06-24-2.pdf, 6.

¹⁶ Bill Hayton, "The London Kidnapping That Changed China," *New Statesman*, October 12, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/international-content/2021/10/the-london-kidnapping-that-changed-china>.

¹⁷ Schenkkan and Linzer, 5–7.

¹⁸ Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," 7.

¹⁹ Schenkkan and Linzer.

²⁰ Schenkkan and Linzer.

²¹ *BBC News*, "BBC News - Jamal Khashoggi: All You Need to Know About Saudi Journalist's Death," February 24, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399>.

²² *Al Jazeera*, "'Hotel Rwanda' Hero Given 25-Year Sentence in 'Terrorism' Case," September 20, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/20/rwanda-court-finds-hotel-rwanda-hero-guilty-in-terrorism-case>.

Belarusian officials, who faked a bomb threat to force the plane he was traveling in to make an emergency landing in Minsk.²³

Impact of transnational repression. Transnational repression has serious consequences for those targeted by their home countries. Through surveillance, harassment, and intimidation, transnational repression creates a sense of being constantly under watch and unsafe even in one's own home and in a supposedly 'free' country.²⁴ Those targeted by these tactics often report feelings of insecurity, fear, stress, depression, and paranoia. One activist described the experience as "psychological or emotional warfare."²⁵

The practice of recruiting diaspora members to spy on people from their own country - a common tactic of transnational repression - generates distrust, division, and isolation within affected communities.²⁶ Being targeted by transnational repression also limits one's ability to travel internationally and communicate with one's family members in the home country.²⁷

Transnational repression not only takes a heavy toll on its victims, their families, and communities; it also represents a threat to the rule of law and to democratic institutions wherever it occurs.²⁸ The growing prevalence of transnational repression is a manifestation of "global authoritarianism:" undemocratic regimes around the world are working together to suppress political dissent, undermine democratic norms and institutions, and challenge the Western-led liberal international order.²⁹

China's Transnational Repression of the Uyghurs: Background. According to a 2021 report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project and the Oxus Society for Central Asia Affairs, China has engaged in transnational repression targeting the Uyghurs since at least 1997, when Pakistan deported 14 Uyghur religious students accused of terrorism by Chinese authorities.³⁰ The deportees were summarily executed after being driven across the border.³¹ From then on, China's transnational repression has undergone three phases of evolution. The first phase (1997-2007) saw Central and South Asia emerging as the hubs of China's transnational repression.³² The second phase (2008-2013) was marked by an escalation of ethnic tension in Xinjiang and the subsequent intensification of the CCP's crackdown on the Uyghurs, resulting in the largest exodus of Uyghurs from the region since 1962.³³ In response, Beijing stepped up its transnational repression efforts targeting Uyghur refugees.

²³ *BBC News*, "BBC News - Belarus Plane: What We Know and What We Don't," June 25, 2021, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57239521>.

²⁴ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer, "Unsafe in America," 3.

²⁵ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer, 3–5; Schenkkan and Linzer.

²⁶ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer, 3.

²⁷ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer, 5.

²⁸ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer; Schenkkan and Linzer, 8.

²⁹ *Journal of Democracy*, "Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy | Journal of Democracy," accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/books/authoritarianism-goes-global-the-challenge-to-democracy/>

³⁰ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, "No Space Left to Run," 30–31

³¹ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 29

³² Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 34–35

³³ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 36

China's transnational campaign entered its third and current phase in 2014, as China launched its campaign of mass repression and internment against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang as part of the "People's War on Terror" and "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism."³⁴ This phase saw not only the long arm of Chinese authoritarianism reaching more countries and more people around the world than ever, but also the growing sophistication and diversification of China's transnational repression repertoire.

The Chinese government conducts its global campaign against the Uyghurs through a vast network involving state and party institutions, quasi- and non-governmental organizations, diaspora associations, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and international organizations.³⁵ CCP institutions like the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) play a key role in the repression of the Uyghur diaspora. The MSS, China's security and intelligence service, oversees the persecution of Uyghurs, Tibetans, and political dissidents abroad, while the MPS, China's domestic police force, engages in surveillance and intimidation of PRC-based family members of overseas Uyghurs.³⁶ Through the use of extradition, rendition, or the denial of consular services like passport renewal, Chinese embassies and consulates also participate actively in transnational repression against Uyghurs.³⁷ In addition to these state agencies, the Chinese government employs a network of pro-Beijing diaspora associations, student groups, and scholarly bodies *inter alia* to surveil, harass, and intimidate critics of the regime abroad. These organizations are supported and coordinated through the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFD), which answers directly to the Party's Central Committee.³⁸

Tools of Repression. Among the most powerful tools of China's transnational repression are its economic power and rising global influence, which Beijing has not hesitated to use to bend foreign governments and international organizations to its will. In 2019, when 22 countries sent a joint letter condemning the PRC's mass detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), 33 other states issued a competing letter praising China's "remarkable achievements" in protecting and promoting human rights.³⁹ Many countries in that second group are economically indebted to China and have allowed their security forces to cooperate with Chinese authorities to detain and deport Uyghur refugees and exiles.⁴⁰ In 2017, for instance, Egyptian authorities arrested and

³⁴ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 39–41

³⁵ Bradley Jardine, "Great Wall of Steel: China's Global Campaign to Suppress the Uyghurs" (Wilson Center, Washington, DC, 2022), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Great%20Wall_of_Steel_rpt_web.pdf, xxxix-xliv; Jardine, Lemon and Hall, "No Space Left to Run," 12–18; Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," 16–17

³⁶ Jardine, "Great Wall of Steel," xxxix-xl

³⁷ Jardine, xli-xlii; Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," 17

³⁸ Jardine, xl; Schenkkan and Linzer, "Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach," 17

³⁹ Catherine Putz, "2020 Edition: Which Countries Are for or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?," *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2020, accessed June 9, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/2020-edition-which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>

⁴⁰ Jardine, "Great Wall of Steel," xlii

deported more than 200 Uyghurs, the majority of whom were religious students at Egypt’s prestigious Al-Azhar University.⁴¹

China also uses the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to facilitate its transnational repression of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities. Established in 2001, the SCO joins together China, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and India in the fight against the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism.⁴² Its 2009 Convention on Counter-Terrorism enables any member state to pursue those whom it accuses of terrorism (even in the absence of evidence) throughout the entire SCO region and obliges all members to refuse asylum to the accused individuals.⁴³

Last but not least, China has increasingly been using Interpol to target Uyghurs overseas through the issuance of Red Notices to have individuals detained or extradited.⁴⁴ In the United States, Red Notices may also lead to subsequent denials of asylum or immigration services and therefore can have a serious impact on non-citizens.⁴⁵

Studies have also found evidence that China deploys its growing cyber prowess to target Uyghurs abroad with increasing frequency and sophistication.⁴⁶ Hackers in service of the Chinese government have reportedly developed spyware and malware to infect personal devices of overseas Uyghurs, hack their emails and social media accounts, conduct phishing attacks, and create fake accounts to infiltrate Uyghur diaspora community pages on social media.⁴⁷ Many Uyghurs have reported being harassed via emails, calls, texts, or messaging apps on a daily basis. The social media and messaging app WeChat has emerged as one of China’s most powerful tools for monitoring the diaspora due to its ubiquity among Chinese users worldwide.⁴⁸ Chinese security services have reportedly forced family members of Uyghurs abroad to contact them on WeChat to warn against engaging in political activism or to demand their return to China.⁴⁹ According to Freedom House, China has also hacked into telecommunication networks across Asia to track Uyghurs and their activities abroad.⁵⁰

Research Goals and Questions

The Study. In spring 2022 we gathered information from Uyghurs in the United States about measures the Uyghurs would recommend to improve their feelings of safety and security within the United States and practices that could facilitate their adaptation and accommodation to life in the US.

