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# **Countering Internal Security Challenges in Xinjiang**

## **Rise of the Surveillance State?**

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**TATA TRUST**



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## Rise of the Surveillance State?



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# Preface



**Debasish Chaudhuri's** latest monograph is an important study combining serious desk research with empirical perceptions collated over many years by the author in his fieldwork. While the broad subject is one visited by him in a full-fledged work some years ago, the monograph breaks new ground and brings fresh detail and perspectives

from a range of Chinese official and non-official material as well as other external research. The Xinjiang problem is generally understood by most scholars outside China as a manifestation of identity politics, marked by the ethno-national resurgence of the Uyghur population. It has stemmed from a prolonged history of interethnic tensions, discrimination and prejudice that have been characteristic of the ethnic policies of the Chinese state combined with other elements such as Han supremacism, the suppression of protest or dissent, as well as the undifferentiated repression of all forms of Islamic practice and local culture within the region.

Within China, the mainstream discourse has consistently portrayed the troubles in the region against the backdrop of the rise of the “three evil forces” (*san gu shili*) namely, religious extremism, ethnic separatism and terrorism, which have been the major source of internal security challenges in Xinjiang. The Chinese official media has persistently viewed the wide range of Uyghur political activities whether violent or non-violent, along with the entire range of their social, cultural and religious practices, through the single prism of their ethno-religious identity. Viewed as a “biological threat,” “a virus” in Chinese society that had to be eliminated, Uyghur identity was consistently projected in binary terms and its affiliation towards Islam seen as a symptom of the “extremization” of the community and a threat to the national security of China. This was accentuated by a continuous effort by the Chinese

state, by state-sponsored academics and the media to exaggerate the role of trans-border terrorist organizations as well as of the “sinister designs” and “anti-China activities” of some foreign countries.

While, through history, the principal objectives of the Chinese state have been rationalised as being those of maintaining social and political order, ensuring the loyalty and obedience of the common people as well as of inculcating “healthy physical, mental, behavioural, moral and spiritual qualities among the population”, the social conditioning imposed by the Confucian tradition over the ages was embodied in a highly paternalistic moral code of conduct, strict rules of hierarchical relations and of propriety as well as harsh penal laws imposed on the common people. In modern China, this perspective continued to be evident in the post-Mao period, albeit under the firm aegis of the Party. A major preoccupation of the Party leadership in the post-reform period has been to prevent a reprise of the political disorder and chaos the country experienced during the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution or GPCR. Indeed, the biggest fear of the Communist Party leadership in the reform period was of the possible reversion to the political disorder and widespread chaos of that period. It was this paranoia that accounted for the extreme response displayed by the top leadership to the student demonstrations Beijing during the 1989 Tian’anmen movement. Indeed, despite the more long-term social and political measures generated by the leadership after the 1992 Deng Xiaoping South China tour, this paranoia remained and was firmly embedded in China’s public security discourse that legitimized the argument that public order and stability had to be safeguarded at all cost and by all means. Through the decades, the trauma of so-called “leadership weakness” in the handling of the 1989 situation has not been erased from the Party’s institutional memory.

It is this mindset that resulted in the policies of securitization and “de-extremisation” practised most dramatically in Xinjiang that represents

the major theme of this monograph. The author sees the year 2008 as a watershed year both in terms of the new wave of violence affecting Xinjiang as well as of the experiences of securitization that shaped China's public security perspectives and methodologies in subsequent years. Security partnerships and international collaborations nurtured during that period allowed China to develop and leverage long term relations with global security agencies and private surveillance technology companies in subsequent years.

It was after Xi Jinping's climb to the top leadership perch in 2013 that the articulation and practice of these policies reached their apogee. His emphasis on the 'four modernization' in social governance and the official use of internet, network information, and cyber security technologies towards this objective, helped create what was described as a "three-dimensional prevention and control system" for social and public order. Using big data to collect information about people, places and events, the government was able to monitor the lives of people in an all-embracing manner to safeguard what it saw as the security interests of the State. In Xinjiang, two different trajectories were successively followed by two senior party officials sent by the Party Centre to pacify the region during this period. Initially, under the tutelage of Zhang Chunxian, Xinjiang's official policy of fighting extremism, violent separatism, and terrorism was pursued with some nuance by delinking religion and ethnicity from extremist ideas. The two main focal points of governance were to advance "ethnic unity" and promote "de-extremization" or expunge religious observances or cultural practices seen as subversive. Zhang mingled with people from all walks of life and brought a balanced approach by emphasising improved conditions of the people's livelihood and the scaling down of the rhetoric of the campaign against separatism and terrorism. However, the violent attacks inside the region and other parts of China between 2013 and 2014, especially during Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang in April 2014 put paid to these efforts



and resulted in a renewed resolve to combat terrorism with an iron hand as well as a return to the harsh rhetoric of earlier years. With the replacement of Zhang Chunxian in August 2016 by a confirmed hardliner Chen Quanguo, it was clear that the central leadership had decided to abandon any kind of moderation in dealing with the troubles of this Muslim-dominated region. Under Chen's leadership, counter-terrorism, stability maintenance and de-extremisation work were all integrated within a single social control system and surveillance mechanism in Xinjiang. Stern steps were also taken against all elements suspected of providing any kind of support to such forces or in any way working against the interest of the state. A whole range of surveillance measures were adopted including physical, electronic, digital and biological surveillance, the setting up of extra-judicial detention camps as well as measures to crackdown on irregular groups mobilising any kind of local religious or cultural symbols and even targeting Uyghur pride.

Meanwhile, in September 2013 Xi unveiled his ambition of a grandiose Economic Belt linking China with the rest of Eurasia and Europe and a Maritime Silk Road linking China through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean all the way to the West. Xinjiang was to become the very fulcrum of this ambitious initiative. Due to its geographical position as the main gateway to Central and West Asian as well as European markets through the land, Xinjiang could emerge as a major growth centre in Western China. The plan was to develop the region into a major logistic centre under the Initiative with a railway network in Kashgar connecting eventually to South Asia. Crucially underpinning such a grandiose vision for the region was the understanding of the Party leadership that a secular culture could be nurtured in this region characterized by urbanization, consumerism, education and modern communication, one that would replace what was regarded as the outmoded religious and ethnic values of the local population of Xinjiang. The new phase of economic development and integration under the BRI

in Xinjiang was seen as an opportunity to raise the conditions of the local population to a higher level while, at the same time, ensuring the successful implementation of the Party's national and social security policies in Xinjiang.

In this monograph, the author also touches briefly on the impact of China's policies on its international standing. Within the UN, China has faced continuous challenges in its efforts to thwart any scrutiny of the Xinjiang camps by the UN Human Rights Council. Apart from active campaigns to defend its policies in Xinjiang in the face of attacks from foreign governments, international NGOs and human rights activists, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has also used the Universal Periodic Review on its human rights record to project its own narrative of its use of Xinjiang vocational skills education and training institutions as means to fight terrorism by imparting legal knowledge, vocational and language skills and education in deradicalization to the local population. China has even claimed that these training centres were part of its antiterrorism measures and constituted an effective contribution to global counter-terrorism efforts. How convincing that argument has been is anybody's guess.

I sincerely congratulate the author for his painstaking as well as rigorous research effort. I also commend the Institute of Chinese Studies for its support of this project.

**Vijay K. Nambiar**

Honorary Fellow, ICS

former Indian Ambassador to China, and

Chef de Cabinet to United Nations Secretary General

# Acknowledgement

Substantial reports on large scale incarceration of Uyghur and other Muslim minorities and proliferation of mass detention camps across Xinjiang began to appear significantly in the international media from the summer of 2018. In response to this development, Ambassador Ashok K. Kantha, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), Delhi, entrusted me with the task of preparing a concept note for a panel discussion with experts on the region from India. Under his initiative, a special seminar on Xinjiang was organized at India International Centre, New Delhi in October 2018. While chairing the session, Ambassador Kantha stressed the need for further research on the topic and gave me the idea of working towards this monograph. I express my most sincere appreciation for him in encouraging me to conceptualise the study and facilitating completion of this work. I extend special thanks to Professor K. Warikoo, Dr. Mahesh Ranjan Debata, and Dr. Shagun Sharma for participating in the deliberation and sharing valuable inputs on the developments in Xinjiang under the present Chinese leadership.

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# INTRODUCTION

The rise of ethno-national movements in different parts of the world and the shift from ideological to ethno-nationalist and ethno-religious terrorism have emerged as a major phenomenon in the post-Cold War world. With the irreversible changes in the geo-politics of the world since the launch of the global war against terrorism in the post 9/11 era, the distinction between terror and terrorism and other forms of violence and coercion has also been blurred in the official discourse of many countries irrespective of the differences of political systems. The rising fear of terrorist attacks has bred in majority populations of most countries a calculated insensitivity and distrust towards ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities as well as led to the exclusion of other marginalised sections of society from public life.

At the same time, there has also been a sharp upturn in the coercive capacities of states across the world. In compliance with the mood of their majority populations, the ruling elites of almost all countries, irrespective of political system, have engaged in strengthening their security apparatuses and gradually expanded their surveillance networks across the respective societies. Economic aspirations and various socio-political issues surrounding the neoliberal tendency also contributed in the process of maximising control over social activism.

The dominance of right-wing populist leaders across the democratic world in the second half of the 21st century further undermined civil rights and individual freedom at the global level in the name of securing social stability and national security by enhancing technology driven monitoring and surveillance machinery. Therefore, the growing reliance on surveillance to maintain social order is not a phenomenon restricted to any specific country or particular political system.

However, the authoritarian states are considered to be way ahead of other countries in this regard. The totalitarian twists in China under Xi Jinping and the widespread securitization process in the country during the last one decade is characterised as rise of surveillance state by many scholars and commentators. And, in this regard, Xinjiang is no doubt an ideal site for experimentation of the social impact of technologically advanced surveillance and social control.

Since the sense of insecurity and fear is basically subjective and varies in accordance to the priorities and convenience of individual countries, it is increasingly evident that non-state actors, social activists and even individuals can be easily stigmatised and ostracized by just labelling them as terrorist. With the paradigm shift in the global security discourse, any ethno-national movement anywhere in the world can, today, be depicted as detrimental to the national wellbeing of a country. In fact, this has created further confusion in differentiating between genuine grievances and protests against state repression or dissent and in distinguishing the non-violent actions of ethno-national movements from their more violent deeds, unlawful offences, criminal acts or acts of terrorism.

With the changing perception of threats and the increasing sense of insecurity among common people as well as the authorities across the world, intolerance towards the demands of ethno-national communities has increased. And the notion of terrorism as a cultural symptom of certain ethnic and religious communities has gained currency in the public discourse and in consideration of official anti-terrorism policies in most of the countries in the world.

Unlike democratic societies elsewhere, the new developments in the area of national security and mass surveillance in China have been taking place on the solid foundation of an authoritarian state structure in which only a minuscule fraction of society questions the political leadership,

with the majority of the population silently accepting the infringement of their individual rights and private space. This situation has favoured the Party-State apparatus allowing it to employ technologies and innovative energies to develop grid social management and social credit system, impose strict censorship on social media and online activities of individual citizens, and pass new laws and strengthen legal instruments for controlling society at large.

Despite differences in degrees of intensity and disproportionate use of coercive force, the renewed social control mechanism and surveillance in Xinjiang and other minority areas is part of the larger project of social governance under the tutelage of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Xi Jinping. Since he declared ambitious global connectivity program Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of Xinjiang became much greater than before. Now for the Chinese party-state, maintaining stability in public life and ensuring security in Xinjiang has become essential not only for establishing the People's Republic of China's (PRC) supremacy through multi-dimensional infrastructural projects and economic initiatives under the BRI in the Eurasian continent but also for the highly sensitive issue of China's territorial sovereignty, national prestige and for the strongman image of the current political leadership.

Apart from the two most pertinent issues in the Uyghur ethno-national movement, namely, territorial sovereignty (*zhuquan*) over Xinjiang and right to rule (*zhiquan*) the region which has been addressed in my book *Xinjiang and the Chinese State – Violence in the Reform Era* (2018), the issue of governance (*guan zhi*) has increasingly been significant in the study of contemporary political situation of the region. China claims its rights over the vast territory in the bordering northwestern province on

historical basis and deals with the demands of indigenous people for self-rule by granting nominal autonomy upon the Uyghur, which constitutes largest minority population in the region. However, contested the two issues may be, the reality is that Xinjiang remains a part of China, rule by the Han dominated party-state and the sub-national position of the Uyghur people will remain unchanged for an indefinitely long time to come. There have been significant shifts in national and regional politics, modification in the style of governance, changes of perception about the internal security challenges, and emergence of strong-man posture of the ruling authority since Xi Jinping assumed the leadership position after the 18th Party Congress. As the party leadership is committed to pursuing people-centred, clean and effective governance, it would be interesting to examine how Chen Quanguo, the regional Party secretary is managing Xinjiang affairs, which has been internationally condemned in the recent years.

The mainstream Chinese discourse underlines that the rise of three radical ideologies, namely, religious extremism, ethnic separatism and terrorism, officially referred to as “three evil forces” (*san gu shili*) has been the major source of internal security challenges in Xinjiang. Scholars point out that between 1996 and 2010, China had persistently characterised the wide range of Uyghur political activities (violent as well as non-violent), as well as their social, cultural and religious practices, behaviour, expression and thoughts through the single prism of their ethno-religious identity as a “biological threat” “akin to a virus” to Chinese society that had to be eliminated. By projecting Uyghur identity in such binary terms and their affiliation with Islam as a symptom of extremisation of the community, any expression of this identity is thus seen as a threat to the national security of China (Roberts 2018: 234).

From the start of global war against terrorism in 2001, China has been trying to reconstruct terrorist threats in the region by continuously emphasizing



the impact of pan-Islamist philosophy, Islamist *jihad*, transnational terrorism, and religious sects like Ikhwan, Wahhabism and Salafism<sup>1</sup> in nurturing extremism among Uyghur population in Xinjiang. According to some scholars, the influence of Salafi-*Jihadi* ideology among a segment of fighters belonging to the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) since they developed interactions with Al Qaeda has also been blown up disproportionately by the Chinese official media.

Based on the understanding that Uyghur separatism and antipathy to Chinese rule is basically rooted in their religious faith, the authorities have rationalised their pursuit of drastic measures to restrict freedom of Islamic practices, change of scriptures to suit the official discourse, and their curbs of socio-religious customs and behaviour. As in China, a section of the West blames the iconoclastic nature of Islam for the upsurge of terrorism in the contemporary world and many Western governments have allowed government departments in Xinjiang including even quasi-military organizations like the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC) to attract foreign investment and funding from international organizations like the UNDP in areas of economic activity that are fundamentally exploitative and discriminatory towards the majority population of the region.

In contrast, one study however questions the seriousness of the purported threats emanating from the militant Islamist forces and from Salafi Uyghur *jihadi* elements in Xinjiang, and insists that the Uyghurs were only using Islam to resist cultural assimilation by the Han dominated Chinese state. This study analyses the growth of Salafism among the Uyghurs seeing it as relatively restricted due to the multiplicity of Uyghur identities, the supervening influence of the widely prevalent Hanafi School, which is more relaxed and open to reasoned discourse, and to the influence of local customs but as having been affected by

state-imposed restrictions on Islam in general and by the influence of Salafi-*jihadism* in particular (Kuo 2012). In fact, besides their strong attachment with Islam, Uyghurs also identify strongly with Turkic ethno-linguistic culture and pan-Turkic ideologies. A large number of exiled Uyghur activists who are settled in the West are actually secular in their social interactions as well as in their personal lives. In the face of growing Islamophobia across the world, they too are bound to soften the religious aspects of their identities in order to avoid discordance in their host countries<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile, there have been deliberate attempts by the Chinese state, state sponsored academics and by the media to exaggerate the role of trans-border terrorist organizations and by the sinister designs of anti-China elements of certain countries that have been complicating the Uyghur ethno-national movements. Until the Urumqi riots in 2009, the regional leadership had been evading responsibility for the disturbances in Xinjiang by condemning transnational terror groups and external hostile forces (*didui shili*). The widespread prejudice against ethnic minorities and the heightened sensitivity regarding national security among the majority population had helped the Chinese leadership build a general consensus within the establishment and to assume legitimacy in pursuing more stringent policies towards Xinjiang and Tibet. Because of this skewed approach to Xinjiang's problems, China has failed systematically to show even-handedness in dealing with the conflict in Xinjiang and, in the process failed to make any genuine effort to emerge from the vicious cycle of separatist violence and counter-violence that has plagued the region.

On its part the party leadership, has, time and again, justified the correctness of state policies towards Xinjiang and refused to review its national ethnic policies. It has implied that these policies were the only

ones that would eventually help China to consolidate its national unity, establish long-term social stability, and provide a strong foundation for regional development in this Muslim-dominated region. Echoing this perspective, the state propaganda machinery has played down all negative impacts of long-term Chinese policies towards Xinjiang and towards the Uyghur people, ignored their relative privations as well as growing sense of alienation during the reform period, and also the effects of the government's coercive policies and counter-terrorism measures. As a result, the state has remained perennially ill prepared to deal with sudden outbursts of large-scale violence in the region. This was most dramatically displayed in the Urumqi riots of July 2009 that forced President Hu Jintao to rush home from the G8 summit in Italy to deal with the crisis.

Studied opinions outside China do not usually endorse the Chinese narrative of Xinjiang problem and consider the lack of an accommodative approach and flexibility in dealing with issues related to minority population especially that of Xinjiang and Tibet as being responsible for the protracted conflicts in these two regions. The Xinjiang problem is generally understood by the scholars outside China as identity politics and ethno-national resurgence of the Uyghur population, interethnic tensions, prolonged discrimination and prejudice in the state ethnic policy, Han supremacism, the criminalization of any separatist tendency among the broad Uyghur masses and the suppression of all forms of protest or dissent, as well as the ruthless repression of even normal Islamic practices and expressions of local culture. The ideologically oriented state authority has failed to comprehend the root cause of the problem and from time to time has taken blatantly biased decisions in dealing with outstanding issues prevailing in Xinjiang, causing further resentment among the local Muslim population. Within the local Uyghur population that had, over a prolonged period faced economic discrimination and

relative deprivation, this has had a multiplier effect and aroused popular suspicion and disaffection even when newer policies of rapid economic development and growth were being encouraged in Xinjiang.

In an earlier volume mentioned above, I had focused on the domestic root of the Xinjiang problem and explored the issues related to the nature of Chinese party-state, ideology of the regime, its policies and attitude towards minorities and their cultural and religious life, and the effects of majoritarian nationalism on the region. It was clear that the international dimension of the problem is only one of the numerous contributing factors for the growing inter-ethnic cleavages and violence evident in the region. While focusing on various aspects of the problematique in Xinjiang, that book also highlighted the similarities and differences between the protests and social unrests within the minority populations of the region as compared to those in Han-dominated areas in terms of how the party-state had dealt with such situations.

The present volume explores recent developments in Xinjiang from the perspective of evolution of China's overall security, securitisation, threat perception of the party-state and its responses to impending threats emanating from the on-going Eastern Turkestan movements and intermittent violence led by the Uyghur factions as well as international dimensions of security threats in Xinjiang along with various sectors of security threats in the domestic context. This study identifies aspects specific to state-society relations in China under Xi Jinping while constituting a broad theoretical framework that examines conflict in a society that is getting increasingly technologically advanced and, in the process, using a variety of concepts of threat, securitisation, social governance and increasing reliance on new age surveillance mechanism in order to monitor its citizens' activities.

I have pointed out in the earlier volume that while the traditional values of submission to the state authority have been replaced by the new values of assertiveness for the protection of self-interest among large section of Chinese people in course of modernization of the country, the Chinese party-state still demands complete loyalty and absolute submission of the people. Because of overt insubordination of some ethnic minorities and a small number of Han dissenters, the state authorities can never trust them. The common persons particularly majority Han masses, however, remained largely trusted by the leadership until the last decade.

The way the Chinese government under Xi Jinping has developed the social credit system to adjudge citizen behaviour and trustworthiness by evaluating credit scores for every individual citizen's social actions and attitudes and providing a numerical base for a system of rewards and punishment for each of them is a clear message that the present regime does not trust its own citizens irrespective of their ethnicity. A section of China studies scholars argues that the reform regime seriously suffers from trust deficit. I would like to characterize the new phenomenon that has emerged under the present leadership as signifying a lack of basic confidence in the masses in what is purportedly a new era of mass line politics.

In order to understand the evolving socio-political dynamic in contemporary China the present work offers an elaborate discussion on ideology and politics of Xi Jinping, on the securitization process under way in China, and the new social control regime. The chapters dealing with the above aspects will throw light on the growing convergence of China's security behaviour towards ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Han masses as well as the differences between the two because of Islamophobia and the deep-rooted prejudice against the minority subjects of the country. The introduction will be followed by an overview of China's politics of "three

evil forces” under last three successive party secretaries and impending security challenges in the region due to threats by transnational terrorist forces. The final two chapters will exclusively discuss on repressions in the name of de-extremization in Xinjiang and China’s global standing in the face of criticism by a section of international communities.

## ENDNOTES

1. Wahhabism arrived China through the Salafiyya movement in the second half of the 19th century and the former also influenced indigenous Yihewani movement started between late 19th century and early 20th century. The Salafiaism and Wahhabism have considerable ‘similarities in their scriptural ideas, historical ancestry and opposition to Chinese Islam’. Both the sects are seen as representing ‘foreign religious project’ and ‘posing a potential security threat’ to China. Salafiyya movement went underground since the late 1950s but remnant of its leadership settled in Xinjiang. The Chinese state began to keep the Uyghur salafi network under surveillance since 1990s, especially from the 9/11 incidents (Gonul and Rogenhoffer 2017)
2. In its official website the World Uyghur Congress declares its commitment to democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people through peaceful and nonviolent method. It also distances itself from violent factions within the group.

## CHAPTER 1

### THREE EVIL FORCES AND NEW CHALLENGES

A quick glance at political developments in Xinjiang since the irruption of separatist violence in the first half of 1990s reveals how the then regional Party secretary Wang Lequan consolidated his power base in the region even as the central leadership gave him full authority to handle the affairs of the region. Wang's uncompromising stand in dealing with separatist activities, ideas and sentiments led him to impose restrictions over a swath of religious practices and intrusions in Uyghur cultural life, while he persisted in the zero-tolerance measures against elements linked with the violence that plagued the region since 1994. While he basically acted in accordance with the central leadership's overriding priority of stability maintenance at any cost, the centre also relied on Wang to create a new narrative of the "enemies of the state" - the "three evil forces" belonging to the Uyghur community.

The imposition of "strike hard" measures on a regular basis ensured Wang's initial success in pacifying the region and his hard power strategy was unquestionably recognised and accepted by the central government and by many Chinese scholars as the most effective formula for resolving the issues of national security and social instability. Many Chinese authors point out that Xinjiang was mostly stable during the first decade of the 21st century. One author points out that the Eastern Turkestan forces went through a phase of recuperation of their strength between 2001 and 2004; in the succeeding four years from 2005 to 2008, they kept issuing online threats of terrorist attacks but were deterred from actually carrying out these threats. It was only in 2009 that they

resumed attacks with full force. But the regional authority continued with heavy blows against the broadly defined Eastern Turkestan (“*Dongtu*”) forces between 2001 and 2009 (Li 2014: 18; Zhao 2015: 106; Xie and Yang 2015: 120). Despite different positions taken by these authors, it is clear from their studies that the Uyghur-led violence in Xinjiang was almost insignificant since 2001 and that relative peace had prevailed in the region till 2008.

The continued adoption of strong measures of state violence and coercion by the authorities, however, proved counter-productive. Official rhetoric against the “three evil forces” and recurrent threats of extermination of these forces through crushing blows by the self-righteous party-state had begun to alienate large sections of the local Uyghur population and even pushed a section of the young people of the community to the path of terrorism. This process of radicalisation of the local population was never properly addressed under Wang Lequan.

A downside of the ever-increasing obstinate attitude and fierce propaganda against the “three evil forces” was the gross failure of the party-state to distinguish between anti-state separatist/terrorist activities and the legitimate civil rights demands of the local minorities for the redressal of their genuine grievances. The uncompromising attitude of the state authorities and the absence of any alternative to coercion precluded the building up of a relatively enduring peaceful political atmosphere or measures to ensure long-term stability in Xinjiang. On the contrary, it created a conflict situation in which both the state and ordinary Han citizens were considered to be adversaries of the Uyghur population. Inter-ethnic tensions took deep roots in Xinjiang which were manifested in the gruesome attacks against each other during the Urumqi riots in July 2009.

The local population belonging to the minority ethnic groups as well as the local Han population criticised Wang for mishandling the riots, vitiating interethnic relations in the region and indulging in corruption.



This was also the time when popular protests had irrupted against Li Zhi, Secretary of Municipal Party Committee of Urumqi for instigating riots and demand made for his immediate transfer in the wake of the “syringe” attacks in the city in September 2009. Under public pressure, Li Zhi was removed from his post. However, considering Wang’s stature in the political hierarchy, the central government took several months to come to a decision on the issue of his transfer and finally in 2010 assigned him to the position of deputy secretary of the CPC Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (CPLC) in Beijing, which was then, headed by Zhou Yongkang.

It was obvious that the connections between these two persons and their corrupt practices would come under the scanner when Xi Jinping unleashed his anti-corruption campaigns. While Zhou Yongkang emerged as one of the most prominent high-ranking Party cadres affected by this campaign, Wang Lequan’s own involvement in the petroleum corruption case was subjected to further probe. Many party and government cadres who had worked in Xinjiang since Wang’s time also came under the radar of the anti-corruption drive and were accused of corruption and misuse of their official positions (Epoch times 2013, 5 October; Jin 2014, 19 January). A probe against Yang Gang, former Deputy Party Secretary of the region, was also declared for alleged misuse of power and massive bribe-taking in 2013 (AFP 2016, 20 January).

The new Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian, on assuming office in 2010, called for dealing with corruption alongside terrorism in the region. Since the 18th Party Congress, a number of high-ranking Han cadres, who were entrusted with the task of maintaining stability and fighting terrorism in Xinjiang were charged with activities in violation of party discipline, as well as various economic and other crimes. In 2014, Li Zhi, who was accused of incompetence during the 2009 Urumqi riots

and later became vice-chairman of the Xinjiang Regional People's Congress, was found guilty of corruption and removed from his post. At least 25 regional level officials were punished on corruption charges in the next few years (Phoenix Info 2016, 29 August).<sup>1</sup>

These developments clearly showed that terrorism and religious extremism were not the only sources of instability and insecurity in this Muslim minority region. Wide-spread corruption among the leading cadres in the region appeared to be a greater domestic security challenge in the region because that caused further resentments among both ethnic groups as well as in the majority Han population, leading to increased mass incidents and social unrest. In fact, the centre's single-pointed agenda of anti-terrorism struggle had paved the way for a host of party officials to profit through corrupt practices and further complicated the already volatile political environment of Xinjiang.

While the kneejerk reaction of the central and local leadership to the orchestration of riots in Urumqi was to place the blame on Uyghur establishments-in-exile, this did not however throw light on the critical question of how the Uyghur diaspora could mobilize rioters in different parts of the capital city of Xinjiang without being detected by the security agencies. A close analysis of the riots reveals deep resentments against Chinese rule, against the Han population influx, the inequitable distribution of political power and economic benefits, and the severe restrictions on religious and cultural activities. Though the Chinese official interpretation of the 2009 riots was quite different, evidence shows that the immediate reasons for the riots were the backlash effects of the killing and injuring of Uyghur workers during a brawl (*dou'ou shijian*) with Han workers in a factory in Shaoguan in Guangdong.

The inability of the regional leadership to curb incidents like the Urumqi riots compelled the central leadership, for the first time, to seriously explore the internal roots of Xinjiang problem and to look beyond

external factors. Even President Hu Jintao had acknowledged that the comparatively dismal economic situation of a section of the population especially in south Xinjiang had caused further complications in the ethnic and religious life of the region and underlined the urgent need of improving the living standard of all ethnic masses across the region. Chinese scholars of ethnicity also focused on local factors contributing to the terrorist activities of the “Dongtu” forces inside Xinjiang (Li 2014: 22; Xie and Yang 2015: 121-125).<sup>2</sup> The central and regional authorities openly recognized the domestic roots of radicalization of the Uyghur separatist forces and prioritised leap-frog development, lasting political stability and people’s livelihood in Xinjiang in order to tackle the security challenges in the region.

It was at this juncture that Zhang Chunxian, widely known as a relatively moderate politician was given responsibility of Xinjiang. Strikingly, however, the glaring incompetence of the long-time regional party secretary Wang Lequan was practically condoned by the centre. This was clear indication that the state leadership basically never doubted the effectiveness of Wang’s draconian rule. While Zhang Chunxian distanced himself from the headstrong approach practised in the region for over fifteen years and introduced a new style of governance and tried to bring fresh ideas in his administration, he had to recognise that this had to be accomplished within the broad national security framework of stability maintenance, political security, and the rigid norms of a zero-sum approach to fighting separatist tendencies in Xinjiang.

Contemporary Xinjiang’s most critical time was, perhaps when Zhang Chunxian took charge of the restive province. China’s overall security concepts had begun to undergo major transformation, and a large-scale expansion of the public security apparatus was under way all over China as part of the securitization process in the country following a series of

incidents in the aftermath of the riots in Lhasa and Urumqi. Some novel social control measures were also undertaken after a series of anti-regime movements shook many countries in the Middle East. It was against this background that Zhang initiated his securitisation process in Xinjiang while maintaining ‘soft’ approaches<sup>3</sup> in handling its ethnic issues.

