A ‘Post-Copenhagen’ analysis of China’s Securitization of the Uyghur: A Counterproductive Securitization?

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Abstract

This article adopts a post-Copenhagen approach to securitization theory in order to critically analyse the security policies developed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) that have targeted the Uyghur community in Xinjiang province. The article explores the relationship between the language of security and threat which has been invoked by the PRC leadership and its role in justifying every-day and exceptional security practices that have been enacted against the Uyghurs since the start of the 1990s. The article makes two important claims. First, the article argues that the securitization of the Uyghur has proved counter-productive, potentially creating the very security threat that the securitization of an issue is supposed to prevent. Second, the article suggests that the role of various audiences, both domestic and international, even in an authoritarian or illiberal state like China, play a key role in the securitization process and the legitimisation of the security measures that have been enacted against the Uyghur community.

Introduction

Since taking over as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Secretary in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 2016, Chen Quanguo and the CCP have embarked upon a systematic campaign of repression and violence against the Muslim Uyghur population in the region. Continuing state-level practices that have endured since the CCP came to power in 1949, it is since the arrival of Chen as the key figure in Xinjiang that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has stepped up its campaign against the Uyghur population. This has included forced detention, increased surveillance, extrajudicial killing and other human rights violations.[1] More recently, it has involved the mass internment of between 800000 and 2 million Uyghur in so-called ‘re-education’ camps. Significantly, the campaign against the Uyghur has been framed through the language of security, terrorism and war, with China invoking the threat from ‘Islamist terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ as a way of justifying their actions. Indeed, Chen was reported in 2017 as urging Chinese security forces to ‘bury the corpses’ of the Uyghur ‘terrorists in the vast sea of a People's War’.[2] The use of the rhetoric of a ‘People’s War’ was intended to legitimise, in the short term, the introduction of new security policies designed to address the rising civil unrest in Xinjiang. However, the security policies which were subsequently put in place have remained and, in other cases, entirely new

[1] Amnesty International, *People’s Republic of China: Gross Human Rights Violations in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, New York: Amnesty International, 1999; Human Rights Watch, ‘“*Eradicating Ideological Viruses”: China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims*’, September 9, 2018. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs

[2] Joanne Smith Finley, ‘Securitization, insecurity and conflict in contemporary Xinjiang: has PRC counter-terrorism evolved into state terror?’ *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 1-26; BBC, ‘All-out offensive' in Xinjiang risks worsening grievances’, 2017. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-39137420

security practices have been enacted that have led to the 'virtual quarantine' of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang.[3]

The security response endorsed by the Chinese state against the Uyghur community lends itself to an analysis of the extent to which this issue has been securitized. By focusing on the role of language in the construction of a security threat, the concept of securitization, first put forward by the Copenhagen School (CS), offers a suitable framework through which to explore the actions taken by China against the Uyghur community. However, following Claire Wilkinson, we recognise that the particular approach to securitization advocated by the Copenhagen School is unsuited to empirical studies in illiberal, non-democratic contexts.[4] As such, the approach to securitization adopted in this article is situated within what Holger Stritzel has referred to as a 'second generation, post-Copenhagen' approach to securitization theory.[5] This approach is adopted for several reasons. First, as Wilkinson notes, the focus on speech-acts as a central aspect of the securitization process excludes other forms of action, such as physical practices, through which securitization is enacted or achieved, thereby leading to a potentially Westernized reading of the securitization process. Second, the performative power of any speech act has to be considered not in isolation but within the wider historical context and specific social situation in which it is occurring. Third, the CS approach to securitization lacks a fully developed appreciation of the role of audience in the securitization process, which we argue is necessary for understanding the securitization of the Uyghur. As such, this article adopts a framework that emphasises not only the linguistic but also the sociological dimensions of the securitization process.

The main argument articulated below is that through the process of securitizing the Uyghur, both historically and particularly since 2014, the Chinese state has put in place the conditions that create the very security threat that the securitization of an issue is supposed to prevent. Indeed, the decision by some members of the Uyghur community to engage in reprisals and attacks against the government, can be understood as a direct response to the security practices explicitly targeting the Uyghur, which have been implemented by the PRC. Moreover, the article make several supplementary arguments related to securitization theory. First, the case of the Uyghur offers an important issue through which to explore the role of multiple audiences, particularly the US and other actors on the international stage, in legitimising China's action in Xinjiang; and second, it offers a suitable case-study through which to consider the relationship between securitizing language and the enactment of both the every-day and exceptional security measures targeted at the Uyghur community in China over the past three decades.

In order to make this argument the analysis is structured as follows. The article starts by explaining our approach to securitization theory, which can be described as 'post-Copenhagen'. First, we outline the core commitments of the Copenhagen School's securitization framework. Although the framework developed below retains a focus on the important role of speech in the securitization process, it is argued that the core commitments of securitization theory must be loosened and consideration given to the important role of

[3] Human Rights Watch, 'Eradicating Ideological Viruses'; Sean Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's "War on Terror" and the Exclusion of the Uyghurs', *Critical Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2018): 252.

[4] Wilkinson, Claire, 'The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is Securitization Theory useable outside Europe?' *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2007): 5-25.

[5] Holger Stritzel, 'Securitization, Power, Intertextuality: Discourse Theory and the Translations of Organized Crime', *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 6 (2012): 549–567; Holger Stritzel and Sean C. Chang, 'Securitization and Counter-Securitization in Afghanistan', *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 6 (2015): 548-567.

context, practice and the audience in understanding how securitizations are made possible.[6] As well as this, the limitations of the CS approach to securitization are explored and a case is made for an approach that adopts insights from both linguistic and sociological explanations for securitization, especially in the case of a non-Western country like China.[7] Having outlined the framework through which the analysis will proceed, the article then turns to consider the multiples way in which the Uyghur community has been securitized in China since the 1990s, including analysis of the political and social implications of this securitization process for the Uyghur themselves.

Securitization Theory: A Second Generation, Post-Copenhagen Framework

The Copenhagen School's concept of securitization, originally proposed by Ole Wæver and later extended in collaboration with Barry Buzan and Jaap de Wilde, refers to the act or linguistic process through which a political issue is moved into the realm of security politics. For the CS, security is viewed primarily as a 'speech act'. As they explain, 'security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship)'.[8] In the process of labelling an issue a security issue, an actor with authority, normally a state-representative 'claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it'.[9] In the classic CS approach to securitization, 'the 'security' part of the act is taken to signify the presence of an existential threat to the *referent object*, or, more simply, a threat to its survival'.[10] An attempt at securitization is called a securitizing move and in order for an issue to be successfully securitized the target audience must accept the move. It is at this point the actor with authority is able to break free from the normal rules that govern the political system in democratic countries.

The CS framework has undoubtedly contributed to theoretical advancements in our understanding of security. However, this approach has not been without criticism. For example, Olav Knudsen contends that the CS approach to securitization relies heavily on a subjective process of threat construction that comes from an actor's own fears, Ken Booth has suggested that the CS approach is overly discourse-centric and relies too heavily on the role of language, while Lene Hansen has argued that the traditional securitization framework is unable to account for the gendered dimensions of security.[11] The limitations that persist with the CS approach to securitization have led to the emergence of a second generation of securitization scholars, who have sought to further extend and develop our understanding of this concept.[12] In order to use securitization as a framework for analysis in the context of the

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[6] For an explanation of how the core commitments of securitization theory can be loosened see: Stuart Croft, *Securitizing Islam: Identity and the Search for Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[7] Thierry Balzacq, 'A Theory of Securitization: Origins, Core Assumptions, and Variants. In: T Balzacq (ed.) *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010): 1–30.
[8] Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) p. 55.
[9] Ibid. p. 55.
[10] Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on Tour', p. 9.
[11] Olav F. Knudsen, 'Post-Copenhagen Security Studies', Security Dialogue 32, no. 3 (2001): 355-368; Ken Booth, Theory of World Security, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lene Hansen, 'The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 285-306.
[12] Stritzel, 'Securitization, Power, Intertextuality'; Stritzel and Chang, 'Securitization and Counter-Securitization'; Croft, 'Securitizing Islam'.