The Project Team. We created a project team to investigate the research questions. The members of the team were:

⁴¹ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, “No Space Left to Run,” 42

⁴² Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 21

⁴³ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 22

⁴⁴ Jardine, xlv; Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 20–21

⁴⁵ Gorokhovskaia and Linzer, “Unsafe in America,” 9

⁴⁶ Schenkkan and Linzer, “Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach,” 16

⁴⁷ Jardine, Lemon and Hall, 17–18

⁴⁸ Schenkkan and Linzer, 16

⁴⁹ Schenkkan and Linzer, 18

⁵⁰ Schenkkan and Linzer

- Ellen Kennedy, Ph.D., Executive Director of World Without Genocide, a sociologist with significant research experience and an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.
- Tara Kalar, J.D., of counsel at World Without Genocide, a judge in the Minnesota Department of Human Services, former chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Minnesota State Bar Association, and an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.
- Kaori Kenmotsu, J.D., a Senior Lecturer at Hamline University's College of Liberal Arts, with a special interest in issues facing Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- Harold Melcher, J.D., former member of the staff of U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, with a portfolio on outreach with members of Minnesota's immigrant communities.
- Hung Le, M.A., a political scientist and the Programs and Operations Director at World Without Genocide.
- Ryan Blegen, academic technologist and webmaster for World Without Genocide.
- Rachel Hall Beecroft, M.A., Communications Specialist, World Without Genocide.

Research Questions. As we began to speak to Uyghurs about their personal experiences as targets of transnational repression, another issue became evident. With few exceptions, they spoke about the challenges of interacting with teachers, health care professionals, lawyers, and social workers who knew little or nothing about Uyghur people or about the ongoing genocide against Turkic Muslim people in China. Respondents spoke about the difficulty of explaining their traumatic experiences in China as a necessary prelude to receiving health care, legal advice, information about children's school issues, etc. It became clear that, although information about transnational repression would be valuable for the IHRU team to facilitate the safety of Uyghur diaspora communities, there was also a great need to educate professional service and care providers about who the Uyghurs are, what is happening in China, and the extent of the trauma that the Uyghurs and their families endure.

We therefore established multiple research goals: to hear Uyghur people's direct experiences with transnational repression and steps they suggest that the FBI might take to limit their exposure; to develop materials to share with professional service providers as background for responding to the needs of clients, patients, and students; and to support legislation and policy initiatives to increase Uyghur people's safety, security, and well-being in the United States.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research. We chose to conduct in-depth interviews of Uyghurs who live in various locations throughout the US. There are many advantages to qualitative research.

- It provides content that is useful for practical application.
- It requires a much smaller sample size than alternative research methods.
- It offers the chance to develop specific insights.
- It can be an open-ended process, allowing flexibility that is not possible with survey research.

Qualitative research is useful for investigating complex or relatively unexplored areas, which is the situation we were facing. It is important to be aware, however, that "a central tenet of the qualitative

approach is that researchers cannot be truly neutral or detached from data generation and analysis.”⁵¹ Every respondent shared highly emotional and traumatic stories, and almost without exception, the respondents broke into tears during the conversations. The interviewers were not dispassionate observers; we were deeply affected by the personal experiences that were shared openly and without hesitation. Without exception, as well, the respondents expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity simply to be ‘heard,’ to have their stories documented and valued, somewhat akin to a victim-survivor in a courtroom giving a victim impact statement.⁵² They all appreciated being able to speak freely and with dignity about the emotional, physical, and other consequences that they have suffered.

We had an initial contact into the Uyghur diaspora community through a Uyghur refugee who was known to one of the researchers. We met with her online to discuss this project, its feasibility, and to consider best approaches for data collection. With her input, we designed the study as follows:

- We conducted interviews online using Zoom.
- The interviews were semi-structured. The questions addressed the research issues but also allowed considerable flexibility to pursue unexpected subjects that a respondent might raise.
- We offered to have a translator available if a respondent wished.
- We ensured respondents’ anonymity; respondents’ data are coded only by number.
- All materials are the sole property and responsibility of World Without Genocide.
- We attempted to enhance reliability of the data by the following:
 - Interviews were recorded and stored in a unique Zoom file.
 - Two researchers were present online at each interview, one to act primarily as a scribe, taking notes as validation for the recordings, and the other to conduct the interview.
- Our original contact put us in touch with other Uyghur people in her community. Directors of human rights organizations who work with Uyghurs also recommended participants. From this start, we used a ‘snowball sampling’ strategy, a non-probability sampling method in which research participants help to recruit additional subjects for a study.⁵³

We generated a sampling frame of 17 respondents. We sent emails explaining the project and inviting participation. We offered several interview times from which the respondent could choose. When the respondent replied, we sent a confirming note and the Zoom link, which was simply called “My meeting,” in the interest of security. Ten people confirmed. We sent three follow-up emails, without success, to the seven non-respondents.

Auspices Bias. We were concerned about a potential research problem called **auspices bias**, the tendency for a respondent to give answers that are influenced by the organization conducting the study

⁵¹ A. M. Clarke and B. Jack, “The Benefits of Using Qualitative Research,” *Professional Nurse* 13, no. 12 (September 1998): 845–47.

⁵² “Victim Impact Statements,” accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ak/victim-impact-statements>.

⁵³ “Snowball Sampling: Definition, Method and Examples,” Simply Psychology, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/snowball-sampling.html>.

or otherwise involved in the study in some way.⁵⁴ For this reason, we did not incorporate law enforcement into this project. We did, however, ask respondents who had experienced transnational repression if they had contacted law enforcement for advice or assistance.

The Interviews. All interviews were conducted on Zoom, with two researchers and one respondent on each call, as noted. Each interview took approximately one hour. The interview schedule is available in Appendix A.

After the Interviews. Each respondent received an email of thanks following the interview and a copy of the beautiful children's book, *Daddy? Daddy, when are you coming home?* by Leila Uyghur. The respondents were surprised and very pleased to receive these gifts.

Description of the Sample. As of 2022, the Uyghur American Association estimates that there are about 10,000 Uyghurs in the United States.⁵⁵ The largest population of Uyghurs is in the Washington, D.C. area, and neighboring states. This was true of the respondents in our sample as well.

Refugees from China have consistently represented a slim portion of total admissions to the US in recent years, but a downward trend has been noticeable since 2016. No Uyghurs were admitted in fiscal year 2020, only one in 2019, six in 2018, 24 in 2017, and 57 in 2016.⁵⁶ It is increasingly difficult for Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims to be able to leave China; in addition, it is very difficult for them to be given entry into the US.

The respondents in our study have been in the US for a number of years, and most of them originally came to pursue advanced educational degrees. They are therefore an exceptional, and likely an unrepresentative, group of Uyghurs as a whole. They were all fluent in English, and, for the most part, they hold M.A. or Ph.D. degrees. They were perhaps allowed to leave China, it is suggested, as part of the Chinese government's strategy to diminish the power of the Muslim intelligentsia remaining in Xinjiang. Their families were typically well-educated and financially above average. Their family members who remain in China today are under surveillance, forbidden from getting passports, are in detention camps or in China's federal prisons, or, in some cases, they are dead, victims of the CCP's prolonged persecution of the Uyghurs and other Turkic minority people.