Interethnic relations were at their lowest point when Zhang took over charge in Xinjiang. In order to ease interethnic tensions, social contradiction, wide-spread mistrust, hostilities and dilemmas prevailing in the region since the riots in Urumqi, Zhang proactively interacted with various sections of the society in his official as well as personal capacity. Among his generation of leadership, Zhang is one of most active users of social media in maintaining close interactions with people of all walks of life. He was also accessible to journalists, including foreign nationals, to share information about the situation in Xinjiang (Phoenix Info 2016, 29 August). Within one year of the change of guard in Xinjiang, local media and news channels had toned down the rhetoric of fighting separatism and cracking down on terrorism, and concentrated more on topics related to development of regional economy (Zhang 2011, 7 July).

Since the central government convened its first Xinjiang Work Conference in Beijing in 2010, the main focus had begun to shift from counter-terrorism to economic development with Zhang Chunxian making clear distinctions between stability maintenance (*weiwen*) and anti-terrorism on the one hand, and people’s livelihood (*minsheng*) and overall economic development in the region on the other. It was the first time that the CPC leadership had begun to pay attention to the sense of exploitation (*boxuegan*) among the local population who lived in poverty despite the region being considered as important base for

strategic resources of China since early 1980s (Zhang 2011, 7 July). The economic backwardness of south Xinjiang became a serious concern for Zhang. The Uyghur-dominated four prefectures of south Xinjiang, namely, Khotan, Kashgar, Aksu and Kizilsu have the highest concentration of poverty. These were also the most disturbed areas in the region. Economic development and improvement of people's livelihood of these prefectures were seen by him as the key to the success of any counter-terrorism or stability maintenance program. In an article published in the *Qiushi*, Zhang Chunxian stressed the importance of poverty eradication and improvement of people's livelihood in the laying of solid foundation for governance in south Xinjiang (Jinggangtai 2014, 4 August).

While the regional Party Secretary denounced terrorist factions for being devoid of conscience and himself carried out his anti-terrorism work with an iron hand, he also explored various ways to contain religious extremism in Xinjiang. On numerous public occasions, Zhang pointed out that violent terrorism is neither a religious problem nor an ethnic problem (China News Network 2012, 7 March). This is the first time a leading cadre in China had consciously sought to delink Islam from terrorism in the region, and to convey that the entire Uyghur society should not be condemned for the separatist violence perpetrated by a few in the region.

The core content of Zhang's policies against extremism was opposing violence, benevolent governance (*renzheng*)<sup>4</sup>, rule of law (*fazhi*), and social order. In December 2010, he issued the 32-point measures for stability maintenance, which were based on practices to deal with mass incidents in other parts of China. His administration did not flinch in their measures to prevent large scale mass incidents or the irruption of acts of terrorism. It was during a discussion with the leaders of Pishan county

in Khotan in January 2012 that he first talked about de-extremisation or de-radicalisation (*qu jiduan hua*) (Phoenix Info 2016, 29 August). The initial intent behind the de-extremisation measures were evidently balanced and moderate, when Zhang Chunxian first put forward the idea, but they gradually morphed to become convenient tool to monitor Uyghur life, report on officially defined unlawful activities and to justify adoption of various repressive policies against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Under the succeeding Party Secretary, they turned the region into an arena for ruthless experimentation in social control techniques.

In May 2013, the Xinjiang Party Committee came out with a document that formulated some ideas on measures to curb the penetration of religious extremist thoughts more widely across the region. This document, officially referred to as “No. 11 Document of XUAR” (Several Guiding Opinions on Further Suppressing Illegal Religious Activities and Combating Infiltration of Religious Extremism in Accordance with Law) differentiated between ethnic customs and “normal religious practice, on the one hand and religious extremist thoughts and practices on the other. (Phoenix Info 2016, 29 August). Notwithstanding this differentiation, however, in practice it was difficult to draw a line between various expressions of religious practice and extremism because terms like ‘normal religious practice’ were never clarified in Chinese official documents.

It is notable that, despite a number of terror attacks and violent clashes including a car explosion into tourists in Tiananmen Square, Beijing in 2013, some Chinese scholars insisted that the overall capacity of “three evil forces” had dwindled because of decreasing room for manoeuvre available to outside forces, due to international anti-terrorism cooperation and the steady loss of a support base with the Region following the reduction of poverty in south Xinjiang. According to

one author, even the few localised acts of violence in Xinjiang during the last two years of Zhang's rule were explainable as acts of desperation (Li 2014: 23). It appears that the regional Party Secretary himself, some leaders in Beijing and many others shared this view till the end of his rule.

Notwithstanding the above approaches, however, major terrorist attacks inside the region and other parts of China did occur between 2013 and 2014 which were unprecedentedly violent and also significant from symbolic point of view, and which appeared to have been both planned and executed most meticulously. In fact, the efficacy of Zhang Chunxian's endeavours to bring change in the governance of Xinjiang and to stop Uyghur-led violence can be questioned because of the above incidents. Yet, the reality was that much longer time was required to build trust among various ethnic communities in the region and restore real peace and stability which was seriously damaged during Wang Lequan's rule in the region.

For a major part of the first decade of the 21st century, Xinjiang experienced a period of relative peace. But even this which could not be translated into a long-lasting peace due to the continuous onslaughts made upon the Uyghur community in name of counter-terrorism. There is no denying that Zhang had very limited scope to bring any fundamental change in the politics of anti-terrorism in the region. His capacity of reshaping inter-ethnic relations and looking for alternatives to the existing practice of governance was further restricted after Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang between 27 and 30 April 2014. This visit was deliberately orchestrated to exhibit an image of strong and determined central leadership. The decades-old slogan of fighting terrorism with iron hand was further emphasised, and harsh anti-terror rhetoric was back again in the official pronouncements (People's Daily 2014, 2 May).

The security system in Xinjiang proved to be indefensible when two major terrorist attacks happened in Urumqi on 30 April, the day President Xi concluded his visit to the region and on 22 May, 2014. Following these two terrorist attacks, soft power projection of the regional government was slowly replaced by an aggressive war offensive.

In the middle of escalation of violent incidents and growing apprehensions of large-scale terrorist attacks, the Second Xinjiang Work Forum was held in Beijing from 28-29 May, 2014. The forum marked the omission of fast-track development objectives and decided to emphasize social as well as long-term political stability, and people-oriented (*yiren-weiben*) development, which was akin to Zhang Chunxian's objective of promoting people's livelihood in Xinjiang. In contrast with Xi Jinping's pledge of accomplishing leap-frog economic development during his visit to Xinjiang and plan of carrying out ambitious project of New Silk Road Economic Belt, the second Xinjiang Work Forum made moderate plan to prioritise greater investment in education, employment generation as a means of resolving livelihood problem, and building up 'mutually embedded multi-ethnic social structure' (*ge minzu qianrushu de shehui jigou*) with the objective of blending ethnic groups (Chaudhuri 2014). The decisions in the work forum appeared to be modest and avoided high pitch anti-terror rhetoric, but it was clear that central leadership was planning a new strategy to rule Xinjiang.

Religious extremism again became the main focus of attention of the Chinese leadership. In the face of growing security challenges in Xinjiang due to the increase of Uyghur entrants in the ranks of transnational terror group like Islamic State (IS), Islamophobia became more prevalent in the official discourse and in public opinion across China.<sup>5</sup> Following the hard-line style of governance of the central leadership, Zhang Chunxian had perforce to carefully calibrate his moderate approach.



It is understandable that the increased frequency and severity of inter-ethnic tensions, separatist violence and terrorism in Xinjiang and other parts of China during 2013 and 2014 compelled the central and regional authorities to take a tougher posture in fighting terrorism. At a counter-terrorism conference in December 2015, Meng Jianzhu, chief of the CPC Political and Legal Commission and overseer of China's counter-terrorism efforts, called on officials to learn from Xinjiang's experiences. In a New Year's address on December 31, 2015, Zhang Chunxian declared that the de-extremisation campaign had "remarkably weakened the atmosphere of religious extremism. In March 2016, Zhang claimed that 'violent terrorism' in China's Xinjiang has dropped, religious management and ethnic unity had undergone "heartening changes" and the people and officials were in "good spirits". He also claimed that government's preventive capability has improved.

But, despite recognition for good performance by some leading central cadres in handling Xinjiang politics, Zhang Chunxian was not allowed to continue for another term as the Regional Party Secretary. He was replaced by Chen Quanguo, who had already acquired a reputation for his skilful pacification of Tibet during his tenure there from 2011 to 2016. We can thus only surmise the reason behind the political reshuffle in Xinjiang as well as application of the methods Chen had used in Tibet to the much more complicated situation of the Muslim dominated province. While the present volume explores recent development in Xinjiang in the backdrop of the changing political canvas that unfolded under Xi Jinping's leadership, it holds that even the slightest alteration and adjustment of the counter-terrorism discourse and of its ethnic policy towards Xinjiang is subjected to strong opposition from the rigid authoritarian party-state structure in Beijing.

As the Party Secretary of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Chen Quanguo had gained prominence as an innovator of ethnic policy

and developed new methods of strengthening the CCP's control over Tibetans, which will be taken up later in the monograph. It was because of his purported success in Tibet that he was given the responsibility to eradicate the real and perceived threat of Uyghur separatism and terrorism in Xinjiang. In recent years, innovation has been overrated so much in China that it appears to have been perceived as the solution of all outstanding problems. This outlook definitely encouraged Chen to make experiments in using new techniques of social control in Xinjiang. However, given Xi Jinping's ruling style, it is not likely that Chen Quanguo has get as much leeway as Wang Lequan during his time in making independent decisions in Xinjiang's affairs. Therefore, it is imperative for us to thoroughly examine the ideology and politics of Xi Jinping, the securitization process adopted across the country, and the evolving social control mechanisms adopted in contemporary China to understand the internal security challenges of Xinjiang in recent years and the all-pervasive surveillance system there.

The central leadership rolled back the moderate approach of Zhang Chunxian and reverted to the hard power strategy leading not only to the intensification of violence in Xinjiang between 2013 and 2015 but also to the direct threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Syria (ISIS, ISIL or IS). Against this backdrop, the central authorities felt the need for a person with a strongman image as the regional Party Secretary and stressed the salience of fortified attacks against various forms of extremism, especially religious extremism within Uyghur society. The leadership reshuffle in the region cannot be simply interpreted as China's inability to come out from the vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence in the region. Chen entered Xinjiang when the frequency of violent attacks had conspicuously decreased in the region and another phase of relative peace was about to set in. Apparently, it was '*qiangguo*' image of CPC's party-state and prestige of powerful leadership of Xi

Jinping that was responsible for the excessive power projection under Chen Quanguo in Xinjiang since 2016.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, Xinjiang again stands alone among China's provinces because of its crucial role in the development of connectivity across the vast Eurasian plane. Three major international development corridors of the BRI linking South Asia, West Asia and Europe are passing through this Muslim minority dominated region of the country. In March 2015, National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and ministries of commerce and foreign affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC) nominated Xinjiang as the 'core' region for the Silk Road Economic Belt. Success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Eurasian plane largely depends on economic prosperity of Xinjiang and for that peaceful social order and political stability has been further emphasised.

But the new security challenges due to transnational terrorism in Xinjiang are much more real and intractable for China to deal with. It is now an established fact that China kept channels of communication open with the Taliban regime (1996-2001) in Afghanistan in order to dissuade them from providing material support and *jihadi* training to Uyghur separatists forces. Though some factions of Uyghur militants have established connections with the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda, these international terror groups have limited their involvement with the Uyghur separatist factions indulging in violence inside Xinjiang and have never directly threatened China.

In fact, Osama-bin-Laden is known to have wanted to take advantage in the Sino-US rivalry. The Al-Qaeda was often criticised for its soft policy towards China, yet the tacit understanding between China and the Al-Qaeda gradually ended when the ETIM fighters relocated themselves in the tribal areas bordering province of Pakistan after the ouster of

Taliban regime from Afghanistan in 2001 and the latter ‘abandoned its restraint towards China in the mid-2000s’ (Duchâtel 2016: 4). According to a Pakistani scholar, from this time onward ‘the ETIM increasingly became influenced by Al-Qaeda’s philosophy of global jihad’ (Ahmad 2016: 119).

The attitude of terror groups towards China further hardened during the Beijing Olympic and in the aftermath of Urumqi riots. The ETIM became increasingly active in the virtual terrorist activities against China prior to the 2008 and since 2009 the number of online terrorist threats increased in every passing year with 8 recorded in 2010, 13 in 2011, 32 in 2012, 107 in 2013, and 72 in first half of 2014 (Zhao 2015: 110). Rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Syria (ISIS, ISIL or IS in short) turned out to be another geopolitical menace in China’s western borderland and surrounding countries in the second decade of the 21st century. The growing influence of IS in Afghanistan and Pakistan posed serious challenge for China to maintain security situation in Xinjiang.

There was wide spread speculation of close interactions with some transnational Muslim terrorist groups and the Uyghur after the car explosion in the Tian’anmen Square, Beijing and the knife attacks in the railway station in Kunming, Yunnan. The situation became so complicated that every part of China became susceptible to possible terrorist attacks in the real sense. Reports on Uyghur participation along with the ISIS fighters in Syria began to appear since 2013 and the possibilities of Uyghur involvement in overseas *jihadi* activities was increasingly suspected. More concrete evidence started coming out after ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi listed China as a new battleground for waging *jihad* for the oppression of the Uyghur population in July 2014. Since then, three propaganda videos and an audio in Chinese language were issued for spreading threat messages to punish an

atheist China (Soliev 2017, 14 March). There is no way to ascertain the Chinese claim of the involvement of the Uyghur trained under the IS in Syria in some incidents of violence between 2013 and 2015. The Chinese government had not, so far released specific information about the terrorist background of the Uyghur involved in the violent incidents that occurred in these crucial years. It is however clear that China finally came within the map of terrorist assaults by transnational Islamist organisations. This has naturally intensified China's sense of insecurity in the Xinjiang front.

It is still not clear how serious the Islamic State's threat to China is, but national security and social stability in Xinjiang and other parts of the country will seriously deteriorate if the IS trained Uyghur terrorists are able to come back to China. In such a situation, China might find it difficult to deal with this new breed of Islamic terror groups and the threat of increased incidence of terrorist attacks perpetrated by this group and its Uyghur recruits in Xinjiang and other parts of China could become a reality. Their capacity and intention of harming Chinese interest outside China has been proved in some cases as well.

China's growingly assertive foreign policy, the dream of a Han-centric nationalist rejuvenation, and the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative under Xi Jinping have drawn increasing global attention not only to China's economic model and its rise as a major international player but also to its ruthless profit-making economic involvement across the world and to the suppression of its ethnic minorities, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang. Because of its total disregard of international norms, China is increasingly seen as an authoritarian capitalist state with totalitarian inclination. An increasing number of weaker nations and marginalised sections of global society have begun to view China with a mixture of awe and intimidation. The pursuit of greater economic growth

has driven the country to penetrate into every nook and corner of the world for resources, markets and allegiance. Since Chinese initiatives in many foreign countries has often gone against the interest of the local population, many *jihadi* groups have considered Chinese economic activities in the Middle East, North Africa and other Muslim countries in Asia as an infringement on the Muslim lands. Though most of the political elites in power in these countries have been comfortable dealing with China for their narrow personal interests, it is evident that China's charm offensives have failed to create an overall favourable global public opinion and has limited effect on these marginalised groups.

Moreover, intensification of religious repression, mass detention in name of de-radicalisation, and growing surveillance on every aspect of Uyghur life in Xinjiang in the recent years also gave reasons for the global *jihadist* groups to recruit from the community for perpetrating attacks on China's interests.

## ENDNOTES

1. In 2014 alone Xinjiang regional Commission for Discipline Inspection took disciplinary action against 2184 cadres including 16 department level officials for money transaction and other offences. In 2015, the commission investigated 48 county level cadres (Phoenix Info 2016, 9 August).
2. The acknowledgment of domestic roots of violence in Xinjiang does not however indicate that Chinese academic and diplomatic circles have toned down criticism of the US and the democratic world for aggravating "Dongtu" problem and even for the rise of Islamic terrorism in the region. One Chinese scholar explores that "American factors", Middle East Factors" and "Japanese factors" are responsible for deep rooted impacts of "Dongtu" in the security environment suitable for promoting China's BRI projects (Ma 2015:116-118).
3. There is a need to have a balanced assessment about Zhang's moderate image and soft approach. One scholar analysed the meaning of soft and hard approach to terrorism in the Chinese political setup in the light of Mao Zedong's theory of contradiction. To follow this theory, one should differentiate between "enemies"

and “friends”, and former should be dealt with hard approaches and the latter with soft approaches. Hard approach is enemy-centric war, offensive tactics, use of special forces, increase of policing and intelligence operation, whereas soft approach adopts population centric model, rule of law, criminal justice system, democratic values, capacity building, and economic development (Zhang Chi 2018, September: 16& 32-37). It is very difficult to make a right balance between the two approaches in the context of counter-terrorism. Understandably, it is even more difficult in the authoritarian countries like China.

4. In contemporary Xinjiang Zhang Chunxian made an exception by incorporating ren (benevolence) as an aspect of his governance. During the fifth session of the 11th National People’s Congress in March 2012 in Beijing, he clarified to a group of reporters that his government would not certainly show benevolence towards terrorists. (China News Network 2012, 7 March). It is one of the warnings to the Uyghur masses time to time issued by the central and regional leadership, but in a conflict situation his choice of word makes it unique.
5. Rising anti-Muslim rhetoric on social media is linked with recent official propaganda against Islamic extremism in Xinjiang. The fierce protest by local Han residents against the construction of planned Nangang mosque in Hefei, Anhui exemplifies growing Islamophobia in China. The local issue became a source of nation-wide ethnic and religious tension after a propaganda official from Xinjiang posted hate message on his Weibo account and encouraged the protesters to desecrate the Mosque site with pig blood and pig head (Shih 2017, 10 April). This Islamophobic tendency in China has greater resemblance with the Western aversion of Muslim communities and Islam in general since the 9/11 incidents. The netizens have become increasingly interested in Western anti-Muslim stories and responsive towards news on attacks and counter-attacks involving Muslims in the English speaking world. For example, Many Chinese praised the shooter who killed 50 people in a Mosque in New Zealand in March 2019 for his “heroic revenge” (ChinaFile 2019). This has also been reflected in growing antipathy towards the Hui and other Turkic Muslims beside the Uyghur in Xinjiang. The removal of loudspeakers from 300 mosques in Hualong Hui Autonomous County in Qinghai province in response to complaints from the neighbourhoods is another example of official intolerance towards Muslims belonging to other ethnicity (Williams 2017, 24 August).

## CHAPTER 2

# IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

The trajectory of the Communist Party rule in China can be divided into three phases marked by three excesses – revolutionary excesses during Mao era, developmental excesses in the reform era, and excesses of securitization under the leadership of Xi Jinping. Like Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the primary motive behind many of Xi's decisions was to ensure national unity, domestic stability, and the continuation of Party's undisputable dominance, while following the path of reform. However, Xi's vision of CPC's ideology and his conservative politics as well as the excesses under his rule have had much deeper and far-reaching consequences.

Xi Jinping has been much more comfortably settled at the helm of leadership in China from the beginning of his career than his two immediate predecessors. This gave him enough room to initiate his tenure with the high sounding 'China dream'<sup>1</sup>, which provided a new direction to the Chinese discourse on nationalism, national question and nationality work, domestic and foreign policies pertaining to ethnic minorities, and also helped to shape new equations among various ethnic groups and socio-political structure in the minority regions in the recent years.

In conjunction with the grand vision of a 'China Dream', Xi put forward ideas of China's global outreach program and declared an ambitious 'belt and road' initiative (henceforth BRI) for connecting China with the world via the continental landmass of Eurasia and the maritime routes.<sup>2</sup> A concrete economic rationale is very much present behind the New Silk Road initiative, but it also has strong appeal for the Chinese people who



remain emotionally attached to the glorious age of Chinese civilization that used to enjoy great reputation throughout the length and breadth of the ancient Silk Road. The continental land bridge across Eurasia also enhanced the importance of Xinjiang since the launch of the BRI.

In content and spirit both initiatives reflected a strong urge and renewed thrust of making China a rich and powerful (*fuqiang*) country as well as a significant power in the international arena. Xi's early assertion of his ideological position was the indication of a new leadership style which is different from Party's political culture in the reform period.

The mental makeup, psychological traits and emotional attributes of Xi Jinping, who served for the major part of his career in the economically advanced eastern provinces were largely unknown until his conceited nature, intolerance towards criticism and attitudes towards foreigners were revealed during a meeting with the overseas Chinese community during a visit to Mexico as Vice-President in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Both the 'China Dream' as well as BRI were way ahead of the earlier theme of China's peaceful rise and represented a clear shift from Deng Xiaoping's dictum of keeping low profile while consolidating nation's comprehensive capability.<sup>4</sup> Xi pushed forward the new agenda permeated with nationalist ardour to diminish the impact of foreign ideas and influences in Chinese society and projected himself as the chosen one, the one most suitable to lead the country to reclaim its national grandeur. He also changed the norms and practices of collective leadership which further consolidated the concept of 'core' leadership of the Party (Economy 2018: 22). Xi Jinping's leadership style is characteristically intolerant towards any opposition from his political rivals, social movements, democratic dissent and one of exasperation towards outstanding issues emanating from ethno-national movements in Xinjiang and Tibet, and, indeed, the movements for democracy and freedom in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The increasing restrictions on civil society, ruthless attack on political opponents, excessive demands of loyalty, trust and obedience, from subordinates, the total disregard of collective leadership norms, and his changing of the law to seek extension of the tenure of his presidency beyond two terms in the 19th Party Congress are indications of a clear transition from authoritarian to totalitarian style of governance. In this political backdrop, national security, social stability, political order, and safety of the regime have now been linked to Xi Jinping's personalised authority.

Under Xi Jinping, while the central authority has adhered to the established discourse of the reform leadership that disorder and instability as well as potential national security threats like the 'three evil' forces in Xinjiang were detrimental to the nation's social and political stability, and its economic modernization, as well as to China's image in the world, Beijing's sensitivity toward the internal security challenges in Xinjiang reached new heights.

## **DESPERATE LEADERSHIP**

Following the principle of collective leadership, the political managers at the highest level during the Hu-Wen era had not only preferred a consensus candidate as the next president but they had made sure that there would not be any power rivalry against the new leader within the party.<sup>5</sup> This substantially reduced the possibilities of any real challenge to Xi Jinping's totalistic inclinations in the subsequent years. Xi's accession in the middle of negative campaigns against Hu Jintao's "weak leadership" and purported underperformance (Mohanty 2014: 143-4) legitimised his decisions of relentlessly punishing Party cadres and government officials in charge of corruption and indiscipline, ruthlessly dealing with social unrests and ethnic separatism, and adopting more

assertive foreign policies.

Xi Jinping's 'princeling' background has determined his leadership style. Xi and his colleagues, whose parents belonged to the generation that made the Chinese revolution carried a strong sense of responsibility to defend the political system that was painstakingly developed by the party over nine decades. The traditional political culture and the paternalistic leadership style of five generations of party leaders had taught them that when the time came, to act as a patriarch was the most accepted behaviour in China and that the party and the people would be treated as an extended 'family' in the traditional sense. Being the most dominant authority figure in the country today, Xi is inclined to believe that he knows better than his colleagues what is good for China and its people. But he lacks, however, the kind of genuine authority and power needed to act and behave like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Like his last two predecessors, he is just first among equals.

In order to monopolise his power and downsize the role of his colleagues, he opted for the easy path of holding as many leadership positions as possible; changing the ethos of the political culture of the reform period; adopting a greater authoritarian style of governance, including over the armed forces; unleashing unprecedented anti-corruption campaigns; and tightening social control.

The basic difference between Xi Jinping's grand vision and Jiang Zemin's idea of 'Three Represents' and Hu Jintao's 'Scientific Outlook on Development' was that the former was not only ambitious and populist but also largely elusive. The primary concern of Jiang was the Party's diminishing influence over the masses and its capacity to represent all sections of the Chinese society. While giving a new interpretation of Jiang's ideas, Hu added his own content in the official ideology which stressed humility, plain living, and hard struggle as well as a focus on

public mindedness in building the Party and governance of the country (Bo 2004: 36). There was clearly a strong sense of anxiety to acquire legitimacy for the regime behind the veneer of rhetoric stressing the correctness of the leadership and greatness of the Party during the tenure of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

In contrast, Xi Jinping, from his very first public articulations, has been projecting a set of extremely ambitious goals based on abstract and often vague concepts. Most of the political campaigns and policy measures undertaken under his leadership were dominated by an urgency to do something big. The personality-based and populist style of governance has created a situation in which it is very difficult to know what is going wrong in the system.

The way things unfolded under Xi Jinping, it appeared that the Party had never faced any legitimacy crisis and was unlikely to confront such a situation. And the Party under his leadership was thus only left with the dual tasks of securing perpetual rule of the Party and strengthening internal security.

## **MAJOR THINKING OF THE NEW ERA**

The 19th Party Congress marked the permanent casting of President Xi Jinping's theoretical and ideological imprint on the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Congress enshrined "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" on par with Mao Zedong thought and Deng Xiaoping theory and incorporated his thought in the national constitution. The basic argument of Xi Jinping's thought is that Chinese socialism has entered a new era. Xi has summed up his ideas and concepts from eclectic sources and various ideological currents from traditional, revolutionary and reformist experiences of China. The traditional value system based on Confucian

ideals of hierarchical relationships in collective life, the cultivation of personal virtue and morality, the mandate of consecrated authority of the party and an elitist model of governance have been concealed in the doctrines of Communist Party of China (CPC), its relations with Chinese society and the behaviour of its leadership. The 19th Party Congress is even more explicit in embracing ancient wisdom along with modern knowledge and experiences in governing China with iron hands.

Xi Jinping's rhetorical response to all major problems of the country has been to relate them to the realization of the 'China dream'. The concrete objective of his dream is to ensure happiness to the people of all ethnic groups by accomplishing the 'two centenary goals' – of realising a moderately well-off society by 2021 and building China into a strong and rich socialist country by 2049. There is a general understanding that this dream cannot be achieved without bridging the gap between the various regions in China, removing urban-rural differences, and those among various social strata and ethnic groups. Xi claims that to achieve these two goals is the common aspiration of the Chinese nation and the common object of all nationalities of China. He also reminds us that this cannot be realised without the strength of the great unity of all ethnic groups of the country (Inner Mongolian Daily 2017, 19 June). The mission of achieving all-round integration and national unity has been handed down from generation to generation since the ancient times of Chinese history. To understand how distinct this period is compared to the previous three decades of reform, we shall focus on Xi Jinping's designs to achieve certain goals specific to this 'new era' of Chinese socialism, what this 'new era' is all about in the context of Chinese society at large, and what its ethnic subsets, in particular, are destined to achieve during this phase.

While describing China's transformation since the early twentieth century and its transition into the 'new era', a Chinese scholar quotes

an ancient text - 'Zhou is an old state but its life is new'<sup>6</sup>. He envisages a road map for the country's development until 2070's when it bids fair to become the richest and the most powerful nation in the world (Pan 2010: 58). This kind of futuristic vision of China's transition to a modern state has been part of the public discourse since the turn of this century. Logically speaking, it was inevitable for China, after four decades of swashbuckling economic modernization, to probe deep into the transformation that has occurred in various sectors of the country's economy, politics, society and culture, and to redraw a new outline for its future. Xi Jinping and his colleagues have tried to do exactly that and, in the process, they claim that Chinese socialism has entered a 'new era'.

In the aftermath of the 18th Party Congress, Xi Jinping formulated a new reform strategy namely the 'four comprehensive strategic layouts' (*sigequanmian zhanlüe*, henceforth 'four comprehensives'). In the 20th Collective Study on fundamental principles and methodology of dialectical materialism conducted by the CPC Political Bureau in 2015, Xi asserted that the party would unitedly lead the people to coordinate and support the task of building a moderately well-off society in an all-round way; comprehensively deepen reform; build law-based governance (*yi fazhi guo*) in every dimension; and impose strict discipline on party members. He interpreted the 'four comprehensives' in the light of possible contradictions in the existing social dynamics and exhorted the people to confront and resolve these contradictions in the course of progress. Blind faith in GDP growth was identified as a major source of contradictions and recommendations were made for rapid transition to a new development mode, the regulation of economic structures, adjustment of problems related to overcapacity and the building of an ecological civilization (*People's Daily* 2015, 25 January). The 'four comprehensives' along with ten more basic overall strategies have been codified in 'Xi Jinping Thought' in the 19th Party Congress.<sup>7</sup>

Xi Jinping sought to give new meaning to the mission of building a well-off society. One of the policy formulations popularized during the first five years of Xi's rule was the 'five-in-one' (*wugeyiti*), which encapsulates construction of economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological civilizations. Since the 18th Party Congress, the leadership had been attaching importance in the following areas: in economic matters emphasis was placed on healthy and qualitative growth towards a new normal (*xin changtai*), supply side structural reform, innovation, coordination, green economy, openness, livelihood, and environmental protection; the utility of political freedom and democratic rights as means of empowering common people to stop greedy officials from engaging in corruption; ideological construction and national cohesiveness in the cultural life, especially of the young people; integration of core values of society into the construction of a legal system; and striving for a consensus on the construction of the ecological civilization through stricter policy and law (Xie 2017, 30 August).

In his explanatory note for the Third Session of the 18th CPC, Xi Jinping articulated the problem of China's development in the face of profound internal and external challenges before the Central Committee. He called for deepening reform by dealing with the challenge of 'unbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable development'. The party leadership made efforts to address this issue through the Western Region Development Program since late 1990s, but the all-round development strategy while creating opportunities for outsiders, had the result of enhancing intra-regional inequalities and of creating a situation that led to the confinement of poverty to the minority-concentrated areas in Xinjiang. Therefore, it is intriguing to question what exactly Xi Jinping offers to the non-Han people of the country in general and Xinjiang, in particular, during this new phase of Chinese history.