Chinese response to the Uyghur community, we follow the suggestions of 'post-Copenhagen' scholars such as Croft and Stritzel, constructing a securitization framework where several of the key commitments of the traditional approach are extended, reoriented or relaxed.[13]

First, there is a need to extend the securitization framework beyond its preference for, or even bias towards, democratic decision-making, so as to make it more amenable to the analysis of security issues in non-Western or non-democratic settings. The argument that is often put forward is that because totalitarian or authoritarian regimes do not need political legitimacy and can rule by force, there is no need to move political issues into the extra-legal realm of special politics, outside of the normal democratic process, because there are no democratic processes in the first place. As Juha Vuori explains, however, all social institutions, even non-democracies, must exercise both persuasion and coercion in order to maintain legitimacy and survive.[14] Even in non-democracies, the state still has to legitimise the use of extraordinary measures and if it fails to provide security for its citizens its authority can quickly be undermined. Security, therefore, remains central to the legitimacy of the state. This remains the case in a non-democracy like in China in the sense that the majority Han-Chinese population and the Chinese state itself still provide the referent object for security.

Second, in order to apply the concept of securitization in the context of China, it is important to reorient the attention of the framework away from a central focus on the role of the speech act to consider the way in which securitization can also occur through non-linguistic forms of physical action or social practice. For Wilkinson, the privileging of speech acts can lead to the theoretical framework providing a Westernized description of a given situation, which in turn will limit its utility for explanation and analysis in a non-Western context.[15] Beyond this, Wilkinson claims that the CS approach to securitization induces a particular normative effect she refers to as the 'Westphalian straitjacket'; whereby in order to explain securitization in a non-Western context the theory acts like an editor reframing the complexities of the situation under investigation through the use of Western terms and concepts such as 'state' and 'society'. Wilkinson suggests that these terms and concepts may not necessarily transfer to other contexts, nor provide an accurate account of what is occurring or, more problematically, may lead to the exclusion of specificities that do not fit the Western model.[16]

Third, it is important to recognise that securitization is more than just an act, a decisive moment or an instance in time when an issue is moved from normal politics into the realm of security. According to the CS, the purpose of a securitizing move is that it legitimates the use of extraordinary or exceptional measures to deal with a threat to the referent object of security.[17] By way of contrast, we argue that securitization is not just about exceptional measures but instead 'has to do also, and above all, with more mundane bureaucratic decisions of every-day politics'.[18] Security, then, is also about every-day practices of security,

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Juha A Vuori, 'Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-Democratic Political Orders', *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2008): 65-99.

[15] Claire Wilkinson, 'The Limits of Spoken Words: From Meta-Narratives to Experiences of Security'. In: Thierry Balzacq (ed.) *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011): 94–115.

[16] Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on Tour'.

[17] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge University Press, 2003): 491.

[18] Didier Bigo and Anastasia Tsoukala, 'Understanding (in)security', In: D Bigo and A Tsoukala (Eds.) *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal practices of liberal regimes after 9/11* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

from the use of technologies that allow for communication, surveillance and control, to the more general management of life where the focus is the management of numbers rather than people. This observation is particularly apt when considering the plight of the Uyghurs in China, as we will demonstrate below, where a mix of securitizing practices, both every-day and exceptional, that target the Uyghur in terms of demography (increased Han-migration, ethnic displacement and control of movement), education (imposition of Chinese language education in schools), religion (repression of Islamic practices) and right to life (internment and extra-judicial execution).[19]

Cumulatively, then, we argue that securitization should be considered not only as a linguistic act but also as an ongoing sociological process.[20] As Bigo and Tsoukala explain, the '(in)securitization process is… a social and political construction related to speech acts, but these speech acts are not decisive'. Moreover, as Thierry Balzacq has argued, the assumption that there are two variants of securitization, the linguistic and the non-linguistic, is a moot point in the sense that approaches to securitization which prioritise social practice still incorporate the use of language and approaches that emphasise the importance of the speech act still explore the impact of language in the enacting or implementation of security policies.[21] From this perspective, in the securitization process it is argued here that language and practice should be understood as mutually constitutive. Indeed, what gives this approach utility in relation to a study of the securitization of the Uyghur community in China is it emphasis on the importance of context in understanding how securitization occurs both linguistically and in practice.

Fourth, there is a need, then, to highlight in detail the social context within which securitization occurs. Felix Ciuta has argued that the traditional CS approach to securitization lacks an appreciation that 'the *definition of security* is a matter of context'.[22] Indeed, the contextual approach that Ciuta advocates adopts a broader approach to securitization, emphasising an intricate relationship between the construction of security threats, the identification of referent objects and securitization actors, the enactment of security practices and, moreover, the very meaning of security.[23] By emphasising a contextual approach to the analysis of securitization as process, Ciuta is suggesting that the CS approach is incomplete in that it fails to recognise the meaning of security is not fixed but rather constantly made and remade through the interplay of language and practice with 'different conceptions and practices of security' operating 'in different places and at different times'.[24] As Stritzel clarifies, the performative power of an individual speech act cannot be understood outside of broader structures of meaning and power and, therefore, must be 'analysed within the context of specific social settings and textual fields, as well as broader historical sequences and continuities'.[25]

As part of this move towards an acknowledgement of the importance of context in securitization, there is also a need to further develop understanding of the role of the audience in the securitization process. Mark Salter has argued that there are at least four types of

[19] See Finley, 'Securitization, insecurity and conflict in contemporary Xinjiang', 1-2.
[20] Mark B Salter, 'Securitization and Desecuritization: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 11, no. 4 (2008): 321-349.
[21] Balzacq, 'A Theory of Securitization'.
[22] Felix Ciută, 'Security and the Problem of Context: A Hermeneutical Critique of Securitisation Theory, *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 304.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid: 309.
[25] Stritzel, 'Securitization, Power, Intertextuality', p. 553.

audience and speech contexts: the popular, elite, technocratic and scientific.[26] Adopting a dramaturgical approach to securitization, Salter has convincingly shown how securitization plays differently dependent upon the specific audience for which the securitizing move is intended. In the traditional CS approach, the audience is limited to the general public and is thought to play a passive role whereby they either accept or reject the securitization move of a state actor. As Stritzel explains, this is restrictive and requires a reconceptualisation of the speaker-audience relationship, which emphasises that securitization is situated within a context that predates the securitizing act.[27]

In reorienting securitization theory to operate as a tool of analysis in the context of China, the role of the audience must also be reconsidered. There is nothing a priori that suggest securitization should be limited to the general public. In an authoritarian state like China, the audience of securitizations can also include the powerful elite, the governing party or the institutions that uphold the state, as well as the masses themselves. To this list of relevant audiences, we might also add the minorities that are the targets of securitizations, such as the Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic groups. As Vuori argues, it does not make sense to predefine or fix what is mean by the audience as they are dependent on the socio-historical situation and have to be convinced of the necessity of security action within the cultural, political and social context within which the securitization is taking place.[28] What this means is that when considering the securitization of an issue, the securitizing move can have various strands that target different audiences depending upon what the securitizing actor(s) intends to achieve. The audiences therefore are multiple and diverse but ultimately act as the arbiters of the success or failure, the political legitimacy, of a securitization move in a given context. As Vuori explains, there are three main audiences for securitizing moves in China: officials, intellectuals and the masses.[29] We would also add to this the international audience, represented by key actors, such as the United States (US) or the United Nations (UN), who as we argue below have often been the target of securitizing moves with regard to the alleged threat of the Uyghurs.

In order to operationalise the theoretical commitments outlined above and to map the securitization of the Uyghur community in China, this article employs discourse analysis as the chosen method of analysis. The understanding of discourse adopted here is much broader than that of the Copenhagen School approach, which restricts discourse to written or spoken utterances. Instead, we argue discourse(s) should be understood as a system(s) of thought, composed of ideas, beliefs and practices, that structure how we think about a particular subject, topic or issue. [30] Discourses are performative in the sense that not only do they help to make sense of the world around us, they also shape how we act. Discourse should, therefore be viewed as dynamic and fluid, incorporating language and social practice in a mutually constitutive relationship.[31] This approach to discourse has consequences for our understanding of securitization theory in that we contend the securitization process should be viewed not as a ‘speech act’ but rather as a form of ‘discursive practice’. As Roxanne Doty

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[26] Salter, ‘Securitization and Desecuritization’.