The practice of eliminating the cultural, social, and business leaders of a group that is targeted for genocide is an all-too-common phenomenon. It occurred during the Holodomor in Ukraine; the

⁵⁴"Critical Issues to Consider in Research Methodology," Encyclopedia.com, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/critical-issues-consider-research-methodology..>

⁵⁵ "Uyghur Americans," in *Wikipedia*, August 24, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Uyghur_Americans&oldid=1106403246.

⁵⁶ Harvest Prude, "U.S. Admitted Zero Uyghur Refugees in Fiscal 2021," *The Dispatch*, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://uphill.thedispatch.com/p/us-admitted-zero-uyghur-refugees?triedSigningIn=true>.

genocide of the Armenians during World War I; in the Holocaust; during the Cambodian genocide; and now among the vulnerable Uyghur population as well.⁵⁷

Without exception, each respondent is traumatized by the genocide occurring in China and each respondent has loved ones in China who continue to be persecuted. Our respondents feel great guilt over their own personal safety in addition to carrying the trauma of their own family's experiences. Furthermore, they express ongoing harassment from the Chinese government or its supporters. These factors, in addition to the already-overwhelming challenges of being refugees, have rendered many of them psychologically fragile and with related physical problems as well. This fragility is transmitted to their children in many ways, and the inter-generational, epigenetic characteristics of this genocide will reverberate for generations.⁵⁸

A note on the use of 'Xinjiang' v. 'East Turkestan.' In this report, we use 'Xinjiang' to refer to the northwestern region of China that is home to the Uyghur people. This usage is in line with that of the U.S. government,⁵⁹ the UN, other international organizations, the media, and academics. At the same time, we recognize that many Uyghurs prefer the use of 'East Turkestan,' as they consider the name 'Xinjiang' a symbol of Chinese oppression. The use of Xinjiang in this report does not in any way challenge or invalidate their preference.

The Transnational Repression Experience

1. Surveillance. Under 50 U.S.C. §§ 1801-1813,⁶⁰ electronic surveillance is a federal offense if it is not conducted pursuant to a search warrant or court order. "Electronic surveillance" in this context means the electronic acquisition of a communication of a person in the United States who has a reasonable expectation of privacy, and a warrant would be required for law enforcement purposes.

All of the Uyghur respondents suspected that their electronic communications had been under surveillance by the Chinese government at some point. Of particular note, respondents reported that there was a sense of surveillance when using WeChat to contact family in Xinjiang. During video calls, it was obvious to the respondents that their family was limiting normal conversation and was being coached off-camera by non-family members. The amount of information that was shared during these telephone calls was limited. Several respondents reported that family members would ask for specific information regarding the respondents' location, careers, or activities within the United States. On occasion, their family members would make pro-Chinese statements and ask the respondents to do the same. Though respondents sometimes were aware that family members had been recently imprisoned

⁵⁷ Victoria A. Malko, *The Ukrainian Intelligentsia and Genocide: The Struggle for History, Language, and Culture in the 1920s and 1930s* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021); A. Salerian et al., "Review of Mass Homicides of Intelligentsia as a Marker for Genocide," *Forensic Examiner* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 31–41.

⁵⁸ Martha Henriques, "Can the Legacy of Trauma Be Passed Down the Generations?," *BBC*, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-epigenetics>.

⁵⁹ "Xinjiang," United States Department of State, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/xinjiang/>.

⁶⁰ "50 USC 1809 - Criminal Sanctions," accessed August 31, 2022, https://www.govregs.com/uscode/expand/title50_chapter36_subchapterI_section1809.9

in “re-education” camps, any conversation on the topic was quickly redirected by the family member. It is generally understood that the conversation must never criticize the Chinese government.

The respondents in general were wary of engaging on social media out of fear of surveillance by the Chinese government. Several respondents reported that if they were to use social media, they would use assumed names and share only limited amounts of information. Several respondents cautioned against using the social media platform TikTok due to the connection to the Chinese government through the company’s parent company, ByteDance, a Chinese internet tech company headquartered in Beijing.⁶¹

Some respondents reported that while engaging in Uyghur cultural or political events, there was a sense that Chinese authorities had infiltrated the group in an attempt to undermine its effectiveness.

Respondents were wary of other participants who asked seemingly invasive questions. Respondents reported that they do not take photographs at Uyghur events because the Chinese government will use the photographs to track Uyghur people’s cultural or political activity. As a result, several respondents reported feeling wary of engaging in cultural or political activity within the United States.

It is not clear to the respondents specifically who may be surveilling their communications beyond generally understanding it to be the Chinese government. In a few cases, they said it was clear that Han Chinese people were present to monitor a Uyghur family’s conversations.

To the respondents, there was an ever-present feeling that the Chinese government was always lurking and listening in the background.

2. Harassment. Under 47 U.S. Code § 443(a)(1)(C),⁶² harassment is a crime when an individual “makes a telephone call or utilizes a telecommunications device, whether or not conversation or communication ensues, without disclosing his identity and with intent to abuse, threaten, or harass any specific person.”

All of the respondents generally agreed that the threats that they have received have been subtle, leading them to question whether the conduct constituted harassment in a way that would be understood by American law enforcement officials. For example, when speaking with family members, respondents would be told by family members to “think of your family.” The Uyghur respondents understood that the message was that they were not to speak out against human rights abuses in the United States; if they did, their family in Xinjiang would suffer consequences, including imprisonment or even death. However, in reflecting on the message, respondents questioned whether the message was specific or egregious enough to report to law enforcement. The fact that the message was delivered by family members rather than a Chinese government official complicated respondents’ calculus of whether or when to report harassment.

A majority of the respondents reported receiving “ghost” telephone calls - calls that would ring and ring and when answered, the caller would hang up. Several respondents reported receiving harassing

⁶¹ Catherine Thorbecke, “TikTok’s Ties to China Are Once Again under Fire in Washington. Here’s Why,” CNN, August 2, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/02/tech/tiktok-lawmakers-explainer/index.html>.

⁶² “U.S.C. Title 47 - Telegraphs, Telephones, and Radiotelegraphs,” accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2009-title47/html/USCODE-2009-title47-chap5.htm>.

telephone calls or messages containing veiled threats to family in Xinjiang after being publicly critical in the United States of the Chinese government.

In addition, unknown callers speaking Chinese would request that respondents report to the Chinese Embassy for unknown reasons.

3. Intimidation. Almost without exception, the Uyghur respondents were unable to locate family members in Xinjiang. A majority of the respondents reported attempting to contact family members in Xinjiang to no avail. One possible explanation is that the family members feared contact. The respondents attributed some of their family members' reticence in being located to surveillance by the Chinese government, either in that the family member in China feared for their own safety or for the safety of their family in the diaspora.

The lack of communication left some respondents questioning whether their family members had been detained or taken to government-run "reeducation" camps. The respondents believed that the lack of contact was out of character for their relatives.

In some cases, respondents were aware that their family members had changed their contact information and believed that was either an attempt to keep the family safe who were abroad or in Xinjiang. In other cases, respondents were warned by family members that contacting relatives in China was dangerous for everyone involved. To a devastating psychological effect, some respondents were able to contact their family members for short period of time before suddenly being met with a different voice on the end of the line, who respondents understood to be a Chinese government official, indicating that their family member was no longer there. Other lines went silent entirely.