The 'new era' does not simply imply Xi Jinping's personal choice to make a thorough overhaul of the party's ideology and working style, develop a new philosophy of governance, and provide innovation for the efficient management of state affairs. The underlying meaning was that China had entered a new stage of social development and it was mandatory for the party-state to bring overall changes of its politics to cope up with the historical changes in every mass-constituted social sector of the new era.

With the development of socialist market economy, the following changes had taken place among the working class of China: a great number of intellectuals (*zhishifenzi*) were increasingly part of the working masses; there was a rapid advancement of knowledge among the working class (*zhishihua*); millions of migrant labour (*nongmingong*) had entered in the ranks of working class and made it a strong social force; various kinds of ownership systems had emerged in full vigour as a growing number of workers from the state enterprises were joining into the private sector. Rapid economic development and advanced industrialization gave birth to new social forces like private entrepreneurs, builders and people in the new economic sectors. There was also a huge transformation among the rural masses as well. The majority of this new working force were born after China had embarked on the path of economic modernization. This mass of the 'new era' constituted the main productive force in industry, agriculture, science & technology, education, culture, innovation and IT industries of future China. This young section of Chinese society now adopted a fresh outlook, novel approaches, higher standards, advanced education and new values (Zheng 2017, 27 June). Therefore, like every other relation in this period, changes of relations between state and its minority populations and interethnic relations in China inevitably dominate national question and ethno-regions policies under Xi Jinping.



A major concern for Xi Jinping during this period is to establish better relations between the new masses including the sub-national entities and the Party. It is clear from the first five years of his rule that the strictures on ideological impurity, party discipline and mass line (*qunzhong luxian*) were convenient tools to get rid of any opposition to his rule, as were the consolidation of power in the hands of the highest leadership, personalised authority, and increasing control over society. In the political report of the 19th Party Congress, he called for putting into practice a mass line in all aspects of government. From the previous instances, it can be inferred hypothetically that mass-line based governance of the 'new era' would systematically eliminate all forms of dissents and wide range of violent and non-violent activities among the ethnic minorities aspiring for greater freedom and constitutionally sanctioned rights for all Chinese citizens.

## **XI JINPING'S POLITICS**

Xi Jinping's 'red' inclination had been a source of speculation since the time of his nomination for the top job. During the Cultural Revolution, Xi had lived in Yan'an, the most important base of the Chinese communists during the revolutionary war and it was at that time that he became a member of the communist party. This was seen as a great asset for the next CPC general secretary when the party was in a greater need of reclaiming its revolutionary tradition. It appears that Xi Jinping exploited this asset consciously. When appointed governor of Zhejiang in 2002, he specially visited Nanhu district, where in 1921 the first-generation communist leaders had held a closed-door meeting inside a boat on a lake to declare the birth of Chinese communist party (*People's Daily* 2010, 18 October). Xi continues to visit revolutionary sites to pay homage and often quotes from Mao's writings. Over the years, however, he has begun to worry about the possible 'red revival' that might disturb

social stability and cause pro-longed disruptions in the society. As a nationalist, he adores the symbolic power of the founding father of the People's Republic of China which he uses for shaping his revolutionary image.

Xi's commitment to a hybrid ideological stand of the reform regime has become clear in the face of uncomfortable issues raised by the people associated with China's New Left movements whose primary concern include growing inequality, excessive dependency on capitalist practice and the neoliberal tendency (Ottery 2014). There are various shades within this movement and many people from this intellectual tradition do not have any taste for the Maoist-style of socialism and the anarchist tendency of mass line.<sup>8</sup> But, so far, the New Left elements have been tolerated since they confine themselves to the ideological and academic level. After the participation of hundreds of students including self-styled Marxists in a workers' strike in Shenzhen in August 2018, teaching and discussion on Marxism at the university level have been facing restrictions (*The Economist* 2018b, 29 September).

Like all leaders of his generation, Xi Jinping believes that the path of economic modernization and market driven growth are the only path for China's future development. Before Xi permanently transferred to Beijing in 2007, he held various positions in the governments and party committees in the most developed coastal provinces of eastern China and contributed in the transition to market socialism. His first inspection trip to Guangdong as party's General Secretary in December 2012 revealed his intention for further economic reform, as a means for the enrichment of the country and its people. The trip is reminiscent of Deng Xiaoping's famous "Southern Tour" of 1992 which sped up the process of economic reform after three years of stagnation following the Tian'anmen incident (Andrésy 2016: 132). The call for deepening

reform in the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress ensured that he would strictly follow and push forward the course of China's economic modernization.

However, symptoms of political conservatism are now very much prominent under Xi Jinping's leadership. In contrast to the general impression about the reform period that China's political development had permanently stopped because of delayed or slow process of political reform, a new political culture has actually evolved in accordance to the logic of internal politics.<sup>9</sup> Until the 18th Party Congress, there were some genuine efforts to understand common people's rightful demands and grievances and satisfy interests of different social constituencies if and when their demands did not directly challenge the central leadership and dominance of the party. The party and state leadership actually encouraged grassroots democracy. This process of political reform has been systematically altered under Xi Jinping. Now the government sees any kind of activities even at the village level as challenge to the central authority.<sup>10</sup>

## GOVERNANCE

The Communist Party of China (CPC), as a revolutionary party and after its transition to the status of the ruling party in the country, has all along demonstrated its capacity to innovate in ideological matters, policy making and in the implementation process. Until Xi Jinping assumed power, it appeared that primacy of ideology was waning progressively and the style of governance under the charismatic leadership of Mao and Deng was being permanently eroded during the techno-bureaucratic regimes of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Xi made utmost effort to reverse this trend and categorically reminded his colleagues in the party that it was the CPC that had taken the lead (*linglu*) in realizing the 'China dream'.

Xi Jinping firmly believes that a strong political party backed by a strong leader is needed to guide the country to realise its aspiration of achieving greatness in all aspects of life. It is the communist party that had been shouldering the leadership role in communist China since its inception. Without the incessant battles and struggles of generations of party members, China could not have been able to play the decisive role it is playing in international politics today. It is this mindset adopted by the present leadership in China that accounts for its combative mode of governance.

With the rising fear of regime security during the months of Arab Spring, the top leaders of China reemphasised good governance, the principle of 'putting the people first' and 'governing for the people', building advanced grass root party organizations and good communist behaviour. Both President Hu Jintao and Vice President Xi Jinping talked on these subjects dozens of times in various occasions during that period. The propaganda departments also engaged in popularizing the new concept of governance at the mass level (*China Brief* 2011, 15-21 January). It was clear that the Chinese leadership were ready to bring the politics of mass mobilization back in a more sophisticated fashion and Xi Jinping would take the lead in this new age mass-politics. Some of the legislative decisions had already begun to address people's interest, social security and mitigate public resentments through populist means.

The new age mass politics however changed under Xi Jinping's leadership. Like Mao Zedong, he took masses to be mute followers and ignored the fact that masses of 'new era' were qualitatively different from that of the pre-reform China. The ideological content of the new generation leadership had become a combination of nationalism and good governance.

Since he took charge as the General Secretary of the Communist Party

of China (CPC), Xi has been stressing that the party-state's governance system (*zhili tixi*) will operate more efficiently only if the party focused on enhancing its ruling ability. And for that there is an urgent need for the party cadres and leading personnel in all areas to improve *dangxing* (party spirit), ideological and political disposition, scientific and cultural level, and working skill. The general understanding until the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress was that China would gradually institutionalize more efficient governance to make it more accountable, responsible and law-bound. The grand success in the area of economic development provided the post-Deng leadership with the much-needed legitimacy but did not give them the measure of confidence that the authoritarian leadership would have liked to have.

Meanwhile, the party developed a deep sense of threat to its rule and began to consider a whole range of social, cultural and religious activities of individual citizens as well as their efforts to fight for these rights as regime threatening. To overcome this inner crisis of confidence, Xi Jinping began to give greater importance to improving the Party's ruling ability (*zhizheng nengli*) and the state's ability to govern (*zhili nengli*). The Third Plenum put forward the idea of modernization of governance system and governance capacity. In the political report of the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping discussed at length the issue of the party's capacity building and fixed the goal of modernization of the governance system by 2035 when the socialist modernization will be basically accomplished (Ouyang 2018, 26 October).

Since the early 1990s, the reform leadership has been trying to fight the growing corruption among party cadres, leaders of the government, bureaucracy and corporate personnel.<sup>11</sup> Xi Jinping identified *sifeng* (four tendencies) viz. formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance and wastefulness among the party members as running counter to

the party's basic characteristics and mission. The corruption of party members caused bitter hatred among the masses and was the root cause of social contradictions and conflicts (Zheng 2017, June 27). In order to ensure clean governance, Xi Jinping showed his determination to have complete control over the party and to inculcate high moral and ideological standards and work ethics among over the 85 million cadres who were expected to conduct themselves with dignity, make self-appraisals, take initiatives and become enthusiastic and self-vigilant (*Liberation Army Daily* 2013, 30 June). In his anti-corruption crusade, Xi has followed the mass line approach which is also being employed for the management in other state affairs including fighting democratic dissents, religious extremism, ethnic separatism and terrorism.

## **SECURITY-DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE**

The abiding concern with national security in the CPC's perspective has expanded and encompassed a wide range of aspects in the first two decades of the 21st century. As early as 2004, Hu Jintao noted that China's national security preoccupations had already entered critical new areas like space, cyberspace and the maritime expanse across the region. Like Jiang Zemin, he, shared concern for shaping the international security environment and international security cooperation, but under his leadership new formulation of China's "core" interests pertaining to its internal and international security has evolved continuously. (Tanner and Mackenzie 2015: 16-20). From time to time China has claimed several specific issues as its "e" interests and gradually hardened its stand on these issues.

The 2011 Whitepaper on 'China's Peaceful Development' discussed China's 'core interests' which include state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, its political system, overall

social stability, and protection of its interests to sustaining economic and social development (Information office of the State Council of the PRC 2011). Safeguarding the ever-increasing fundamental national interests slowly became part of China's security strategy and linked to the existing and burgeoning security apparatus.

The spontaneous participation of hundreds of thousands of common people in the series of regime changing movements in the Middle East and North Africa in the closing months of 2010 and early 2011 further changed the security discourse in China, which included regime security and survival of the party-state system. Following the clear shift to assertive foreign policy under Xi Jinping, China became increasingly concerned about the growing predictable and unpredictable risks – domestic as well as international. Along with political security and social stability, the external dimension of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and China's 'development interest' (*fazhan liyi*) outside the country got prominence in its comprehensive security strategy (Xi 2013, 15 November).

Xi Jinping gave a completely new twist to the national security debate and reformulated the proposition of the reform leadership that maintaining social stability is prerequisite for any continuation of the economic reform and modernization process. He considered China's existing national security posture, which was based externally on realpolitik perspectives was far from its actual security environment. He offered a novel set of assumptions and viewpoints to explain the dangers faced by the Party and the state and how to deal with them. The new interpretation of dangers broadened the scope and definition of China's national security concern (Cheung 2020, 1 September). It was on the basis of this understanding that his government decided to set up Central National Security Commission (CNSC) following the

deliberations on national security in the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in 2013.

Xi has attached greater importance to national security than to economic development, and posited that national security is the fundamental prerequisite of national existence and development. In the first meeting of the CNSC on April 2014, Xi Jinping discussed the rationale behind his comprehensive national security outlook (*zongti guojia anquan guan*) and how to handle dialectics in China's national security. For the advancement of national security with Chinese characteristics, he emphasised that the purpose of national security should be security of the people; political security should be the essence; military, cultural and social security needs to be ensured; and international security should be a major plank to count on. According to the gist of Xi's formulation of scientifically wielded strategic and dialectical thinking, the following set of dialectical relations need to be tackled: internal and external security; security of national territory and that of the citizens; upholding traditional security and managing non-traditional security; the relationship between security and development; and the dialectic of personal safety and collective security (Gao 2016, 16 November).

In addition to setting up the CNSC and adopting a comprehensive national security outlook, the 15th session of the Standing Committee of 12th National People's Congress adopted a new state security law in July 2015. Article 2 of the law offers a definition of state security that envisions a situation that would be relatively free from internal and external threats to political regime, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, people's wellbeing, sustainable development of economy and society, and other national interests. The law provided the legal foundation for a prioritization of "prevention" in the national security framework and stressed treatment of symptoms and wiping out of root causes, as



well as the combination of specialised work and a mass line approach (Article 9). In order to create greater awareness and mobilise masses in the work of national security, the law earmarked 15 April every year as National Security Education Day (Article 14). China assigned duties and obligations of national security to all its civilians, state machineries and armed forces, political parties, enterprises, undertakings, organizations, and social units (Article 11). Articles 15 to 32 of the state security law provides a broad concept of security in 18 distinct areas.<sup>12</sup> The underlined message of the new security discourse and strategy is that defending national security from unspecified threats is the right and obligation of every citizens of China which has been reflected in the sixth chapter of state security law (Xinhua 2015a, 1 July).

While these provisions gave a legal foundation to the government's actions to restrict social movements, sudden outburst of resentment of common people, violent and non-violent separatist activities, mass mobilization of marginalised section of the society, and right groups and dissidents, such actions were not limited just by the adoption of state security laws. Since 2014, the Chinese party-state authorities passed other laws, namely, counter espionage law, counter-terrorism law, cybersecurity law, foreign non-government organization management law, national intelligence law, and amended numerous other laws in order to extend PRC's legally armoured iron hand in every nook and corner of China and even beyond (Cheung 2020, 1 September).

The new security discourse and strategic posture, building national security structure and bolstering restrictive legal foundation not only made security a new dimension of modernization program but also contributed in the securitization process in China, which left immense scope for excesses. Intensification of surveillance, censorship and coercion as well as the programs of improving and innovating social

control mechanism under the present regime are part of this process. It is however questionable whether some of these deliberate efforts to go overboard to ensure all-round security were reflective of political self-confidence or an inherent weakness of Xi's leadership style. The intensification of surveillance and coercive politics in Xinjiang since mid-2016 needs to be examined in the context of changes of security dynamics in China under Xi Jinping's leadership.

## **IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO NATIONAL QUESTION**

Throughout Hu Jintao's rule, a section of ethnic studies scholars as well as other academic commentators had questioned the efficacy of the existing ethnic discourse and policies, which, according to them were modelled on the Stalinist formula of political-economic empowerment of minority nationalities and their region. They contended that this model had strengthened identity among various ethnic minority groups since the establishment of the PRC and further solidified it in the era of reform and opening, market economy, and globalisation. Following the riots in Lhasa and Urumqi in 2008 and 2009, the academic discussion on the need for reviewing ethnic policies sharpened. These scholars publicly called for a thorough revision of the state ethnic policy, depoliticization of ethnic issues, and the introduction of a 'second generation' ethnic policy. There were also other schools of thoughts among scholars of ethnicity and stakeholders who opposed any kind of change in thinking on ethnicity. These two contending schools of ethnicity scholars have continued to strongly influence the thinking, strategies and policies on the issue of ethnic minorities and their regions under Xi Jinping.

Unlike his predecessor, Xi did not have any experience of working in minority areas in his earlier appointments. As the vice president of the country, his views on ethnicity (*minzu guan*) evolved as he began to

play a key role in the securitisation process during the Beijing Olympic and in the aftermath of the riots in the capital cities of Tibet and Xinjiang. James Leibold points out that during his first tenure, Xi Jinping had faced two challenges in the area of ethnic affairs – the legacy of his father Xi Zhongxun<sup>13</sup> and the presence of Hu Jintao’s allies in the *minzu* establishment (Leibold 2015, 19 October). By the time of the 19th Party Congress, however, he overcame these hurdles practically and imprinted his signature in the Party’s ideological position on national questions and ethnic works.

Xi Jinping’s vision of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and pledge for realising the “China dream” has shaped the more muscular form of nationalism that have been influencing China’s foreign policy as well as domestic politics since he came to power. The millennium dream of national revival also encapsulated Hu Jintao’s national perspectives of glory and shame in socialism (*shehuizhuyi rongru guan*). By putting greater emphasis on patriotism, nationalism and national pride at the core of his ruling philosophy, Xi called for greater cohesion between the Han majority and the national minorities in China. Xi Jinping’s nationalistic vision gave thrust to collective national identity, cohesiveness and assimilation of ethnic nationalities with the Han majority. According to him, patriotism is the deepest, most fundamental and eternal core value of socialism. And the Party is the most decisive advocate and practitioner of the Chinese patriotic spirit. Xi calls for ardent love of the motherland, for the Party and Chinese socialism because, in his view, their fates are inseparable (Tang 2018, 30 September). At the 19th Party Congress, the consolidation of patriotism was made a guideline of all united front work and enhancement of patriotic, collective and socialist education as part of broader ideological education in the country.

During numerous visits to the minority areas across the country since 2012, Xi Jinping and the top-ranking cadres of the fifth-generation party

leadership emphasised that party and government were committed to carrying out poverty alleviation and the building of a well-off society in the minority regions, which was reflected in Xi's catchy slogans 'not a single ethnic group can be left out' from China's modernization process (Xinhua 2015b, 23 November). The official discourse on building a well-off society in the minority areas has been attributed to Xi Jinping's personal experience of carrying out poverty alleviation work in a minority village during his tenure as the Party secretary in Ningde, Fujian.

Xi Jinping advanced his ideological inputs and major thinking on the issues related to ethnic minorities and their regions as well as nationality works during three important conferences, namely, Second Xinjiang Work Forum, Fourth Central Nationality Work Conference and Sixth Tibet Work Forum which were held between May 2014 and August 2015. Since open debate on the sensitive issue of national minorities was completely against Xi Jinping's political agenda of ideological unification, at the Central Ethnic Work Conference in September 2014 he expressed displeasure at the open criticism of official ideology and policy of ethnic affairs and clarified Party's view on some of the issues debated in academic circle since the beginning of 21st century. To deal with ethnic identity at the theoretical level, he emphasised the cultivation of five kinds of identifications, namely, identification with the motherland, Chinese nation, Chinese culture, Chinese Communist Party, and Chinese socialism (Jia 2016, 17 March; Leibold 2015, 19 October).

In practice, concepts like depoliticization of ethnic issues and de-institutionalization of ethnic regions as well as the suggestion of 'second generation' ethnic policies were often perceived at the ground level as confusing ideas. The Central Ethnic Work Conference (September 2014 date) stressed that ethnic relations and issues should be seen

from political perspective. It was clarified that not all issues arising at the social lives of ethnic groups should be treated as political issues. Xi Jinping pointed out that over the years ‘certain differentiated measures in ethnic policies automatically lost meaning’ as a result of Chinese social construction and implementation of uniform public services (Hao 2018, December).

The fifth generation of Chinese leaders led by Xi Jinping appears to have preferred a gradual adjustment of the existing ethnic policy and adopted a ‘hybrid model’ of ethnic relations by embracing social, cultural and psychological integration of ethnic minorities within the existing ethno-regional autonomy and economic structure (Jia 2016, 17 March). It also appeared that the government would gradually phase out favourable policies in family planning and education and readjust the policies that strengthened ethnic identity among the minorities.

Inter-ethnic unity and ethnic work have been Xi’s long-term concern. Xi Jinping reiterated correctness of Party’s ethnic theories, guidelines and policies and reassured that overall ethnic relations in the country were good and the foundation of ethnic relations were stable. While attaching importance to ethnic unity, Xi stressed that multi-ethnicity is the ‘greatest characteristics’ and fundamental national condition of China as well as one of the ‘most beneficial factors’ behind China’s development (Hao 2018, December). During the Xinjiang Work Forum in May 2014, Xi pointed out that ethnic unity is the lifeline of all ethnic groups and underlined the need of ethnic groups to cohabitate like pomegranate seeds and live with mutual understanding, respect, forgiveness, appreciation, and support of each other (Xuexi Zhongguo 2015, 24 August). For ethnic unity, Xi’s administration emphasised on ethnic mingling (*jiaorong*) and gave priority to policies of residential integration, joint schooling and Chinese language education, and interethnic migration and mobility (Leibold 2015, 19 October).

Along with national unity, maintain stability in the ethnic minority regions has been given utmost priority under the new security regime. On various occasions Xi Jinping and his colleagues stressed on interethnic unity, national security, social stability, and reminded the dangers owing to social unrests, ethnic separatism, and terrorism in the country. The recent changes in religious policies and related laws clearly reflect general understanding of the leadership that to a great extent religious faith is the root cause of problems in Xinjiang and Tibet.

The fifth-generation party leadership considers that ethnic work for various minority groups and areas in the changing circumstances during the reform era confront both challenges and opportunities. Xi Jinping in his Report to the 19th Party Congress identified that ‘unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for better life’ is the ‘principal contradiction’ of the contemporary Chinese society. The symptom of unbalanced and inadequate development is most prominent in the life of ethnic minorities and in minority dominate regions.<sup>14</sup> In order to resolve this contradiction, the new nationality policy assured implementation of *xiaokang* goal among all ethnic groups by 2020 and implementation of comprehensive development focusing on quality and efficiency, not merely the speed of development (Chen H. 2017: 7).

## **POLICY ORIENTATION TOWARDS XINJIANG**

The Chinese central leadership gave special thrust to fight violent separatist tendency in Xinjiang and to the all-round integration of the region through a so-called ‘carrot and stick’ policy focusing on ‘strike hard’ measures and count-terrorism war as well as through the Western Region Development campaign. The effectiveness of these dual policies had been seriously doubted after the riots in Xinjiang capital which led

to thorough investigation of the Party's theoretical and strategic basis and process of policy making and implementation in the region. The endeavour to change the style of governance in Xinjiang in the next few years was both too little and shortlived. Before any worthwhile results of new policies were achieved, the highest leadership of the Party appeared to have become impatient in the face of a series of highly symbolic and deadly acts of Uyghur-led terror in the initial years of Xi Jinping's rule.

The fifth-generation leadership redefined the status and role of Xinjiang under the rubric of 'core' region of the Belt and Road Initiative. The importance of the region further enhanced from both geo-strategic and geo-economic perspective since 2013. In order to deal with the changed situation in Xinjiang, Xi Jinping offered his thoughts on governing the region which has been rated as the latest development of Marxism and achievement of the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics by a Chinese professor of the XUAR Party School (Chen H. 2017: 7). Xi Jinping's thinking on the governance of Xinjiang (*zhijiang*) is based on his ideas on national unity, stability maintenance and economic development, however the question remains whether the leadership is able make any right balance between them.

The glimpse of Xi Jinping's vision of handling Xinjiang was first revealed during his visit to Xinjiang in April 2014. This visit and subsequent violence consolidated Xi Jinping's strategic thinking against extremism in Xinjiang. He categorically set the agenda of carrying out pre-emptive attacks against common enemy (*gongtong diren*) i.e., religious extremism, separatism and terrorism. President Xi called upon the people to carry out counter-terrorism people's war (*fan kongbu renmin zhanzheng*) and educate the majority population to unite by hitting hard a small number of miscreants (Xinhua 2014, 4 May). The second Xinjiang Work Forum in May 2014 emphasised that proper handling of

Xinjiang work is a major task of the entire Party machinery as well as the country and its people as a whole.

The Central Ethnic Work Forum in September 2014 observed coexistence of forces of unity and disruption, growing trend of ethnic intimacy and blending, and rise of social contradictions and disputes, as well as on-going fight against three forces of extremism and intensification of terrorist activities in some areas of the country (Xuexi Zhongguo 2015, 24 August). With this understanding, the central party leadership appears to be convinced that time has come to vigorously push forward the mission of national unity, ethnic mingling, and struggle against “three evil forces” and de-extremization in Xinjiang.

In an article published in the *People's Daily* in September 2017, Chen Quanguo summed up Xi Jinping's speeches on Xinjiang work and the new thinking and new strategies regarding the region formulated by the Central Party Committee. The main objective of Xinjiang work is now defined by social stability and long-standing peace in the region and building socialist Xinjiang with the Chinese characteristics (*Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi Xinjiang*). The core idea of governing the region under President Xi is to correctly handle relations between stability and development; adhere to concerted efforts of the Party, government military, police, Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC) and common masses; and focus on the main goal of effectively striking “combination punch” (*zuhe quan*) on the target. The tasks in the new strategies include safeguard overall situation, and maintain harmony and stability; promote smooth and healthy development; guarantee and improve people's livelihood; carry forward poverty alleviation; consolidate national unity; facilitate religious harmony; skilfully handle ideological work; strengthen ecological and environmental protection; support the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC) to



reform and thrive; and discipline the party comprehensively and strictly (Chen Q. 2017, 18 September).

Broadly speaking, most of these tasks are part and parcel of Xinjiang policy for some time, but new meaning has been attached with them under Xi Jinping's leadership who wants to permanently resolve problems of inter-ethnic tensions, root out extremism, and decisively crush separatist forces and terrorists in Xinjiang. This makes Xinjiang one of the major concerns of China's security dynamics.

## ENDNOTES

1. Within a month after he assumed the position of Party General Secretary in the 18th Party Congress, Xi first pronounced his vision of 'China dream' during a highly publicized visit to the exhibition on "The Road to Revival" at the National Historical Museum on 29 November, 2012. The components of 'China Dream' are rejuvenation of Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) and building a moderately prosperous society (*xiaokang shehui*). It is meant to serve the current Chinese leadership to ensure national unity, domestic stability, party's control.
2. On 7 September 2013, Xi Jinping declared his grand plan of "Belt and Road" in a speech at the Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan. This was followed by Xi's visit to ASEAN member states in October 2013 when he proposed to jointly build up "Maritime Silk Road" (*Haishang Sichouzhi Lu*). Though the "Belt and Road" initiative (henceforth BRI) is ruthlessly profit driven development program, Xi Jinping fixed the objective for the new Silk Road on higher moral ground of creating a 'community of common destiny' with trust, mutual assistance, friendship, openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation (Griffiths 2017: 5-7).
3. In February 2009, when Xi Jinping was still far from directly taking country's foreign policy decisions, he already gave enough indication during his visit to Mexico that he could be tough in dealing with foreigners. While meeting some overseas Chinese during the visit, Xi retorted that some foreigners after stuffing their stomach have nothing else to do but point fingers at China. He categorically told that China neither export revolution nor hunger and poverty (Ford 2010, 19 October).
4. As early as 2010 most of the neighbours of China felt the brunt of an assertive Chinese foreign policy which is increasingly echoing a jingoistic nationalist voice

emanated from certain section of new generation hardliners in the party and military. Many scholars and foreign policy experts like to interpret that China possibly became confident enough to relinquish the policy of hiding capabilities and is ready to display its economic might and military prowess.

5. Wen Jiabao's role in removing dynamic and charismatic leader Bo Xilai from power suggests this. The incident no doubt made the political succession much smoother and it also helped Xi Jinping to manoeuvre more freely in absence of any formidable challenger within his own rank. Some anonymous sources 'leaked' in the official media suggested that Bo 'even plotted to oust Xi Jinping' (Ranade 2013: 107). Andrew Wedeman mentioned about a rumour that Zhou Yongkang was an accomplice of Bo in planning a coup against Xi Jinping (Cited in Lensing 2016: 66).
6. This is a famous quote from ancient text *Shijing* (Book of poetry), which is 'Zhou sui jiu bang, qi ming weixin' in *pinyin*.
7. Fourteen fundamental general strategies are laid out in the 19th Party Congress: universalization of party's leadership in all matters; people-centred approach; deepening reform comprehensive way; new vision for development; seeing people as the master of the country; bringing every dimension of governance under rule of law; core socialist values; improving living standards; harmony between human and nature; holistic approach to national security; absolute Party leadership over the people's forces; "one country, two systems" and promoting national reunification; building of a community with a shared future for mankind; full and rigorous governance over the Party.
8. Four major New Left intellectuals, namely, Wang Shaoguang, Cui Zhiyuan, Wang Hui and Gan Yang represent different intellectual positions and do not share any monolithic stand on socialism. In order to develop their thought on socialism in the post-Cold War world they tried to explore various traditions of Marxism as well as liberal ideas. Because of their flexibility of absorbing liberal ideas, Cui Zhiyuan, Wang Hui and Gan Yang became known as 'liberal left' (*ziyouzuopai*) (Shi, Lachapelle and Galway 2018).
9. Some major changes in the political spheres between 1978 and 2012 are as follows: collective leadership; term and age limits for various party and government posts including the presidency; inter-party democracy to certain extent that even allowed abstentions and negative voting; institutionalization of the process of succession; regulation of recruitment and promotion of cadres; civility among various elite factions; reduction of informal personal influence; three levels of separation – party and government, factory administration and local government, and economic decentralization; introduction of direct elections to the local congresses at the level of county and below.

10. The Wukan protests in 2011 gave the authority reasons to enhance surveillance on people's activities even in the rural China.
11. The 2010 White Paper on corruption titled 'China's Efforts to Combat Corruption and Build a Clean Government' reported 240,000 cases of embezzlement, bribery and dereliction of duty. Over 69,200 cases of commercial bribery involving a total 16.59 billion RMB were investigated. In 2009, about 7,036 officials were held responsible for serious mistakes in the decision making, breach of duty and inefficiency. The White Paper also claims that over 80 per cent Chinese think that corruption have reduced over the years (Information Office of State Council of the PRC 2010, December). Some people in China are appreciative of the measures taken by the government, latest data however disclose somewhat different corruption scenario in China. The Carnegie Endowment scholar Minxin Pei points out that the chances of a corrupt official going to jail is about 3 percent and this makes 'corruption a high-return, low risk activity' (Pei 2007: 4).
12. These articles of state security law cover political security, people's security, homeland security, military security, economic security, financial and infrastructural security, energy security, food security, cultural security, science & technology security, information security, ethnic security, religious security, security against terrorism, social security, ecological security, nuclear security, and security of outside space, deep sea and polar regions (Aerospace, Defense & National Security, Covington, 2015, 2 July).
13. In the early years of the PRC and again in the 1980s the senior Xi adopted a very moderate approach in dealing with the ethnic crisis in Tibet and Xinjiang. He also developed personal relations with the Dalai Lama and initiated dialogue with exiled Tibetans.
14. Total economic aggregate of eight provinces with ethnic minorities of provinces under the Western Region Development Program and 30 ethnic prefectures are equal to that of Guangdong and Suzhou city of Jiangsu respectively. The value of foreign trade of the eight provinces is one fifth of Shenzhen city alone (*Zhongguo minzu bao* 2017, 9 November).