[27] Holger Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond’, European Journal of International Relations 13, no. 3 (2007): 357-383.

[28] Vuori, ‘Illocutionary Logic’.

[29] Ibid: 70-72.

[30] Matthew Broad and Oliver Daddow, ‘Half-remembered quotations from mostly forgotten speeches: the limits of Labour’s European policy discourse’, *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 12, no. 2 (2010): 205-222.

[31] Our understanding of discourse (as practice) follows that outlined by Lene Hansen. See Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

explains, discursive practices reflect power relationships and are productive of the worlds they help to create; they cannot be traced to a fixed or stable centre but rather are dispersed and scattered through various locales.[32] By viewing securitization as a form of discursive practice it is possible to explore the role of both language and action in the securitization process.

This understanding of discourse shares similarities with that advocated by Stritzel, who has argued that in relation to securitization theory an approach that emphasises a sociological understanding of discourse, applied through a holistic form of discourse analysis, is necessary if we are to capture the intricacies of the securitization process. As he explains, 'scholars post-Copenhagen often argue that the performative power of a speech act cannot only be captured in the abstract but needs to be contextually located within broader structures of meaning and power'.[33] As such, a holistic approach to discourse analysis, which takes account of linguistic and sociological dimensions of discourse, is adopted because it provides a set of techniques through which it is possible to explore and analyse securitization processes. Not only does this approach allow us to map securitization processes, by uncovering the structures that create the threat image, in this case the Uyghur community in China, whose 'source, mechanisms, and effects we want to explicate'[34]; it also allows for critical reflection on the power relations that underpin securitizing discourses and the contexts within which they occur.

Finally, although the focus of this article is on the securitization of the Uyghur by the Chinese state, as part of this commitment to critically analysing the securitization process through a holistic approach to discourse analysis, the article also seeks to highlight the political and social consequences of the securitization of the Uyghur as a security threat for both China and the community itself. We argue below that if the purpose of securitizing an issue is to allow a securitizing actor to claim authority to develop measures that can help to combat or counter a particular security threat, then the securitization of the Uyghur can be viewed as counter-productive. Here we draw parallels with Sean Roberts argument that the discursive (re)construction of the Uyghur as terrorists provides the potential for a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', in effect creating the conditions for the emergence of the very security threat the securitization of an issue is supposed to help prevent.[35]

The Securitization of the Uyghur: Providing Context

In order to understand the various ways in which the securitization of the Uyghur has occurred within China, it is important to situate the analysis of the securitization process within its wider historical context. As Vuori explains, in China these processes are represented primarily as 'ideological threats voiced by the Party leadership… [that] have political and social relevance in contemporary China'.[36] These threats are invoked as part of a

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[32] Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines', International Studies Quarterly 37, no. 3 (1993): 297-320.
[33] Stritzel, 'Securitization, Power, Intertextuality', 553.
[34] Thierry Balzacq, 'Enquiries into Methods: A New Framework For Securitization Analysis'. In: Balzacq T (ed.) *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), see: 40.
[35] Sean Roberts and M. Clarke, 'The narrative of Uyghur terrorism and the self-fulfilling prophecy of Uyghur militancy'. In: Clarke M (ed.) Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China: Domestic and Foreign Policy Dimensions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 99-127.
[36] Vuori, 'Illocutionary Logic', 67.

process that seeks to legitimate the security policies enacted against minority groups within China, which do not conform to the CCP's perception of acceptable cultural practices adopted by its citizens. Indeed, it is the Han Chinese way of life that the Chinese state promotes and seeks to protect, the *referent object of security* then, which is perceived to be threatened by the 'Islamisation' of China. Importantly, the securitization of religious minorities and other groups viewed as an ideological threat to the PRC can be traced back to earlier periods in contemporary Chinese history. For example, China's response to the Falun Gong, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, contains parallels with the response to the Uyghur today, especially in relation to the construction of religious freedom as a security threat to the Chinese state.[37]

The Falun Gong was a spiritual practice steeped in mediation, described as a quasi-religious form of qigong, that originated in China in the 1990s. In April 1999, over 10000 protestors, demonstrating against the banning of Falun Gong literature, the treatment of imprisoned practitioners of the religion and criticisms of Falun Gong within the media, were subject to similar policies that have also been visited on the Uyghur. According to Madsen this response to religious revival across China can be attributed to the CCP's rejection of religion as incompatible with the atheist, communist state.[38] The foundation of current Chinese religious policy is 'Document 19', a product of Deng Xiaoping's (CCP leader 1978-92) religious policies in the 1980s, which maintains that scientific education, not political coercion, should be used to eradicate religion.[39] Indeed, the steps towards the securitization of the Uyghur that took place during the 1990s, discussed below, in many way mirrored the securitization of the Falun Gong, with a similar pattern of both elements of securitizing language and securitizing practices identifiable during the period in which the PRC had designated the Falun Gong a threat.

Labelling Falun Gong an 'evil cult', the Chinese state pushed for increased police measures that would allow the state to target members of the group.[40] According to Gutman, as well as increased surveillance of the Falun Gong community, there were also documented instances of human rights abuse and detailed reports of politically inspired incarcerations that led to accusations of, for example, illegal state-mandated organ harvesting of political prisoners.[41] In some quarters, the campaign of systematic persecution has been described as genocide. Ironically, this approach by the CCP is counter-intuitive, as defined by Document 19, regarding the requirement for scientific education to spread atheism, rather than political coercion. This demonstrates how the non-tolerance of religious and spiritual practices by the CCP conflict with its own state-sanctioned atheism and clearly predate the current persecution of the Uyghur community.

The treatment of religious minorities, such as the Falun Gong or Tibetan Buddhists, has been mirrored in the Chinese response to specific parts of the Muslim communities living in China; although interestingly not all parts of that community. As Dru C. Gladney explains, Chinese tolerance towards Islam varies between its different Muslim communities.[42] For

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Richard Madsen, 'The Upsurge of Religion in China, *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 4 (2010): 58-71.
[39] Ibid. 59.
[40] Yu Shuning, Minister-Counselor to the People's Republic of China's Embassy in the Republic of Lithuania, Letter to the Editor of the Washington Post, 10 January 2000. Available at: http://lt.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/jpflg/t125342.htm
[41] Ethan Gutmann, 'Bitter Harvest: China's' Organ Donation Nightmare', *World Affairs* (2012): 49-56.
[42] Dru C Gladney, 'Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?', *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003): 451-467.

example, the treatment of the Hui Muslim community stands in stark contrast to that of the Uyghur. Whilst the Hui have been categorised as 'Sino-Muslims' by some regional experts, Gladney suggests this is mis-leading given that all Muslims born in China are attributed Chinese citizenship by law.[43] Incidentally, this helps to explain CCP resistance to the Uyghur communities claim for separatism; the Uyghurs, despite retaining a different ethnicity to Han Chinese, are still by law Chinese citizens, and therefore moves for an independent Uyghur state are perceived to be a direct threat to the internal sovereignty of the Chinese state - thus, in Beijing's eyes, legitimising the enactment of further security measures taken against the Uyghur.

It is nonetheless accurate to suggest the Hui are closer to the Han Chinese when compared to most other Muslim communities in China, both geographically and culturally. This has been maintained by the Hui adapting many of their Islamic practices to the Han Chinese ways of life, including for example the majority population adopting Chinese as their language, with Arabic language used only intermittently.[44] It is only since the 1980s that non-Hui Muslim groups have begun to assert themselves as separate to Han Chinese. Traditionally, non-Hui Muslims have been more isolated internally than the Hui, who maintain communities throughout China (in contrast to the Uyghurs who are predominantly located in Xinjiang) and thus have felt less threatened and more able to express their religious identity. Whilst these Muslim communities view their identity largely through paradigms other than their religion (i.e. linguistically, ethnically etc), the Hui are unique among the 55 identified nationalities in China in that they are the only ones for whom religion is the only unifying identity.

