



Spending Ethically for Justice: A Muslim Response to the Uyghur Genocide

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Abstract

This paper is focused on highlighting the situation in occupied East Turkistan, explaining the persecution faced by the Uyghurs and other Muslim Turkic groups, and why it can legitimately be described as a genocide. Building on this, through scriptural analysis of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the paper argues that in the face of such injustice, it is incumbent on every Muslim to change their consumption habits to ensure they are not spending their *rizq* (sustenance) on perpetuating the suffering of Uyghurs and other Turkic people. Specifically, I show that social justice is at the heart of the Muslim faith, and that it is contrary to Islamic teaching to appraise the value of social action through its measure of effectiveness in this *dunya* (world) alone.

I. Introduction

This article discusses the Chinese genocide of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim people currently taking place in East Turkistan, and sets out, through scriptural analysis of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Prophetic tradition as recorded in hadith), the Islamic imperative for social action, and what some of these actions might be in this specific context. Far from resigning to a defeatist mindset in the face of a Goliath where individual action might appear inconsequential, this paper re-affirms the Islamic imperative for Muslims to understand their actions as part of a broader spiritual framework rather than assessing action simply through a worldly consequentialist lens.

The paper is structured in four parts. First, a brief background is provided to contextualize the conflict in East Turkistan. This includes a socio-demographic description of the region, as well as an outline of the economic, political, and geographic benefits the territory offers. Second, I discuss the evidence of China's treatment of the Uyghurs and other Muslim Turkic people. Third, I explain why that treatment can indeed be qualified as genocide. Finally, before concluding, I highlight the centrality of social justice in Islam, and how this core tenet enjoins on

Muslims an obligation to ensure their actions are geared towards alleviating injustice and abstaining from perpetuating the suffering of others, including through their consumption choices.

II. Background

a. Occupied East Turkistan

In the 19th century, the Qing dynasty conquered East Turkistan and renamed it Xinjiang, which translates as ‘new territory’ or ‘new frontier.’ Since 1955, this area has been officially referred to as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. However, East Turkistan remains the preferred name among the region’s Turkic inhabitants,¹ and, thus, in line with identifying people through their “mode of being” not their “mode of oppression,”² this is the term adopted in this paper. Indeed, it was only in 1949, under Mao Zedong, after short-lived bouts of independence as the Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkistan (1933-1934) and the East Turkistan Republic (1944-1949),³ that the People’s Republic of China officially annexed East Turkistan. Therefore, much like the Palestinians since 1948, the East Turkic people have been under occupation since 1949. This is an important historical fact because it undermines China’s narrative that Uyghurs are simply a ‘Muslim minority’ in Chinese territory, rather than an occupied group. It, therefore, challenges the “myth that animates Chinese nationalism” that China is a victim of colonialism,⁴ rather than also being its propagator, which the Tibetan case further underscores. In doing so, it highlights the problematic nature of describing the ethnic tensions in East

¹ Wang Lixiong, *Wo de Xiyu, ni de Dongtu (My West China, Your East Turkestan)* (Taipei: Lotus Publishing, 2007); Wang Lixiong, “Excerpts from My West China, Your East Turkestan: My View on the Kunming Incident,” China Change, March 3, 2014, <https://chinachange.org/2014/03/03/excerpts-from-my-west-china-your-east-turkestan-my-view-on-the-kunming-incident/>.

² Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 104.

³ Rémi Castets, “The Uyghurs in Xinjiang: The Malaise Grows,” China Perspectives, September-October 2003, <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinapersonpectives.648>.

⁴ Dibyesh Anand, “Colonization with Chinese Characteristics: Politics of (In)Security in Xinjiang and Tibet,” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 129–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1534801>.

Turkistan as an issue of “internal colonialism” rather than a situation “resulting from contemporary colonization.”⁵

East Turkistan boasts an ethnically diverse population, constituted of 13 ethnic groups, of which the Uyghurs, Hans (Chinese majority ethnic group), and Kazakhs are the largest in number.⁶ Hui, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Tajiks comprise some of the smaller populations. According to official Chinese data—which are disputed by the World Uyghur Congress⁷—of the 21.82 million population in 2010, 10.00 million are Uyghur, 8.83 million are Han Chinese, 1.42 million are Kazakh, and around 1.00 million are Hui.⁸

Turkic people identify as Central Asian, and are both culturally and religiously closer to other Central Asian ethnic groups than to Han Chinese. Their language is more similar to Turkish than it is to Mandarin, and the large majority of Turkic people identify as Muslim in stark contrast to the majority of Chinese people who have no religious affiliation.⁹ That said, although the majority of Uyghurs are adherents of Islam, there are a relatively small proportion of Uyghurs of other religions and no faith. Understanding this distinction is important to appreciate the mechanisms at play. Specifically, China’s motive for its genocidal campaign in East Turkistan is to get rid of Islam and Muslim identity under the guise of combatting ‘religious extremism,’ but also to perpetuate China’s territorial occupation by persecuting non-Muslim Turkic people too. Before discussing the evidence that indicates a genocide is indeed taking place, the next section outlines

⁵ Anand, “Colonization with Chinese Characteristics,” 131.

⁶ Amy H. Liu and Kevin Peters, “The Hanification of Xinjiang, China: The Economic Effects of the Great Leap West,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17, no. 2 (2017): 265–80, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12233>.

⁷ For details, see the World Uyghur Congress website. Available at <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/east-turkestan-2/>.

⁸ Stanley Toops, “Spatial Results of the 2010 Census in Xinjiang,” University of Nottingham’s Asia Research Institute, March 7, 2016, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2016/03/07/spatial-results-of-the-2010-census-in-xinjiang/>.

