

**Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots: Investigating the Chinese Government's
Relationship with the Uyghur Population to Determine the Potential for Terrorism and
Genocide**

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In 2017, Maisumujiang Maimuer, a Chinese religious affairs official said of the Uyghur population: “Break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins. Completely shovel up the roots of two-faced people, dig them out, and vow to fight these two-faced people until the end”¹. In late 2018, reports that claimed that China was building large amounts of compounds in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) began to surface. These reports alleged that approximately one million Uyghurs were forced into these compounds for suspected involvement in or sympathy toward demonstrations or attacks against the Chinese government. While Chinese authorities originally denied the existence of these camps, they eventually acknowledged them, but cited their reason for existence to be to train the Uyghur people to be productive in the workforce². These reports only scratch the surface in revealing the Chinese government’s attitude toward and treatment of the Uyghur people. By examining the commonly-recognized definitions of “terrorism” and “genocide,” it is clear that the Chinese government is committing both terrorism and genocide against the Uyghur people.

In order to comprehend the magnitude of the actions of the Chinese government against the Uyghur people, it is essential to understand who the Uyghur people are, as well as the history between them and the Chinese government. The Uyghur people are mainly Turkish Muslims who have lived in China for centuries. They speak their own language, which is similar to Turkish. There are currently about 12 million Uyghurs living in Xinjiang, a 1.6 million square kilometer area in Northwest China, which itself holds and interest, conflict-filled history³. Starting in 1934, Sheng Shicai, then-leader of the region, began ruling it as an extension of the Soviet Union, but under the official name of the Republic of China. A few years later, Sheng ordered a purge of intellectuals, much like Stalin’s purges in the Soviet Union. These purges in Xinjiang involved the murder of many Uyghurs and Kazakhs. In 1954, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) was founded and served as a paramilitary organization that ruled the unofficial Xinjiang region. After a period of military conflict and government turnover, in October 1955, the XUAR was formally established, replacing the former province⁴. At that time, Uyghurs made up over 70% of the population of XUAR. In 1991, after a tumultuous fifty years of flip-flopping between revolution and military state rulers, Chinese authorities arrested over seven thousand individuals for splittism and ethnic-specific crimes. Just five years after the initial mass imprisonment, Chinese authorities launched a “Strike Hard” campaign, specifically targeting religious practices and supposed anti-Communist ideas⁵. This background information is essential to keep in mind when examining the Chinese government’s recent behavior towards the Uyghur population.

The Chinese government has become increasingly hostile towards the Uyghur people in recent years, mainly because the Uyghur people claim that XUAR should be its own state with its own government, a sentiment which the Chinese government heavily disagrees with. In 2009,

¹ “‘Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots,’ China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims,” Human Rights Watch, Last Modified April 19, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>.

² Michael Dillon, “A Uighurs’ History of China,” *History Today*, January 1, 2020, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/behind-times/uighurs%E2%80%99-history-china>.

³ “Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?,” *BBC*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>.

⁴ Dr. Eric Schluessel, “Historical Overview of Events Shaping the Politics of Xinjiang - Xinjiang Documentation Project,” Xinjiang Documentation Project, n.d., <https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/timelines/historical-overview/>.

⁵ Ibid.

clashes between the Chinese government and the inhabitants of XUAR resulted in the deaths of over 200 people⁶. More recently, the Chinese government has persecuted the Uyghur people in societal and cultural ways. They have instituted strict surveillance in the region, even going so far as to monitor electricity usage and how often an individual's front door is accessed. This is done by mobile phone application. Although these acts alone are enough to call the Chinese government's actions into question, the mistreatment of Uyghurs extends far beyond strict monitoring and surveillance. In 2014, the Chinese government began a mass detention initiative against the Uyghur people. Since the start of this initiative, an estimated 800,000 to 2 million Uyghurs have been forcibly detained in internment camps⁷. Most people detained in these camps have not been formally charged with crimes, nor have they been able to utilize the justice system to challenge their detainment. One of the alleged offenses includes contacting or visiting someone from the list of twenty-six countries that China deems sensitive, such as Afghanistan or Turkey. Furthermore, the Chinese government has targeted the Uyghurs because of their Muslim faith. In 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping "issued an order saying all religions in China should be Chinese in orientation," which has caused further persecution of Uyghurs⁸. Attending a service at a mosque, sending text messages containing verses from the Quran, or having more than three children are all supposed grounds for the Chinese government to forcibly detain Uyghurs⁹.