By way of contrast, the first steps taken towards the securitization of the Uyghur community can be traced as far back as 1949, when the Communist state annexed what was then East Turkestan. Meaning 'New Territory' in Chinese, Xinjiang suffered tens of thousands of deaths during the communist pacification of the Muslim Uyghur population[45], resulting in the creation in 1955 of the XUAR. For the second half of the twentieth century China embarked on a process of 'Hanification' in the region, repopulating Xinjiang with the dominant Chinese Han ethnic group, transforming the social demographic of the region in under fifty years. In 1949 the region was almost 90% Uyghur; by the turn of the century it had dropped to 40-50%, with the Han the dominant ethnicity.[46] This policy resulted in large scale socio-political unrest, and heightened ethnic and religious tensions; the consequences of which continue today in the form of increasing attacks, allegedly committed by Uyghurs, against Han Chinese, and subsequent retaliatory attacks by the Chinese state on the Uyghurs.[47]

The difference between the treatment of the Hui and Uyghur Muslim communities within China must be understood within the context of competing ideational factors such as religion, ethnicity, culture and linguistics, all of which play a role in the securitization process and

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[43] J Friedrichs, 'Sino-Muslim Relations: The Han, the Hui, and the Uyghurs', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37:1 (2017): 55-79; J. N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (University of Washington Press, 2011).
[44] Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, No. 149 (Harvard University Asia Center, 1996).
[45] Alim Seytoff, 'China's Uighurs Claim Cultural 'Genocide', *Al-Jazeera Online*. 2014. Available at https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/06/china-uighurs-claim-cultural-gen-20146165946224857.html
[46] Chien-peng Chung, 'China's War on Terror - September 11 and Uighurs', *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2002):8-12.
[47] Peter Foster, 'Han Chinese mob takes to the streets in Urumqi in hunt for Uighur Muslims', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 2009.

importantly, help to explain why the Chinese state view certain ethnic groups as a threat to its sovereignty, over others. In short, the Hui have conformed to the CCP's 'Sinicization' of religion, whilst the Uyghurs have resisted.[48] Historically, the Hui have enjoyed greater freedom to practice Islam over the rights afforded the Uyghurs; for example, Hui government officials were allowed to fast during Ramadan, whereas from 2014 Uyghur officials have been prohibited from doing so.[49] Chinese acceptance of some religious practices and not others, has been maintained by the CCP's choice of where, and to whom, it enforces its religious policies against.

Analysing the Securitization of the Uyghur: 1989-2020

As explained above, we adopt a second generation, post-Copenhagen approach to our analysis of the securitization of the Uyghur in China. Borrowing insights from both the Copenhagen School (linguistic) and the Paris School (practice) approach to securitization, we show how the Chinese state has used language to securitize the Uyghur community and consider the audiences that it has targeted to legitimise this process. We view securitization as a multi-faceted process that evolves over time. In order to chart the evolution of the securitization of the Uyghur we adopt a longitudinal method of analysis favoured by Angela Snetkov.[50] A longitudinal approach enables 'researchers to better capture evolutionary dynamics within security politics', as well as trace 'the multifaceted and incremental processes of [de]securitization that much of the theoretical literature emphasizes'. In essence, studies of securitization of particular issues are often limited to short time frames. We adopt a much longer period of analysis here in order to fully demonstrate the ongoing securitization of the Uyghur.

We show how, since the mid-1990s, the Chinese leadership have utilised speech acts to construct the Uyghur as a security threat, often framing the Uyghur either as separatist in nature or, more frequently since 9/11, as terrorists, through discourses that are targeted at both domestic and international audiences, making possible much broader securitization practices. Before moving forward a note on methodology, given the lack of transparency within the PRC with regard to the Uyghur issue and the sensitivity of the issue we recognise that it is almost impossible to collect data on the activities of Uyghur separatists that is bias free. We also note that the information provided on the security practices of the Chinese state by the PRC will be highly politicised. As researchers that do not speak or write Chinese, in order to analyse the speech acts of representatives of the Chinese state or the laws passed by the PRC and its regional governments, we are dependent on translations of official documents and statements contained in media reports and through translation websites. The main body of the analysis below is drawn from media reports, academic articles and reports provided by human rights organisation, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

To structure the analysis, we split the securitization of the Uyghur across three time periods to chart when particular speech acts were made, the audiences they were aimed at, and the subsequent security practices enacted. First, is the period from the end of the Cold War in 1990/1991 through until September 11, 2001 and the start of the US-led 'war on terror'. This period was characterised by the Chinese state constructing the Uyghur issue in Xinjiang as primarily a separatist problem, though increasingly towards the late 1990s as one that was

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[48] Jennifer Ang, 'Sinicizing the Uyghurs', *Peace Review* 28, no. 4 (2016):399-406.
[49] BBC News, 'China bans Xinjiang officials from observing Ramadan fast', *BBC Online*, 2 July 2014. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-28123267
[50] Aglaya Snetkov, 'Theories, Methods and Practices'.

also becoming more explicitly a religious dilemma. The next is the post-September 11, period from 2001 until the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2014. During this period, the threat of terrorism was invoked frequently by China, and attempts were made to draw links between the Uyghur movement and international Islamist terror networks. We argue that the Chinese government framed the issue within the context of the global war on terror, in part to gain the acceptance of an international audience for Beijing's domestic policies. The final period we analyse is from 2014 until 2020, where the number of securitizing speech acts increased dramatically, both in content and tone, as attempts were made to solidify the domestic Chinese audience and acceptance by the Han Chinese of the exceptional and every-day security practices enacted against the Uyghurs.

1990-2001 – The Securitization of the Uyghur as a Separatist and Religious Threat

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the start of the 1990s and the subsequent emergence of several newly independent Central Asian states, many of which shared a similar cultural heritage with the ethnically Turkic Uyghurs, led to calls for greater autonomy from Uyghurs in Xinjiang. For Beijing, these events were viewed as a direct threat to its sovereignty and were articulated as such consistently throughout the 1990s.[51] A spectacular uprising by Uyghurs in the Baren township in Xinjiang on 4 April 1990, which resulted in the deaths of 23 people and the capture of over 230 Uyghur fighters, seemed to confirm the Chinese perception of the increasing threat of separatism.[52] Importantly, from the perspective of the Uyghur, the reasons for the uprising were very different, with the aforementioned mass migration of Han-Chinese across previous decades into Xinjiang one of the main drivers, as well as claims that the government has forced 250 Uyghur women to have abortions.[53] These events set a pattern for much of the conflict between the Uyghur and the Chinese government throughout this period.

Indeed, the 1990s were characterised by the continuation of large-scale Han migration into Xinjiang to work in the region, particularly in the energy industry. Interestingly, the every-day practice of state investment into the energy industry in Xinjiang, and the encouragement of migration for economic purposes, played a key role in fuelling Uyghur grievances and the subsequent securitization of the Uyghur.[54] Within official state discourse, as early as 1991, Xinjiang's Party Secretary Wang Lequan stated that the 'major task' facing the authorities in Xinjiang was to 'manage religion and guide it in being subordinate to the central task of economic construction, the unification of the motherland, and the objective of national unity'.[55] For the government of China, economic revival was placed above religious freedom.

The steps taken to try and improve the Xinjiang economy, by encouraging increased Han migration for labour, had the opposite effect for the Uyghur with the widespread perception that what was actually occurring was China's exploitation of Xinjiang's land and natural

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[51] Thierry Kellner, 'China: The Uyghur Situation from Independence for the Central Asian Republics to the Post September 11 Era', *UNHCR Emergency & Security Service*, Writenet Paper No. 2, May 2002, p. 7.
[52] Rongxing Guo, *China's Spatial (Dis)integration: Political Economy of the Interethnic* (Elsevier: New York, 2015): 45.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Thierry Kellner, 'China: The Uyghur Situation', p. 21.
[55] Human Rights Watch, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang* 17, no. 2 (April 11, 2005):28.

resources.[56] Alongside the mass migration of Han Chinese, there was a growing belief amongst the Uyghur community in Xinjiang that their culture and autonomy within the region was coming under further attack 'through a growing insistence on the use of Mandarin Chinese in the education system, limitations on religious authorities and practices, and increasing economic inequality'.[57] In response to these issues, throughout the early 1990s the Uyghurs engaged in a series of protests; which in turn were met with ever increasing violence as the PRC sought to put the protests down, again following the pattern established after the Baren township uprising.