## CHAPTER 3

# SECURITISATION

As economic performance has become the main source of legitimacy in the reform period, managerial acumen, business-like precision, innovative operational tactics, and efficiency and performance have increasingly become the major thrust in the discourse of statecraft in China. In the course of the modernization of agriculture and building of the new socialist countryside, industrialization, urbanization, spread of literacy, education, and science and technology, strengthening military, increasing international exposure and renewed status in the world politics, and expansion of the mass media for over forty years, China strove to catch up the West and went ahead of the Western standard in many areas. The Chinese leadership became increasingly aware that systematic innovation in the function of government, legislature and judiciary as well as management of the growing diversity in society was required in order to persist with the chosen path of deepening reform.

Despite efforts at inculcating strong nationalist sentiment, collective interest, spiritual civilization, secular culture and loyalty among its citizens, the demands of the Chinese people for greater expression of their individual and group interests have increased, and their behaviour towards politics has undergone change during the four decades of reform and opening up. These new social dynamics, coupled with prominent disruptive forces like separatist activities in Xinjiang and Tibet, demands for the independent existence of Taiwan, and for a democratic and liberal administration in Hong Kong posed serious challenges against the Centre's objective of fulfilling development goals, state unification, and national rejuvenation. While China has been skilfully managing the country's economic and other affairs, it has yet to improve its capacity

to deal with ethnic conflicts, social unrests, mass movements, various civil rights demands, dissent, as well as the sudden spurt of netizen activism in the social media. In order to eliminate the root causes behind the above problems, the present leadership has given increased importance to social governance, maintenance of law and order, and to the strengthening of national security.

With the growing perception of new security threats in the changing national and international arenas, the leadership has felt a strong sense of urgency that the CPC should continue to remain ‘the vanguard of the times, the backbone of the nation, and a Marxist governing party’ and while doing this, to ‘hold itself to the highest standards’ (Xi 2017, October 18). During the first five years of Xi’s rule, political rhetoric on all sectors of security was heightened and several new institutional arrangements made to hasten and strengthen the securitisation process across the country. In this situation, the intensification of surveillance in Xinjiang appears to be a test case because the Uyghur ethno-national resurgence has posed the biggest challenge to the Chinese dream and to BRI projects. Thus, securitisation in the Muslim-dominated Xinjiang has been intrinsically linked with the counter radicalisation and de-extremisation programs.

## **SECURITY AND SECURITIZATION**

It is evident that non-traditional security threats, commonly believed to be threats that went beyond the conventional and military sphere, were factored into the strategic thinking across the world since the 1980s. In the background of the Cold War, when security was merely defined in term of state power and military strength, Richard H. Ullman and Barry Buzan put forward a comprehensive definition of security and brought other dimensions such as economy, environment, society, military and

politics within the ambit of security studies (Ullman 1983; Buzan 1983). Other closely related concepts like global security and human security were also eventually to become part of the debate on non-traditional security threats. Buzan's formulation included both micro and macro security and along with social aspects it addressed individual level of security as well as questions of how people perceive security and how a security threat is constructed. An overemphasis on military and physical strength in security matters has allowed political and military elites to wield maximum power by exaggerating the level of threat, cultivating hostile images, shifting resources for a defence build-up, by increasing political surveillance and by restricting the options alternative to coercive means (Buzan 1983: 9). In the narrow international and national security environment of the globalized world, individual and group security has been under constant threat because of economic and financial uncertainties, or untoward mishaps due to miscalculated policy measures, internal political disorder, a deficient justice system, due to inadequate or excessive legalities, or arising from unwarranted policing and arbitrary prosecution practices.

The new approach to security study argues that institutions of state and the process of securitization (a concept expounded by Ole Wæver) can directly pose threats to social and individual life. Wæver explored the problem from the basic premise of 'what really makes something a security problem?' According to him, an issue is 'securitized' when it is constructed as a threat and declare to be a security problem by the elite power holders in a state. The state enjoys a special right to define certain political development as security problem and elites in power can use the 'instrument of securitization' for gaining control over the situation. He further notes that security issues are always relative and there is no such thing as a situation of complete security. However, the maximization of security is always on the agenda of authorities irrespective of the

ideology of ruling factions. Wæver argues that the absurdity of security maximization becomes clear when the 'securityness' of an issue is probed further (Wæver 1998: 6-8). Wæver's approach of securitization was further elaborated and tested in both traditional (military) as well as non-traditional (economic, environmental and societal) sectors in a book titled *Security a new framework for analysis* jointly authored by Buzan, Wæver and Jaap de Wilde.

The above work offers an 'operational method for distinguishing the process of securitization from that of politicization'. Depending on the nature of a state, and the change of circumstances or time, a public issue can be characterized either as non-politicized or politicized or securitized. A politicized issue is mostly seen as a 'part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations.' Whereas, an issue is regarded as securitized when it is projected as 'an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bound of political procedure' (Buzan, Wæver and Wilde 1998: vii, 23-4). As in the former Soviet Union, in China, today societal, political, and military security are closely linked and most of issues tend to be politicised. As we shall soon discuss, some issues that were in the realm of Chinese politics during the first decade of reform have evolved into major security problem in the 1990s.

Buzan expanded the concept of securitization by analysing the universalist construction of threats as well as by setting forth the idea of micro-securitization. For him, the Cold War was a historical example of macro-securitization and he points out the obvious tendency of macro-securitization in the US-led 'war on terror' in the aftermath of the 9-11 incidents (Buzan 2006). Since that time, the process of securitization of the phenomenon of terrorism and the wide range of related threat perceptions have not only affected every sphere of social and individual

life in both democratic countries but it has also hardened the already existing social control mechanisms in authoritarian polities.

## **NATURE OF THREATS**

One of the major unresolved issues confronted by all modern states is intrastate conflicts emanating from violent and non-violent resurgences based on ethno-national identity, religion, language and regions. Threats related to ethno-national conflicts can be realistic, symbolic, and perceived. Fears resulting from tangible problems like economic discrimination, history of conflicts and injustice, prejudice and stereotype depiction of sub-national entities, territorial claim, disparity in sharing political power on ethnic lines, and the capacity of causing physical harm to each other constitute realistic threats. Symbolic threats develop from perceived differences in the moral values, beliefs, norms, standards, attitudes, identity and way of life in an ethno-national conflict, while perceived threats are characterized by a wide variety of biases including negative stereotypes, distorted perceptions of other group's intentions and motives, inflated sense of moral legitimacy, exaggeration of intergroup differences, and lack of confidence in conflict resolution (Turner and Hewstone 2010; Stephan and Mealy 2011: 1-3). Other than real and psychological threats, the secessionist and terrorist groups in the virtual space have also created a form of invisible threat through modern information and communication technology. Considering the degree of severity, some author has coined terms like "cyber-terrorism" which exist in the virtual world but can be very much part of reality. There are contending views about the actual impact of cyber-terrorism but it is 'undeniable that the threat of terrorist action over the Internet is realistic' (Brunst 2010: 53). Therefore, it is unjustified to claim that China does not have any reason to feel threaten just because terrorist and violent separatist factions among the Uyghur community are numerically small with limited striking capability.



The psychological impact of the new terrorism on societies can be 'as powerful as the effect of terrorist bombs. Moreover, the most destructive forces working against an understanding of the actual threat of cyberterrorism are a fear of the unknown and a lack of information, or worse, too much misinformation' (Weimann 2004: 3). It is no doubt unwise for the state authorities to undermine these threats, but danger lies when states, both democratic as well as authoritarian utilise the situation emanating from unconventional and unpredictable security threats to suspect, suppress and ostracise certain section of the society and individuals who hold dissenting views. It is even more problematic when political regimes use these threats and fear in the public life as an opportunity to inculcate hatred among the majority population towards some ethnic groups and develop consensus to maximise social control and surveillance in name of security.

Threat in an ethno-national conflict is often mutual but undoubtedly asymmetric in terms of its effects. Threat and fear have long been recognized as tools to consolidate political power, acquire state authority and maintain dominance. Misappropriation of threat perception and fear in public life is possibly easier in an authoritarian polity. As a sole authority of coercive power, it is state's prerogative to judiciously use force to suppress unrest and violence by non-state ethnic actors. When an ethno-national community is engaged in a protracted struggle authoritarian state like China, being situated in the other side of the asymmetric relations, it faces challenge of maintaining privileges in all aspects of life.

Several studies indicate that the more threatened or concerned people are about their security following terrorist attacks, less supportive they are of civil liberties (Thórisdóttir and Jost 2011: 787). This is exactly what happened in the post 9-11 world when political conservatism gained

credence and impatience among the majority population towards ethnic constituencies increased in most of the countries in the world.

Threat perception in the face of separatist violence in Xinjiang since early 1990s increased in China. Unlike non-violent resistance of the Tibetan movements, despite the fact that a majority of the Uyghur population are peace loving citizens, the Uyghur movement has long been characterised as a violent ethno-national extremist force engaged in anti-China activities with the support of trans-national terrorist organizations and rival countries. The Chinese leadership has fully exploited the wide spread fear in the minds of the broader civilian population due to Uyghur-led violence, the fears of sporadic terrorist attacks and built up an aversion towards an independent minded ethnic minority affiliated with Islam. The high pitch rhetoric against “three evil forces” and counter-terrorism measures has thus become a permanent phenomenon in course of protracted conflicts between the Uyghur separatist elements and the state.

Since the Uyghur diaspora movement began to take off in the early 1990s, they have made full use of the internet to popularise their cause. Largely as a result of this, some Western writers have described their movement as cyber-separatism or cyber-secessionism. In 2004, Dru C. Gladney pointed out that the Uyghur diaspora communities’ contribution to ‘cyber-separatism’ is not merely virtual, however their cyber activism ‘did not really pose a threat to the Chinese state’ (Gladney 2004: 230). His opinion changed in the later years. Observing ‘the dramatic growth of Uyghur connectivity’ and the events in various Arab Spring and Jasmin Revolution in the Middle East, he argues that ‘a new virtual Uyghur community has begun to emerge in the diaspora that has indeed given Beijing much greater cause for concern’. He further argues that the ‘Uyghur cyber-secessionism/separatism could lead to the establishment

of virtual nation, but one that for the distant future will remain outside China, existing virtually in the diaspora and on the internet' (Gladney 2013: 221). However, there were reasons for the Chinese authority to consider repeated terrorist threats issued by the Uyghur outfits located in Pakistan and Afghanistan prior the Beijing Olympic to be real and imminent.

Fear in the public mind further deepened in the subsequent years after July 2009 Urumqi riots in which for the first time a large number of people from the Han and the Uyghur communities confronted face-to-face while the regional leadership, police and entire government machinery not only proved their inefficiency to stop violence but also played a dubious role. Despite attempts of putting blame on the digital activism by the exiled Uyghur leadership for the riots, it became almost impossible for the state to refute the proximity of threat that has its origin in the radicalisation of the Uyghur society resulting from national politics and state policies towards Xinjiang and its ethnic masses.

## **CONFLICTS AND CONTRADICTIONS**

In the Chinese context, conflict is mostly used to describe conflicts between social classes. Taking cue from Mao's theory of contradiction, Chinese scholars and Party ideologues put many social phenomena, which are described as conflicts in the Western theories within the broad category of non-antagonistic (among people) and antagonistic (between people and enemy) contradictions. 'Mao Zedong pointed out that various forms contradictions between 'ourselves and the enemy' are always antagonistic in nature. According to him, both non-antagonistic and antagonistic contradictions prevail between the exploited and exploiting classes and content of contradiction varies in different periods of time (Mao 1977: 81). He recommended distinct guiding

principles and methods for resolving the two types of contradictions and categorically stated that all attempts of using ‘administrative orders or coercive measures to settle ideological questions or questions of right and wrong’ would be ineffective. He further pointed out the correct handling of religions could not be done through ‘administrative decree or force’ and people would never abandon their faith if state resorts to coercive measures. It is only through democratic means, discussion, criticism, persuasion and education that contradictions among people can be resolved (Mao 1977: 86). This thesis on contradiction however stands as a powerful counter discourse against several aspects of state’s ethnic policies and treatment of ethnic minorities and for the understanding of Xinjiang problem under Xi Jinping.

There is no doubt that Mao’s own dictum on contradictions helped him and subsequent generations of Chinese leadership to circumvent responsibility for their actions by manufacturing new enemies of socialist state at different points of time. In fact, time and again this doctrine has been conveniently used to suit political discourse and as a result new contradiction have emerged in Chinese society. Most importantly, categorising a large majority of Uyghur population as actual, suspected and potential terrorist undermines Mao’s view that ‘unity of opposites’ is possible in the process of resolving contradictions.

The phenomenon of ‘social conflict’ (*shehui chongtu*) and process of adoption of the Western conflict theories as a tool to explain wide range of phenomenon of the contemporary China are only a recent endeavour of the Chinese social scientists. In addition to increasing number of academic writings focusing on conflicts in the Chinese societies, scholarly interests on social contradictions have remarkably increased since the end of the last century.<sup>2</sup> The above study however shows that not only discussion on ethnic conflict is neglected but reference

of social contradictions in case of minority areas as a theme in recent scholarly research is also rare (Chaudhuri 2018: 56).

In this regard, Xinjiang hardly figures anywhere in the academic research on *weiwén*. Interestingly, a study conducted by Xiao Tangbiao on the politics of stability maintenance in contemporary China from 1978 to 2014 did not have mention of any violent incident in Xinjiang or of the July 2009 riots in Urumqi. Xiao's article however referred to the turmoil and political crisis in Tibet in 1989 and 14 March incident in 2008 (Xiao 2015: 142&143). This suggests that in official discourse as well as academic understanding of Xinjiang problem is not a social-political phenomenon but a unique national security issue.

In the process of the classification of a new enemy, the entire Uyghur community rank and file are often tarred with the same brush. This is exactly what happened since the time Chinese authorities identified “three evil forces” of extremism in Xinjiang. In the course of fighting against separatist violence and extremist elements, a whole range of political, social, cultural and religious activities of the Uyghur population have been seen as antagonistic to the Chinese state. This has further aggravated inequality and given birth to newer contradictions and conflicts in Xinjiang society. In this asymmetric conflictual relationship, both the state and the majority Han population in the region enjoy greater access to media and technology along with political and economic power. As a result, a large majority of Uyghur population feel systematically exploited in the name of economic development, maintenance of national security and social stability.

Xi Jinping's call for helping religion to ‘adapt to the socialist society’, ‘manage religious affairs in line with laws’, ‘merge religious doctrines with Chinese culture’ and ‘devote themselves to China's reform and opening up drive and socialist modernization in order to contribute to

the realization of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation' (Xinhua 2016, 23 April) are definitely goes against Mao's intentions in dealing with contradictions between atheism and various religions or among religions.

The Chinese scholars have examined contradictions in the reform period from Marxist, sociological and legal perspectives. According to these works, social contradictions in the reform period evolved under the influence of ownership structures, and government's strategies and policies. The social contradictions during this period build up relatively slowly, have longer cycles and are more complex. It has been observed that most of the conflicts in today's China can be resolved through policy adjustments, administrative measures, coordination, innovation, petitioning to the higher authority, litigation, arbitration, judicial mediation and reconciliation, and people's intervention (Feng 2009: 45-7).<sup>3</sup>

Some Chinese scholars have studied the phenomenon of the "sudden outburst of contradictions among the masses" (*tufaxing qunti maodun*), a most prevalent form of collective actions in the contemporary China from the viewpoint of "non-antagonistic and antagonistic contradictions." It is argued that the cumulative and unresolved contradictions among people, especially those resulting from unfulfilled material and cultural needs often turn into antagonism. In the absence of ideological and political work in the reform period, some extremely antagonistic relations lose clear line of distinction between contradiction among people, and contradictions between 'ourselves' and enemy (Yu 2004: 171-72). Yu Yonghua notes that *tufaxing qunti maodun* have the following features: display extreme behavioural tendency and use of violent means; cause social unrests at the local level; harm unity among the people; damage image of the party and the government (Yu 2004: 174-5). He continued that all opponents in this kind of conflicts however support

the leadership of the party, have faith in the party and government, and promote reform and opening. Despite their antagonistic and destructive characteristics, however, they serve a positive function of exposing administrative lapses and problems of governance (Yu 2004: 174-5). It is in the face this kind of contradictions/conflicts in the Chinese society that the official discourse of stability maintenance (*weiwén*) evolved.

As the state authority continued to categorise people involved in all forms of violence and non-violent activities in Xinjiang as part and parcel of the “three evil forces”, the need for stability maintenance (*weiwén*) was not considered and conflict resolution mechanisms available in other parts of China was not applicable in Xinjiang until the Urumqi riots. Subsequently, before the efforts in this direction undertaken by Zhang Chunxian was able to yield any positive results in mitigating any incipient contradictions and social conflicts, they were reversed and an array of full blown coercive measures were unleashed in name of de-extremisation by the new Party secretary, Chen Quanguo.

I have shown in my earlier study that the Chinese official discourse denies any major adverse impact on the ground of the top-down social changes brought about by the authorities. Instead, they point out to the rapid economic development in the province and contend that social stability could be easily maintained amidst such huge transformation in every aspect of life in the country. They argue against the Western theory of social change which contends that social instability, unrest and conflict are inevitable in a period of massive socio-economic transformation. In this study I argue that China seems to have developed a robust formula to maintain stability and bring about socio-economic transformation by leveraging a new kind of digital and technological culture.

The way China has been using modern techniques of surveillance to keep vigilance on the day-to-day activities of its citizens is quite

amazing. This kind of experimentation on social body is analogous to administering complicated medical surgery with minimally invasive procedures in a technologically advanced clinical environment. Basic thinking behind this is that like a patient's body, society can be least disturbed in course of ground shaking social changes if state authorities can successfully inculcate habit of self-censoring among the citizens and transform them into docile subjects by employing foolproof security and technologically advanced surveillance system, innovative disciplinary and punishment mechanism, effective education, training, propaganda and indoctrination, monitoring system of people's day-to-day activities, behaviour and thinking, and develop stringent legal foundation. This can as well be a long-term plan of the evolving authoritarian party-state to remove the possibilities of social unrest and conflicts in both majority and minority communities in China.

## **SECURITIZATION IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT**

The biggest fear of the CPC leadership in the reform period was of a possible reversion to the kind of political disorder and widespread chaos of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>4</sup> The panic of the highest leadership of the party was reflected during the Tian'anmen movement. They felt that if the problem was not handled immediately it would be too late, and could never restore political order. Suppression of a peaceful demonstration with military force for political control over the situation set a new pattern in China's public security discourse that legitimized stability by any means. Despite decades of attempts to erase the episode from the public memory, the weakness of the leadership is that they are still haunted by the fear of large-scale regime threatening protests.

However, Chinese strategic thinking began to shift from military security to other aspects of security after the publication of the United Nations



Human Development Report in 1994 that first outlined new dimensions of human security.<sup>5</sup> In the same year, Wang Yong, a scholar from Beijing University discussed the concept of non-traditional security in an article published in a Chinese journal titled *World Economy and Politics* (Zhang, Chen and Biao 2013: 99). From the time of disintegration of the Soviet Union, most political problems were seen from the standpoint of the question of the survival and dominance of the Party, of the end to the century of humiliation of China, of the finding its rightful place in the world, and eventually the standpoint of the revival of the Chinese nation.

The 'three evil forces' in Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Falungong, mass incidents, and right movements posed different kind of security threats and there was general consensus among the scholars and in the security establishment that these kind of security threats were difficult to tackle with purely military means. While addressing non-traditional security concerns along with strengthening capability of armed forces, the Chinese leadership kept on manufacturing new enemies of state and maintained strategic disposition against sovereignty threat owing to the above problems, especially due to violence led by the Uyghur.

It was after the 9-11 incidents that an increasing number experts became interested to explore various aspects of non-traditional security threats in China. Research on non-traditional security proliferated since 2003 but only a very few works are theoretically sound. Most of the works are based on empirical research and policy study. There are however some scholars who studied securitization (*anquanhua*) and explored why and how securitization and de-securitization processes start (Li and Xue 2012: 94). Like many concepts originated in the West, a section of Chinese scholars interpreted human security in terms of differences between the individualistic worldview of the West and the collectivistic

worldview of the East. According to one scholar, the essence of human security in the Western mind is basically security, right and welfare of individuals. Whereas, the Eastern worldview, and, by implication, that of the developing countries, such individual security and growth were linked with national security and development (Li 2005: 5). The Chinese official discourse on non-traditional security links individual security and growth with national security and comprehensive development. Since there is no scope for individual security outside the realm of national security, the present study contends that the nature of the Chinese party-state, its definition of the national interest, its understanding of the impact of international dynamics on its national security and the threat perception of the party, government and military elites preclude any definition of human security linked to the development or growth of its minority social and ethnic movements and a determination to infringe any and all such individual or group rights at the slightest provocation.

In this situation, the holding of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 without any unpleasant incident was viewed by the Chinese leadership as an opportunity to showcase greatness of Chinese culture, acquire international acceptance and regain confidence in internal security matters. One study provides a very interesting insight on how Chinese modernization in general and the Beijing Olympic in particular played a crucial role in changing culture for the better. The Chinese government used the games to serve its goals of altering long standing cultural habits like spitting and smoking in public and queue jumping, and use of foul languages (Brennan 2009). To a large extent the government took the initiative to change certain public behaviours unacceptable according to Western standards. However, the rich experience of monitoring social and cultural practices helped the authorities to develop a new culture of surveillance in the sphere of security as well.

As far as security enhancement was concerned, 2008 was a watershed year. It is the 100th year of China's first Constitution (i.e. Qing Imperial

Constitution, *Qing ding xianfa da gang* in Chinese), the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the 30th anniversary of the birth of the Democracy Wall, and the 10th year since China signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). A magnificent display of success in the field of economy and science in the grand ceremony of the Beijing Olympic and spectacular performance of Chinese participants in the game made 2008 a year of glory for the country.

However, several natural calamities including the Sichuan earthquake, Lhasa riots and Tibetan protests in several places outside Tibet, more than a dozen major mass incidents were not only a source of agony but also matters that shook the confidence of the CPC leadership. For several reasons this year was also significant for a growing recognition of the rights of the Tibetan and other minorities by Han intellectuals and dissidents. Many scholars noted that students, liberal intellectuals and dissidents who participated in the Tiananmen Square movement in 1989 were either uninterested or unaware about the brutal suppression of the Tibetan cause. In contrast, the situation was completely different in 2008. The Chinese dissidents, right activists and right lawyers were no more indifferent about the Tibetan situation. Immediately after the riots in Lhasa, 30 Chinese writers and scholars put forward a 12-point petition to the Chinese Government and criticized China's minority policy (Central Tibetan Administration 2008). And 18 Chinese lawyers from Beijing publicly offered legal help to the Tibetans detained during the unrest. In 2008, for the first time Dalai Lama's Tibet policy was defended by a lawyer in a mainland court. Zhu Jiuhu, a Beijing-based attorney, while defending a Sichuan writer Chen Daojun for writing in support of Dalai Lama's position on Tibet question, argued that the writer committed no crime, and pointed out that the Dalai Lama did not advocate independence in the pursuit of splitting China (Zhang 2008, 7 November).

The year ended with the release of the Charter 08 which openly challenged the authority of the Communist Party of China and called for abolition of one-party rule. The authors of the Charter (Liu Xiaobo and Zhang Zuhua) were inspired by Charter 77, associated with Vaclav Havel and others who fought for political reform in Czechoslovakia. One important similarity is that both the Charters demand proper implementation of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by their respective governments.

Like their Tibetan compatriots, both militant as well as moderate Uyghur groups considered the Beijing Olympic as an opportunity to draw international attention to their cause by carrying out violent attacks or non-violent demonstrations. This was the beginning of a fresh round of separatist violence in Xinjiang after the 1990s.

Against this socio-political backdrop, securitization during 2008 Beijing Olympic proved to be a valuable experience for shaping China's public security in the subsequent years. With a staggering expenditure of over USD 6.5 billion, the event turned out to be 'the largest peace time security operation in history' (Yu, Klauser, and Chan 2009: 1). Excessive security measures were legitimized by creating a 'climate of insecurity' through an official rhetoric on terrorism, and various disruptive forces and forms of criminality of both indigenous and foreign origin. Maximum levels of security were ensured in the high-risk areas of the city: 54.2% of the area of Chaoyang district, the main location of the games was covered with surveillance cameras; security consciousness among the city's population was increased through mass mobilization, propaganda, and active public participation. Security partnership and international collaboration allowed China to develop long term relations with global security agencies and high-tech private companies specializing in

surveillance technologies (Yu, Klauser, and Chan 2009). In terms institutionalization, technicalization and building vertical and horizontal linkages with global, national, regional, local security agencies and high-tech private companies specializing in surveillance technologies across the world, China's national security entered a new phase since 2008.

The Urumqi riots a year after the Beijing Olympic and regime threatening movements in the Arab world<sup>6</sup> led to an intensification of securitization across the country bringing civil society under maximum control of the party and state authorities. It was from this time onwards that the leadership had begun to consider a wide-range of community and individual activities, behaviour, expression and thinking as regime threatening and detrimental to political stability.

Violence had long been a mode of Uyghur resistance and a source of national security threats for the Chinese leadership. At the turn of the first decade of the 21st century, however, the regime faced unusual kinds of challenges in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas of China where more than one hundred Tibetan monks, nuns, and lay men and women had set themselves aflame since 2009. Habituated to using coercive force at the slightest provocation in Tibet and Xinjiang, the state authorities found themselves helpless in handling self-immolations cases. In order to deal with the situation, idea of securitization of Tibetan Buddhism at the level of management of monasteries evolved and the regional Party secretary of TAR, Chen Quanguo began to apply various innovative techniques to pacify the region.

Meanwhile, the demand for introducing anti-terrorism law was gaining momentum in Xinjiang as well as other parts of China as the frequency of violent terrorist attacks escalated since 2013. This was confirmed

during the Second Xinjiang Work Forum and an anti-terrorism law ratified at the next NPC and CPPCC sessions in March 2015. With this law the securitisation process in Xinjiang entered a new stage.

## ENDNOTES

1. The theoretical foundation on contradiction in China is based on Mao Zedong's two essays titled 'On Contradiction' and 'On Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People' which clearly emphasise universality of contradiction. New research on social contradiction also explores social psychological roots of contradiction, new social stratification and various kinds of conflicts linked to social interest that disturb social order in the reform period.
2. According to a Chinese author, in 1999 a total 89 articles on contradiction were published in China, a steady increase of scholarly interest on the topic is evident from 2005, with 165 articles published in that year, 419 articles in 2007 and 139 in the first nine months of 2009 (Feng 2009: Table 1, 46).
3. The academic works from the Marxist perspective examined contradictions in three areas – economy, politics, and social and cultural life. In the economic matters, contradiction is between multi-stakeholders such as state authority, collectives, and individuals; in politics, the contradictions are mainly between people's increasing consciousness of democratic rights for participation, autonomy and legal protection, and urgent need for political reform; and in social and cultural life, contradictions and conflicts are resulted from the impact of changing pattern of economic interests on peoples thinking, values, life style as well as contradictions between traditional and modern ideas and values. The sociologists and legal scholars identified income gap among various social strata and social groups, dual social structure, urban-rural differences, unequal income distribution between regions, conflict of interests between rich and poor, between labour and capital, between party cadres and masses, and among various social groups as the causes of social contradictions in the contemporary China (Feng 2009:45-47).
4. The 'Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China' declared the Cultural Revolution to be 'catastrophic', 'long-drawn-out and grave blunder', and was 'responsible for the most severe setback'. According to Wang Hui, the Cultural Revolution is a taboo in today's China, one cannot study the history of that period but it can be used to attack people. In his comment on Bo Xilai incident, he points out how Premier

Wen Jiabao criticised Bo and the Chongqing model for its return to the Cultural Revolution era (Wang 2012, 10 May). Compared to many people in the New Left, Wang was not sure about Bo's real intension as well as fairness of dealing with his case by the government.

5. The UN Human Development Report 1994 enumerates threats that are common to all people both in rich and poor countries – such as famine, unemployment, drugs trafficking, pollution, communicable diseases like HIV and AIDS, crime, terrorism, ethnic disputes and social disintegration, and human rights violation. These human security issues are not isolated events and can have impact on the life of peoples of all countries. It is recommended that the concept of security should change from excessive stress on territorial security to much greater stress on people's security and sustainable human development. The report listed a few major security concerns of contemporary world, namely, economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP 1994: 22-25).
6. The author has extensively discussed the 2009 Urumqi riots and impact of Arab Spring in his book *Xinjiang and the Chinese States – Violence in the Reform Era*.

## CHAPTER 4

### NEW SOCIAL CONTROL REGIME

During the first thirty years of CPC rule, China experienced systematic, formal, informal and voluntary restrictions on the life of the ordinary people. In the four succeeding decades of economic modernization and opening, a host of changes took place in the Chinese society and the debate on “strong society vis-à-vis declining state authority” became a widely held analytical framework among scholars who believed that the social and political changes associated with economic reform had undermined state legitimacy and the effectiveness of the previous state-society polity. In order to regain its control over both majority and minority communities, the Chinese party-state began to take steady and determined steps in the direction of harnessing an increasingly pluralistic society, curbing various social movements since the 1990s through reform of the legal and judicial system, introducing stringent censorship on the internet, and strengthening its coercive capacity by raising expenditures on public security. As discussed in the previous chapters, political space and freedom for the individual were further curtailed drastically by a reversal of many positive features of the political reform of previous years and introduction of even more restrictive laws and policies under the leadership of Xi Jinping.