In our sample of respondents, older Uyghur respondents report more reticence in speaking out against human rights abuses in China than younger people. In particular, older people felt that silence would protect them in the United States and their family in Xinjiang. However, the younger respondents reported feeling a responsibility to use their voices to advocate against the plight of the Uyghur people in China.

A majority of the respondents felt that it was too dangerous to return to China to visit family following the Chinese government's 2017 push to imprison the Uyghur population in "reeducation" camps. Several respondents reported that Uyghurs who had returned to China for visits did not return and were never heard from again.

All respondents, to a varying degree, felt an overwhelming sense that the Chinese government intended to intimidate Uyghur people in the diaspora to prevent them from speaking out or from being able to fully engage in work, family life, and other meaningful activities.

The Impact of the Uyghur Genocide

The genocide against the Uyghurs in China has had a traumatizing micro-level impact on the respondents in this study. The guilt associated with their own safety, coupled with the powerlessness of not being able to contact or assist loved ones in China, has left most respondents feeling stressed, isolated, and fearful. The following is a synopsis of the respondents' micro-level trauma.

Concern for family who remain in China. Like the findings from Clothey and McCammons’s research on Uyghur students in higher education,⁶³ our respondents similarly described having family members who are currently or had been detained in prison-like “reeducation camps” as part of China’s counterterrorism program. Many respondents have had little to no contact with family members in China. One respondent stated,

In January 2017 my brother was detained as part of large-scale detentions in Xinjiang. I did not go back; I did not attempt to make a trip. For three years I could not do anything. You asked me to share a nice memory, but for the last 5 years all my memories are connected with my loss and grief.

Another expressed the unimaginable impact of having no contact with family members.

2016 was the last time I talked to my older sister. March 2017 was the last time I talked to my older brother. When the concentration camps and the Uyghur Human Rights Policy were enacted, it was so hard. We were losing hope, which is what the Chinese wanted. There is not one minute I’m not thinking about my family. I have not been able to contact family. I tried one month ago and couldn’t get through.

This lack of contact creates a deep sense of fear for family members.

All respondents expressed a uniform sense of fear for the safety of their family members remaining in Xinjiang, which has led to a fear of speaking out. The respondent who had not spoken to family members since 2016 stated that when they attempted to contact family members, they would receive calls from China saying, ‘You have a package to collect, please call.’ The more actively they tried to reach their family, the more frequently they would receive these harassing types of calls. Another respondent recounted similar subtle intimidating phone calls and interactions:

I started to get the phone calls again from U.S. numbers. When you answer the phone calls, they are pre-recorded calls, saying you have an urgent document to pick up [at the Chinese Embassy]. Recently I spoke up about my brother to a congresswoman. Half the audience was Chinese students. I asked about [why the] Genocide on the Uyghurs has not gotten much recognition. The Chinese students walked out, they laughed at me and jeered at me. Their behavior was very intimidating.

Another respondent described threats they have received over WeChat

In 2019, I learned my sister had been detained in 2018. I started campaigning on social media to release my sister. Because I was openly talking against the Chinese government, they threatened me over WeChat. I would get a call or threat every day. They threatened that if I

⁶³ Rebecca Clothey and Brian McCommons, “Uyghur Students in Higher Education in the USA: Trauma and Adaptation Challenges,” *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 16, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 106–18.

kept speaking out, I would not be able to see my family alive. They really tried to scare you by keeping your loved ones hostage. At that time, I started feeling like I had nothing to lose. I already feel like I am living in hell.

Respondents also described instances when they were able to speak to loved ones in China but were limited to praising the Communist Party or only speaking in code.

In 2017, we had the last phone call, and [my parents] told me not to come back. My mother said, 'This place is a desert. If you come back maybe the sands will blind your eyes.' She was speaking in code. It has been almost 5 years.

One respondent, after publicly speaking about the Uyghur treatment in Xinjiang, received a phone call from their mother telling them to stop publicly speaking. The respondent later found out that their mother was released from the "reeducation camp" to make this call in the presence of five Chinese police officers and then returned to detention. The respondent has decided not to speak out anymore. Another respondent described how their spouse, who is unable to leave China, told them how great it was to live under the Communist Party. The respondent stated that they believe someone behind the camera was making their spouse say these things.

Pervasive stress and isolation. One respondent spoke of the deep disconnection most Uyghurs feel. After losing contact with family members since 2017, because this respondent's Chinese passport has expired, the Chinese embassy has refused to renew it unless they return to China. The respondent believes that if they return to renew their passport, they will be detained. Another spoke of this disconnection as a cultural conflict between the necessity of fleeing their homeland and the isolation of not being able to return or speak to loved ones.

In my culture, I was taught that to leave the homeland is to be a traitor...We must protect this land. When we die, we will have to face our ancestors and explain how we protected and contributed to this land. [My father] told us to never leave this land behind. He told us to travel for study and vacation, but you should always come back.

The burden of either remaining silent or to risk speaking out against the treatment of their Uyghur community further exacerbates the stress and isolation.

There's a part of me that is hopeful that my family is okay, that they are free and not in detention. I think 'What if I speak up? Will there be retribution?' I feel like a coward. I fear if I go public, how will that impact my work? This is life and death for my family, siblings, relatives. If I speak up, I ask myself, Is the Chinese government watching? But I'm also afraid my relatives will say, 'Why didn't you speak up?'

Need for psychological resources to manage the trauma of the Uyghur genocide. The stress, isolation, and fear for the safety of family in China have taken a tremendous toll on most of the respondents. One respondent, whose partner is detained in China and who is raising their child alone in the United States, stated,

It's overwhelming right now, I have a full-time job, and I am a parent, teacher, nurse, friend [to my child]. I am tired. I dropped my child at daycare, and then I was driving to work, and I did not see them in the car. For 10 seconds I panicked. I got confused. It happened again when I couldn't find my phone even though I was holding it. I don't have any medications, I am a healthy person, but because of how overwhelming everything is, I feel like I am getting lost.

Another respondent described their debilitating anxiety.

I remember one time when I went to the hotel for one night, I was afraid of being abducted. I was very anxious. I blocked the door just in case something happened. I didn't eat. But I had a package of peanuts. And I would eat one peanut at a time. I was scared to leave the room.

Other respondents described countless sleepless nights and the tremendous physical and emotional tension this creates for their families.

This situation is an enormous stress for me and my family. I have been taking medicine for at least one year because every day I am crying. I cannot control my body. Sometimes I am angry and shaking. It is not good for my children.

Several respondents mentioned specific physical problems as well, particularly a high rate of cervical cancer. In China, this is likely due to poor knowledge due to lack of access to adequate medical care and screening, as well as genetic isolation of the people. Because of possible family history of this disease, Uyghur women in the US need access to screening and HPV vaccination.⁶⁴ However, given the level of PTSD, it is likely that essential self-care may be overlooked.

It is clear from the interviews that the Uyghurs living in the United States are suffering from the emotional toll of the fear for their families in China and by the subtle but pervasive intimidation they feel directed at them by the Chinese government. As one respondent stated,

I do not feel safe. I have reported this to the FBI many times. They have given me advice on how to protect my information. It's not just me getting threats. Everyone here gets threats; they use our family members as hostages.

"They are trying to break our roots, to make us less Uyghur, or not at all." In some ways, analyzing the impact of a genocide on the people experiencing it seems like a painfully unnecessary and obvious exercise. Genocide can only have one effect on a people, and that effect is devastating. To allow for the discussion to end there, however, with regard to the trauma that the Uyghur people are enduring, would miss the particular ways that Uyghur culture is being mortally threatened both in China, and wherever those who have fled find themselves in the world.