The growing Uyghur protests of the early 1990s were met by, in 1996, another of Beijing's 'Strike Hard' campaigns in Xinjiang[58]; what were in effect, brutal police crackdowns.[59] The campaign exacerbated the cycle of violence, with further protests and in some extreme cases, rioting and civil unrest, including attacks by Uyghurs against both Han civilians and symbols of the Chinese state including police stations.[60] Under the leadership of President Jiang Zemin, this was constructed primarily as a direct response to the long-held Uyghur desire for statehood, with the Chinese state framing its speech accordingly against the perceived threat of 'splittism' in Xinjiang, with Uyghur calls for autonomy constructed as separatism and therefore viewed as a direct threat to the security of China. The 'Strike Hard' campaign was followed by increased Uyghur demonstrations, which were in turn met with further brutal repression by Beijing, resulting in the deaths in 1997 of an estimated 300 Uyghurs.[61] A central dimension of the evolving response to the Uyghur issue was the way in which Beijing sought to securitize religion by drawing a causal link between Islam and state-subversion; with the threat of religion increasingly invoked as a powerful tool through which to further the threat narrative against the Uyghur community.

By combining 'splittism' (i.e. separatism) and 'illegal religious practices' as the key threats facing China during this period, indeed, as existential threats to the state's own security, it enabled China to enact both every-day and exceptional security practices. In terms of every-day securitizing practices, religion was now being used as an important tool through which Beijing could denounce Uyghur behaviour. Each year between 1996 and 2001 the Chinese leadership conducted province-wide anti-crime campaigns in Xinjiang that specifically focused on 'illegal religious activities'[62]. Religious freedoms were amongst the first to be violated in the ever-increasing securitization of the Uyghur in Xinjiang. This included the closure of mosques and religious schools[63], and the tightening of restrictions placed upon Imams.[64] Furthermore, the Chinese state also implemented exceptional security measures, which included the large-scale extrajudicial killing of Uyghur civilians. Indeed, between 1996 and 2001, there was on average one Uyghur executed every four days.[65]

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[56] Joanne Smith, 'Four Generations of Uyghurs: The Shift towards Ethno-political Ideologies among Xinjiang's Youth', *Inner Asia* 2, No. 2, Special Issue: Xinjiang (2000): 195-224; Howell and Fan, 'Migration and Inequality in Xinjiang: A Survey of Han and Uyghur Migrants in Urumqi', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 52, No. 1. (2011): 212. Available at: https://www.geog.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/users/fan/403.pdf
[57] Philip B. K. Potter. Terrorism in China Growing Threats with Global Implications. 2013. p. 71.
[58] The first 'Strike Hard' campaign was conducted in 1983, targeting a perceived increase in crime in China.
[59] Justin Rudelson, 'Xinjiang's Uyghurs in the Ensuing US China Partnership', *Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Uyghur Panel*, June 10, 2002.
[60] Human Rights Watch, 'Devastating Blows', 14.
[61] Rudelson, 'Xinjiang's Uyghurs', 2.
[62] Human Rights Watch, 'Devastating Blows'
[63] Ibid. 15.
[64] Human Rights Watch, 'Devastating Blows', 32.
[65] *Ibid.*

As well as increased domestic repression of the Uyghur, there was an international dimension to China's securitization of this issue. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in summer 2001, China managed to gain support for its security policies against the Uyghurs from the then six member states. The wording in 'The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism', a binding agreement drafted by China, was very deliberate stating that the six member states should work together to combat the 'three evils' of terrorism, separatism and extremism together.[66] This speech act, which was aimed at a wider international audience, reframed the political issue of separatism as a security issue directly linked to terrorism, thus setting the tone for future campaigns against the Uyghur.

The adoption of the language of terrorism, understood here as a form of securitizing speech, at the SCO summit, helped to convene legitimacy on China's response to the Uyghur issue to a regional audience. The adoption of this speech act was evidenced by two securitizing practices: two every-day, the other exceptional. SCO member states had little hesitation extraditing Uyghurs to China[67], in addition to increased surveillance of Uyghur communities in the SCO; testimonies from Uyghurs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan spoke of facing increased surveillance and increased repression by their governments.[68] In a case of an exceptional security practice, China was alleged to have been involved in politically motivated extrajudicial killings of Uyghurs within the SCO member states themselves. This included the high profile killing of Dilbirim Samsakova, a member of the Central Committee of the East Turkestan National Congress, in Kazakhstan in 2001.[69] Even at this stage, it was becoming increasingly evident that China intended to export its campaign against the Uyghur abroad, utilising the same tactics of mass surveillance, intimidation, and extrajudicial killing, that it does unabated twenty years later.

September 11, 2001 – 2013: The War on Terror and Reframing the Uyghur as a Terrorist Threat

Towards the end of the previous period, the two perceived threats of separatism and religion, had begun to overlap in official state discourse. In early 2001, China's Minister of Public Security instructed the Xinjiang police to carry out another two-year 'Strike Hard' campaign aimed at 'eliminating separatism and illegal religious activities'.[70] The latest campaign against the Uyghur was strengthened by concurrent global events and in particular the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. The events in the US provided the basis for the strengthening of the narrative of terrorism and extremism that had been invoked at the SCO conference in June 2001, and the reframing of the Uyghur threat as not just separatist and religious in orientation, but primarily as an existential terrorist threat to the PRC|.

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[66] SCO, *The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*, June 15 2001. See also: Stephen Aris, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: 'Tackling the Three Evils'. A Regional Response to Non-Traditional Security Challenges or an Anti-Western Bloc?' *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 3 (May, 2009): 457-482.
[67] East Turkistan Information Centre, *Three Uyghur Political Asylum Seekers Deported from Kazakhstan to China*, Munich, 12 February 1999.
[68] Thierry Kellner, 'China: The Uyghur Situation'
[69] Ibid. 20.
[70] Human Rights Watch, 'Devastating Blows'.

The impact of the events of 9/11, therefore, was to usher in a new era of Chinese persecution in Xinjiang. In the wake of the attacks, Beijing saw an opportunity to gain further international legitimacy for its ongoing domestic 'Strike Hard' campaign. Reframing the Uyghur issue as one of Islamist 'terrorists' seeking to subvert the Chinese state and fighting for separatist beliefs, China attempted to gain the acceptance of the US for its cause by drawing links between international Islamist terrorism and Uyghur separatism. Zhu Bangzao, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated at a press conference on 18 September 2001 that 'the United States asks for China's support and assistance in the fight against terrorism. China, by the same token, has reason to ask the United States to give its understanding and support in China's fight against national splittism and terrorism'.[71] The language used was designed to convince a US audience that the US and China shared a common threat from Islamist terrorism. China even began censoring anti-American content online to appear more sympathetic to the US in a diplomatic effort to win over American acceptance and support for its security policies in Xinjiang.[72]

Interestingly, the securitization of the Uyghur as a terrorist threat has been reliant on accusations targeted at a single Uyghur separatist organisation: The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).[73] As Sean Roberts explains, little is still known about this group, with few Uyghurs, or scholars studying Uyghur political movements, having heard of the organisation in the years prior to 2001.[74] Roberts goes on to note that although there were 'numerous incidents of inter-ethnic violence and civil unrest' in Xinjiang in previous decades, 'few if any of these incidents resemble the premeditated, targeted, and substantial acts of violence one usually associates with international terrorist groups'.[75] Indeed, although references to the group appear to have originated from official sources representing the Chinese state, the narrative surrounding the ETIM as a dangerous, global 'jihadist' group with ties to international Islamist terrorism has been adopted by policymakers and politicians in the international arena.