Within the detainment camps, Uyghurs face cruel, prison-like, and inhumane conditions. Gulbahar Haitiwaji was imprisoned in a detainment camp from 2017 until 2019 and, in 2021, wrote an article detailing her experience. She wrote of violent interrogations, inhumane living conditions, and countless hours spent in small "classrooms" as Chinese authorities attempted to brainwash and indoctrinate her to support the Communist agenda. Additionally, Haitiwaji was given a vaccine that was not to prevent disease but was, in reality, sterilization. Haitiwaji's experience in the detainment camp regarding forced sterilization is not unique. A 2020 report asserted that many Uyghur women forcibly received intra-uterine devices (IUDs) that would prevent pregnancy. Other women claimed to have received vaccines that stopped their periods or caused abnormal bleeding which is typical of birth control medications¹⁰. Haitiwaji's article provides a harrowing explanation of the system of Uyghur detainment camps: "That was when I understood the method of the camps, the strategy being implemented: not to kill us in cold blood, but to make us slowly disappear. So slowly that no one would notice"¹¹.

The most notable explanation of Haitiwaji's time in the camp revolved around the Chinese government's attempt to strip her of her ethnic and religious identity:

We were ordered to deny who we were. To spit on our own traditions, our beliefs. To criticise our language. To insult our own people. Women like me, who emerged from the camps, are no longer who we once were. We are shadows; our souls are dead. I was made to believe that my loved ones, my husband and my daughter, were terrorists... They

⁶ "Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?."

⁷ Lindsay Maizland, "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," Council on Foreign Relations, September 22, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>.

⁸ "Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?."

⁹ Maizland, "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang."

¹⁰ "China forcing birth control on Uighurs to suppress population, report says," *BBC*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53220713>.

¹¹ Gulbahar Haitiwaji and Rozenn Morgat, "How I survived a Chinese 're-education' camp for Uyghurs," *The Guardian*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/12/uighur-xinjiang-re-education-camp-china-gulbahar-haitiwaji>.

managed to convince me that the sooner I owned up to my crimes, the sooner I'd be able to leave. Exhausted, I finally gave in. I had no other choice. No one can fight against themselves forever. No matter how tirelessly you battle brainwashing, it does its insidious work. All desire and passion desert you. What options do you have left? A slow, painful descent into death, or submission. If you play at submission, if you feign losing your psychological power struggle against the police, then at least, despite it all, you hang on to the shard of lucidity that reminds you who you are¹².

As evidenced by Haitiwaji's experience, China's "reeducation" facilities are in fact not what they seem, which begs the question: How do we classify the Chinese government's actions against the Uyghur people?

To properly respond to the situation in XUAR, it is important to assess what is happening. To explain the actions of the Chinese government, it is important to consult and understand commonly held and accepted definitions of problematic behavior. One such relevant behavior is that of genocide. According to Article II of "The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," the United Nations defines genocide as:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group¹³.

Additionally, the United Nations's definition of genocide includes "a mental element: the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such" by way of the previously listed actions¹⁴. This definition of genocide is widely cited as international law and is commonly held by many governments worldwide.

The next important concept to define is terrorism. The definition of terrorism is widely disputed and varies from country to country. Due to the internal nature of the conflict in XUAR, this work will utilize the definition of domestic terrorism according to The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), which defines domestic terrorism as "Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature"¹⁵. The last definition that must be examined relates to the role of the state in regards to facilitating terrorism. The United States Department of State defines a country as being a state-sponsor of terrorism if they "repeatedly provide[d] support for acts of international terrorism"¹⁶. These three definitions are essential to understand in order to accurately classify the actions of the Chinese government.

The terms and definitions listed above are incredibly important in assessing the Chinese government's actions towards the Uyghur people. The Chinese treatment of the Uyghur people

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Genocide," United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Terrorism - FBI," FBI, n.d., <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>.

¹⁶ United States Department of State, "Terrorist Designations and State Sponsors of Terrorism," United States Department of State, n.d., <https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designations-and-state-sponsors-of-terrorism/>.

falls under the United Nations's definition of genocide, specifically tenets two, three, and four. Haitiwaji's experience in the detainment camp demonstrates all three of these points: she was exposed to psychological manipulation and brainwashing, forced to live in inhumane conditions that did not allow for physical flourishing, and was forcibly sterilized. Because the Chinese government is directing these measures at the Uyghur population specifically, it can be classified as genocide. Second, the definition of domestic terrorism can be applied. The Chinese government is engaging in violent acts against the Uyghur people because their religious beliefs are perceived to threaten the Communist ideology of the Chinese government. By violently targeting these Muslims for practicing their religion, i.e. attending mosques or sending verses from the Quran, the Chinese government is engaging in terroristic actions, fueled by a Communist ideology. Finally, the question of whether the Chinese government's terrorist actions are state-sponsored can be raised. The State Department's definition of state-sponsored terrorism is specific to international terrorism, while this analysis examines domestic terrorism. However, the Chinese government has funneled over \$2.6 billion to building and maintaining Uyghur detainment facilities to further facilitate terrorism against the Uyghur population¹⁷. Though this does not fall in line with the State Department's definition of state-sponsored terrorism, government funds are used in the facilitation of terrorism, strengthening the case for deeming the Chinese government's behavior towards the Uyghur people as state-sponsored terrorism.