If the major ambition of the Chinese state was to create an ideal society, this would have had to be built on the foundation of a social and political order that ensured the complete loyalty of the common people, while inculcating sound physical, mental, behavioural, moral and spiritual qualities among the population. Børge Bakken describes China as an ‘exemplary society’ in which state-society relations is based on



exemplary norms and behaviour, on tradition and modernity, laws and morality, rules, regulations and strategies, education and discipline, on rewarding virtue and punishing vices, on socialization and social control in order to shape a model society. By fixing standards in each of the above areas, the state has sought to improve the ideal ‘human quality’ (*ren de sushì*) with the aim of making it serve as ‘a force for realizing a modern society of perfect order’ and ‘harmonious modernity’ (Bakken 2000: ‘Introduction’). The Chinese authorities have channelized the nation’s resources and energy in education, indoctrination, in various forms of social control and surveillance, and in various innovative techniques to foster a community of ideal Chinese citizens. The ultimate goal is to inculcate model social behaviour and self-censorship among the citizens. In the fulfilment of this agenda, however, the Chinese state faces its biggest challenge while dealing with minority societies, especially in Xinjiang and Tibet.

In the face of an increasingly dominant state authority under the present leadership, the ethnic minorities are even more disadvantaged because of prejudice of the state authority and its general mistrust of the majority population. Due to the separatist violence and terrorist activities of a small group of Uyghur outfits, the entire community is viewed as being affected by extremist ideologies, and the state as a whole faces a greater challenge in controlling them. In order to fight against three extremist forces, while continuing with counter-terrorism and a series of “strike hard” measures against extremism, and social and religious repression, the authorities have taken determined initiatives to implement social management (*shehui guanli*) and stability maintenance in Xinjiang since the Urumqi riots in 2009.

Even as China has incorporated various aspects of management in the statecraft and strengthened securitisation process under Xi Jinping,

social control has now appeared in the new official parlance as “social governance” (*shehui zhili*), which is pledged to ensure ‘people’s participation in the management of economic, cultural, and social affairs of the state for enhancing political stability, unity, and vitality’ (Xi 2017, 18 Oct). This new “mass line” approach to social control is basically meant to engage multiple social groups of the majority Han communities as well as ethnic members of the society through participation and beneficial interactions. With the objective of improving governance over society and foster maximum number of loyal citizens China has, in recent years, been perfecting various tools like law, public security, the grid system, as well as the internet and information technology. The intensification of the surveillance and securitization process across China has now taken place within a broad framework of social governance that seeks the solution of social conflicts and contradictions at the source of the problem.

## **CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR AND THOUGHT**

For a modern state, surveillance is a means to monitor behaviour and activities of the people, and gather information about individuals, groups, places and objects. All modern states use this tool for influencing, managing, directing, controlling or protecting people. The surveillance system helps the authorities to maintain social control, monitor threats, and prevent and investigate crime. Michel Foucault’s thesis on discipline and punishment broadens our understanding of modern surveillance system prevalent in all countries in the modern world. Foucault has pointed out that changes in modern legal punishment and prison system occurred with the shift from the ‘power to punish’ towards ‘a disciplinary power to observe’. Disciplinary power helps to train and control people beyond the public view and attempts to change the mind and the soul of criminals as well as ordinary citizens. The ultimate objective of

disciplinary power of surveillance is to mould a disciplined mass and docile social bodies in the line of training a perfect army. This is how a perfect society can be made and internal peace and order can be ensured (Foucault 1995: 168-9). The internalised fear of being labelled as bad person among the ordinary Chinese people and their submissiveness to the authority have ancient roots but the tendency of self-censorship in contemporary China can be effectively analysed in the light of the Foucaultian concept of the disciplinary power of surveillance.

China has a long history of disciplining its people through the Confucian teachings of morality, rules of propriety, the five hierarchical relations, as well as through harsh penal laws. The personal and social behaviour of the Chinese people has been controlled, monitored and moulded through ethical, ideological, legal and technology-driven social control mechanisms and surveillance from ancient times all the way to the contemporary period. The penal philosophy of ancient China predominantly relied on two principles – *li* (ritual, rite, ceremonies, rules of conduct, propriety) and *xing* (penalties, punishments).<sup>1</sup> Though the two principles originated in the moralist Confucianism and statist Legalist traditions respectively, the contradictions between the two had diluted over the years and mostly complemented each other in the administration of the state. Though there had been many changes in the regime of punishments in ancient China, the Confucian moral education based on the concept of *li* (rule of moral conduct) never lost its relevance in training the Chinese people for generations to live properly within society.

Along with the faith on rules of propriety, China's penal law developed entirely in line with crimes and punishment and there were a great number of punishable offences in the ancient China. The harsh treatment of crimes ranging from murder and robbery to unfilial and unbrotherly

behaviour continued till the last imperial dynasty. There were 840 offenses punishable by death sentence during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), however in half of the cases the penalty was “nominal death” where offenders were only exiled (Chang 2012: 269). As a result of prison reform and changes of criminal code, traditional penalties reduced to imprisonment and fines between in the first decade of twentieth century (Dikötter 2002: 1). Dikötter points out that movement of prison reform undertaken in the last leg of the Qing dynasty gathered momentum in the Republican period and prison turned into ‘a symbol of modernity and a talisman for social order’ (Dikötter 2002: 2). China adopted the modern idea of punishment and discipline as well as the institution through prison reform but pursued the traditional concept of *ganhua* (corrective influence or redemption) which endorse transformative capacity of education through repentance and moral reform. And it is the responsibility of the state to promote proper conduct among the people and transform them into a disciplined force for social cohesion and national unity (Dikötter 2002: 8&14). In many ways political culture of reforming individuals through emulation of exemplary models, and rewards and punishment retained under the CPC, which in spirit and in deed avows its transformative role.

Massive campaigns for elevating Mao’s image as a saviour of China and dissemination of CPC’s revolutionary ideologies and patriotic feelings for socialist motherland instilled self-censorship at the mass level in the first three decades of the communist rule. For the first time in history the party-state authorities in China successfully penetrated into every section of the society, developed mechanism to gather maximum amount of information about the elites and masses, and foster habit of toeing the official line among people. The Party propaganda system played vital role in social control and as a master propagandist, Mao used ‘a variety of “thought control” techniques’, like mass mobilization, creation

of exemplary “model” personages, “brainwashing” camps, memorization of official documents, control of study materials for educational institutions, domination over print and broadcast media, extensive use of loudspeakers to spread Party’s messages in urban and rural areas, formation of study groups, use of propaganda teams for indoctrination of targeted segments of the population, and many more methods (Shambaugh 2007: 26-7). The effectiveness of Mao’s “thought control” techniques had considerably weakened in the new political culture of the reform era but they are still used by the party while dealing with the society. Shambaugh points out that official propaganda authorities’ ‘control and censorship abilities remain substantial’ but they have lost credential in the face of economic and technological modernization, globalization and social pluralisation. Because of growing awareness of Chinese people and flow of information available to them, general public are no more naïve to fully rely on the interpretation percolated through official propaganda machinery (Shambaugh 2007: 55). However, it is too early to say the last word about the complex system of Chinese propaganda because propaganda department continue to have hegemony over information and dominance over technologies in the age of digital technology.

Incarceration, detention and reform through labour also became an important aspect of thought control as well as criminal justice system during the Mao era when there was surge of offenders branded “rightists” and counterrevolutionaries in China, who were arbitrarily arrested, detained, interrogated, tortured, tried, killed or pushed to commit suicide on the basis of speculation, fabricated evidence and coerced confession. China’s penal law against counterrevolutionary crimes is viewed as a most disturbing category in the criminal justice system. This law was meant to suppress enemies of socialist state, control social behaviours and the ‘deviant and heterodox mind’, and

exact punishment for free thinking (Ren 1997: 87-8). This law was in use throughout the 1980s and early half of 1990s for social control, and in cases related to counter-revolutionary offences and the sentencing rate of these cases were very high right up to the time the law was finally amended in 1997.

Though the hyped-up political activities that characterised the environment of the Cultural Revolution years was replaced by quest for economic modernization of the nineties, the Party leadership remained equally intolerant of any form of dissent or liberal-democratic views. The law allowed the Chinese government to label the Tian'anmen movement in 1989 as "counter-revolutionary rebellion" and a host of pro-democracy dissidents were punished under this law. In fact, the official report observed counterrevolutionary intention in the first major incident of violence in Xinjiang in 1990 (Chaudhuri 2018: 167). Like counterrevolutionary crimes, now there are many ambiguous categories in Chinese penal laws for handling offences such as pro-democratic dissent, endangering state security (ESS), and three extremist ideologies in Xinjiang, which does not serve any purpose other than controlling the social conduct and public thought of the people.

## **CONTROL, MANAGE, AND GOVERN**

In the reform period, there has been considerable transformation in people's attitude towards party's ideology and indoctrination style. Other means of social control, namely, system of work unit and residential permit also declined in the face of socialist market economy. With the entry of hosts of highly qualified leaders from technocratic and professional backgrounds in the highest echelon of leadership position in the central and regional governments of the CPC since 1980s, regular administrative means of handling state affairs minimized campaign

mode of governance<sup>2</sup>, but the party-state authority in China time and again selectively used this convenient political tool to suppress social forces, civil society, ethnic communities, individual political dissidents as well as to discipline the Party until late 1990s. The campaign mode in Chinese politics started reappearing with the intention to revitalise Party and discipline its members under Jiang Zemin in 1998 and since then a series of campaigns were introduced not only for rectification of the Party and fight corruption but also for consolidating grassroots activities and organizations.

There have been continuous changes in state-society relations throughout 1990s because of many structural changes. Due to rapid transformation of economy, the systems of work unit and residential permit have undergone changes, and are no more remained effective in controlling individual citizens. With the rise of small-scale privately owned business and self-employed work force in the age of market economy, individualistic demand for interest increased and people's dependence on work units diluted. The mobility of surplus labour force from country sides to the urban centres in the reform period further weakened *hukou* system which used to be effective in confining a large majority of rural population in their place of birth for decades. The numbers of social unrests and conflicts have been on the rise across China because people's aspiration for self-realization, group interest and ethnic identity increased in the age of economic modernization and opening.

In the face of growing new trends of materialistic culture , Jiang Zemin revived the idea of 'socialist spiritual civilization'<sup>3</sup> which along with other related thoughts eventually became an important dimension of social control during his presidency. The Chinese leadership aimed at building socialist spiritual civilization to foster citizens with ideals, ethics,

culture and discipline and improve ethical quality (*suzhi*<sup>4</sup>) and scientific culture among entire Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) while denied multiplicity of ethnic and other identities in the country. This concept coalesces China's traditional civilizational mission as well as socialist zeal of uplifting country's minority population, who are generally viewed as backward both materially and spiritually.

It is remarkable to note that in Chinese human resource management the criteria of good citizens is assessed in terms of *sushi* (human quality) index measured on the basis of a person's educational level, social and professional status, physical and health condition, as well as ethics and behaviour. The economic backwardness and poverty in the national minority area like Xinjiang is often justified on the basis of low *sushi* which is often understood in terms of some 'inherent physical quality of the population as well as an abstract acquired quality' and not just as historical conditions. Therefore, official deliberation of development and economic policies in Xinjiang since late 1990s has always been accompanied with 'aggressive policies to transform the thought and behavior of the local minority population' (Zukosky 2012: 241).<sup>5</sup> Based on the socio-political discourse of *suzhi*, many new stereotypes and prejudice fed into Chinese security thinking, especially in dealing with the affairs of Xinjiang, where 'low' ethnical quality of the Uyghur masses is consider responsible for extremist behaviour among them.

A population study based on 2010 census data shows that there has not been any noticeable increment of *sushi* index for minorities compared to Han despite some partial improvement in the determinant variables such as education and health. The author surmises that this may be an indication of social stratification. According to this study there has been sharp reduction of *sushi* index in case of the Hui and the Uyghur (Guo 2014: table 3&4)<sup>6</sup>. The only logical deduction appears to be systematic



exclusion of these two largest Muslim groups from the meaningful economic benefits, educational facilities, and social opportunities.

Since Chinese system of social control is directly linked with improvement of human quality (Bakken 2000: 'Introduction'), Jiang Zemin, while promoting and popularising the concept of rule of law, stressed on the concept of 'rule by virtue' (*dezhi*) as well. It has been argued that the rule of law comes within the realm of politics and helps to develop political culture, while rule by virtue is an ideological construct and helps to cultivate spiritual civilization, which is obviously a queer combination of Chinese traditional ethnics, socialist morality and modern public and professional ethics (Zou 2006: 87).<sup>7</sup> The cultivation of moral conduct among people is reflected in the construction of notion of *hao gongmin* (good citizen) to restore party legitimacy, ensure party's perpetual rule, bolster domination of the ruling dispensation and establish a stable social order for smooth economic development (Cheng, Ni, Sin and Cheng 2012: 52). Since the turn of the second decade of the 21st century the leadership appears to have given greater emphasis in fostering absolutely loyal and ethically robust citizens with the extensive utilization of new scientific innovation and technological advancement in surveillance system.

The fourth-generation leadership realized the need for innovation in China's social control system by taking cognizance of people's demands and grievances. Hu Jintao put forward the idea of harmonious socialist society, construction of new countryside and people-oriented governance. His administration focused on harmonisation of social relations, standardisation of social behaviour, resolution of social issues, dilution of social contradiction, promotion of social justice, confrontation with social threats, and maintenance of social stability (Cai 2012: 212). In course of construction of new countryside Chinese politics entered

into Mao era campaign mode and the party-state extended its control over grassroots institutions.

Hu Jintao gave a clear indication that at the primary stage of socialism there would be many conflicts and social disorder. The working principles for strengthening social management in the Hu-Wen era focused on poverty reduction; migrant labourers and floating population; food and drug safety; work related safety and emergency response capabilities at the grass-root level; health care; housing supply; social security and social welfare for women, children, aged and disabled people; promotion of social justice system; and better management of “virtual society” and public opinions on the internet. We have already discussed that it was under Hu-Wen period that large scale securitization process was undertaken in China.

Hu Jintao however followed existing pattern of social control, repressive religious polices, and persisted with the strike hard and anti-terror measures in Xinjiang. It was after a series of regime threatening movements in the Arab world that he reformulated his ideas on social control and gave a new meaning to social management which reflected Party’s fear of losing control over the society (Chaudhuri 2018: 246-47). Chaudhuri also offers a discussion on application of the social management in counterterrorism and stability maintenance in Xinjiang and points out that the institutions of social management in the region give utmost importance to social control, restrictions on religious faith and vigilance instead of resolving problems of the ordinary citizens, and educating and guiding them (Chaudhuri 2018: 249-51). The new generation of regional leaders in the subsequent years undertook securitization of religion in order to ensure higher level of social control over religious minded ethnic groups in Tibet and Xinjiang.

The 18th Party congress in 2012 outlined further innovation of social management and the 3rd Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in 2015

emphasised on the innovation of social control. A Chinese scholar points out that the 3rd Plenary Session has marked significant qualitative changes in the following three aspects of China's political structure: 1. There has been major alteration of power distribution between the central and the regional governments which is evident in national budget. Now centre enjoys monopoly in distribution of budgetary funds; 2. The Plenum gave greater organisational weightage to Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC and deprived its appendages in the regions of their rights; and 3. It also curbed power of the National People's Congress and the State Council by setting up numerous small leading groups and committees under the party central committee. This has brought the Party in the front stage of national governance (Li 2015, 20 January). Since this time focus of the official discourse thrust more on modernisation of system of national governance and governing capacity.

Xi's idea of governance got prominence in the official discourse and slowly the phrase social management was replaced by social governance which includes systemic governance, legal governance, source governance (*yuantou zhili*) and comprehensive policy implementation. Xi's idea of social governance considers that peace, social harmony and stability are as important as people's livelihood issue. It was considered that people are the main driving force in the process of strengthening and innovating social governance. Rationalization of interpersonal relations is viewed as the key to social stability and order. Xi Jinping emphasizes on 'four modernization' (*sihua*) in social governance, namely, socialization, legalization, intelligentization (*zhinenghua*) and specialization. He insists on full utilization of internet, network information technology and defensive ability of cyber security for the advancement of social governance (Qing 2017, 17 August). Modernization in the four areas of social governance has hugely improved various social control

instruments, namely, system of social responsibility, mass mobilization, laws and legal institutions, technology intensive surveillance systems, and social credit system.

As early as January 2014, Xi Jinping put forward the concept of comprehensive governance (*zonghe zhili*) for deepening of social and public security, firmly containing serious criminal activities, and securing safety of people's life and property. To prevent and resolve the problems related to social and public order is the most important aspects of comprehensive governance. Revolutions in new technological knowledge and transition from information to digital technologies created new possibilities of three-dimensional prevention and control system for social and public order. The new technology has enhanced usability of Big data and enable it to change the way people live, work, entertain and behave. China is determined to promote data-driven communication, management, innovation, collection of information about people, places, incidents as well as subsistence, mobility and consumption pattern of the people for preventing and controlling the problems of social disorder and public safety. It also wants to exploit fully the potential of the new technologies to make early warning system more scientific, prevention and control system more effective and crack down operations more precise (Wang 2015, 15 Nov).

The actual nature of social governance under the present leadership however revealed in an official document titled 'Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere', famously known as Document no. 9 which was circulated by the Central Committee of the CPC General Office in 2013. It urged to guard against seven political "perils", namely, Western constitutional democracy, civil society, neoliberalism, "nihilistic" view of history, "universal values", promotion of "the West's view of journalism, media and publishing system", "infiltration" by

outside ideas. The document called for renewed vigilance of all ideas, institutions, and people's demand threatening to unilateral party rule. It also emphasised on strengthening leadership in the ideological sphere; guiding party members and leaders to distinguish between true and false theory; adherence to the principle of the party's control of media; and strengthening management of the ideological battlefield (General Office of CC CPC 2013, 22 April). From the increasingly repressive policies against civil society, it is clear that Xi Jinping's administration is not hesitant to maximum use of coercive power and sanctions to prevent any form of social disorder and discontent, change human nature and human thinking, reduce deviance and enhance conformity in the society. Every section of the society, social and ethnic groups, and individual citizens are expected to self-regulate behaviour or comply each other to politically correct their behaviour. The party-state intends to inculcate the habit of governing through formal institutions within a society based on political, religious and other forms of authority. In this context it is most likely that Xinjiang could be treated as an ideal site for experimentation.

## ENDNOTES

1. I have borrowed the idea from Chang Wejen's article 'Classical Chinese Jurisprudence and Development of Chinese Legal System' (2012).
2. A number of scholars viewed that rise of technocratic leaders brought an end to Mao style political campaigns and 'mass line' politics and established "rational" bureaucratic mode of governance'. Elizabeth J. Perry discards their observations of contemporary Chinese politics and contends that 'the legacy of mass campaigns has remained an integral' component of population control and crisis management as well as an instrument for pushing forward development agenda. In her opinion, the post-Mao leaders 'have both retained and reconfigured revolutionary tradition'. She coins 'managed campaign' to describe political campaigns of the contemporary China led by technocrats (Perry 2011: 30-31).
3. Ye Jianying first put forth the idea in his talk on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the PRC in September 1979. Some major decisions were made regarding the

- guidelines and difficulties in building socialist spiritual civilization at the sixth plenum of the 12th and 14th Party congress in 1986 and 1996 respectively.
4. For discussion on historical origin of the indigenous concept of *suzhi*, evolution of its connotation and implications in the present politics of China, one can see studies done by Børge Bakken, Andrew Kipnis, Gary Sigley and others. In the late 1970s, the concept was associated with national population control and in the 1990s, the term became popular in the context of quality-based education emphasising on cultivation of 'virtue and morality social and community relationship'. There are several other connotations of *suzhi*, namely, behaviour of an individual; 'substantive characteristic or set of characteristics of the individual, which are subjected to classification and measurement'; 'cultural and political norms, rules and behavioral strategies', and from human resource management and development point of view, it is all about inculcating 'desired behaviour and required skills and knowledge in both the workplace and social settings' (Wang et al 2014: 100-101).
  5. Michael L. Zukosky's study is based on pastoral Kazakh population of Xinjiang but extension of *suzhi* discourse in understanding backwardness of other ethnic is quite obvious.
  6. *Suzhi* index of the Hui and the Uyghur reduced from 1.1389 to 1.0518 and 0.7902 to 0.7007 respectively between 2000 and 2010 census periods, however the author did not provide any explanation for this (Guo 2014, tables 3&4).
  7. It was argued that 1. Rule of law cannot solve all social problems; 2. Too much reliance on law, that is excessively giving importance to the protection of a suspect's rights, might allow some criminals to get scot-free; 3. Too much reliance on legal means of resolving disputes would enhance litigation cost and influence judicial efficiency; 4. Moreover, 'socialist market economy is not only rule of law economy, but also an ethical economy (*daode jingji*)' (Zou 2006: 86).

## CHAPTER 5

### DE-EXTREMISATION

From the discussions so far, it is clear that China has been steadily imposing social control over the entire Chinese society in order to ensure public safety, social stability, national security and consolidation of leadership of the Party. It is much easier for the government to undertake such mammoth securitisation and surveillance work since a vast majority of Han Chinese citizens either feel contented with or indifferent towards administrative activities as long as they are not directly affected by official decisions. The situation in some minority areas especially the Uyghur dominated Xinjiang is however different from other parts of China. For the last three decades the Chinese party-state has encountered several violent separatist backlashes in spite of continuous struggle against 'three evil forces', counter-terrorism measures, hosts of restrictions over Uyghur society and totalitarian statist control in Xinjiang.

In the face of a series of terrorist attacks and various forms of violence in Xinjiang and other parts of China and abroad in the initial years of Xi Jinping's rule, in 2014 the central and regional leadership reverted to an exceptionally coercive strategy to tackle growing challenges by the extremist factions of the Uyghur society (see Chapter 1, *en3*). The Chinese authorities consider the task before them in this phase as being one of carrying out an even more comprehensive struggle of fighting against terrorist forces, preventing violence, and to exterminate the very roots of extremism. China is now determined to completely eliminate three extreme forces—religious extremism, ethnic separatism and international terrorism from its soil.

The initiative of de-extremisation is not only different in respect to its objective from earlier security approaches but also more rigorous in using latest technologies, legal instruments and mass line tactics. The term de-extremisation itself gives an indication that China has crossed the stage of taking ‘counter’ measures against extremism. The task before the present leadership is to establish everlasting peace in the region by removing unwanted parts of the ‘social body’<sup>1</sup>. In an authoritarian political atmosphere, China’s ‘de-extremisation’ initiative in Xinjiang is proving to be even more totalistic under Chen Quanguo, an ardent follower of Xi Jinping.<sup>2</sup>

Following the ideals of Xi Jinping’s mass line approach and socialization of governance, involvement of masses in keeping vigilance on the activities of ordinary people is the key to de-extremisation program and social control mechanism in Xinjiang. And in this case, it the Han majority and Han-dominated XPCC that is serving the state assigned responsibility of guarding against the indigenous ethnic population especially those Uyghurs who are tainted by extremism. At the same time, in order to develop self-surveillance, the Xinjiang authorities are involving more and more Uyghurs to monitor their fellow community members by linking with various kinds of security related works.

## **DEEPENING OF “PEOPLE’S WAR”**

Xinjiang experienced a clear shift from “population-centric method” to “enemy-centric war model”<sup>3</sup> of dealing with terrorism, extremism and separatism between 2010 and 2016. Chen Quanguo entered Xinjiang after three turbulent years of violent conflicts and terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and other parts of China. At the time of his transfer to Xinjiang, the region was relatively peaceful. The counter-terrorism, stability



maintenance and de-extremisation works were going in full pace and many initiatives for improving surveillance system and social control mechanism were already undertaken in Xinjiang prior to Chen's arrival in August 2016. However, it is generally understood that the leadership transition from Zhang Chunxian to Chen Quanguo marked a new phase of repression of the Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

Given the difference in nature of two ethno-national movements, Chen's innovative technique of stabilizing Tibet appears to have limited applications in containing separatist violence and terrorism in Xinjiang but his style of governance in his last appointment will throw light on the present situation in the Muslim dominated region of China.

Besides a few years of relaxation in the 1980s, restrictions on religious and cultural life as well as detention, arrests, torture and ill-treatment of Tibetan religious personnel and laymen have now become a regular phenomenon in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and in Tibetan areas in other provinces. The aggressive ethnic politics, verbal attacks of the Tibetan religious leader, the Dalai Lama in derogatory language and frequent use of police power in stopping protests and demonstrations by previous regional Party secretary Zhang Qingli was responsible for the breakout of riots in 2008 and escalation of tension in the region (AsiaNews 2011, 27 August). At the time of Chen Quanguo's appointment in TAR in 2011, the region was seething with anger and discontent in the face of intensification of repressive policies after the 2008 riots. It can be surmised that Zhang's unsophisticated way of handling Tibetan affairs had connection with his experience of working in Xinjiang where harsh treatment of the Uyghurs was part of the political culture under Wang Lequan.

There can be no doubt that Chen Quanguo took a new line of action in dealing with the Tibetan problem. Some Western scholars had

viewed Chen's early meetings and exchanges of letters with the monks from disturbed areas in a positive light. In contrast to Zhang Qingli's policies, according to these observers, Chen's technique appeared to be a 'softer approach to winning over the loyalty of Tibetans'. Carole McGranahan, a Tibetan studies professor in the University of Colorado found similarities between Chen's method and tactics China used in the early 1950s (Voice of America 2014, 26 March). However, other than technicalities, the intent and purposes of the CPC's politics in Tibet in the initial years were completely different from that of the present generation of Party's leadership. Chen also incorporated many social control mechanisms of the latter years of Mao era. Moreover, he was not far behind his predecessor in the use of harsh rhetoric against the Dalai Lama.

Over the years, the breaking of the connection between the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism had become a major agenda of the central and regional leadership of the Party. In this regard Chen Quanguo was the most successful of all party secretaries in Tibet. Reflecting on Xi Jinping's idea of winning public opinion by waging war against media and forming a powerful internet army within the existing propaganda apparatus, Chen wrote, in an article published in the *Qiushi* in 2013 that China desired to erase Dalai Lama's voice in Tibet with the help of new digital technologies. He underlined the importance of preventing the distribution of the Dalai Lama's images, speeches and writings on the internet. And to that purpose, his government planned to confiscate all illegal satellite dishes and to intensify restrictions on online activities (Chen 2013a, 1 November; Blanchard 2013). The article gives a clear idea of Chen Quanguo strategy to diminish Dalai Lama's influence in Tibet, securitize Tibetan Buddhism and re-interpret its religious doctrines to suit the official ideology.

During the five years of his rule Chen grounded potential dissenters and considerably reduced the possibilities of anti-government protests through strengthening of surveillance system and innovation of social control mechanism. In order to stop interactions with exiled Tibetans, Tibetan communities from other provinces and with foreigners, he imposed various restrictions on travel and pilgrimage. Tibetan monks, nuns and laymen were not allowed to travel abroad and passports were confiscated from a large number of the Tibetan population in the TAR. The travel bans and restrictions over media in the subsequent years substantially blocked the flow of information in Tibet.

In a series of pronouncements and articles, Chen Quango put forward his ideas on maintaining stability, economic development and lasting political security in Tibet.’ He pinpointed the following four broad areas of stability work in his report at the 8th regional Party congress of the TAR in November 2011: deepening of anti-separatist struggle; strictly implementing management of monasteries; laying concrete foundation of grassroots in the villages and towns; and strengthening and innovating social management (Fenghuang information 2016, 29 August). In an article published in the *People’s Daily* in December 2013, Chen explained how to put into effect the concept of national governance system and modernization of governing ability endorsed in the resolution on comprehensively deepening reform passed in the 3rd plenum of the 18th Party Congress and Xi Jinping’s strategy emphasising the importance of ‘governing the border first to stabilize Tibet’ (Chen 2013b, 13 December).<sup>4</sup> In another article in the *People’s Daily* Chen Quanguo elaborated the significance of mass line in pacifying Tibet. He realised that winning good will of the people and support of the masses are essential for defeating separatism in Tibet (Fenghuang information 2016, 29 August).

On the basis of this overall understanding, Chen developed his own strategy of governing Tibet by incorporating the rich experience of securitisation in other parts of the country and new technologies. The measures undertaken by Chen Quanguo to stabilise Tibet can be divided into three broad categories, namely, grid management system and technology intensive surveillance on social groups, mass-line based social management and governance of grassroots, and economic wellbeing, social welfare, improvement of health care facilities and hygiene condition.

It was during Chen Quanguo's tenure that the central government fully extended its grid management program in the TAR, which, unlike the Han areas, mainly observes the activities of ordinary Tibetans, Buddhist monks and nuns in the monasteries, and certain individuals. Under Chen's leadership, the network of grid management system established grid unit offices as well as convenience police posts (*bianmin jingwu zhan*) at the street-levels. In December 2013, Chen first discussed about the convenience police posts in his article in the *People's Daily*. According to him, the rationale of these police posts situating in close proximity were to develop intimacy with the people, make their life convenient, benefit them and provide security (Chen 2013b, 13 December). By 2016, the TAR established more than seven hundred convenience police posts in Lhasa city as well as other cities and also rural areas which ensures zero-distance patrolling (*lingjuli de shouhu*) (Pengpai news agency 2016, 4 March). These police posts also created huge employment opportunities in the TAR and it is worth noting that the Tibetans benefited significantly from the overall securitization process under Chen Quanguo.<sup>5</sup>

Chen applied a mass line approach along with grid management system in improving management of more than 1700 monasteries, monitoring

activities of over 460,000 Buddhist monks and nuns, and keeping eye on the households of more than 2 million believers in the rural and urban areas across the TAR. He introduced the policy of permanent residency of Party cadres who now play various roles in improving the management of monasteries in Tibet.<sup>6</sup>

In order to extend the range of surveillance over the Tibetans in the rural area, Chen sent over 100,000 Party cadres to station in 5,464 villages in Tibet under a government campaign called '*qiang ji hui min*' (consolidating grassroots and benefiting masses). The teams of officials and the Party cadres stationed in the Tibetan villages were also tied up with rural households and hosting them at home, they were assigned to perform ten practical works for the improvement of education, steady work, satisfactory salary, dependable social insurance and health care, comfortable housing, healthy environment, better life for the masses every year. As part of the village level program, the administration also introduced "double-linked household" system of pairing families to report on each other (Fenghuang information 2016, 29 August).