The first time ETIM was mentioned appears to have been in a document prepared for the UN Security Council by China titled 'Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by "Eastern Turkistan" Organizations and their Ties with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban'.[76] In particular, the language used by Beijing drew a clear link between Al-Qaida and the Uyghur by claiming that ETIM was a 'major component of the terrorist network headed by Osama bin Laden', denouncing 40 Uyghur organisations as terrorist groups, despite no evidence of planned or attempted terrorist attacks.[77]

Indeed, the case of 22 Uyghur men, all captured in Afghanistan and sent to Guantanamo Bay, seemed to confirm this idea that the Uyghur posed not only a threat to China but also had

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[71] PRC, 'Foreign Ministry Regular Press Conference by Spokesman Zhu Bangzao', 18th September 2001. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3712_665976/t19011.shtml
[72] J Pomfret, 'China Censors Anti-U.S. Reaction', *International Herald Tribune*, 15 September 2001.
[73] This organisation is also referred to as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP).
[74] Sean Roberts, 'Imaginary Terrorism? The Global War on Terror and the Narrative of the Uyghur Terrorist Threat', *PONARS Eurasia Working Paper*, 2012.
[75] Ibid. p. 2.
[76] PRC, 'Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by 'Eastern Turkistan' Organizations and their Ties with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban', November 29, 2001, *Website of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations*. Available at: http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/fk/t28937.htm
[77] Ibid

links to the global 'Islamist terrorist' threat that was now the focus of the US war on terror.[78] Roberts has detailed how, through interviews with some of the former detainees, that while these individuals expressed distaste for Chinese rule in Xinjiang, none were committed to 'global jihadi ideology'.[79] Regardless of this, and of doubts amongst the military leadership in Guantanamo over whether the Uyghur detainees should even be there, the US moved to accept the Chinese narrative on the security threat posed by the Uyghur, in part as a result of the new strategic imperative created by the 'war on terror'.[80] This move to securitize ETIM as a terrorist threat to China gained further acceptance by an international audience when the US government signed Executive Order 13224 designating ETIM as a 'terrorist organisation' in September 2002, with the UN also adding the group to a list of terrorist organisations covered by UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1390 at the same time.[81] Indeed, this decision was accompanied by a press release from the US Department of State, which claimed that between 1990 and 2001 'members of ETIM reportedly committed over 200 acts of terrorism in China, resulting in at least 162 deaths and over 440 injuries. Its objective is the creation of a fundamentalist Muslim state called East Turkistan', demonstrating full acceptance of China's securitizing move.[82]

Henceforth, all Uyghur separatist movements, rallies and protests were labelled by China as terrorist activities. The securitization of the Uyghur as a terrorist threat had proved successful in terms of audience acceptance by regional allies in the SCO, and now the US through the linking of the Uyghur issue to the newly launched Global War on Terror (GWOT) and even at the UN. Indeed, as Hastings explains, after 9/11 'Central Asian governments' policies towards Uyghur separatism turned nearly as hostile as those of China itself'.[83] The effect of these moves in the global arena was to bestow international legitimacy to the Chinese state to continue its brutal repression in Xinjiang province. Despite claims of links between ETIM and regional Islamist terrorist organisations, there appears to be little evidence for this, nor is there evidence to support the classification of acts of resistance in Xinjiang as terrorism.[84]

Ironically, China had, prior to the events of 9/11, sought to convince an international audience that in fact Xinjiang was a relatively peaceful and prosperous province, and that the problems of religious and separatist inspired terrorism were both isolated and contained. Days before 9/11, in early September 2001, communist party officials in Xinjiang described the situation as 'by no means (is Xinjiang) a place where violence and terrorist accidents take place very often'.[85] This language was transformed sharply weeks later in the aftermath of 9/11 when China exploited a window of opportunity to frame its agenda as one of commonality with the wider Western and indeed global reaction to the perceived threat of Islamist terrorism. By reframing the response to the Uyghur as part of the GWOT, the

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[78] See Roberts, 'Imaginary Terrorism?'; Richard Bernstein, 'When China Convinced the U.S. That Uighurs Were Waging Jihad', *The Atlantic*, 19 March 2019. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/us-uighurs-guantanamo-china-terror/584107/
[79] Roberts, 'Imaginary Terrorism?'
[80] Bernstein, 'When China Convinced the U.S. That Uighurs Were Waging Jihad'.
[81] United Nations, Security Council Resolution: 1297. Distr.: General 15 October 1999. S/RES/1297; United Nations, Security Council Resolution: 1390. Distr.: General 16 January 2002. S/RES/1390; See also: Council on Foreign Relations, The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), September 4, 2014. Available at: https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim
[82] US Department of State, 'Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. Policy in Central Asia', Bureau of *European and Eurasian Affairs*, 27 November 2002. Available at: https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/15562.htm
[83] Justin V. Hastings, 'Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest', *The China Quarterly* 208 (December 2011): 908.
[84] See Roberts, 'Imaginary Terrorism?'
[85] Bao Lisheng, 'Chinese Officials Say Not Much Terrorism in Xinjiang', *Ta Kung Pao*, 2 September 2001.

Chinese state was able to justify the suppression of unsanctioned religious activities in Xinjiang.

The extent of the repression against the Uyghur in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 has been well documented by Amnesty International.[86] This included amendments to the Criminal Law of China making membership of a 'terrorist organisation' a criminal offence, longer detention for 'terrorist crimes' and changes to the range of offences for which the death penalty was applicable. The result of this was the arrest of hundreds of Uyghur on terrorism charges, some of whom were sentenced to death. As well as this, there was yet another, concurrent, crack down on religious practices in Xinjiang, including the targeting of Mosques and schools. Counter-intuitively, though, the increased repression of the Uygur by the Chinese state did not lead to an increase in violence on the part of the Uyghur during this period; as Hastings notes 'within Xinjiang itself Uyghur-related violent incidents seemed to die down for the next six years'.[87] Hastings has also suggested that when Uyghur violence did start up again in 2008 and 2009, the capacity to do real damage was hampered by the ongoing crack-down.

The Beijing Olympics, which were held in the summer of 2008, also played a key role in the on-going securitization of the Uyghur. Although acts of violence, often alleged to have been perpetuated by Uyghur separatists, had significantly reduced during the 2000s, in the build up to the games the PRC claimed to have foiled numerous terrorism 'plots'. For example, in April 2008, the Public Security Ministry spokesperson Wu Heping, claimed that 45 Uyghur terrorists had been arrested on suspicion of planning to kidnap and athletes and detonate explosives with the intention of disrupting the games.[88] Throughout the build up to the event, the PRC made multiple claims that terrorism was the greatest threat to the Olympics. Roberts has suggested however that the real reason for the invoking of the threat of terrorism during this period was so that the PRC could continue to target the Uyghur with repressive security practices.[89] He also notes that the Beijing Olympics provided the first instance where the 'quarantining' of the Uyghur would occur, with members of the Uyghur community banned from purchasing hotel rooms in the city, as well as forced expulsions of between 4000-5000 Uyghur from Beijing, before the start of the games.[90]

Although no attacks occurred during the Olympics, the increasing repressive nature of the security measures taken against the Uyghur, and their ongoing construction as a potential terrorist threat, undoubtedly contributed to a growing sense of tension within China and particularly in Xinjiang between the Uyghur and the Han-Chinese. The tensions began to spill over in the summer of 2009, when in July, peaceful protests in the city of Urumqi over the killing of Uyghur workers at the Guangdong toy factory, led to an outbreak of violence, after riot police moved in to suppress the protest. It was reported that members of the Uyghur community had clashed with the Han Chinese, with the violence resulting in over 800 injuries and the deaths of 140, mostly Han-Chinese, people.[91] The protests in Urumqi were followed predictably, in the cycle of violence and counter-violence, by another crackdown on the part

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[86] Amnesty International, *China's Anti-Terrorism Legislation and Repression in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* (New York, NY: Amnesty International, 2002).
[87] Hastings, 'Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest', 909.
[88] Gulnoza Saidazimova, 'China: Officials Say Uyghur Group Involved in Olympic Terror Plot'. *Radio Free Europe*, 11 April 2008. Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/1109560.html
[89] Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's War on Terror'.
[90] Ibid. 241.
[91] Tania Branigan, 'Ethnic violence in China leaves 140 dead'. *The Guardian*, 6 July 2009.

of the PRC.[92] Human Rights Watch have claimed that Chinese security forces detained thousands of people on the basis that they were suspected of involvement in the unrest, with many disappearing afterwards without trace.[93] Furthermore, strict restrictions were implemented on communications in Xinjiang during this period, including the shutting down of the internet and blocks placed on text-messaging and international calls. The riots in Urumqi therefore marked an important moment in the securitization of the Uyghur in Xinjiang, confirming to the PRC their perception that the Uyghur represented an increasing threat to the ethnic Han-Chinese way of life.