⁶⁴ Zezhou Wang et al., "Comparison of Cancer Incidence and Mortality between China and the United States," *Precision Cancer Medicine* 4 (December 2021): 31–31; Guzhalinuer Abulizi et al., "Knowledge of Cervical Cancer and Pap Smear among Uyghur Women from Xinjiang, China," *BMC Women's Health* 18, no. 1 (December 2018): 21.

Over the course of our interviews and discussions, we heard heart-wrenching stories of families broken, separated by continents, prevented from staying in contact because of heavy-handed Chinese government surveillance, outright intimidation, and coerced communication from those who still remain in China. What became clear is that, as a result of the Chinese government's efforts, the effect on Uyghur culture is two-fold. There is an obvious and painful degradation of Uyghur cultural practices within China that is paired with the violent cultural severing that those Uyghurs in the United States and elsewhere are forced to endure.

While the human rights violations against Uyghurs in Xinjiang were not the focus of our discussions, since these issues have been documented by Western media, it was impossible for our respondents not to bring up what they and their families had experienced.

They believe they can transform us through reeducation. The language policy is working, though. Uyghur language has been removed, and there are many boarding schools [for children] and I am afraid that there are new generations who will not be able to speak the language.

They gave my sister [a] 17-year sentence. Seven years for praying and 10 years for keeping a Qur'an.

For those Uyghurs living in the United States, they find themselves desperately trying to perpetuate a culture, something that they did not anticipate having to do on their own and in another country. Several respondents mentioned that they try to keep Uyghur culture alive for their children by bringing them to Uyghur get-togethers and, in some cases, to events at a local Uyghur cultural center. Yet, in the same breath, they admitted that they fear their children, many of whom have not spoken to extended family in China for years, will entirely lose any connection they have to being Uyghur, including the language. The fear and trauma that Uyghur exiles experience on a daily basis has affected the ability to gather and engage communally and to perpetuate their traditions.

"The fear keeps everyone apart." Uyghur parents in the United States are facing the immense burden of maintaining their culture in a country where they are effectively an unknown ethnic group, and in doing so without any support from Uyghur elders or family members who remain in Xinjiang. The Uyghurs who settled in the United States find themselves largely unmoored from any cultural anchors they could have had were they able to travel to see family, or at least to communicate with them. This appears to be an unintended, yet decidedly punitive, effect on them for escaping the heavy-handed control of the CCP. Yet despite their nightmarish exile from their land and families, they persist in teaching Uyghur language, dance, and culture at community celebrations.

We have the Uyghur center here. If you have a special occasion, we all get together. And on Sunday they teach the children Uyghur language and dance. We all gather together for a big celebration.

Uyghurs in the United States are desperately trying to hold onto their culture.

Another chilling circumstance is the likely effect that Chinese government policies are having on Uyghur culture as a central pillar of policy. In our discussions with respondents, it became apparent that those

who are detained and imprisoned, as well as those who are effectively forced to flee, are those members of the Uyghur community that hold the social capital and are therefore the ones most responsible for being able to pass on the Uyghur culture – the elite, the educated, the influential leaders in the community. These people are specifically targeted because of the cultural capital that they wield within the community.

When you look at the profile of people who are detained, they are elite groups who carry the legacy of the Uyghur people and the language. Writers, poets, teachers, footballers, nurses, doctors, artists, actress, actors, etc., the social elite are specifically targeted. They are the carriers of the Uyghur culture. They are the ones being put in the camps. Now many of them are sentenced to prison without trial.

The pattern of targeting “social elites” was apparent in the composition of our sample as well. By and large, our respondents came from highly educated backgrounds in the arts, sciences, or business and most held multiple professional degrees in specialized fields. Many of them left behind in Xinjiang families where siblings and parents were all members of a professional class. The effect is to weaken the Uyghur people’s ability to resist government policy by detaining those “elites” who remain in Xinjiang and by permanently exiling the other leaders through offering no possibility of safe return. When this is paired with a *de facto* prohibition that the government has placed on family members communicating with their relatives overseas, we see the effect of the severing of communications on cultural continuity.

Xinjiang has been the homeland of the Uyghur people for centuries. Their ethnic and cultural identity are inextricably tied to the arid steppes of Xinjiang. The Chinese government has violently cut off access to the source of Uyghur culture for those who have escaped the reach of the surveillance state, and the cost to those Uyghurs here has been dear.

The Chinese government is **attempting** the same cultural and physical destruction of an ethno-religious minority in Xinjiang as in Tibet. It is the inexorable strangling of a people through intentionally imposing central government policies.

Raphael Lemkin coined the term *genocide*, the combination of “genos,” meaning “tribe, group, people” in Greek, and “cide,” from the Latin verb *cidere*, “to kill.” The killing of a people can happen **many** ways. It can be done systematically, with brutal industrial efficiency, or it can be done slowly, lumbering along until there is no trace of the people left. What is being done to the Uyghur people has elements of both approaches. What is clear is that by destroying Uyghur culture and the means to perpetuate it, the Chinese government seeks to end the Uyghur people through both physical and cultural genocide. If these policies and human rights violations continue, at some point the word “Uyghur,” unsupported by any traditions, language, memory, or heritage, will lose all meaning, and the history of this people will disappear.

Action Agenda

The Refugee Experience. It is often said that refugees are among the most misunderstood of people in the world. Why?

It is because we label them as just that. ‘Refugees’. This mark typecasts and strips away the humanity of these individuals, and it does so because it crafts a one-dimensional perception of them. What many of us lose sight of is that they were often highly educated professionals who thrived in their societies. Many are doctors, nurses, teachers, and lawyers. Doting fathers and mothers.⁶⁵

One of our respondents said, very simply, “I don’t think anyone really understands our situation.”

There are currently nearly 100 million forcibly displaced people worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or other disrupting events.⁶⁶ These displaced persons include refugees, the internally displaced, and asylum seekers. Most of the Uyghurs in our study are seeking or have sought asylum, a form of protection and legal status which allows an individual to remain in the United States instead of being deported to, or returned to, a country where he or she fears persecution or harm.⁶⁷

All forcibly displaced populations report experiencing traumatic events in their countries of origin; during displacement; and in their subsequent resettlement in a host country. This trauma is typically categorized as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.⁶⁸

Mental health professionals who work with displaced persons note that “the most significant effect from all of the experiences refugees endure is having been betrayed, either by their own people, by enemy forces, or by the politics of their world in general.”⁶⁹

One respondent said,

China [is seen] as a friendly country, the friendly nation, that beautiful long history. But deep down, they try to expand their territory, their power, day by day, expanding into Africa and the Middle East with the BRI [Belt and Road Initiative]. They don’t do it with weapons; they do it with soft power. You don’t realize you’re losing your ground until the last point.

When refugees resettle to a host country, they must adapt to a new place and language under uncertain circumstances and with uncertain futures. Re-establishing a home and identity while juggling tasks of daily living is a significant challenge. This type of post-migration stress influences emotional well-being

⁶⁵ “Refugees Are amongst the Most Misunderstood of People in the World. Why?,” Syrian American Medical Society Foundation, February 15, 2017, <https://www.sams-usa.net/2017/02/15/refugees-amongst-misunderstood-people-world/>.