Some observers question how much benefit rural Tibetans may have received under the village level drive other than going through the pain of political education sessions, operations by 'partisan quasi-police forces' and scrutiny of their political views along with extraordinary monitoring (Human Rights Watch 2013, 19 June). In addition to these innovative social control techniques, huge number of detentions, prosecution and conviction of Tibetans continued throughout Chen Quanguo's rule. The Human Rights Watch documented 479 such cases between 2013 and 2015 which reveals further criminalization of non-violent form of protests and inclusion of new activities and issues targeted for repression especially in the countryside, where detention for political offence was previously rare (Human Rights Watch 2016, 22 May). It appears that

Chen's innovation of social management and their crude application in the grassroots successfully silenced dissenting voices in the TAR but further alienated masses across Tibetan countryside as well as urban areas rather than winning their heart.

Chen Quanguo's entry into Tibet was quite different from his taking charge of Xinjiang. After successfully working for five years in Tibet, in August 2016 Chen came to this even more disturbed and unstable region with some preconceived ideas and plans of how he would discharge his duties in Xinjiang. The tendency of hardening of policies in Xinjiang was already evident in the final year of Zhang Chunxian. In this regard, the approval of the Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China in December 2015 marked the beginning of a new phase of war against terrorism in Xinjiang. In contrast to the highly positive appraisal of Chen Quanguo's contribution in pacifying Tibet, Zhang's moderate image appeared to be less appealing for the central leadership for the latest round of "people's war" in Xinjiang.

## **SECURITIZATION AND DE-EXTREMISATION**

Securitization process started in Xinjiang in 1996 when central political authority constructed threat of "three evil forces" and declared that the region had security problem from these forces. Like other parts of China, technology intensive security infrastructure in Xinjiang started during the preparation of the Beijing Olympic. In 2007, the capital city of the region was included in the list of third batch of trial cities for top-down social monitoring system of urban grid management. Before the completion of the project, the Urumqi riots broke out in 2009 which led to large scale security arrangements and by the first anniversary of the riots, 40,000 surveillance cameras had been installed across Urumqi which covered 3,400 buses, 200 key public transportation stops, 4,400

streets and alleys, 270 schools and 100 large shopping centers and supermarkets (Wu 2014, 12 August). In December 2010, when Zhang Chunxian put forward his 32-point measures he proposed to build 2,500 stability maintenance grids and staff ‘every village with (more than) one police personnel’ (Zhang 2013, 14 June). Security arrangements were beefed up in other main cities of Xinjiang and the social grid management system was expanded across the region during this time. Further emphasis was given to develop the grid management system with technologically advanced facilities with CCTV cameras, mobile internet technologies and big data analytics to monitor all suspicious activities within discrete geometric zones in the cities of Xinjiang.

In 2012, Xinjiang promoted community level management with the facilities of “unitised management, network coverage and socialised services” (*danweihua guanli, wangluohua fugai* and *shehuihua fuwu*). By 2014, of the total 1,716 social communities that accomplished the above facilities in Xinjiang, 84 percent were equipped with technical and physical defense capabilities and 50 percent were capable of conducting fully or partially enclosed management to deal with security related works. Various monitoring devices and security inspection facilities increasingly became part of public life in Xinjiang (Li 2014: 24).

After the 2009 riots the central government specially approved a total of 5,000 public security special police for Xinjiang (Zhang 2013, 14 June). The regional administration made consolidated efforts to increase manpower in public defense and special defense forces especially in the main security establishments engaged in counter-terrorism and stability management consisting of public security, armed police and *bingtuan* militia. In 2012, Xinjiang recruited more than 8,000 policemen for rural police booths in order to fulfil the standard criteria of “one people’s police, three auxiliary policemen and six militia” per village (Li 2014: 24). This

recruitment trend continued throughout Zhang Chunxian's tenure. The 2014 recruitment drive introduced several new employment categories required for expansion of grid-style social management. By May 2014, daily average of personnel involved in various patrolling forces reached 100,000 in Xinjiang (Li 2014: 24).

While viewing counter-terrorism to be a major task in governing Xinjiang, Zhang Chunxian avoided raising a high-pitched battle cry until 2014. He considered de-extremisation as an integral part of counter-terrorism measures and stability maintenance work. His policy of providing economic benefits to the minority population especially in south Xinjiang was part of his program of bringing the Uyghurs back to the path of economic reform and reducing the factors leading to radicalisation of the community. Besides intensifying defense capability at the grassroots, the regional government began to staff increasing number of university graduates at of village administrative and government institutions. In early 2014, 200,000 cadres were sent to rural units to carry out the program of "visiting to enquire people's living conditions, benefiting their livelihood and consolidating popular will" (*fang minqing, hui minsheng, ju minxin*, "fanghuiju" in short) (Li 2014: 25). This program has served the dual purpose of extending economic benefits to the common Uyghur families as well as of enabling the state to closely monitor Uyghur activities at the local level.

The presence of a great number of Party cadres in the minority villages in Xinjiang however became a source of further resentments among the Uyghurs. Despite Zhang's repeated pronouncements that terrorism was not linked with religion or ethnicity, he did not try to adopt any less restrictive religious policies in Xinjiang. In fact, he incorporated many cultural aspects including emphasis on bilingualism within the framework of his de-extremisation program and some of the major



restrictive laws enforced on Islam, Islamic practices and the Uyghur customs were made in his time.

## **INSECURITY AND INNOVATIONS**

An article published in the *Global Times* on 2 July, 2013 stressed that China can comfortably fight off the increasingly audacious terrorists in Xinjiang by using five “don’t fear” (*bupa*) factors because of the following reasons: the terrorist forces in the region do not have capacity to accumulate enough weapons and deadly explosives. They can just carry out sporadic attacks with chopping knives; difficulties of the official in various parts of Xinjiang is understandable but they should not shy away from performing their duties boldly; everyone can be afraid of personal misfortune but the Chinese society is not worried that the terrorist would turn into a powerful force to bring political crisis; and the terrorist in the region cannot create major controversy or split in the Chinese society (Global Times 2013, 2 July).<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the article was representing a new discourse against the exaggeration of threat emanating from “three evil forces” in Xinjiang.

The state’s counter-terrorism policies based on this threat perception was severely challenged after the Urumqi riots and subsequent violence and terror attacks in the region. Some renowned intellectuals openly called for the imposition of second generation ethnic policies. There was also criticism that the on-going counter-terrorism measures are counterproductive and only invited more terrorist attacks. But because of a series of violent clashes and terrorist attacks involving the Uyghur community which continued from 2013 to 2015, the discourse of excessive fear, and sense of threat and insecurity continued to dominate the state’s counter-terrorism discourse. A person like Chen Quanguo with his strongman image was required for a new discourse to gain

ground. And the highly appraised innovative technique of Chen during his previous appointment was a signal that future counter-terrorism in Xinjiang would not be the same as before.

The removal of Zhang Chunxian at a time when the frequency of violent incidents and terror attacks was the lowest and Chen's renewed assaults on the Uyghur as well as other Muslim societies in Xinjiang can be from the prism of the state's political need for a new "instability" and securitization discourse. Thomas Cliff argues that 'the threat of instability and its counterpoint, the assurance of stability, are valuable tools in Xinjiang'. The central authority, public security institutions, the XPCC, and the local Han population depend upon the perception of instability for political and economic gains (Cliff 2012, 86-87). The Uyghur-led violence is often seen as an opportunity to push forward hard core anti-terrorism policies in Xinjiang. Therefore, it can be inferred that the Chinese party-state was and continued to be either not interested in making any genuine effort to disengage the radical section of the Uyghur population and bring them into the mainstream or that it was not ready to follow the criteria for implementing a de-extremisation process initiated by the United Nations.

## **LEGAL BASIS**

The central and regional governments passed a series of laws that made a wide range of social, cultural and religious activities of the Uyghur as criminal offence. Before Chen Quanguo's arrival to the region, the efforts of controlling Uyghur thoughts, appearance and newly criminalised behaviours like putting on veil and burqa, of growing 'not-normal' beard, wearing radicalized marks or signs by legal means had already started.

In this context, the following three laws added an entirely new dimension to the future social governance and counter-terrorism in Xinjiang: 1.

Regulation on Religious Affairs in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region – a two decades old local law on religious affairs was amended on 28 November 2014 in the 11th session of the standing committee of 12th regional people’s congress. The amendments were specially made to carry out de-extremisation work and to shape the relations between religion and society; 2. Regulation on Banning the Wearing of Burqa in Public Places of the Urumqi City Government was passed by the local legislatures on 10 January 2015. The regulation also banned other symbols that the lawmakers perceived as symptoms of extremism; 3. Counter-terrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China – a much discussed and anticipate law was passed by the National People’s Congress on 27 December 2015. The law had clear provisions on de-extremisation. Unlike any other provincial units in China, the legislatures of Xinjiang passed a fourth law entitled Implementing Regulations of the Counter-terrorism Law of the PRC in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on 5 August 2016. This regional law comprised 61 articles in 10 chapters featuring important provisions to supplement the national counter-terrorism law.

The Counter-terrorism Law of the PRC has certain provisions covering persons ‘advocating extremism or using extremism to endanger public security, disturb public order, encroach upon the safety of persons and property, or impede social administration’ (article 28) in Articles 28 to 30. These articles provided the legal basis for China’s de-extremisation measures. While Article 29 focuses on social and custodial de-extremisation, Article 30 addresses post-imprisonment de-extremisation (Counter-terrorism Law of the PRC 2015, 27 December).

After Chen Quanguo took charge of regional party secretary, the Xinjiang legislature passed another set of laws that provided it with extensive powers to continue with religious repression, counter-terrorism,

censorship, and surveillance over the broad masses of Muslim minorities in the region. The De-extremisation Regulations of the XUAR passed by the Xinjiang legislature on 29 March 2017 further extended the meaning of extremism and extremist behaviour. Article 4 of the law upheld the party's basic guidelines on the promotion of sinicization and legalization of religion. Meanwhile, Article 9 enlisted 14 different actions, as well as behavioural, verbal, emotional, and sentimental expressions, and other (unspecified) discourse and behaviours within the broad definition of extremism (XUAR De-extremisation Regulations 2017, 30 March). According to a report in the Radio Free Asia, in order to facilitate the detention of real and perceived Uyghur extremists, the authorities in certain areas of Xinjiang began to use a list of 75 signs of religious extremism among the Uyghurs (Radio Free Asia 2017a, 7 November).<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the extensive use of these criteria possibly started after the regional government launched large scale detention of the Uyghur and other Muslims in Xinjiang.

Within a short span of time, the Chen administration strengthened the legal basis of policing including various religious activities, social customs and cultural habits of the Muslim population as well as imposed restrictions on the giving of names to new born babies after the prophet Muhammad or names bearing other symbols of religious fanaticism and the prohibition of halal food (Haas 2017a, 24 April). These laws completely deprived the local Uyghur and other Muslim minorities of opportunities to seek justice from the administration or from the judiciary, but conversely provided the authorities maximum power to detain, prosecute and even execute a large number of real and perceived suspects of terrorism and extremism.

## **CHEN QUANGUO'S RULE**

The new Xinjiang Party Secretary was selected particularly by Xi Jinping to fulfil his mission of converting Xinjiang into a peaceful, stable,

orderly, harmonious, secure and prosperous hub for the geo-politically and geo-economically ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. Because of Chen Quanguo's fame for pacifying Tibet during his last appointment, the central leadership gave him considerable latitude in eliminating extremism and carrying out security measures in Xinjiang. The very nature of the appointment called for a high level of performance from a loyal official like Chen. In such a situation, it was natural for him to do his utmost to prove his worth by accomplishing the mission assigned to him by his 'core' leader and for securing his acquired reputation of skilfully handling volatile ethnic region. In his new job, Chen Quanguo did not have the kind of constraints he did as Party Secretary in Tibet.

From the very first moment of his arrival in Xinjiang he knew that he was supposed to intensify existing security arrangements, ruthlessly apply every single innovative measure he undertook in Tibet, and maximize pressure on broad masses of minority population of the region to stop incidents of terror and separatist violence. Under Chen's leadership, counter-terrorism, stability maintenance and de-extremisation work were all integrated with the social control system and surveillance mechanism in Xinjiang. Besides terrorists and "three evil forces", the regional administration increased vigilance and propaganda against "two faced cliques" (*liangmianpai*) and "two faced people" (*liangmianren*) who, being part of the Party and government system in the region were accused of providing vital support to the perpetrators of terror, violence and crime against the interest of the state and the people. In order to eliminate this kind of people, the regional leadership enhanced disciplinary measures within the party and the administration (Ma 2017, 10 September). In addition, Chen gave utmost importance to continue with the "fanghuiju" (visit, benefit and consolidate) work in the country sides and personally led "fanghuiju" small leading group. The "fanghuiju" works helped the authorities transform institutions at the grass-roots, creating a

base for mass mobilization for official campaigns against religious extremism and helping to penetrate into day to day life of the Muslims in Xinjiang.

In addition to the existing surveillance system, Chen innovated and introduced a more stringent surveillance regime in Xinjiang. The surveillance system under his rule can be broadly categorized under physical control, electronic monitoring, genetic codification, and psychological control through indoctrination. A number of high-tech industries in China have recently focused on developing a base for their advanced surveillance products and services. This has strengthened the conviction of the authorities in the centre as well as in the region that highly developed social governance system, invasive social monitoring and forced assimilation, and technologically superior surveillance mechanism would ultimately ensure peace, stability and security in Xinjiang.

In order to burnish the strong man image of Chen Quanguo in contrast to Zhang Chunxian and exhibit his will of using full blown attacks in slightest provocation of violence from the Uyghur, the XUAR authorities held a series of mass “anti-terror” rallies involving armed troops, party cadres and officials, and common people belonging to various ethnic groups in the aftermath of some incidents of ethnic violence in December 2016. In February 2017, tens of thousands of security personnel participated in “anti-terror” rallies in Urumqi, and three other cities, namely Aksu, Kashgar and Khotan which are officially considered as the forefront of the anti-terror war (Phillips 2017, 28 February). From various reports it is evident that mass rallies of armed personnel and propaganda team swarmed across the region throughout the year to intimidate potential terrorist factions in the region and giving a signal that the political power in the region is very much in control of the situation.

## PHYSICAL AND HUMAN SURVEILLANCE

In order to enhance the government's capacity to closely invigilate and, control local communities and maintain security, Chen Quanguo introduced 'convenience police stations' (*bianmin jingwu zhan*) within the existing grid management infrastructure in Xinjiang. Within a few months of his arrival, one or two storeyed constructions stocked with wheelchairs, first aid kits, repair tools, umbrella and mobile phone chargers began to appear in cities and rural areas across Xinjiang. They were equipped with the latest anti-riot equipment and guards for 24 hour patrolling. It was planned to have over nine hundred 'convenience police stations' in Urumqi alone (Gan 2016, 12 December). In some places these stations also have high-tech surveillance equipments such as face and voice recognition software. The local authorities also recruited thousands of security personnel to staff these police stations. According to a report, Xinjiang has built about 7000 new 'convenience police stations' in 2017, many of them were located within the range of 500 metres, and recruited around 100000 new security officers. In 2017 public security spending reached 11.85 billion USD, a 92 percent increase from the previous year (Vanderklippe 2018, 8 March). The grid management system and convenience police stations enhanced the performance of public governance and expedited electronic administration in Xinjiang. The system enhanced social monitoring capabilities of the local administrations in the urban and rural areas to record, codify and report any activities or contingencies, including cultural activities, public safety, criminal cases, mass protests, activities of terror and criminal suspects, and sensitive figures in terms of "stability maintenance" to the higher authority.

Chen's administration was not only continuing with various activities under the "fanghuiju" (visit, benefit and consolidate) program but made it even more

invasive. Like in Tibet, it introduced a system of pairing local party officials with specific families in the rural areas in Xinjiang under a campaign titled ‘becoming family’ (*jiedui renqin*) in order to foster ethnic harmony in October 2016. These officials regularly visit assigned families, ate with them, and spent time at their houses as a means of keeping track of their attitudes and activities. In December 2017, the Xinjiang authorities further expanded the party’s reach by mobilizing over one million cadres to spend one week in the house of Muslim families in the countryside of southern Xinjiang. Finally, in the early 2018 the ‘home stay’ program became a regular phenomenon and was expanded in other areas of the region (Wang 2018, 13 May).

The authorities also introduced the ‘double-linked household’ management system (*Shuang lianhu jizhi*) in both rural and urban areas. In 2016, officials within their respective jurisdictions in the XUAR began to implement this system, which divides households into groups of 10 for the dual purposes of watching over each other for security purposes and poverty relief (Gan 2016, 12 December). The ‘double-linked household’ management system was modelled after the *baojia* system of social control that was in practice in the later dynasties of the ancient China (Dillon 2019:188). The system is reportedly aimed at developing a culture of self-surveillance among the Uyghur, curbing security threats and “religious extremism” and to supervise individuals designated as “key persons” of interest to the security enforcing authorities in Xinjiang.

However, the Xinjiang authorities also began to reward and punish on the basis of the reports on each family by other household of a group in ‘double-linked household’ management system. In order to improve all-pervasive social monitoring system in Xinjiang, the government also encourages everybody to report about terrorists, fellow citizens who displayed signs of religious extremism, ‘two-faced people’, and those



who violated or were disposed to violate officially approved behaviour as well as new political, social, cultural and religious norms. According to a report, the Khotan prefectural government enacted a Counter-Terrorism Reward Resolution and earmarked 100 million yuan for giving rewards to residents for providing information on acts of terror, suspicious activities and other kind of offences. Reporting on some of the offences is highly profitable. The security personnel and other residents considered the campaign “a means of making money”. A Uyghur political analyst living in Norway compared this campaign with the Hundred Flowers Campaign under Mao Zedong (Radio Free Asia 2017b, 26 December). The difference between the two is certainly obvious – in the earlier campaign it was faith in socialism and Mao’s leadership that encouraged people to share information about others whereas now the state requires to pay handsome amount of money to manage the political campaign against its own citizens. To make things foolproof, people were also punished when they intentionally or unintentionally concealed information about offences committed by other persons known to them.

In the effort to improve the capacity of socially monitoring the Uyghur population, the present government is also continuing and expanding the policy of mixing ethnic groups through ‘mutually embedded multi-ethnic social structures’ and planning to relocate 100,000 Uyghur populations within Xinjiang (Sainsbury 2018, 19 July).

In order to intensify physical and human surveillance the Xinjiang government placed major restrictions on the mobility of the Uyghur population. In October 2016, the Xinjiang authorities announced that all residents of the XUAR had to submit their passport for review to the public security bureau reportedly for ‘safe keeping’, effectively restricting the Uyghurs’ chances of visiting foreign countries (Gan 2016, 12 December).

In April 2017, a large number of Uyghurs studying abroad were ordered to return home at the end of their academic session. The main purpose behind this order was to identify the political and ideological stand of these students and to educate them on Chinese laws and current developments in Xinjiang. The parents of the students who refused to come back were detained or warned of dire consequences. The students studying in Egypt even faced pressures from the host country and a number of students had to flee to Turkey (Voice of America 2017, 14 May). The Egyptian authorities repatriated about twenty-two Uyghurs studying religion to China in the first two weeks of July 2017 and many Uyghur students were arrested (Sharma 2017, 5 October; Yellenik 2019). According to diverse reports, a majority of the returned Uyghur students disappeared after being detained or ended up in jail or were sent for political re-education.

In an effort to check the ideological inclinations and patriotic conviction of the Uyghur students studying in the various institutions in other provinces of China, in mid-2018, the authorities made it compulsory for them to return to their homes in Xinjiang during summer break in order to participate in propaganda tours to promote ethnic unity and to praise the central government's policies. The students were required to make notes of their speech for the campaign and get these verified from the grassroots government departments. The students were not permitted to enrol for the next semester if local authorities in Xinjiang disapproved their propaganda speech (Radio Free Asia 2018c, 16 July).

There were also reports that cities throughout Xinjiang had fenced the Uyghur neighbourhoods entirely with security patrols standing by their singular entrances to check the documents of those who came or went (Radio Free Asia 2016, 19 August). Checkpoints were also erected within and between urban areas across Xinjiang to keep a watchful eye on the movements of Uyghurs throughout the region.

Apart from restricting their mobility, other restrictions like those on the kind and quantity of goods they could buy, curbs on their consumption of halal food, use of fuel in the vehicles in their names and sundry other restrictions were imposed. In order to restrict use of kitchen knives and other cutting instruments as weapons, the authorities made it mandatory to etch buyer's ID on the blade of such tools when they are bought by Uyghurs (Millward 2018, 3 February).

## **ELECTRONIC AND DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE**

Such physical and human surveillance increasingly relied on high-tech devices and surveillance cameras. Xinjiang is now home to particularly sophisticated high-tech digital surveillance apparatus and monitoring system to continuously gather information about activities and communication of the Uyghur in the day-to-day and virtual life, and make futuristic predictions. Various electronic and digital surveillance apparatus and gadgets like highly sophisticated surveillance cameras, face and voice recognition software were placed at the disposal of the security forces in Xinjiang. Practically the Xinjiang police have developed system of patrolling suspicious behaviour, gathering information, and developing big data on Uyghur communications.

Since August 2016, the Xinjiang Bureau of Public Security had initiated the development of an Integrated Joint Operation Platform (IJOP, *yitihua lianhe zuozhan pingtai*). It is a big data 'police cloud' platform for Predictive Policing Program. The IJDP collects data on individuals from many different sources, namely, CCTV cameras (many with facial recognition facilities and infrared capability), "wifi sniffers", security checkpoints, visitor's management system, and existing data base with the police and local administration. The system was first completed in Kashgar (Human Rights Watch 2018, 26 February). The AI-powered

IJOP system generates lists of suspects for detention. Besides regular information the new ID issued include fingerprint, DNA information, blood type, detention record, “reliability status” and details data about their relatives. For the continuous surveillance of private communications, the authorities in Xinjiang have made it compulsory for the Uyghur to install government supplied spyware on their smart phones (*The Economist* 2018a, 31 May). Random examination of Uyghurs’ smart phones for suspicious applications in numerous checkpoints in Xinjiang is now a common practice in the region.

Urumqi first initiated installation of China-made satellite navigation system Beidou (Chinese version of Global Positioning System) in vehicles. Then in the early 2017, the process started in Bayangol Mongol Autonomous Prefecture of Xinjiang. The prefectorial administration informed all drivers to install this system in their vehicles by June 30 (Wong 2017, 24 February). The other areas of Xinjiang followed suit which helped the authorities further monitor movements and activities of the Uyghur individuals more efficiently.

Installation of pass-word activated security doors and panic-buttons in public buildings, commercial and residential complexes in the region is quite common throughout the region. In Kashgar, it is mandatory for the shop owners install pass-word activated security doors, panic-buttons, and cameras outside and inside of the store, to which security organs have full access. The shop owners also need to join in regular anti-terror drills conducted under police supervision. (Wen 2017, 30 March). From the spring of 2017, the Xinjiang authorities started installing QR code on the Uyghur homes in order to get quick access to the personal information (Embury-Dennis 2018, 11 September).

As the regional authorities in Xinjiang have been widely using latest available technologies to track the Uyghur and other Muslim minorities,

this has become a major selling point of goods and services produced by many high-tech companies situated in the eastern part of the country. The central and regional authorities also consider Xinjiang as potential hub of international market of surveillance products for the entire Eurasia region and Europe. This has created economic opportunities for companies specializing surveillance, related digital technologies and AI.

## **BIOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE**

Large sale collection of DNA from every resident of Xinjiang and creation of biometric data base of the population is special innovation for strengthening surveillance in the region under Chen Quanguo's personal initiative. The biometric data collection scheme is based on the official document titled "XUAR Working Guidelines on the Accurate Registration and Verification of Population" (Quanqu renkou jingzhun dengji heshi gongzuo zhinan). According to the official statements, the stated purposes of population registration are "*hukou*" registration, poverty alleviation, better management, and "social stability" in Xinjiang. The annual "Physicals for All" program launched by the government in 2016, ostensibly for healthcare benefits for the poor parts of the regions is an important part of biometric data collection and management (Human Rights Watch 2017, 13 December). The real purpose of creating this data base, according to various sources is to strengthen technology driven mass surveillance system in the region.

In September 2016, Xinjiang police issued a call for tender, which, according to a Human Rights Watch report was valued at around 12 million USD for purchase of 12 DNA sequencers, 30 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) amplifiers, and 1000 batches of genotyping kits. The report indicates these devises would enable Xinjiang authorities to build

large-scale infrastructure to process DNA samples and record profile of a large number of individuals (Tsultrim 2018, 23 April). As early as 2017, Thermo Fisher Scientific, a US-based company came under public criticism for supplying some of these DNA sequencers to the Xinjiang police. But another US based biotech company Promega has been selling DNA analysing equipments throughout China for over a decade and in 2015 XPCC initiated purchase of some devices from this company (Batke and Ohlberg 2020, 19 February). It has been claimed by some experts that cooperation with the global scientific communities would legitimize this kind of genetic surveillance (Wee 2019, 21 February).

Since the beginning of 2017, the authorities sped up the program of collecting DNA samples of all residents of age between 12 and 65 across Xinjiang. The genetic data base is linked with other information about every individual. It is the local police who began to collect pictures, fingerprints, iris scan, and household registration, whereas the health authorities were given responsibility to take DNA samples and blood type information. Data for “priority individuals”, apparently a euphemism for suspects belonging to the Uyghur has been collected without any relaxation of age (Reuters 2017, 13 December). The collection of the biometric data has been done through government led medical checkups but a large section of people appears to have no clue about the government’s intention of the authority (Haas 2017b, 12 December).

## **EXTRA-JUDICIAL DETENTION CAMPS**

With numerous prisons, detention centres, and labour reform camps (*laogai*), Xinjiang has well-established punishment and disciplinary mechanism since the early 1950s. The present Chinese leadership however intends to achieve foolproof security and develop all-embracing surveillance system in the technologically advanced world by perfecting

art of social governance across China. Given the growing threat perception in Xinjiang owing to repeated terrorist attacks by the Uyghur radical elements and their participation with the transnational terror groups, the regional leadership under Chen Quanguo reverted back to large scale educational transformation (*jiaoyu zhuanhua*) campaign in the region, a contemporary admixture of social control mechanism in the new era and arbitrary detention methods invented since the time of Mao Zedong.<sup>9</sup> This campaign required setting up of a new institution which, according to an interview of XUAR Governor Shohrat Zakir in October 2018 and central government whitepaper titled Vocational Education and Training Centre (*Zhiye jineng jiaoyu peixun zhongxin*) issued in August 2019.<sup>10</sup>

In all probability, it was in early 2017 that the Xinjiang authorities began to construct many such facilities across the region in order to accommodate increasing number of detainees. However, dissemination of reliable information regarding these camps outside China did not happen before the middle of 2018. China's initial reaction to the international criticism was complete denial of large scale detention and existence of such camps in Xinjiang. After several months of criticism of coercive polices and racial cleansing in Xinjiang by the Western countries, the first official pronouncement on this issue came from the governor of XUAR Shohrat Zakir. On 16 October 2018, he talked about the building of Vocational Education and Training Centres by the regional government, which according to him, are part of counter-terrorism, stability maintenance and de-radicalization work in the region. He mentions that following the spirit of the UN Global Anti-terrorism Strategy the Xinjiang authorities lawfully created these centres to fulfil the need of vocational education and training work. According to him, these centres provide training to a large number of people who came under the influence of terrorism and extremism as well as offenders whose crime were not serious enough

for punishment under penal law and those who completed imprisonment term. He also mentioned that these centres focus on training and practical skill development and provide boarding facilities (Xinhua 2018, 16 October).

China seems to have rectified the name of the detention centres since the publication of Zakir's interview with Xinhua journalist.<sup>11</sup> It needs to be noted that the legal documents referred in the Governor's interview as well as in the August 2019 White Paper do not have specific provision for building Vocational Education and Training Centre in Xinjiang. However, there are clear mentions of transformation through education as a component of de-extremisation work, legal education, thought education, psychological counseling, behavioral correction, training for occupational skill and humanistic care in several articles of the De-extremisation Regulations of the XUAR. It is evident that the central and regional authorities have been extremely secretive about these detention centres since their inception.

According to Chinese government data, the percentage of criminal arrests in Xinjiang rose by 306 per cent between 2012 and 2017. More than 70 per cent of the total arrests in the region were made in 2017 and this accounts for 21 per cent of total arrests in China in that year (Creery 2018, 25 July). Major part of those arrested persons belonged to the Uyghur and other Muslim minorities.

More and more concrete evidence and substantial information became available by the summer of 2018. In June, by using Google satellite images a Chinese graduate student in Canada identified many similar looking structures across Xinjiang and by verifying with some known detention centres in Urumqi and other parts of the country he was able to verify the purpose of those structures, which are different from regular prisons. From various sources it became evident that these detention



centres had been increasing in size and numbers (Thum 2018, 22 August; Zhang Shawn 2018, 19 June). About the same time, a number Kazakh citizens as well as Chinese citizens from Kazakh ethnicity shared their experience in the detention camps to the outside world.

In July of the same year, a former teacher of Kazakh origin who worked at a detention centre in Xinjiang gave her testimony in a Kazakhstan court about the mushrooming of such camps in Xinjiang. There were 2500 inmates in the facilities where she worked for four months and she knew many such re-education camps. It has been estimated that there are around 1200 camps in Xinjiang, unlawfully confining hundreds of thousands people including Kazakh and Kyrgyz population (Millward 2019, 7 February). More information about these camps poured into the international media, mainly from the accounts of former inmates in these confinement camps.