2014-2020: The Emergence of a Genuine Uyghur Threat and the Introduction of Exceptional Security Practices

In the period after the Urumqi attacks until the start of 2014, the Chinese state continued to escalate the use of security measures that targeted the every-day activities and behaviours of the Uyghur community. This included the further development of surveillance measures with the installation of thousands of CCTV cameras in Xinjiang and the recruitment of 5000 extra police officers to monitor and control the population.[94] According to Roberts, by 2013, the 'cycle of repression and violence had escalated to the point that some Uyghur-initiated acts of violence began looking increasingly like planned terrorist attacks by any definition of the term'.[95]

The start of the 2014 was particularly violent, with attacks in Xinjiang, Beijing and Yunnan all attributed to Uyghur separatists. The first was an attack at Kunming rail station in March, which saw a number of knife-wielding attackers kill at least 29 civilians and injure over 130 more.[96] It was widely reported in the official state media outlet Xinhua that the attackers were Uyghur, with the Chinese government blaming 'Xinjiang separatist forces' as the cause for this terrorist attack.[97] Despite this, no group claimed responsibility[98], the Kunming police and Chinese state failed to share any evidence which pointed to their claims of Uyghur separatism, and these claims could not be validated by any external actor due to Beijing's centralised power structures and restriction on foreign media outlets, which as previously noted makes independent verification difficult. As well as the attack in Kunming, there were further incidents involving explosives used at a crowded market in Urumqi in May 2014 that killed 31 people, wounding 94, and an attack at a coalmine in Xinjiang that left over 50 Han-Chinese workers dead in October 2015.[99]

Significantly, in the following three months after the Kunming attack, President Xi spoke publicly on the subject of counter-terrorism on twenty-two separate occasions, on average

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[92] Human Rights Watch, *'We are Afraid to Even Look for Them': Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang's Protests* (New York, NY, 2009).
[93] Ibid.
[94] BBC News, 'China steps up surveillance in Xinjiang'. BBC News Online, 2 July 2010. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10485129
[95] Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's War on Terror', 244.
[96] BBC News, 'China mass stabbing: Deadly knife attack in Kunming'. *BBC Online*, 2 March 2014. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-26402367
[97] Chicago Tribune, 'China blames Xinjiang militants for station attack', *Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 2014.
[98] BBC News, 'China separatists blamed for Kunming knife rampage'. *BBC Online*, 2 March 2014. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-26404566
[99] Michael Martina, 'Biggest attack in years kills 31 in China's troubled Xinjiang'. *Reuters*, 22 May 2014; Ben Blanchard, 'At least 50 said killed in September Xinjiang attack'. *Reuters*, 1 October 2015.

invoking the threat from terrorism almost twice a week.[100] In April 2014, Xi announced a year-long campaign against terrorism in Xinjiang, describing the province as at the 'front line in anti-terrorism'.[101] The language used during these speeches reflects the harsh and often confrontational tones with which the Chinese leadership view the ongoing issues in Xinjiang. According to the official Xinhua news agency, Xi was quoted as saying that the government must 'make terrorists like rats scurrying across a street, with everybody shouting beat them'.[102]

In the summer of 2014, echoing the language of President Xi, the Xinjiang Party Chief Zhang Chunxian declared a 'People's War on Terror'.[103] In the speech, Chunxian claimed that the government would seek to:

> 'promote the eradication of extremism, further expose and criticize the 'reactionary nature' of the 'three forces', enhance schools' capacity to resist ideological infiltration by religious extremism, and resolutely win the ideological battle against separation and infiltration'.[104]

This speech, strikingly similar to President Xi's, suggested it was the responsibility of all Chinese citizens to assist government forces in defeating Uyghur terrorism and separatism. The audience for the securitizing language used during this period was again the majority Han Chinese population, in effect contributing to the further demonisation of the Uyghurs, strengthening highly negative attitudes laced with suspicion by the Han and fuelling ethnic tensions further still.[105]

There was further civil unrest later in the year, in Shache county (also known as Yarkant), Kashgar prefecture, at the end of July 2014. Amid widely differing accounts of events, even amongst official outlets, there were reportedly 100 dead civilians in Xinjiang's deadliest incident in over five years. The official accounts provided by the government describe Uyghur terrorists carrying out knife-wielding attacks that followed a similar pattern to the Kunming attack.[106] The World Uyghur Congress, an exiled Uyghur human rights advocacy group branded as a terrorist organisation by Beijing, reported that in fact peaceful protests aimed at highlighting the extrajudicial killing of a Uyghur family, in addition to the infringement of religious freedoms during the holy month of Ramadan, led to a brutal police crackdown causing the deaths.[107]

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[100] Simone van Nieuwenhuizen, 'China May Regret 'Free Riding' in Iraq', *The Diplomat*, 26 August 2014.
[101] Michael Martina, 'China's Xi says Xinjiang is front line on terrorism, hails police'. *Reuters*, 29 April 2014. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang/chinas-xi-says-xinjiang-is-front-line-on-terrorism-hails-police-idUSBREA3S03D20140429
[102] Brian Spegele, 'Shades of George W. Bush in Xi Jinping's Anti-Terror Campaign'. *Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2014. Available at: https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/04/29/shades-of-george-w-bush-in-xi-jinpings-anti-terror-campaign/
[103] China Daily, 'Xinjiang's Party chief wages 'people's war' against terrorism'. *China Daily.Com*, 26 May 2014. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-05/26/content_17541318.htm
[104] Ibid.
[105] Al-Jazeera. Repression stalks China's Uighurs, 10 years after Urumqi riots. *Al-Jazeera Online*, 5 July 2019. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/repression-stalks-china-uighurs-10-years-urumqi-riots-190705045804805.html
[106] Emily Rauhala, 'China Now Says Almost 100 Were Killed in Xinjiang Violence'. *Time Magazine*, 4 August 2014. Available at: https://time.com/3078381/china-xinjiang-violence-shache-yarkand/
[107] World Uyghur Congress, 'China's War on Terror becomes all out attack on Islam in Xinjiang'. 20 September 2014. Available at: https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/chinas-war-on-terror-becomes-all-out-attack-on-islam-in-xinjiang/

Significantly, as they had done at the start of the US led 'war on terror' a decade before, the PRC embraced the opportunity provided by the emergence of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014, to further legitimise their actions against the Uyghur to an international audience. Indeed, the government of Xinjiang claimed that the attack on Shache 'was a serious terrorist attack incident which has links to domestic and overseas terrorist organizations and was organized, premeditated, carefully planned and evil', linking the threat of Uyghur terrorism to the conflicts in Iraq and Syria for the first time.[108] In July 2014 Cui Tiankai, the Chinese Ambassador to the US, claimed that 'there's clear evidence that the terrorists and terrorist groups in Xinjiang are closely connected with international terrorist groups. We believe that if we really want to combat international terrorists, we have to do it everywhere'.[109] Tiankai also suggested that there was a clear link between ISIS and Uyghur terrorism in Xinjiang.

The Chinese state and the government of Xinjiang responded to the events of 2014 and 2015 by enacting new regulations aimed at more tightly controlling the religious affairs of the Uyghur and banning all unauthorized religious practice, including through every-day forms of securitizing practice such as the monitoring of online communications and internet websites, as well as actions to clamp down on the role of religion in 'marriage, funerals, culture, the arts, and sports'.[110] By the end of 2015, the more banal, every-day forms of securitization, reflected in the steps taken by the Chinese state to monitor and control the religious practices of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang, gave way to something more sinister and exceptional in nature. After decades of repression, legitimised through the construction of the Uyghur as not only a separatist but also a terrorist threat, in part provoking the violent acts in Kunming and Shache and counter-productively creating the very security threat a securitizing move is supposed to help prevent and combat, the PRC took the next step in their securitization of the Uyghur. Since the appointment of Chen Quanguo as Communist Party Secretary in the XUAR in 2016 the steps taken to deal with the Uyghur community more accurately resemble a securitization akin to the classic CS understanding of the process, whereby the language of the 'People's War on Terror' has been accompanied by truly exceptional security practices.[111]