Now that the Chinese government's actions against the Uyghur people can be properly classified as genocide and terrorism, it is appropriate to recommend actionable steps to take to mitigate the damage done to the Uyghur people. Though fifty-one United Nations countries, including the United States, have formally condemned the Chinese government's actions, it has made no difference in China's treatment of the Uyghur people¹⁸. Therefore, countries who view this problem seriously must reevaluate business practices involving China until they cease the oppression of the Uyghurs. Specifically, the United States fashion industry must uphold its ban on cotton that is sourced from the forced labor of Uyghur people¹⁹. In an attempt to do this, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security enacted the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), which prohibits the "importation of goods made wholly or in part with forced labor into the United States and to end the systematic use of forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region"²⁰. On March 23, 2023, the House Select Committee held a hearing to discuss the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) continued genocide of the Uyghur people in regard to the fast fashion industry. Known for keeping up with fashion trends but sporting affordable prices, Temu and Shein are two brands that have gained popularity in recent years. This hearing divulged troubling findings about the involvement of forced labor in goods shipped to the United States. First, the Select Committee found that "Temu and Shein alone are likely responsible for more than 30% of all packages shipped to the United States daily under the de

¹⁷ "Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?."

¹⁸ Louis Charbonneau, "UN Member Countries Condemn China's Crimes Against Humanity," Human Rights Watch, October 23, 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/23/un-member-countries-condemn-chinas-crimes-against-humanity>

¹⁹ Fleur Britten, "US Ban on cotton from forced Uyghur labour comes into force," *The Guardian*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/21/us-ban-on-cotton-from-forced-uyghur-labour-comes-into-force>.

²⁰ United States Department of Homeland Security, *UFLPA Strategy*, (Washington, D.C., June 2023), <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/fast-fashion-and-the-uyghur-genocide-interim-findings.pdf>

de minimis provision, and likely nearly half of all de minimis shipments to the U.S. from China”²¹. The de minimis exception allows entry of products free of duty, as long as the retail value of the product is not greater than \$800. The U.S.’s de minimis threshold is more than double that of any other country²². Under this de minimis rule, Temu and Shein account for nearly 600,000 packages sent to the United States daily. Annually, that is an estimated 210 million packages that are sent to the United States that are not subject to import duties²³. On a practical level, there are an estimated 210 million packages entering the United States annually, which Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) is unable to access data on, limiting their ability to conduct risk assessment and mitigate potential threats. This technically legal, but highly suspicious practice gives insight into both Temu and Shein’s business model and practices. Specifically, the House Select Committee found that:

Temu conducts no audits and reports no compliance system to affirmatively examine and ensure compliance with the UFLPA. The only measure Temu reported that it takes to ensure that it is not shipping goods to Americans that are produced with forced labor in violation of U.S. law was that its supplier agree to boilerplate terms and conditions that prohibit the use of forced labor²⁴.

Additionally, Temu, when questioned about what measures were in place in its business practices to ensure compliance with the UFLPA, answered that, “Because Temu is not the importer of record with respect to goods shipped to the United States, [the UFLPA] and the prohibitions do not apply directly to Temu’s activities as an online platform operator”²⁵. Temu’s lackadaisical attitude towards compliance is evident in their lack of enforcement of regulatory compliance issues. The only measure that Temu imposed is a requirement that “its sellers agree with its website’s ‘Third Party Code of Conduct,’ which includes boilerplate language that the company has ‘a zero-tolerance policy’ for the use of forced... or penal labor”²⁶. This dubious policy relies on the self-reporting of Temu partners. In addition, there is no way for American consumers to determine if a product they purchased involved forced labor. On May 31, 2023, Temu featured a product labeled “New Handmade Knitted Cotton Pendant with Xinjiang Cotton”²⁷. Since the cotton industry in Xinjiang is part and parcel of forced labor of the Uyghur people, it is clear that Temu’s business practices are unethical. Though this investigation is only in its beginning stages, it is obvious that there is a correlation between China’s fast fashion industry brands and the use of forced labor. Because of this, it is imperative that the United States lower the threshold for de minimis products. Doing so would promote transparency, accountability, and risk management for parcels imported to the United States. Additionally, a lower de minimis threshold would require fast fashion brands like Temu to pay taxes on imported goods. The United States’s de minimis threshold is disproportionately high when compared to other countries and should be lowered as a first step to addressing the issue of forced labor in XUAR.