Local authorities have forcefully sent thousands of Uyghurs and other local Muslims of different age groups to these camps under suspicion of involving in terrorism, associating with extremism, being politically disloyal to the PRC. Five kinds of suspicious persons are sent for re-education: 1. Who threw their mobile phone's SIM card or did not use their mobile after registering it; 2. Former prisoners; 3. blacklisted people; 4. People with fundamentalist religious sentiments; and 5. Those having relatives abroad. These camps function by using the tools of physical torture, indoctrination, brainwashing and psychological experiments, and self-criticism.

China definitely does not care about international allegations of human rights violations anywhere in the country but it does not like to lose its dominance in creating global public opinion on the issues like Xinjiang problem. China's desperation became so much that from March to August 2019 it issued three White Papers (WPs) on Xinjiang. The last

one specifically focused on the issues related to vocational education and training in Xinjiang.

## **CRACK DOWN ON OTHER MUSLIM GROUPS**

As mentioned before, the incarceration of other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang added new dimensions in the problem. Since the early phase of PRC rule, the objective of the authorities was to create division among various Muslim groups, especially among Turkic Muslim groups in Xinjiang. It was evident that, as separatist violence started in Xinjiang in the early 1990s, the government successfully singled out the Uyghurs as the trouble makers. Because of the growing Islamophobic trend, local authorities across China have been increasingly taking anti-Muslim positions in order to satisfy majority Han demands in many disputes. However, the brazen attacks against Kazakh and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang under Chen Quanguo can be compared only with pre-liberation period warlord Sheng Shicai's anti-Kazakh onslaught in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 2017, authorities began to crack down on ethnic Kazakh Muslim residents of the XUAR, detaining many for peaceful religious activities and for "offenses" such as sending online messages on emigration issues, as well as for having connections to friends and relatives living in Kazakhstan and for "having close ties" with Uyghur Muslims in the XUAR. It has been reported that the authorities subsequently detained many Muslims who applied for a permit, and also detained some local imams cutting across ethnicity for presiding over prayers without having obtained a permit.

Around April 2017, a court in Emin county, Tacheng prefecture sentenced a Kazakh resident to 10 years' imprisonment after he reportedly posted online content regarding Kazakhstan's immigration policies. In June,

authorities in Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture reportedly detained ethnic Kazakh imam Akmet for unknown reasons. Several days after the detention the authorities informed that he had hung himself and returned his body to his family. XUAR authorities reportedly detained more than 100 of Akmet's acquaintances who made comments online about his death (Pannier 2017. 8 August). In June 2017, officials in Wumachang township, Qitai county, ChangjiHui Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR, reportedly issued a notice saying that local Hui Muslims must obtain a permit before praying, or they could be detained for "illegally engaging in religious activities."

Chen's approach to eliminate religious extremist tendencies among other Muslim minorities and to punish Kazakh and Kyrgyz individuals seeking permission to permanently settle in the friendly Central Asian countries could be counter-productive and lead to solidarity among various Muslim groups in Xinjiang, which would be definitely much greater challenge to maintain stability, security and social order in the 'core' region of Xi Jinping's ambitious BRI.

## **TARGETING UYGHUR PRIDE**

So far, the attacks on Uyghur culture and tradition have been restricted to Islam and Muslim social customs and practices, to the imposition of Chinese over Uyghur language teaching and learning, and to curbs on intellectual activities of the community. In order to implement the ambitious plan of Sinicising the local culture and implant officially approved 'modern' habits of the central and local leadership, local administrations and law enforcing authorities across Xinjiang have begun to forcefully inculcate Han culture among the Uyghurs.

The Uyghur community was never enthusiastic in Chinese New Year but exchange of greetings during the festival was very much prevalent

in Xinjiang until interethnic tensions began to grow since the mid-1990s. While the Uyghur cannot celebrate their own festivals peacefully for about two decades and it is legally restricted in multiple ways for a few years, it was a shock for the community during the 2018 Spring Festival when the authorities in the region made it mandatory for them to participate in the festival by hanging couplets on the doors of their houses, attending dumpling-making and joining other activities during the festival session (Byler 2018, 23 February).

In the summer of 2018, a number of disturbing news and photos of overzealous police personnel cutting off long dresses of Uyghur women on the streets in an attempt of fighting religious extremism in Xinjiang appeared in various media outlets across the world (Smith 2018, 17 July). A staff writer of *Taiwan News* explained that the local cadres purposely allowed visual representation of disrespectful treatment to the Uyghur because they thought these tactics would dissuade them from pushing the boundary of official policies and restrictions. Another report published in the same newspaper in June 2018 referred to a video showing a forced marriage of a Uyghur girl to a Han resident. The writer claims that this was an official tactic of “gene washing” of the community (DeAeth 2018, 16 July).

In Khotan, the government advertised in the local newspaper offers of up to five million yuan for ‘inside operational story information’ on actual planned terrorist attacks along with lesser rewards for reporting on potential terrorists, and 200 yuan for reporting on face covering, youth with long beards, or other popular religious customs that have been radicalized. In Khotan 97 cadres were punished for failing to report on key terrorist suspects. One Uyghur official in Khotan was punished for refusing to smoke in front of group of elder men, a behaviour that was viewed as ‘extremist’. Whether the policy of ‘award and punishment’

helped to identify actual terrorist, perpetrator of violence, criminals or dangerous extremists is doubtful but greed for earning easy money has definitely demoralised the community.

Indiscriminately targeting “two-faced people” among the Uyghur intellectual elites, especially those who achieved their present status for their worth besides their loyalty to the Party was another way of erasing hope for the future from the minds of educated aspiring youths belonging to the community. The case of Teyip Tashpolat is an example. Teyip, served Xinjiang University as the president since 2010 was removed from his position on 31 March 2017 and allegedly detained for being insincere to government policies. So far he is the most important personality among those attacked in the campaign against “two-faced people”. His crime was considered so serious that his name was also removed from the list of former university presidents (Radio Free Asia 2018b, 20 February). Such attacks were also inflicted on four wealthiest businessmen of Kashgar, accused of conducting “unapproved, private hajj” pilgrimages to Mecca. They were arrested on counts of religious extremism in May 2017. To set an example for engaging in such unlawful activities, these elderly businessmen were later sentenced to a total 42 years in prison (Radio Free Asia 2018a, 5 January). It is important to note that the largely religious minded rural Uyghur folk highly have traditionally revered individual who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca.

## ENDNOTES

1. Sean R. Roberts analyses China’s present “war on terror” on the basis of Michel Foucault’s thesis on the biopolitical polity and Slavoj Zizek’s depiction of the Global War on Terrorism as biopolitical war which is a departure from the wars of the modern period. According to Foucault, ‘the biopolitical polity views itself as a living organism, the health of which depends upon fostering the productive actors within

it while excluding the infectious potential of those who are unproductive or even worse, counter-productive' (Roberts 2018: 234-6).

2. Among 14 provincial leaders who rallied behind Xi Jinping's absolute leadership, Chen Quanguo expressed his loyalty by saying that he 'staunchly safeguard, support and be faithful to General Secretary Xi Jinping, the core' (Buckley 2016, 4 February).
3. Borrowed the phrases from Zhang Chi's PhD Thesis referred earlier. Zhang applied arguments on soft and hard approaches to terrorism discussed by Jason Rineheart in an article titled 'Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency' in analysing China's counter-terrorism agenda (Zhang 2018, September: 32).
4. This strategy of Xi Jinping posits that stability of Tibet is prerequisite for governing the border which in turn a necessary condition for the governance of the country (*Zhiguo bi zhibian, zhibianxian wen Zang*).
5. Between 2012 and 2016, around 77 percent of applicant who 'either obtained or were close to obtaining a government job were Tibetan' (Zenz and Leibold 2017, 21 September).
6. During Chen Quanguo's rule in Tibet, more than 7000 cadres has been assigned to around 1700 monasteries in the TAR. These cadres have functions in three major areas – education, management and service. Their work profiles are as follows:
  1. *liujian*(six build ups) – building management organization, party committee, leading group, team of cadres, and building core of managerial function and mechanism; 2. *liuyi* (six one) – every cadre stationed monasteries are supposed to build friendship with a number of monks and nuns, conduct home visit, take up one practical activity them, make a set of dossier, open channels of interactions, and form a set management mechanism to coordinate between management committee, monastery, and families of monks and nuns; 3. *Jiuyou*(nine haves) – promote monasteries with image of highest national leader, national flag, access to road, water supply, electricity, television, communication facilities, newspaper and bookshop; 4. *yifugai*(one coverage) – insurance for health care and old age care, subsistence allowance, insurance in case of physical injuries in accidents, and free health check-up; 5. *yichuangjian* (one establishment) – a system of selecting harmonious exemplary monasteries and progressive patriotic law abiding monks and nuns through public appraisal; 6. *yijiaoyu* (one education) – deepening education for inculcating love for the country, respect for religion, law abidingness, abandoning evil thoughts, fostering good feelings, advocating harmony and praying for peace; 7. *yigongcheng*(one project) – implement a moral

cultivation project comprising of hundred high ranking monks; 8. *yifuwu*(one service) – carrying out patriotic education propaganda service to the countryside and improve the measures of benefiting monks and monasteries (Fenghuang information 2016, 29 August).

7. Without giving any explanation, the article insists that China is concerned about stability in Xinjiang in the real sense but does not care about “very stable” Xinjiang.
8. A Chinese source indicates that the list of 75 signs of religious extremism is part of a reading material circulated among the grassroots cadres and officials in some parts of Xinjiang in late 2014. The guideline tells that person having these signs can be suspected as extremist and should be reported to the police (CASS website 2014, 24 December). Some of the signs of extremist tendency among people include those who do not greet village Party secretary or cadres; abstain from alcohol; colour their hair; wear short trousers; ‘stand with their legs wide apart and place their hands above their chest’ while at pray; and wear watch on their right wrist. The security personnel continuously monitor in and around mosques in Xinjiang in search of people with such signs and ordinary people also keep their vigil to find such people and complain to the authorities (Radio Free Asia 2017a, 7 November).
9. There are several terms in the political terminology in China to describe formal, informal, legally defined and extra-judicial detention methods. *Laogai* (*laodong gaizao*, reform through labour) was penal labour given to a person who received judicial sentence in a criminal case. In the beginning *Laojiao* (*laodong jiaoyang*, reform through education) were given to counter-revolutionaries and bad elements whose offence was not serious enough to call for prison term or reform through labour under 1956 administrative directive of the Central Committee of the Party. After the promulgation of Decision on Reform through Education in 1957, *laojiao* acquired some sort of legal status but remain unclear about the terms for re-education. In the following years the “anti-rightists”, hooligan, wanders and witch were also sent to *laojiao* camps (*Laogai* Research Foundation 2015, January). Other administrative detention methods include soft detention (extra-judicial house arrest), sending to law education centres, psychiatric treatment in hospitals, “shuanggui” detention (dual regulation, reserved for the members of the Communist Party of China), drug rehabilitation, and unlawful detentions in “black prisons” (*hei jianyu*, run by Chinese security forces and private companies across the country). The institutions behind these detentions have common characteristics and the cases of the inmates in these facilities do not go through proper judicial review. It is mostly at the whims

of the public security forces that individuals are incarcerated under these arbitrary provisions (Wu and Goodrich 2014: 3-4).

10. The Chinese official document and articles also describe the institution in different names, e.g., re-education camp (*zai jiaoyu ying*), transformation offices (*zhuanhuasuo*), de-extremization training classes (*qujiduanhua peixun ban*), and education and transformation training centre (*jiaoyu zhuanhua peixun zhongxin*). According to the Western commentators, this institution serves for the purpose of detention and internment. Some writings in the West even called them concentration camp meant for racial cleansing of the indigenous Muslim population.
11. China's sensitivity to the use other terms was reflected during a press conference in October 2019 when Geng Shuang, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson sharply admonished for asking about re-education camps in Xinjiang by a foreign journalist who resided in China so long (Observer network 2019, 8 October).



## CHAPTER 6

### CHINA DEFENDS GLOBAL RESPONSE

There have been some sharp external responses, mainly from Western media and some observers to China's de-extremisation measures under Chen Quanguo since he assumed the position of the Party Secretary in the region. The release of news on the detention of an estimated one million Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in the region and mushrooming of detention centres across Xinjiang caused hue and cry within a certain section of international communities. The UN also made China confront some international committees that raised serious charges against China's recent policies in the region.

In the face of the accusations by the Western democracies of Chinese human rights violations, China has responded in three distinct ways – it has cited its own discourse on human rights and counter-attacked these countries, especially the USA, for breaching human rights norms in their countries; it has criticised the Western interventionist approach in China's internal matters; and it has completely denied the allegations. Over three decades since the Tian'anmen incidents, China has made constructive efforts to interpret and disseminate a new set of ideas on human rights, and eventually it became an 'active participant in the international human rights regime' (Chaudhuri 2019: 7). China's reactions against any criticism of its domestic politics are based on the internationally accepted principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of an independent state. Even as it has become evident that internal ethnic violence and state-sponsored atrocities against any specific community in any country can pose serious threat to international peace and security, the principle of non-interference has been challenged by many quarters within the international community. However, internal matters have long

been an indispensable phrase in Chinese diplomatic language in the face of complaints of human rights abuse in Xinjiang and Tibet, and China's behaviour in the affairs of Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as disputes over the South China Sea (Anthony 2019, 11 October).<sup>1</sup> Against this background, and given its considerable ability to suppress news as well as its highly developed propaganda machinery supported by advanced digital technologies, China has shown increasing confidence in refuting allegations of mass detention centres in Xinjiang and developed a sharp counter-narrative describing the so-called detention centres as basically centres for vocational education and training work under an ongoing de-extremisation program.

The responses of the international community to the violation of human rights in China are, however, not only lacking in consistency but also reflect the unique mindset of the Western democracies. While China is promoting its own brand of exceptionalism and setting new norms in the global governance, the West is harping on its own democratic ideas and refusing to accept that the launching of a world-wide war against terrorism and a host of such initiatives has engendered a decline of many liberal values and in social and political behaviour within their own societies.

The changing politics of the post 9/11 world has legitimised an intensification of the already coercive state policies towards the Uyghur community and eventually the full-fledged securitisation that started in the region after the riots in the regional capital in 2009. The Chinese leadership had become ultra-sensitive about the security and stability of the region ever since China declared its ambitious Belt and Road initiative with Xinjiang as one of its 'core' regions in 2013.

In fact, China has taken full advantage of the deeply-biased Islamophobic sentiment across the world<sup>2</sup> and its general intolerance towards the

demands of suppressed communities and marginalised groups to carry out excessively harsh policies in the name of fighting terrorism and deextremisation in Xinjiang. The Xinjiang administration has just followed the European precedent in making and applying laws on dress codes of Muslim women and other similar cultural, social and religious habits and symbols affecting its minority communities. Interestingly, global opinion was not so sharp when, for the first time, Chen used some of his hallmark innovations in the TAR. How China counters international opinion and actions need to be seen in this context.

## **CHINA AND THE GLOBAL ANTI-TERRORISM REGIME**

The emergency security environment since the launching of the world-wide anti-terrorism war allowed the Chinese state authorities to draw legitimacy from the growing intolerance towards sub-nationals among the majority population, public acceptance of government's policies against terrorism, and the absence of accountability for the many acts of pre-emptive state coercions taken in the name of maintenance of national security and social stability.

When it came to the issue of terrorism, deviation from democratic principles has been quite common in the Western countries that have been at the forefront of the global anti-terrorism regime. The lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism has allowed political authorities in every country to broaden its scope by bringing many forms of violent as well as non-violent activities of certain sections of citizens within the basket of terrorism. Country-specific anti-terrorism laws have served to strengthen the legal basis for fighting any form of violence and using excessively coercive policies to detain, persecute and even execute large numbers of suspects and potential terrorists, often at the cost of constitutional rights.

These Western countries have seriously undermined their democratic values while making anti-terrorism laws and formulating policies related to these issues. On this matter, the controversial US law National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), with its Homeland Battlefield provisions give a clear idea of how the Obama administration legalised the arrest of civilians anywhere in the world as terrorist suspect or accused supporters of terrorism, detain them without trial, and even prosecute. A campaigner against the law claimed that the NDAA or Homeland Battlefield Bill would cripple free speech around the world. Despite being legally challenged by a group of political activists and journalists, the law was signed by the president (Harris 2012, 29 March). According to a report, initially the White House maintained its reservation about certain languages in the bill but finally Barak Obama signed it on the consideration that the bill would enable the administration 'to collect intelligence or incapacitate dangerous terrorists' (Sorcher 2011, 31 December).

It must to be kept in mind that the protection of its interests across the world was the main objective when the US called for a world-wide war against terrorism and for nearly two decades it has been continuing such a war based on this logic. In fact, to a large extent, the global war against terrorism has been fought at the level of individual states, and like any other issue in the existing world order, the international communities have been divided on the question of counter-terrorism war in each country. This however has not stopped countries from developing counterterrorism cooperation both at the multilateral as also at bilateral levels between countries that continued to retain sharp differences on the issue of terrorism and human rights violations. Since the 9/11 incidents, the single most rationale – fighting terrorism, the common global enemy has legitimised all sorts of diplomatic dealings as well as gross violations of human security in internal struggles against terrorism across the world.

In the post-Cold War period, the geo-strategic importance of the resource-rich Xinjiang has greatly increased and this fact has played a vital role for economic integration between China and the Central Asian countries. China also faced serious challenges in safeguarding its interest in Xinjiang due to Uyghur led separatist violence originating in the region. Taking full advantage of the international situation after the 9/11 incidents, China jumped on the bandwagon of anti-terror war in order to fight Uyghur separatist groups, secure itself from international terrorism through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and maintain stability in Xinjiang. Anti-terror cooperation with the US helped China to justify its policies in Xinjiang, get Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) enlisted in the UN terrorist groups associated with the trans-national terrorist organizations, and acquire terrorism related intelligence (Chaudhuri 2018: 221-221). One of its first reports on post-9/11 global terrorism, the US State Department mentioned China as a victim of international terrorism and spoke highly of its international counter-terrorism cooperation (Park 2017: 8). This cooperation was however not based on mutual trust but on the logic of gaining advantage to push forward each other's agenda of fighting terrorism.

China was not comfortable with the improvement of the US's relations with various countries including Russia and the expansion of its defense cooperation with many countries as well as its growing military presence in Asia. The US was also concerned about the consequences of the cooperation with China in the fight against global terrorism and was not ready to accept the Chinese government's projection that 'America's fight against Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda with its own battle against the separatists of Xinjiang'. It gradually became evident that one of the major constituents of China's domestic counter-terrorism measures is religious repression of the Uyghur, which led the spread of terrorism in the region (Park 2017: 9-11). In the course of its preparation for the

Beijing Olympic, China got further opportunity to develop long term cooperation with the US and many developed countries in developing counter-terrorism infrastructure and technologies in the areas of security and surveillance.

After nearly two decades of diplomatic engagement and cooperation with many countries in the aspects related to terrorism, China not only found a formidable niche in the global anti-terror regime but also created space for promoting its brand of human rights. China claims it is committed to adhering to the principles of human rights and sticks to its pledge of fulfilling material needs of its citizens to the best of its capacity. China's huge success in poverty alleviation often overshadows its deplorable human rights records, ruthless treatment of political dissidents and pro-right peoples, and draconian policies towards Tibetans, Uyghur, and other marginalised groups.

Interestingly the US government showed its concern for issues beyond human rights as China accelerated the process of making counter-terrorism law in 2015. Articles 15 and 16 of the draft law require telecommunication and internet service providers to 'install government accessible "backdoors" and provide encryption keys to the public security authorities for any data stored on their servers'. The law also necessitates ISPs to locate servers and store all user data with the border of China to have access to large private data (Livingston 2015, 18 March). Throughout the process of the drafting of China's counter-terrorism, law along with the US global technology companies anticipated possible decline of business prospects in the IT sector in China.

If we keep aside China's callous authoritarian culture of social control and its treatment towards minorities and other dissidents, logically speaking, the hardening of its policies towards Uyghur and Tibetan is no different from the treatment of particular ethnic and religious group,

especially those affiliated with Islam in many countries, including India in the recent years. China's success in the economic and scientific matters is so obvious that it will be academically unsophisticated to assess its authoritarianism through a democratic prism. Clearly, an increasing number of countries including the democratically elected present political dispensation in India, appear to be learning from Chinese social control mechanism, and its repressive methods of containing terrorism, separatist violence, and any form of ethno-religious movements, civil right demands and dissent. In recent years, China has also emerged as an attractive market providing surveillance goods and services to the developing world.

China is now an economic powerhouse. Many countries in the developed world depend on Beijing for their economic interest and they do not see any reason to raise issues related to the repression of the Uyghur Muslims. Moreover, the rise of right-wing political parties, authoritarian trends, and neo-liberal inclinations among the people in power in several countries across the world practically leaves a very few states to seriously raise questions relating to Chinese excesses in their so-called de-radicalisation policies relating to Uyghur society in any appropriate international forum.

Following the rise of Han-centrism and an increasingly assertive foreign policy under Xi Jinping, China has made it clear that it has its own definition of terrorism and it will continue to fight the “three evil forces” in Xinjiang in its own authoritarian style. This is also evident in what China is pursuing in name of de-extremisation.

## **DE-EXTREMISATION UNDER THE UN INITIATIVE**

As early as in 2005, the UN had initiated a balanced approach in its fight against terrorism and its harmful consequences by setting up a number

of Working Groups for addressing radicalization and extremism that lead to terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) was established to ensure overall coordination and coherence of counter-terrorism efforts of the UN system in 2005. It consists of 38 international entities, International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and 12 inter-agency working groups from member countries of the UN. In September 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Anti-terrorism Strategy to have some consensus among member states in their individual and collective struggle against home grown and international terrorism, extremism and violent radicalisation process. This is a living document in the sense that the UN General Assembly reviews it in every two years. It allows the member states to take practical steps to individually and collectively prevent and combat terrorism. The document also calls for measures ranging from strengthening state capacity and for better coordination of national policies with United Nations system's counter-terrorism activities.

The Global Anti-terrorism Strategy recommends four pillars of measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, to prevent and combat terrorism, to build states' capacity in their struggle against terrorism, and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in this regard. It calls for changing the conditions of lawlessness, lack of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion and socio-economic marginalization.<sup>3</sup> The document also seeks a legal definition of terrorism and attempts to answer what makes someone a terrorist and identifying effective policies and practices to prevent this from happening. The Working Group underlines the significance of non-coercive approaches for prevention and long-term measures in fighting terrorism.

While a major portion in this UN document categorically asserts the salience of the protection of human rights and fundamental rights



in course of fighting on terrorism, it allows individual countries to broaden the scope of military involvement, public security and policing, surveillance, censorship, and restrictions on civil society in the course of their carrying out counter-terrorism operations and pre-emptive strikes in the name of preventing and combating terrorism. In the context of micro-securitization in the post 9-11 world, both democratic, as well as authoritarian countries, used these measures as guidance to strengthen, modernize and perfect national security apparatus and enhance social control mechanism.

In response to the interest of some member states to better understand the radicalization process and how to counter that process, in February 2008 the Working Group invited all member states to provide information on their policies and initiatives to address radicalization and violent extremism that lead to terrorism.<sup>4</sup> To highlight the core focus of the non-coercive approach, the Working Group cited the Malaysian government's response which points out the importance of 'winning hearts and minds of the segments of society that are normally targeted by extremist and radical groups for recruitment, support and funding' (Counter-terrorism Implementation Task Force 2008).

While there is a broad consensus on the above operational aspects of de-radicalisation process, there is much confusion regarding the very notion of radicalization and de-radicalization. After reviewing whole range of literature on radicalization and violent extremism, Alex P. Schmid concludes that radicals and violent extremists share some characteristics like alienation from the state, anger over certain policies and feelings of discrimination, but a radical attitude is not always violent in nature. He observes that much of the literature on terrorism equates radicalism with extremism and both with terrorism, and many governments use the concept of violent extremism interchangeably with

terrorism, political violence, and extreme violence. In most of the cases these terms are applied to non-state actors only (Schmid 2013) and there is limited scope for critically assessing the state's use of force in the counter-terrorism activities.

Moreover, only 34 out of 192 members of the United Nations provided information on their policies and programmes which constitute the inventory for de-radicalization in the world today. This clearly shows the reluctance of a majority of member states to take appropriate measures to restrain the use of disproportionate force and repression in their individual wars against terrorism, accusing each other of excesses towards particular communities within their respective countries, and of having double standards on the issue of terrorism at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

According to the first report of the Working Group and other literature, de-radicalization efforts in various countries are organised around the following strategies: engagement between government and civil society; prison programmes; education; promotion of civilizational and intercultural dialogue; tackling economic and social inequalities; global program to counter radicalisation; internet access; legislation reforms; rehabilitation programmes; dissemination of information; and training in counter radicalisation policies. Notwithstanding the UN initiative, the track record of the Western powers in fighting international terrorism has remained problematic. Being an authoritarian state, China's performance is even more deplorable and what is going on in Xinjiang in name of de-extremisation is symptomatic of a security/surveillance state. From the discussions in the previous chapters, it is clear that the Chinese system has neither the foundation to carry out nor does it allow its policy makers to incorporate the above strategies for de-radicalisation inside Xinjiang. In fact, under the present Party secretary Chen Quanguo all traces

of non-coercive aspects seem to have vanished from the programs undertaken in the name of de-extremisation in Xinjiang.

## **GLOBAL REACTION**

While violent separatist activities by certain factions of the Uyghur community had increased in Xinjiang in the beginning of the 1990s, the exile Uyghur organizations and activists had engaged in dissemination of information about the repression of ethnic minorities in China and the demands of the community by using new forms of communication and social media had greatly increased interest on the Eastern Turkestan movement across the world. Despite China's utmost efforts of suppressing, distorting and fabricating the facts surrounding Xinjiang and the Eastern Turkestan movement and around Uyghur intentions, the ethno-national violence and counter violence in this Muslim dominated region of China has remained a major concern of the international community for the last two decades. However, compared to the Tibetan diaspora movement, because of the violent nature of the Uyghur resistance against China, their affiliation with Islam and general suspicion of violent extremist activities emanating from the Muslim world, the Uyghur movement could not gather enough international support, which is considered as one of the major shortcomings of the movement.

Outside China, to a very large extent, the repression of Muslims in Xinjiang has been mostly observed dispassionately by leaders of other countries, international NGOs and social media (Steinhauer 2017: 53-6). However, during the last few years, the frequency of reporting on Uyghur related news has greatly increased in the world press as a series of alarming reports on criminal detention and confinements of hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities by the Xinjiang authority in name of de-radicalization program started appearing in

the international media since 2017. A major source of information regarding the detention camps, number of detainees and various forms their physical and mental torture in name of re-education has been the Kazakhs from Xinjiang as well as some citizens of Kazakhstan who gathered first-hand experience in these camps as prisoners or in other capacities.

A Kazakh social activist Serikjan Bilash, through his organization Atajurt Eriktoleri (Homeland Volunteer) has documented close to 10,000 cases of ethnic Kazakhs who were detained in Xinjiang in the recent years and successfully raised awareness across the world about the detention camps in Xinjiang. Apparently, under Chinese pressure, the Kazakh government arrested Bilash and fined him for running an unregistered organization (Standish and Toleukhanova 2019, 4 March). Bilash, who was born in Xinjiang and became a citizen of Kazakhstan, was also accused of inciting ethnic hatred and creating tensions between Kazakhstan and China. There is a general impression among the people that the Kazakh government is always ready to please China so much so that Bilash's wife, Leila Adilzhan had feared that the government might hand him over to the Chinese authorities. Toeing the official line, some well-known public figures of Kazakhstan also criticized Bilash in an open letter (Dorsey 2019, 11 March; Putz, 2019, 11 March). The general impression was that the government had acted in accordance with Chinese desires in dealing with Bilash and his organization. The purpose was to silence any anti-China sentiment. But some reports suggest that many people in Kazakhstan believe that their relatives are in detention camps in Xinjiang.

The detention of Kazakh minorities along with Kazakh citizens in Xinjiang has naturally had reverberations within Kazakhstan. The Kazakh government was fully aware of its asymmetric relations with its

big and powerful neighbour, China. China has been its second largest trading partner after Russia in 2017. In order to secure energy imports China has invested heavily in Kazakhstan's resource industry and other areas. The latter also plays a crucial role in Xi Jinping's ambitious BRI projects (Kozhanova 2019, 1 May). Given its growing dependence on China in economic and strategic matters, the Kazakhstan leadership finds it difficult to manage people's resentment against the treatments of Kazakhs in Xinjiang and feels restrained in raising the issue with the Chinese authorities.

Wide-spread criticism of certain Chinese policies in the Central Asian media has been evident since the early years of the 21st century. The origin of China's image as an enemy of Islam and the Turkic people in the region however can be traced to the Soviet period. Since 2017, however, China's "soft expansionism" in Central Asia has caused an increase of Sinophobic tendencies with both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan experiencing many anti-China demonstrations in the recent years (Peyrouse 2020, 1 May). As resentment began to build up domestically in the wake of indiscriminate arrests of their own people in Xinjiang and increased Chinese sensitivity on its internal affairs, the Kazakh government sought to cautiously raise the issue with China through diplomatic channels. A number of formerly detained Kazakhs in camps in Xinjiang reported that they were released after the Kazakhstan government intervened but this kind of diplomatic efforts had only limited results (Putz 2018b, 14 June). In such a situation, it was quite uncertain how long the government could continue its present China policy while pursuing its heavy-handed pushback on suppression of voices against the repression of people of Kazakh origin in the Xinjiang detention camps. Equally, it could lead to more robust and resilient anti-China and anti-regime movements within this Central Asian nation.