As of December 2018, it has been estimated that between 800,000 and 2 million Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims have been detained arbitrarily without charge, and interned, in political 're-education' camps.[112] As well as being made to learn the Han-Chinese language, pledge loyalty to the Chinese state and subject to other forms of political indoctrination as part of their 're-education', it is alleged that Uyghur and other minorities detained in these camps have also been subject to torture and ill-treatment including physical and psychological forms of abuse.[113] According to Finley, the project for re-education, culminating in the creation of these camps, can be traced back to 2014 and the start of the 'People's War on Terror', when

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[108] Ben Blanchard, 'Almost 100 killed during attacks in China's Xinjiang last week'. *Reuters*, 3 August 2014.
[109] PRC, 'Ambassador Cui Tiankai's Interview with the Foreign Policy', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC*, 11 July 2014. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1208141.shtml
[110] Amnesty International. 'Amnesty International Report 2015/16: The State of the World's Human Rights'. *Amnesty International* (London, 2016).
[111] Zenz, A., and J. Leibold, 'Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing's Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang'. *China Brief* 17, no. 12 (2017): 16–24.
[112] Finley, 'Securitization, insecurity and conflict in contemporary Xinjiang'.
[113] Human Rights Watch, *'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims*. September 2018.

the Xinjiang regional government demanded the return of Uyghur migrants to their hometown to obtain new identity cards.[114] This was followed by the dispatch of teams of local officials (as part of what is known as *fanghuiju* - a programme to 'visit the people' – to report of signs of extremist behaviour in Xinjiang) these behaviours included 'innocuous every-day Islamic practices such as fasting during Ramadan, sporting a long beard, avoiding alcohol, or possessing Qur'ans'.[115]

A key step in the ongoing securitization process was the passing of China's counter-terrorism legislation by the People's Congress in December 2015, which was followed shortly after, in 2017, by a Regulation on De-extremification in Xinjiang. As Roberts explains, as well as giving the state sweeping new powers of surveillance and censorship, the 2015 counter-terrorism law also defined 'terrorism', 'terrorist activity' and 'terrorist organization' in such a way that any expression of dissent or religiosity on the part of the Uyghur community could now be considered a criminal act.[116] Similarly, Article 9 of the 'de-extremification' regulation identified fifteen behaviours that could be construed as signs of extremism, including the wearing of a burqa or 'spreading religious fanaticism through irregular beards or name selection'.[117]

However, the surveillance and control of the Uyghur goes beyond the internment camps, impacting upon the entire Uyghur community in Xinjiang. Human Rights Watch has reported that there are now considerable restrictions on freedom of movement for Uygur residents of Xinjiang that have been achieved through a combination of administrative measures, checkpoints and control over access to individuals passports, effectively requiring the Uyghur to request state permission to travel.[118] Alongside the controls on movement, the Chinese state has introduced new forms of high-tech mass surveillance. This includes the compulsory mass-collection of biometric data, including DNA, the use of artificial intelligence and big data to 'identify, profile and track everyone in Xinjiang', the ubiquitous use of CCTV, including at checkpoints with facial-recognition enabled cameras, and even the use of QR codes for the purchase of products (such as knives) that are then linked to an individual's ID card.[119]

These practices have become so entrenched that many behaviours which might have once been considered normal or every-day activities for citizens in Xinjiang, such as travel, work or worship, have been exceptionalised through the implementation of extraordinary security measures designed to combat the perceived Uyghur threat. This campaign against the Uyghur is not directed against a small minority of the community but rather the entire population of 13 million people that live in Xinjiang and which amounts to a form of collective punishment. As Roberts explains, these moves to target the entire community have been accompanied by a narrative of extremism and terrorist threat that constructs the Uyghur as an 'almost biological threat infecting society, bringing into question whether the goal of their assimilation is even possible in the present context'.[120] Interestingly, returning to our argument about the role of audiences in the securitization process, the US Congress in 2019

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[114] Finley, 'Securitization, insecurity and conflict in contemporary Xinjiang'.
[115] Ibid. 4.
[116] Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's War on Terror', 246.
[117] China Law Translate, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation of De- Extremification. Available at: https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/
[118] Human Rights Watch, 'Eradicating Ideological Viruses'.
[119] Ibid. 10 & 22.
[120] Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's War on Terror', 246.

passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, demonstrating that the priorities of the 'war on terror' were now secondary to the rights of the Uyghur in China.[121] Unfortunately, by accepting the earlier moves to securitize the Uyghur on the part of the PRC, this law amounts to nothing more than closing the proverbial stable door after the horse has bolted. Of course, it is difficult to predict whether US action on Uyghur rights in the early 2000s would have done anything to alter the course taken by China over the following two decades, but it does raise the point that of the international community is serious about promoting democracy abroad, they should remain wary of securitizing moves by authoritarian states, even in instance where those moves correlate with their own strategic priorities.

Conclusion

In summary, we have sought to demonstrate how over the past three decades the Uyghur have been the victims of an all-encompassing securitization process that shows no sign of abating. First, through linguistic construction of the Uyghur as a separatist threat throughout the 1990s, which helped to legitimate every-day and banal forms of securitizing practices, such as restriction on religious practices, or through the encouragement of migration into Xinjiang. More recently, since the start of the 2000s, the securitization of the Uyghur has been achieved through their (re)construction as a terrorist threat. We have argued that the PRC has exaggerated the threat of terrorism by groups associated with Uyghur separatism, such as the ETIM, as a way of continuing to legitimise the now decades long oppression of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang.

The reframing of Uyghur separatism as terrorism through the invocation of the US-led 'war on terror' demonstrated the importance of international audiences of securitizing moves, with the US unwilling to criticise China's actions against the Uyghur for as long as their interests coincided with the Chinese. This then offers an important lesson to the international community with regard to their acceptance of the securitizing moves of oppressive states within the international system. This move to securitize the Uyghur was also, we suggested, aimed at an internal audience; the Han-Chinese, who have come to accept the narrative of the PRC that the Uyghur do indeed represent a significant terrorist threat to the country. This move has however had another impact. We agree with Roberts that the exaggeration of the threat of Uyghur terrorism and the security practices that have been developed by the PRC in response to this issue can be viewed as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', with the branding of the Uyghur as terrorists providing the basis for the potential 'creation of a viable Uyghur militant insurgency like the one it has long claimed to face'.[122]

In the classic CS approach to securitization, the purpose of securitizing an issue is that in doing so the securitizing actor can claim authority to develop measures that are aimed at countering the security threat. We suggest, from a post-Copenhagen perspective, that the securitization of the Uyghur has been counter-productive in the sense that not only has the Chinese state failed to assimilate Uyghur to the Han-Chinese way of life, the sporadic Uyghur initiated acts of violence that have occurred over the past 30 years, and specifically the deadlier incidents witnessed between 2014 and 2015, can in part be viewed as a direct response to increasingly repressive security practices implement by the PRC. The argument that the securitization of the Uyghur has been counter-productive of course rests on an assumption - based on the claims of the PRC - that the purpose of the securitization process is

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[121] US Congress, 'Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019', *US House of Representatives*, 3 December 2019.
[122] Roberts, 'The Biopolitics of China's War on Terror', 253.

to deal with the perceived security threat posed by the Uyghur in order to restore normal politics and order to Xinjiang. If, however, the purpose of the securitization was for reasons that remain unspoken, such as the continued ethnic cleansing of Xinjiang and the elimination of Uyghur cultural differences from the majority Han-Chinese population, then the securitization process might actually be considered a success from the perspective of the PRC.

However, whether we consider the securitization counter-productive or successful, there is another major problem for the Chinese state moving forward. With the increasingly extreme nature of the securitizing practices implemented by the PRC, from the every-day surveillance architecture that has been created to the use of internment camps for the purposes of 're-education', it becomes ever more difficult to see how the situation can be de-securitized or how the PRC might extract itself from this situation. Indeed, if the PRC was to close the camps or to dismantle the security architecture that has been created, it leaves a situation in which there would undoubtedly be anger and lasting animosity amongst the Uyghur community. Not only this but history is littered with examples of state-led oppression of minority groups that have led to movements that adopt violence as the chosen method in response. There is every possibility that through the targeting of the Uyghur community with increasingly excessive securitizing practices, the PRC has created the conditions for the emergence of an ongoing security threat that will continue long into the future.