⁶⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “UNHCR - Refugee Statistics,” UNHCR, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

⁶⁷ “What Is Asylum?,” UNHCR USA, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://help.unhcr.org/usa/applying-for-asylum/what-is-asylum/>.

⁶⁸ Matthis Schick et al., “Changes in Post-Migration Living Difficulties Predict Treatment Outcome in Traumatized Refugees,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9 (October 9, 2018): 476.

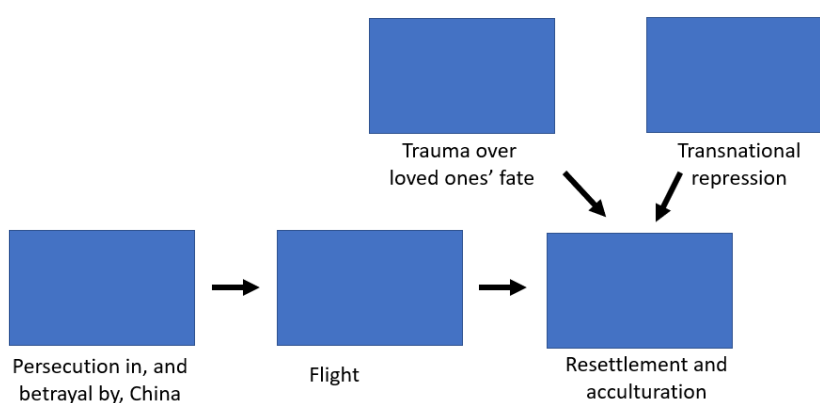
⁶⁹ “Traumatic Experiences of Refugees,” Refugee Health TA, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/mental-health/adult-mental-health/traumatic-experiences-of-refugees/>.

and often “provides a risk similar to or greater than war-related trauma.”⁷⁰ It is during the period of resettlement where stress is high and the refugee may be reminded of other traumatic events of their lives, a time when resettlement agencies, health care workers, and others might start to reverse the effects of trauma across the lifespan of the refugee by providing care and resources that give the refugee support.⁷¹

The Uyghurs who have fled for safety into the US face two additional threats to their physical and psychological well-being: living with the knowledge that their loved ones who remain in China, with whom they have lost all contact, are likely enduring torture and other heinous deprivations of human rights and human dignity; and their own ongoing persecution through China’s continual transnational repression.

The model for their experience can be schematized as follows:

Figure 1. Uyghur Asylum Experience



This diagram illustrates the ongoing impact of the external family trauma and the direct impact of transnational repression on resettlement and acculturation. These two factors are, at present, significantly limiting the well-being and adjustment of diasporan Uyghurs and creating trauma for their children as well.

A recent study in *The Lancet*,⁷² using a Danish database of more than 100,000 refugees who were examined over a 20-year period from 1995 to 2015, demonstrated that refugee children with parents suffering from PTSD had more psychiatric diagnoses, particularly nervous disorders, than those whose parents did not have a diagnosis. This Danish research did not examine the additional variable that we address in this study: the extended family remaining in China and being targeted by transnational

⁷⁰ “Traumatic Experiences of Refugees.”

⁷¹ “Traumatic Experiences of Refugees.”

⁷² Mina Fazel, “Focusing a Lens on Refugee Families to Address Layers of Avoidance,” *The Lancet Public Health* 4, no. 7 (July 2019): e318–19, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(19\)30107-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30107-0).

repression. The impact of these factors, when added to the already-great likelihood for intergenerational trauma among diasporan Uyghurs, is likely to be very grave.

The level of persecution of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang has been labeled as ‘genocide’ by many human rights leaders, nations, and multinational bodies.⁷³ The significance of applying this term for our study is that a growing body of evidence links the experience of genocide to intergenerational genetic changes in what is known as *epigenetics*. This does not involve actual changes in the DNA code itself; rather, the changes occur in the expression of the DNA, the way in which it is activated. A 2015 study⁷⁴ found that children of Holocaust survivors had epigenetic changes to a gene that was linked to their levels of cortisol, a hormone involved in the stress response. Similar documentation has been found for children of survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Various studies have concluded that these epigenetic changes can affect the next generations’ cognitive and affective responses in significant negative ways.

Our goal with this study is to suggest actions that can smooth the Uyghurs’ resettlement process and acculturation, which means mitigating some of the harms experienced from transnational repression and family-based trauma.

Addressing Transnational Repression

Several respondents reported that they contacted the FBI with details of harassment and intimidation. On July 6, 2022, a grand jury in federal court in Brooklyn charged five defendants with various crimes pertaining to a transnational repression scheme orchestrated on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party.⁷⁵

The scheme was designed to target U.S. residents whose political views and actions are “disfavored by the PRC government,” the charge read, such as advocating for democracy in the PRC.

We suggest the following actions.

1. Inform and report. The FBI has a website and phone line to report efforts by foreign governments to stalk, intimidate, or assault people in the US. We will prepare information about how to report suspicious activity safely and confidentially. We will make this information widely available to leaders of Uyghur organizations, programs, cultural groups, etc. to share with their communities. We recommend that the FBI consider unique secure phone and web lines for Uyghurs to access with their reports.

2. Strengthen the definition and laws about transnational repression. Congress should codify a definition of transnational repression and ensure that laws offer protection against the full range of repression schemes. The organization Freedom House notes that many types of transnational

⁷³ Edward Wong and Chris Buckley, “U.S. Says China’s Repression of Uighurs Is ‘Genocide,’” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/us/politics/trump-china-xinjiang.html>.

⁷⁴ Henriques, “Can the Legacy of Trauma Be Passed Down the Generations?”

⁷⁵ “Five Individuals Indicted for Crimes Related to Transnational Repression Scheme to Silence Critics of the People’s Republic of China Residing in the United States,” July 7, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/five-individuals-indicted-crimes-related-transnational-repression-scheme-silence>.

repression fall outside the scope of activities covered by existing law. Codification of a definition of transnational repression is an important first step in the process.⁷⁶

In addition, funding should be allocated for additional investigation and enforcement of the subsequent laws.

We will raise awareness of these issues among various civil society groups through public education programs to move this issue forward.

3. Provide legal immigration status for potential victims. As of the end of fiscal year 2021, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had **412,796 pending applications for asylum**.⁷⁷

According to government data compiled by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, more than 667,000 people are currently waiting for court hearings in their asylum cases, The average wait time is 1,621 days — or nearly four and a half years.⁷⁸

Many of our respondents spoke about interminable delays in the processing of their asylum claims, which leaves them in a legal limbo. Without official legal status in the US, they feel insecure and uncertain about being safe from harassment and about reaching out and seeking government protection. In addition, the multi-year application process adds financial costs that are a considerable burden. The backlog must be addressed.

One respondent said,

The asylum process is very wrong. Even with the genocide declaration [of China's actions against the Uyghurs], it still takes a long time to get an interview. In my situation, I keep getting threats from the authorities [in China] but I know I am still safe in this country. If I could have my status confirmed, that would be nice, but that will be a long time. I think that because of what we suffered, very little else matters.

Another respondent stated,

The government cannot help people in Xinjiang. But they can help Uyghur refugees. [We're] Not talking [about] hundreds of thousands; we are talking very few. Uyghurs are trapped in Turkey because China would not renew their travel documents, so they are trapped there. Help those people. Also help people who are waiting for their asylum cases. Help adjudicate them. Put more sanctions on Chinese officials and on companies using Uyghur slave labor. Or pass more

⁷⁶ "Policy Recommendations: Transnational Repression," Freedom House, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/policy-recommendations/transnational-repression>.