²¹ United States Congress, House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, *Fast Fashion and the Uyghur Genocide: Interim Findings*, (Washington, D.C., 2023), <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/fast-fashion-and-the-uyghur-genocide-interim-findings.pdf>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Fast Fashion and the Uyghur Genocide: Interim Findings*

²⁷ Ibid.

Also concerning is China's prominent position on the world stage. On a daily basis, China is gaining power and influence and has quickly strengthened its position as a global superpower that rivals the United States. The Chinese government very obviously supports, promotes, and executes communist ideals, an assertion that is supported by examining China's current treatment of the Uyghur people. These Chinese policies and behaviors can be explained and categorized by the term "unrestricted warfare." Unrestricted warfare blurs the lines between war and non-war and between military and non-military affairs, which allows any situation or geographical location to be seen and used as a battlefield²⁸. It is obvious that China's foreign policy is one that seeks global hegemony and world domination. If China continues to strengthen their power and prominence on the world stage, it may not be long before other minority groups are subject to the same treatment as the Uyghurs in XUAR.

The current state of XUAR is disturbing on a fundamental human rights level. However, these atrocities are even more disturbing when examined from a Biblical worldview. The Bible states that man is created in the Image of God (*Imago Dei*) (Genesis 1:27, English Standard Version). That foundational belief about man's identity allows for an argument regarding a case for human dignity. Because every human being is created in the Image of God, each one is assigned value, dignity, and significance²⁹. This groundwork for human dignity is also the rationale behind what Matthew 22:36-40 asserts is the "[second] great commandment of the Law... [to] love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40). If a Christian believes that each human being, regardless of faith, ethnicity, gender, or geographical location, is made in the Image of God and is therefore crowned with glory and honor, the Christian cannot turn a blind eye to instances of genocide and terrorism (Psalm 8:5b). Refusing to support brands that strip human beings of their dignity is a practical step individuals can take to make a tangible difference in this situation. Additionally, though China is a growing world superpower, the Chinese government is not untouchable, and should not be treated as though it is. As a step in the right direction, in 2021, the United States formally declared that the Chinese government's treatment of the Uyghur population is genocide³⁰. Following this declaration, it is time for the United States government to craft policies that appropriately address the actions of the Chinese government. One such policy would be lowering the de minimis threshold to establish accountability with brands like Temu and Shein. Additionally, the United States holds weak foreign policy in regard to limiting China's ability to grow as a global superpower. Beyond reevaluating trade policies, the United States needs to develop policies that restore emphasis on putting US interests first, instead of catering to China, essentially handing them power and influence on a silver platter.

Based on the examination of the Chinese government's behavior coupled with clear definitions of state-sponsored activity, terrorism, and genocide, it is glaringly obvious that China is committing both terrorism and genocide against the Uyghur population. Because of these findings, it is imperative that the United States creates policies that restrict the importation of goods manufactured with forced Uyghur labor. Additionally, the United States must reevaluate its foreign policy to limit the amount of power and influence China holds on the global stage, as

²⁸ Tony Cothron, "China" (Lecture from GOVT 484 at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, February, 2024).

²⁹ R.C. Sproul, *Now That's a Good Question*, (Tyndale, 1996) "What is the Biblical Basis for Human Dignity?" taken from *Now That's a Good Question* (1996), Ligonier Ministries, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/qas/what-biblical-basis-human-dignity>

³⁰ Simone McCarthy, "US condemns China's reported life sentence of acclaimed Uyghur scholar," *CNN*, October 2, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/02/china/rahile-dawut-uyghur-academic-china-life-sentence-intl-hnk/index.html>.

China is quickly rivaling the US. On an individual level, an informed consumer truly is the best consumer. Individuals would do well to research where brands source materials from, to ensure that forced Uyghur labor is not being used in the creation of desired products. These measures alone will not stop the genocide of the Uyghur people, but they serve as a starting point to elicit meaningful, long-lasting change. As Christians, we are called to “love [our] neighbors as [ourselves]” which we are incapable of doing if we turn a blind eye to the blatant suffering of our fellow Imagebearers (Matthew 22:36-40).

Due to the repetition of atrocities throughout history, it is incredibly urgent that this behavior is recognized, reprimanded, and remedied so the lineage and roots of the Uyghur people are not broken, but are given the chance to grow and thrive.

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