The internal political situation in Kyrgyzstan has been volatile in recent years as the country has experienced anti-regime protests and demonstrations. The anti-China sentiments have been growing for some time in this Central Asian country. In recent years, adverse feelings against China have deepened among the common people following an incident in Bishkek's main power plant causing a five-day blackout during the cold months in January 2018. The plant was upgraded by a Chinese firm. The failure of the modernization plan of the power plant naturally made the Chinese company a target of the common people who demanded its punishment. But the firm was not officially charged with any allegation (Putz 2018a, 30 January).<sup>5</sup> Such situations have further exposed the involvement of the power hungry political leadership and elite sections of the country in corruption and malpractices.

The detention of large numbers of Kyrgyz minority persons along with other Muslim groups in Xinjiang has captured popular attention in the middle of such a prevailing political atmosphere in Kyrgyzstan. The concern for the parlous conditions of their ethnic brethren in China's restive Muslim dominated region coupled with other issues led to huge anti-China protests in the capital, Bishkek on 17 January 2019. Protesters demanded that the government take measures to restrict the growing Chinese presence in the country by curbing work permits, banning Kyrgyz-Chinese marriages as well as by initiating long term plans to reduce debt to China. When protests converged on towards the presidential building and persisted beyond the allotted time for the protest rally, the Kyrgyz police was forced to push the protesters out of the central square of Bishkek city as well as detain dozens of them. (Reuters 2019, 17 January).

In response to similar protests in Bishkek prior to the rally mentioned above, the Kyrgyz president had cautioned the population that whoever

tried to disrupt the Kyrgyz-Chinese partnership would be legally prosecuted. Each of the 21 activists found involved in disrupting public order during the 17 January rally were fined 3000 Som. (45 US\$). (RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service 2019, 18 January). In light of China's continuous attempts to reap profit from such events without concern for the sentiments of the local population across Central Asia, it is doubtful whether the Kyrgyz government's actions aimed at protecting Chinese image and interests could suppress or calm down growing anti-China feelings among a large section of the population. Inevitably, they generated a public backlash against Chinese investment as was evident in many other parts of the world.

The trend of indifference to the repression of Uyghur and other Muslim ethnic groups and of abject support China's policies in Xinjiang was not limited to the political and social elites of Central Asian countries, whose relative dependence – economic as well as geo-strategic - on China was apparent. What is striking is that a majority of Islamic countries have preferred to be silent about the internal affairs involving Muslim communities within China stemming partly from economic interests and the fear of annoying a powerful but dependable ally which was also viewed as a formidable opponent of the West, especially of the United States of America. Even countries like Saudi Arabia, which has had long standing relations with the US no longer considers it dependable, fearing the US might withdraw from the region any time in the future, yielding the space to an ascendant China. Moreover, relations with China are also important because it is the major customer of crude oil from Saudi Arabia (Yellenik 2019). Like Saudi Arabia, most Muslim countries of the world highly value their relations with China.

While the abusive treatment of Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang in the name of re-education programs in the detention camps

and the increase in other forms of repression during the last few years were strongly condemned in the West, the Islamic world has remained mostly silent. Other than relying on China's good sense and making proforma comments, the Independent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2019 merely expressed "concern" at 'disturbing reports on the treatment' of the Uyghurs. (Yellenik 2019). On the one hand these countries have been vocal in addressing the plight of Muslim communities suffering in the Israel-Palestine conflict, Rohingya refugee problems, and in Kashmir situation, on the other, they have not only preferred silence on the issue of on-going repression of the Uyghur and other Muslims in China, but nearly half of the 37 signatories that defended China in the High Commissioner of the United Nations' Human Rights Council in July 2019 were Muslim majority countries (Qiblawi 2019, 17 July). China's all-weather friend Pakistan, which does not lose any opportunity to project itself as the champion of cause of Muslims across the world also chose to remain silent on the Uyghur issue. Pakistan Prime Minister, Imran Khan, in an interview with *Foreign Policy* in January 2020 declared somewhat disingenuously that he was not aware of 'the scale of what is going on in China' and his government was so grateful to China that it has decide not to talk about such issues in public (Tepperman 2020, 22 January).<sup>6</sup> Pakistan also publicly endorsed its support to China at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019. Notwithstanding the above, while all majority Muslim countries had disregarded any intent on the part of the UN Human Rights Council to probe into the Xinjiang situation, it is notable that, along with Turkey, OIC members like Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Tunisia refrained from signing any statement in defence of China (Siddiqui 2019, 14 August).

Among the major Muslim countries, Turkey is the only exception which has been trying to balance between closer relations with Beijing and its



obligation of providing moral and material supports to its ethnic kin groups in Xinjiang, especially the Uyghur since the 1980s. Establishment of a number of Turkish Muslim republics in Central Asia after the breakup of the Soviet Union and resurgence of Eastern Turkestan movements led by the Uyghur allowed Turkey to play a very important role as leader of Turkish-Islamic world in the early 1990s. Because of low ebb of pan-Turkic sentiments and rise of some Turkish politicians who wanted better relations with China in the latter half of 1990s, the exile Uyghur diaspora community in that country has begun to face difficulties in carrying out their activities and pro-independence movements which are perceived as against China. From 2000 to 2009 the two countries concentrated on the development of commercial and economic relations. All political parties of country from this time somewhat altered their earlier stand on the Uyghur cause, but a clear anti-China upsurge appeared again in the Turkish political circles following the riots in Urumqi and relations between the two countries reached its nadir after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was Prime Minister at that time condemned the incident as genocide of the Uyghur people (Chaudhuri 2018: 234-236). Soon after this both the countries took constructive steps to restore relations in the area of economic and commercial cooperation but the Uyghur issue continues to be an obstruction between the two countries.

Apparently, Turkey became convinced that better relations with China will improve chances of the Uyghur getting better treatment in Xinjiang. The then Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping during his visit to Turkey in 2012 proposed involvement of Turkish business investors in Xinjiang provided its leadership abandon pan-Turkic ambition. The central authority in Beijing thought that economic engagement of Turkey would not only create atmosphere for improvement of the life of the Uyghur people and integration of them with the main stream Chinese culture and Chinese nationalism. In subsequent years China appeared to have

treated Turkey generously for its cooperation in the BRI as well as in the counter-terrorism and anti-separatism. Both countries consider Turkey's inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as dialogue partner as a win-win result of their diplomacy (Pan 2016, 106-109, 113 & 115). Despite a number of thorny issues<sup>7</sup> and the complicated trajectory that Sino-Turkish relations were subjected to by the intensification of Uyghur led violence between 2013 and 2015, bilateral relations between the two countries has developed and assumed solid foundations in recent years.

For the last entire decade, the Uyghur refugee problem continued to be an edgy issue for many countries, especially those in Southeast Asia. In order to avoid increasingly coercive atmosphere in Xinjiang and escape persecution and repression for ever increasing criminal offences since 2013, a large number of Uyghur people of different age groups fled the region to Southeast Asian countries with the help of Chinese smugglers. A majority of them were ordinary people with no record of terrorist activities or violence. The large number of them sought political refuge mainly in Turkey, which has been a major destination of Uyghur refugees since 1950s. But like other countries, the Uyghurs, especially newly arrived ones are increasingly facing various kind difficulties including continuous threat of arrest by Turkish police and fear of being repatriated to China.

In 2015 the Uyghur issue once again disturbed the well crafted diplomatic balance between China and Turkey when reports on the ban of Ramadan fasting for public servants, teachers and students in Xinjiang began to appear in Turkish media. The protests and public anger against China due to Uyghur issue were not new in Turkey but this time there was unprecedented public outrage because of some other incidents affronting religious and cultural values of the Muslims

in Xinjiang. The Turkish official response was also unexpectedly blunt. The Chinese ambassador in Ankara was summoned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to express concern about the issue of fasting ban in Xinjiang. The Ministry also issued a statement regarding this (Asia Times 2015, 6 July). The issue became even more complicated when President Erdogan reacted sharply in response to the accusation of his indifference to the sufferings of Uyghur people by one of his political opponents from the nationalist party. He reminded that in January 2015 his government accepted 500 Uyghurs who sought refuge to Turkey and assured that the Uyghur are always welcome there (Kizil 2015, 28 June).<sup>8</sup> However, as the internal political situation changed fast in Turkey following the nationalist joining the government, political pressure on how to deal with Uyghur issue further weakened.

It is clear that China is not ready to accept any comment on the treatment of the Uyghur by the Turkish authorities nor allow the former to have any option other than to tolerate its own rigid approach in dealing with the issue. However, compulsion under public anger, humanitarian reasons and sentiments for their ethnic kin group compelled the Turkish leadership to break their silence over the intensification of repression and confinement of a huge number of Muslims in Xinjiang again in February 2019 and criticise China for contributing to the “tragedy” in Xinjiang (ABC/AP 2019, 11 February). This however did not reflect any change of the leadership’s policy towards China.

On the contrary, the Turkish authorities imposed more restrictions on the activities of newly arrived Uyghur by pressurizing them to prove their identity. In fact, in summer 2019 some people including a young woman and two kids were deported to Tajikistan. The woman was later arrested by the Chinese police in Xinjiang (Kakissis 2020, 13 March). The general impression of the Uyghur people (both old residents and new comers) is

that recently China has been closely monitoring activities of the Uyghur in Turkey and the latter has succumbed to the Chinese pressure.

## **XINJIANG SITUATION REVIEWED**

The Chinese Human Rights Defenders and the Equal Rights Initiative made a joint submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) when it spoke out against the ruthless and indiscriminate crackdown on the Muslim in Xinjiang in August 2018. The report provided to the CERD for review an analysis of issues pertaining to legal mechanism available to the persons detained on charge of “endangering state security; amendment of the criminal procedural law conforming to the Convention against Torture<sup>9</sup>; a broad definition of terrorism and linking terrorist activities with religion in the law passed by Xinjiang government; the new regulation on de-extremisation; freedom of opinion and expression; the killing of people for lawful assembly; right to move out of the country and settle in other country; illegal detention, re-education and political indoctrination; economic, social and cultural rights; minority language education; public health hazards due to prolonged nuclear testing in Lop Nur region and medical issues; and detail information about Ilham Tohti and others who have been incarcerated and detained by the authorities in China (World Uyghur Congress 2018, July).

While presenting China’s report to the CERD, the permanent representative of China to the UN Office at Geneva, Yu Jianhua and his team (comprised of 48 senior officials) denied any instance of arbitrary detention of Uyghur, existence of re-education centres or counter-terrorism training centres in Xinjiang, but admitted that there were “vocational education and employment training centres” and other “measures” to counter “extremism. They highlighted China’s performance

in carrying forward economic development in five autonomous regions and three multi-ethnic provinces (Guizhou, Yunnan and Qinghai), and claimed reduction of poverty stricken people from 31 million to 10 million and rate of poverty from 34 to 10 per cent. It was claimed that great efforts were made to close the development gaps between ethnic and other areas of China during the 13th FYP and, as a result, the number of poor people had dropped from 14 million to 10 million from 2016 to 2017. The report cited examples of developments in education for ethnic minorities, free education for the minority students from rural areas, introduction of various new laws and amendments of legal provisions, and increase of minority deputies in the National People's Congress and regional NPCs to substantiate state's attempts to improve racial discrimination and overall development of minority nationalities in China. The Chinese side categorically denied any "de-Islamization" or suppression of ethnic minorities' freedom of religion in the name of counter-terrorism. It was also claimed that China had adopted measures to strengthen social and security management, gather information, crack down on illegal and criminal activities of the "three evil" forces, and protect stability and citizen's safety and security in accordance to the law (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018, 13 August).

The Committee expressed disappointment that the answers of delegates were mostly defensive and some of the experts' questions were rejected as baseless. Mere denial of the accusation that state and national security laws violated the rights of ethnic minorities was not enough and the committee required numerical evidence along with verbal claim. One committee member also asked about the history-teaching curriculum, which had enormous power of creating division or unity among various ethnic communities (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018, 13 August).

In our view, Yu Jianhua's two points are worth noting – one, as a developing multi-ethnic country with a large population, China readily admitted that there was still room for improvements in policy; and two, eliminating racial discrimination was a daunting task facing the international community as a whole, not just China. What is undeniable, however, was the abundant evidence that the Xinjiang authorities under the present leadership especially since the entry of Chen Quanguo had made deliberate plans to intensify social control and surveillance over the Uyghur as well as other Muslim population in the region. And, most importantly, that China has remained extremely secretive about the internal situations, evincing no willingness to engage in any fruitful discussion with outside parties about its policies in Xinjiang.

China responded in the similar manner at the time of third round of Universal Periodic Review on its human rights records in November 2018 as well and added that the country followed the human rights with Chinese characteristics in the new era of socialism. It was reported in this occasion that the Xinjiang vocational skills education and training institutions were set up for fighting terrorism by imparting legal knowledge, vocational and language skills and deradicalization education. These institutions helped to reintegrate those who are exposed to terrorism and extremist ideas and save them from becoming hard-core terrorism. China claimed that these training centres were part of the racial discrimination measures and another contribution of the country to the international counter-terrorism endeavour (United Nation General Assembly 2019, Human Rights Council, 25 February to 22 March). In the interactive session member states urged that China should ratify International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Convention of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Labour Convention of the International Labour Organization and its 2014 Protocol, implement the recommendations of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Xinjiang,

and establish national human rights institutions in accordance with the Paris Principle. Over a dozen countries recommended promotion of the human rights and eradication of racial discrimination in Xinjiang. Some countries insisted that China should implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on Xinjiang and allow the United Nations unrestricted access to monitor the implementation (United Nation General Assembly 2019, Human Rights Council, 25 February to 22 March). In response China criticised the practice of using human rights as an excuse to interfere in its internal affairs and undermine its sovereignty and territorial integration.

After these two sessions with the UN agencies on human rights in 2018, China enhanced its lobbying efforts strenuously to thwart any scrutiny of the Xinjiang camps at the UN Human Rights Council's main annual session in 2019. While active publicity campaigns were launched to defend its policies in Xinjiang in the face criticism from activists, scholars, some foreign governments and the UN human rights experts, the Chinese Foreign Ministry welcomed the UN official if they were willing to abide by China's laws and regulations and go through proper travel procedure (Aljazeera 2019, 7 January). In response to Beijing's invitation, the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International appealed to the UN Human Rights Council to send an international fact finding mission to Xinjiang (Nebehay 2019, 4 February).

Differences between the UN members on this issue became clear by July 2019 when 37 countries including Russia, Belarus, Bolivia, Serbia and majority Muslim countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan supported Chinese government's program in Xinjiang, whereas 23 other nations mainly Western countries and Japan showed concern over the human rights violation in the region and called on China to allow international monitors to examine the ground situation (Westcott and Roth 2019, 30 October). After the leak of documents related to

the detention of individuals in Xinjiang in November, further demands of providing access to the region was made by the Western countries, but unfortunately unprecedented situation of self-isolation at national, communal and individual level emerged globally in the turn of New Year following the outbreak of Covid-19 in China.

## ENDNOTES

1. Anthony observes that China's internal affairs are now 'drifting' more into external realm and shown that within one week Chinese Foreign Ministry level official used the phrase 'internal matter' in reaction to issues like, support of the Hong Kong protesters by the manager of the US basketball team through tweet from the USA; Apple hosting an app to help those protesters to locate police; and an episode of "South Park" comedy series on China's censorship and political prisoner camps (Anthony 2019, 11 October). This shows that China is becoming more intolerant in every passing day about any activity, thought, cultural expression and sentiment of anybody in any part of the world.
2. Since 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centres in 2001, Islamophobia dramatically increased in America. From 2010 onwards, one after one European country have imposed total or partial ban on wearing of veil, headscarf, hijab, niqab and burqa by Muslim women. There has been conspicuous upsurge of Islamophobic tendency in the world with the rise of Donald Trump in the political centre stage since the last Presidential election in America and increasing popularity of Far-right political parties in European countries (Organization of Islamic Countries 2017).
3. The measures to this direction include best possible use of the capacities of the United Nations in areas such as conflict prevention, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, judicial settlement, rule of law, peacekeeping and peace building; promotion of dialogue, tolerance, mutual respect, understanding among civilizations, cultures, peoples and religions; prevention of defamation of religions, religious values, and beliefs; creation of culture of peace, justice and human development; spread of appropriate education and public awareness programmes involving all sectors of society; timely and full realization of the development goals and objectives; reinforcement of social inclusion agendas like youth unemployment, reduction of marginalization and sense of victimization (United Nations 2006, 8 September).
4. The specific questions asked to the member states are as follows: Has your country undertaken or is it planning to undertake any project and/or programme



to understand and counter the appeal of terrorism? Has your country undertaken or is it planning to undertake any project and/or programme on de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and integration of people who joined terrorist groups or participated in terrorist acts, including any programmes centred on prisons? Has your country any available analysis or evaluation of these programmes, particularly with regard to their effectiveness, success and shortcomings (Counter-terrorism Implementation Task Force 2008).

5. Some sources reveal that the Kyrgyzstan government bypassed other Chinese companies which offered lower bid and selected the said company, Tebian Electric Apparatus Stock Co. Ltd (TBEA) without public tender. The TBEA was also involved in other costly projects in the country. There are some other Chinese as well as companies from other countries got favourable treatment from the official elites. The president, who was then prime minister of country inspected the power plant in August 2016 and talked highly of TBEA's efficiency (Putz 2018a, 30 January).
6. In the interview Imran Khan also claims that Xinjiang situation 'is nothing compared to what is happening in Kashmir' (Tepperman 2020, 22 January).
7. Other than Uyghur issue, Turkey's relations with Taiwan, trade imbalance in favour of China, and differences on some international matters like Syrian civil war also hinder the two countries to develop strategic partnership (Pan 2016).
8. Some Uyghur organizations in Turkey also complained that the government's support for the Uyghur was very little compared to what it was spending for Syrian and Palestinian refugees (Asia Times 2015, 6 July).
9. China is a signatory of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment since October 1988. In December 2015, the UN Human Rights Council observed that while China adopted internationally accepted definition of torture, it did not take any step to change the problem regarding pre-trial detention, restrictions on access to lawyers, and the shortfall in medical support independent of police and detention centres (Human Rights Watch 2015, 9 December).

# CONCLUSION

What emerges clearly from the Chinese official discourse, from the draconian measures to control entire sections of Xinjiang society, from the rapid securitization measures, and implementation of high-tech surveillance to monitor ordinary citizens across the country especially under the Xi Jinping regime is that the Chinese party-state is now determined to create an 'exemplary society' with absolute loyalty of the people, an ordered and stable society as well as uncontested, national and political security. In contrast to new dream, determination, and innovative techniques to maintain everlasting peace and stability in the new era, the Party is completely bereft of fresh ideas in dealing with some of China's long-standing problems like political dissents and right activism, ethno-national movements in Tibet and Xinjiang, movements for democratic rights in Hong Kong, and Taiwanese independence. The spurt in separatist violence and terrorism in Xinjiang in terms of frequency and intensity between 2013 and 2015 posed direct challenges to Xi Jinping's personal image as well as his ambitious plan of trans-national communication network through the BRI projects in the vast Eurasian plane. Internal security challenges in the Muslim dominated region of China were further complicated in the recent years by the phenomenon of repeated threats in other parts of the world by notorious terrorist elements such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Syria.

After carrying out series of strike-hard measures, various kinds of political coercion and repressive religious policies for over fifteen years in Xinjiang, for the first time the central leadership made some genuine efforts to examine roots of violence in Xinjiang following the 2009 Urumqi riots. Zhang Chunxian, a man with moderate image was appointed as the regional Party secretary to manage the restive Muslim minority region at the most difficult time in its history when inter-ethnic relations went to

the bottom. In order to improve situation in the region Zhang interacted with people from all walks of life on his personal capacity and explored a balance approach of governance by incorporating people-centric policy, emphasising people's livelihood and scaling down rhetoric of crushing separatism and terrorism. While continuing with the policy of fighting against extremism, violent separatism, and terrorism, Zhang delinked religion and ethnicity from extremist ideas and also underlined the need for de-extremization programs in the region. Following Xi Jinping's visit to the region in 2014 and subsequent violence, Zhang's approach to governance began to harden.

Until this time the general understanding of the Party leadership was that a secular culture characterized by urbanization, consumerism, education and communication would eventually replace religious and ethnic values of Muslim population of Xinjiang. The oft-quoted "stick and carrot" approach of the regional leadership was still applicable. The new phase of economic development and integration with outside economy under the BRI in Xinjiang is now seen as an opportunity to completely obliterate ethno-religious characters of indigenous population. Therefore, it was considered that the mission China's global integration, regional development and social transportation of minority population hinges upon the successful implementation of national and social security policies in Xinjiang.

Zhang Chunxian's unceremonious replacement from Xinjiang by Chen Quanguo in August 2016 reflected that the central leadership was no more tolerant with any kind of moderate approach in dealing with the Muslim dominated region.

Xinjiang problem has already been politicised and securitised but the present administration is now projecting it as an existential problem. A new discourse of Xinjiang problem has evolved which highlights

physical, mental, behavioural, ethical and spiritual decay of the Uyghur society and condemns extremization/ radicalization of the community as the main root of the problem in the region. In view of this the state has taken vow to cure the community in an all-round way through de-extremization (*qu jiduan hua*) programs, which is totally different from the de-radicalization programs practiced in other countries.

Chen Quanguo fully used his methods of pacifying Tibet in Xinjiang which already has long-standing base to fight terrorism and separatist violence, robust militia organization as well as grassroots social management and social monitoring mechanism. Besides various ways of seizing life of a large section of the Uyghur population in the region, within a short period of Chen's rule in the region drew attention of the international community owing to his policy of mass detention of the Uyghur and other Muslims minorities in the region.

It is understandable that the Chinese party-state will try to crush any deviation from set exemplary behaviour of its minority citizens in Xinjiang. Nonetheless what China really wants to achieve in Xinjiang by putting a huge number of people under detention remain unclear. Some commentators find resemblances between the activities in several detention centres spreading across Xinjiang and indoctrination and interrogation of common people during the Cultural Revolution period.<sup>1</sup>

The documents leaked in November reveal origin of mass detention and reversal of hard-line approach in the security offensive in a series of secret speeches of Xi Jinping during his visit to the region in 2014. In these speeches Xi instructed the Party cadres to 'unleash the tools of "dictatorship" to eradicate radical Islam in Xinjiang' (Ramzy and Buckley 2019, 16 November). It is quite evident what Xi meant was re-education and indoctrination because these two have proved to be the most deadly arsenals throughout CPC rule in China, especially during the Cultural Revolution period. Previous party secretary of the region

Zhang Chunxian possibly missed the point. According to Ramzy and Buckley's article, Chen distributed Xi Jinping's speeches to justify his policies in the region.

The secret documents suggest that the highest leadership of China considers tools of "dictatorship" are the best formula to maintain stability. And apparently Xi Jinping and Chen Quanguo are quite sure that rampant use of these tools within secured space of detention centres in the age of censored cyber culture and technologically advanced surveillance system would be least chaotic and have less negative impact on socio-economic development of Xinjiang.

Whether mass indoctrination of large number of people under detention in securitised atmosphere can de-extremize an entire community and ensure stability in ethnically divided region are what China experiments in Xinjiang. And in this process the central and local leadership have lost purpose of governing the restive minority region and ended up punishing so many innocent people just for their perceived crime of having faith on their religion, cultural preferences and particular life style. Whatever might be the achievement of the security biffed-up and development of foolproof surveillance system in the region, it is absurd to call it an efficient policy. Ineffectiveness and limitation of technologically advanced surveillance and nationwide securitization as tool to control society became prominent across China following the outbreak of Covid-19 and serious of natural calamities in 2020.

From the beginning, there have been apprehensions among the local cadres that the repressive atmosphere under Chen Quanguo could be detrimental to the economic development of the region, which might further aggravate inter-ethnic relations.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately they were proved to be right. By the middle of the year it has already been questioned within Chinese political circle whether the country can attend its 2020 *xiaokang* goal which will be even more unattainable in the repressive atmosphere in Xinjiang.

There is no doubt that China has successfully shielded itself against international criticism and the Western pressure on the issue of detention camps in Xinjiang by garnering support of 37 countries to its policy in Xinjiang in the UN in July 2019. However, leakage of official documents in November opened flood of criticism by the Western countries. In the year of global pandemic in 2020 when the central leadership engaged in suppressing the information regarding inefficient dealing of the Covid-19 outbreak and preparing to impose newly drafted national security law to shatter anti-China protests in Hong Kong, the Xinjiang authorities dedicated themselves in ‘targeted birth prevention, forced abortions, intrauterine injections and sterilizations’ while continuing with large scale detentions of Muslims in the region (Kirubakarn 2020, 25 July). These reports regarding internal developments in Xinjiang invited further criticism of racial and cultural cleansing in the region under the totalitarian rule of the present leadership in China. Xi Jinping’s personalised rule was not only denounced internationally but also faced serious challenges in the country because of inefficient handling of Covid-19 breakout in the initial stage despite strict surveillance and social credit system. This clearly shows weakness of absolute rule and absolute security, generally characterised as a symptom of surveillance state.

## ENDNOTES

1. Rian Thum, a scholar of Xinjiang history draws analogies between on-going re-education program in the region and that of the Cultural Revolution period. He further comments that the psychological effects of the experiences will have multigenerational trauma among the people ((Shih 2018, 18 May).
2. Following the culture of crushing political opponents under Xi Jinping, Chen ruthlessly punished the officials who expressed their doubts about the consequences of his policies in Xinjiang (Ramzy and Buckley 2019, 16 November).

## GLOSSARY

anquan hua	安全化	securitization
bianmin jingwu zhan	便民警务站	convenience police posts
boxuegan	剥削感	sense of exploitation
baojia	保甲	traditional communal administrative and self-defence system
dangxing	党性	party spirit
dezhi	德治	rule by virtue
danweihua guanli	单位化管理	unitised management
didui shili	敌对势力	hostile forces
dou'ou shijian	斗殴事件	brawl
fanghuiju	访惠聚	visit, benefit and consolidate
fang minqing	访民情	visiting to enquire people's living conditions
fan kongbu	反恐怖	counter-terrorism
fazhan liyi	发展利益	development interest
fazhi	法治	rule of law
fuqiang	富强	rich and powerful
ganhua	感化	corrective influence or redemption
ge minzu qianrushishi de	各民族嵌入式	mutually embedded multi-ethnic
shehui jigou	的社会机构	social structure
gongtong diren	共同敌人	common enemy
guanzhi	管制	governance
hui minsheng	惠民生	benefiting their livelihood
jiaoyu zhuanhua	教育转化	educational transformation
jiedui renqin	结队人亲	becoming family
ju minxin	聚民心	consolidating popular will
laogai	劳改	labour reform camps

liangmianpai/ren	两面派/人	two faced cliques/people
lingjuli de shouhu	零距离的守护	zero-distance patrolling
linglu	领路	taken the lead
nongmingong	农民工	migrant labour
qiangguo	强国	strong nation
qiangji huimin	强基惠民	consolidating grassroots and rendering benefits to the masses
Qing ding xianfa da gang	清定宪法大纲	Qing Imperial Constitution
Quanqu renkou jingzhun	全区人口精准登记	Regional Working Guidelines on the
dengji heshi gongzuo zhinan	合适工作指南	Accurate Registration and Verification of Population
qu jiduan hua	去极端化	de-extremisation/de-radicalisation
qunzhong luxian	群众路线	mass line
renmin zhanzheng	人民战争	people's war
renzheng	仁政	benevolent governance
san gu shili	三个实力	three evil forces
shehui chongtu	社会冲突	social conflict
shehui guanli	社会管理	social management
shehuihua fuwu	社会化服务	socialised services
shehui zhili	社会治理	social governance
shehuizhuyi rongru guan	社会主义荣辱观	glory and shame in socialism
Shuang lian hu jizhi	双联户机制	double-linked household' management system
sifeng	四风	four tendencies
sige quanmian zhanlue	四个全面战略	four comprehensives
sihua	四化	four modernization
suzhi	素质	ethical quality



tufaxing qunti maodun	突发性群体矛盾	sudden outburst of contradictions among the masses
wangluohua fugai	网络化覆盖	network coverage
weiben	维稳	stability maintenance
wuge yiti	五个一体	five-in-one
xin changtai	新常态	new normal
yi fazhi guo	依法治国	law-based governance
yirenweiben	以人为本	people-oriented
yitihua lianhe zuozhan	一体化联合作战	Integrated Joint Operation
pingtai	平台	Platform (IJOP)
yuantou zhili	源头治理	source governance
zhijiang	治疆	governing Xinjiang
zhili nengli	治理能力	ability to govern
zhili tixi	治理体系	governance system
zhinenghua	智能化	intelligentization
zhiquan	治权	right to rule
zhishifenzi	知识分子	intellectuals
zhishihua	知识化	knowledgable
Zhiye jineng jiaoyu	职业技能教育	Vocational Education and Training
peixun zhongxin	培训中心	Centre
zhizheng nengli	执政能力	ruling ability
Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi	中国特色社会主义	socialist Xinjiang with the
Xinjiang	新疆	Chinese characteristics
Zhuquan	主权	territorial sovereignty
zonghe zhili	综合治理	comprehensive governance
zongti guojia anquan guan	总体国家安全观	comprehensive national security outlook
zuhe quan	组合拳	combination punch

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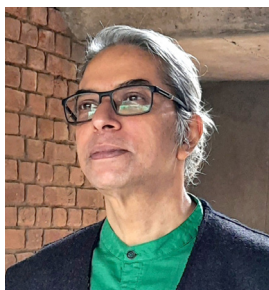
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**Dr. Debasish Chaudhuri** has been working in the field of Chinese Studies for over two decades. The thrust area of his research includes Chinese nationalism and ethnicity, regional economy and politics, ethnonational movements in Xinjiang, political dissent and ethnic literature. His major work is a book titled ***Xinjiang and the Chinese State—Violence in the Reform Era*** (2018).

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