⁷⁷ "Policy Recommendations."

⁷⁸ "Uyghurs Who Fled China Face Lengthy Asylum Backlogs," Roll Call, January 11, 2022, <https://www.rollcall.com/2022/01/11/uyghurs-who-fled-china-face-lengthy-asylum-backlogs/>.

legislation like the Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act; it talks about Priority 2, that would help many Uyghur people.

This respondent is urging help for Uyghurs outside of the US who should be recognized as persons of special humanitarian concern, eligible for Priority 2 (P-2) processing under the U.S. refugee resettlement priority system.

In addition to the issues noted above, a pending asylum claim limits asylum-seekers' opportunities in the US, even if they can work legally. Many are unable to access government benefits or education for themselves and their families, with no end date in sight to their legal limbo. Uncertainty around their legal status also limits other options, including going to college or to a military academy.⁷⁹

4. Support the *Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act* (S.1080/H.R.1630). This Act, pending in the 117th federal legislative session, provides Uyghurs access to P-2 processing and it should be passed. We will advocate at state and federal levels for support of this important legislation, and should it not pass in the 117th Congress, we will urge its introduction in 2023.

5. Support the *Sanction Xi Jinping for Xinjiang Atrocities Act* (S.; not yet numbered).⁸⁰ Using the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, this would impose sanctions with respect to General Secretary Xi Jinping and other senior officials of the Chinese Communist Party complicit in the perpetration of genocide and other crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

6. Support the *Foreign Advanced Technology Surveillance Accountability Act* (H.R.2075). This would amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to require information about excessive surveillance and use of advanced technology to violate privacy and other fundamental human rights. This information would be included in the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

7. Review laws criminalizing "individual espionage." Spying on refugees, a common tactic of transnational repression, is not directly criminalized in the US. In some Western European countries, spying on individuals is either explicitly criminalized as "refugee espionage," or it is clearly incorporated into general espionage provisions. In the US, however, espionage is narrowly defined as collecting or distributing sensitive defense information. A new statute addressing "individual espionage" might help law enforcement address transnational repression.

8. Strengthen national and global prohibitions on refoulement. This study is based on interviews with Uyghurs in the United States. An estimated 1–1.6 million Uyghurs live outside China in significant communities elsewhere as well, including in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and in smaller communities in Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Norway, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Turkey. According to findings by Amnesty International, Uyghurs throughout the diaspora face similar acts of transnational repression and live with fears of reprisal and

⁷⁹ "Uyghurs Who Fled China Face Lengthy Asylum Backlogs."

⁸⁰ This Senate Act has not been given a number yet, as of 10-22-2022, nor is there a companion bill in the House of Representatives. The text is found at <https://www.hawley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/HEY22B64.pdf>

retaliation against themselves and their loved ones who remain in China,⁸¹ including the threat of deportation back to China.

According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, the international human rights law principle of *non-refoulement* guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm. This principle applies to all migrants, at all times, regardless of migration status. The prohibition of refoulement is included in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED),⁸² the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.⁸³ Nearly all UN member states are party to various conventions prohibiting refoulement.⁸⁴

Uyghurs who are not legally settled and protected in third countries face an exceptional risk of detention and refoulement. For over two decades, Uyghurs living outside of China have faced **efforts by Chinese authorities to pressure foreign governments to forcibly transfer them back to China**. Records show that more than 1,500 Uyghurs have been detained or forcibly returned, and many have subsequently faced imprisonment and torture in custody.⁸⁵

For those waiting to receive asylum status, this threat of deportation is a source of tremendous stress, including for those in the United States, as we have documented. When their passports expire and their status is in limbo, they are informed that passport renewal can happen only by returning to Xinjiang, and this means almost certain arrest.

Since 2018, Germany and Sweden have officially made commitments not to deport Uyghurs to China.⁸⁶ Some states have formalized the prohibition against refoulement in their constitutions and/or through legislation. Some states' constitutions enshrine the prohibition against refoulement explicitly; in others, constitutional provisions, stipulating that binding international treaties (e.g., UNCAT) prevail over

⁸¹ "Uyghurs Tell of China-Led Intimidation Campaign Abroad," Amnesty International, February 21, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/02/china-uyghurs-abroad-living-in-fear/>.

⁸² "The Principle of Non-Refoulement under International Human Rights Law" (OHCHR), accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>.

⁸³ Shirley Llain Arenilla, "Violations to the Principle of Non-Refoulement Under the Asylum Policy of the United States," *Anuario Mexicano de Derecho Internacional* 15, no. 1 (2015): 283–322.

⁸⁴ David Weissbrodt and Isabel Hortreiter, "The Principle of Non-Refoulement: Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in Comparison with the Non-Refoulement Provisions of Other International Human Rights Treaties," *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review*, 1999.

⁸⁵ "Civil Society Calls for Urgent Measures to Protect Uyghurs at Risk of Refoulement," Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://unpo.org/article/22221>.

⁸⁶ "Civil Society Calls for Urgent Measures to Protect Uyghurs at Risk of Refoulement."

contrary domestic law, have given legal effect to the prohibition against refoulement. The courts of some States have also confirmed the latter.⁸⁷

The US has no similar policy. We urge that prohibitions against refoulement be formally adopted and that the US should encourage other states to take similar action.

We also recommend that the US consider applying various forms of diplomatic, economic, and political pressure on those countries that forcibly return Uyghurs to China.

Addressing Trauma over Loved Ones' Fates

Several people described visits to therapists, social workers, and other health professionals for treatment of their debilitating grief, trauma, guilt, and sorrow that manifests both physically and psychologically. Yet before meaningful conversations can occur, the patients must explain, over and over and over, where they are from; the dangerous situations they have left behind; the language, religion, and culture of their communities; and other important elements of their personal and collective stories.

Similarly, lawyers and other experts are often unfamiliar with the background of the Uyghur situation in China and are not informed about Uyghur communities in the United States.

1. Educate relevant professionals. We will prepare short summaries about the Uyghurs' background and the current crisis as 'factsheets' to be available on our website and on websites of various professional organizations (for nurses, social workers, teachers, lawyers). We will also encourage professionals to provide services to Uyghurs in their communities on a *pro bono* bases wherever possible.

We will prepare articles for websites and periodicals of state and national organizations, such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (national journal for higher education administrators), *Bench and Bar* (state publication for lawyers), and *The Bulletin* (international journal for women educators in 18 countries).

2. Support individual Uyghurs. We will make print and online materials available to Uyghurs for use in their communities: to share with health-care providers, children's teachers, attorneys, and others with whom they interact. Each time a refugee or asylee must re-tell their personal story, there is a significant chance of re-traumatization. The goal is to make interactions less painful, more efficient, and more helpful and productive for the refugees and everyone involved.

Enhancing Resettlement

Most of our respondents are parents, and they expressed a great desire to support their children in learning and maintaining the language, culture, and history of the Uyghur people. They fear the erasure of their identity, essentially a continuity of 'cultural genocide' being perpetrated by the CCP.

⁸⁷ "Non-refoulement Procedures and Safeguards" (CTI2024), accessed August 31, 2022, https://cti2024.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CTI-Non-refoulement_Tool_4-ENG-Final-1.pdf.

1. Provide Materials for Classroom Education. Parents are eager for their children’s teachers and classmates to learn about Uyghur culture. Several respondents have spoken at their children’s schools, an experience they have found personally rewarding and, in many ways, healing. We will develop age-appropriate curriculum materials for Uyghur parents, classroom teachers, and Uyghur supporters to use in class presentations.

2. Provide Materials for College and University Administrators. China is the number one source of overseas students in the United States,⁸⁸ with 317,000 Chinese students enrolled at U.S. institutions in 2020-2021. Very few of those students are Uyghurs, and Uyghur students have reported intimidation and harassment at U.S. universities from Chinese students, typically of Han background. Institutions’ administrators seldom, if ever, intervene because they are typically not informed about these issues. We will make information available through articles in publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

We asked every Uyghur respondent what people could do to give more support to them. This poignant statement summarizes many people’s sentiments.

I think that every Uyghur has different stories and different needs, but we all need compassion and love. Even if it is just learning a little about us, that means a lot. Uyghurs are very hard-working and we do not rely on food stamps, etc., but we are so far away from our parents and relatives, we feel like we are alone. We need more attention. In experience, I try to be strong, but getting help from a therapist is a stigma in our culture. I appreciate that I did it, though. I knew my family is there, and it takes just a few seconds to dial a number, but now I don’t have that privilege to do that. When people say they are talking to their family, I say how lucky you are. I think I am very traumatized. I have a dream that I lost my parents, but I get so happy when in my dream I am with them. But then the police come, and they hide my family from me but then I wake up. When I see them in my dream, I feel relaxed and happy when I wake up.

Conclusions

This study examined the experiences of a small number of Uyghur nationals living in the United States, with the hope to illuminate the following:

- Incidents of transnational repression from the CCP and its agents in the US and elsewhere;
- Circumstances of their family members remaining in China: detention, torture, and other forms of human rights abuses;
- Recommendations for policies, procedures, and resources to enhance the safety, security, dignity, and well-being of Uyghurs residing in the United States.

⁸⁸ U. S. Mission China, “China Remains the Top Sender of International Students to the United States in 2020/2021,” U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, November 17, 2021, <https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/china-remains-the-top-sender-of-international-students-to-the-united-states-in-2020-2021/>.

The research was conducted through in-depth, qualitative, online interviews by a team of human rights and legal professionals using protocols to protect respondents' anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

- The results document a wide range of transnational repression schemes enacted onto the Uyghurs in the US by agents of the CCP.
- The results also indicated that, at a macro level, there is a significant and successful effort by the CCP to destroy the Uyghur culture in China. This has a parallel in the United States as well, because the Uyghurs are, to most people in the US, an unfamiliar ethno-religious group from a somewhat unfamiliar country compared to places like the UK and northern European countries.
- The final set of findings illustrate that, at a micro level, the Uyghurs in the US face very grave trauma as a consequence of the situations of their loved ones who are still abroad. Most of our respondents have been unable to contact their families for years and live with the knowledge that this silence is likely an indicator of their parents' and their siblings' torture and detention at the hands of the CCP.

These findings have led us to propose a set of action steps in three areas: 1) to reduce the likelihood of transnational repression through enhanced reporting, codification of laws and policies regarding transnational repression, and enhanced processing of asylum applications; 2) to increase knowledge of the Uyghurs among lawyers, social workers, teachers, nurses, and other professionals, thereby minimizing some of the cultural disruption and dislocation Uyghurs experience in the US; and 3) to improve the resettlement process through education and awareness in academic settings at all levels.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current results present a snapshot of the Uyghur experience in the US at an unusual historical moment: a time shaped by the additional stressors of a multi-year pandemic and of extreme political upheaval and instability in the US and around the world. These two factors undoubtedly exacerbated the trauma that the Uyghurs already faced as they rebuilt their lives far away from China.

A third variable is present as well: China's increasing power and threat on the global stage. The FBI statement on its public website highlights this: "The counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are a grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States. **Confronting this threat is the FBI's top counterintelligence priority.**"⁸⁹ The statement continues, "China's efforts target businesses, academic institutions, researchers, lawmakers, and the general public and will require a whole-of-society response."⁹⁰ It is unlikely that the CCP will pull back from strategies of transnational repression; targeting Uyghurs in the US and elsewhere outside of China are certain to continue in an effort to silence any anti-CCP dissent.

⁸⁹ "The China Threat," Folder, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/the-china-threat>. t

⁹⁰ "The China Threat."

We recommend that a follow-up study be conducted to determine whether hostile activities have increased and to explore additional steps to support respondents' safety, security, and well-being.

Appendix One. Interview Instrument.

1. Introduction

My name is _____. I'm working on this project for World Without Genocide, a human rights organization in St. Paul, Minnesota. A little about me: I'm working on this project because I ***. (Partner introduces self.)

My name is _____.

We're interviewing Uyghurs from across the US – men and women, teens to older people – to learn what they want people to know about them. Our goal is to give information about Uyghur people to lawyers, teachers, social workers, nurses, and other professionals. We hope that this can help them understand Uyghur students, patients, and clients better.

As you know, we will keep your name and your identity completely confidential. Thank you for being part of this important project.

2. I'd like to begin by learning a little about you. Please tell me some favorite memories of your time with family and loved ones before you came to the US.

3. What made you decide to come to the US? When did you come?

4. What was the hardest for you in adjusting to life here? Most helpful? If you could change something to make it easier for other refugees, what would you recommend?

(If the respondent has family members here, e.g., children, spouse, parents, you can ask about each one – what do you think was hardest for your children/parents/spouse, etc.)

5. We know that nearly every Uyghur has been affected by the genocide in some way. Can you describe what it has meant for you and for your family?

6. Many Uyghurs have said that they feel intimidated and harassed by the Chinese government even here in the US. This could include people monitoring your phone, hacking into your email messaging, and other activities like that. Do you feel safe in your social interactions here?

- In the US, there's a constitutional right to practice any religion and to speak on any subject. Do you feel you have this freedom?
- Do you ever not say or do certain things because you worry it might not be safe for you as a Uyghur person?

(If yes) How has this made you feel? Has it affected your daily life in any way?

Have you reported this harassment? To the local police? To the FBI? To any other federal agency?

We can send you information on how to report a threat or email harassment, if you would like to receive that. (offer to be the person in the middle: ***Would it be ok if I share your situation with some people who can maybe help protect refugees and asylees?***)

How could the US protect you from this harassment?

7. Have you been able to go back to China?

(If yes) Did you have any difficulties traveling because of being a Uyghur person?

- Do you stay in touch with any Uyghur friends or family in China or anywhere else, like in Canada or Europe or Turkey?

8. If you could ask the U.S. government to do something to help Uyghurs in this country, what would you ask for?

9. What would you like lawyers, teachers, nurses, and social workers to know about the Uyghur experience or Uyghur culture?

10. Please share a positive highlight of your time in the US.

11. Is there anyone you know who might want to be interviewed? We'll appreciate a name and phone number or email address.

12. As we conclude, would you tell us a little about yourself: maybe your education or work experience, if you have children, anything you care to share?

13. In closing, is there anything else you'd like us to know?

Thank you so much for being part of this project.

A small way we can say 'thank you' is with a gift. We would like to send you a copy of the beautiful children's book "Daddy? Daddy, when are you coming home?" It's written by a Uyghur woman in California. It shows the beauty of the Uyghur culture and the terrible situation today for Uyghurs in China. We hope you'll share it with other Uyghurs and your non-Uyghur friends. Maybe give it to your local school so that teachers and children can learn more about the Uyghurs.

May I ask for your mailing address to send you the book? It will be sent in a plain brown envelope. Thank you again for talking about your stories and your experiences.