⁹ Pew Research Centre, “Religion in China on the Eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics,” May 2, 2008, <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/05/01/religion-in-china-on-the-eve-of-the-2008-beijing-olympics/>. This does not deny China’s own native Muslim history dating back to the seventh century, with the first mosques constructed in China’s eastern coastal area, namely in Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, and Yangzhou. For details, see Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, “China’s Earliest Mosques,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, no. 3 (2008): 330–61.

the strategic advantages driving Beijing's appetite for hegemony over East Turkistan.

b. East Turkistan: A prized asset

There are several reasons why China benefits from maintaining control over East Turkistan. First, it is an area that is rich in natural resources. The region boasts “the largest reserves of oil, natural gas and coal” in China representing 30%, 34%, and 40% of the country's total, respectively.¹⁰ With Beijing looking to reduce reliance on imports and establish energy security, dominance over East Turkistan offers clear benefits. In fact, reports suggest that “Chinese companies extract 15 percent of its [China's] oil output and almost 25 percent of its natural gas in Xinjiang.”¹¹ The region is also “China's largest growing base of cotton, lavender, and hop.”¹² In 2019, East Turkistan accounted for a fifth of the world's cotton and 85% of China's total production.¹³ Second, East Turkistan also offers Beijing sizable land mass making it “a major area for raising sheep and cattle and fine-wool production.”¹⁴ At three times the size of France,¹⁵ for the most populous country on earth, the region offers important food security advantages. Third, East Turkistan borders eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Its geographic location therefore offers important trade links with Asia and Europe, vital for the success of China's gargantuan Belt and Road initiative.

Announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, this initiative seeks to revive the Silk Road trade network and vastly expand China's economic and political influence on the

¹⁰ HKTDC (Hong Kong Trade Development Council), “Xinjiang: Market Profile,” July 15, 2021, <https://research.hktdc.com/en/data-and-profiles/mcpc/provinces/xinjiang>.

¹¹ Rémi Castets, “What's Really Happening to Uighurs in Xinjiang?” *Nation*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/china-xinjiang-uyghur-oppression/>.

¹² Liu and Peters, “The Hanification of Xinjiang, China,” 268.

¹³ Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor in Xinjiang: Labor Transfer and the Mobilization of Ethnic Minorities to Pick Cotton,” Centre for Global Policy, 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/china/coercive-labor-in-xinjiang-labor-transfer-and-the-mobilization-of-ethnic-minorities-to-pick-cotton/>.

¹⁴ Liu and Peters, “The Hanification of Xinjiang, China,” 268.

¹⁵ Castets, “What's Really Happening?”

world stage. The strategy plans to cover two-thirds of the world's population and account for a third of global GDP.¹⁶ To achieve its objective, China plans to build six economic corridors (see Figure 1). East Turkistan plays a vital role in the success of three of these. First, the *China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor*, which will be mainly focused on the transfer of natural resources, relies on Urumqi (the region's capital) as a key hub linking the corridor all the way to Turkey through Iran and Iraq.¹⁷ It also hosts vital gas pipelines covering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.¹⁸ Second, the *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor* that starts in East Turkistan and stretches for 3,000 km to Gwadar port in Pakistan offers China access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, "a vital route for oil transportation between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Another advantage to China is that it will be able to bypass the Strait of Malacca. As of now, 60 percent of China's imported oil comes from the Middle East, and 80 percent of that is transported to China through this strait, the dangerous, piracy-rife maritime route through the South China, East China, and Yellow Seas."¹⁹ The third, the *New Eurasian Land Bridge*, seeks to link China with Europe via rail, starting in Lianyungang and reaching Rotterdam.²⁰ This rail land link will reduce the cost of transporting goods relative to air freight, and reduce the time of delivery relative to maritime transportation. The Lanxin (Lanzhou-Xinjiang) high-speed railway which links East Turkistan, through Urumqi, to central China (Lanzhou in Gansu) is an integral part of this corridor.²¹

¹⁶ EIU (The Economist Intelligence Unit), "Prospects and Challenges on China's 'One Belt, One Road': A Risk Assessment Report," The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2015, https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=OneBeltOneRoad.

¹⁷ Ben Derudder, Xingjian Liu, and Charles Kunaka, "Connectivity Along Overland Corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative," MTI Discussion Paper no. 6, October 2018, The World Bank, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/264651538637972468/pdf/Connectivity-Along-Overland-Corridors-of-the-Belt-and-Road-Initiative.pdf>.

¹⁸ Simon Pirani, "Central Asian Gas: Prospects for the 2020s," The Oxford Institute For Energy Studies, 2019, <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Central-Asian-Gas-NG-155.pdf>.

¹⁹ Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "A Strategic Seaport: Is Pakistan Key to China's Energy Supremacy?," *Foreign Affairs*, March 5, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-03-05/strategic-seaport>.

²⁰ Derudder, Liu, and Kunaka, "Connectivity Along Overland Corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative."

²¹ Hou Qiang, "Lanxin High-Speed Railway Serves for Belt and Road Initiative," Xinhuanet, September 5, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/09/c_136268502.htm.

Understanding the economic heft (and associated political clout) that China carries can shed light on why 50 countries—in response to a letter (A/HRC/41/G/11²²) to the President of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in July 2019, endorsed by 22 mostly ‘Western’ countries raising concerns about the treatment of Uyghurs—signed a letter in support of China. Importantly, not only does the first letter not include a signature from a single Muslim-majority country, the second letter, in defense of China, includes many, such as Algeria, Pakistan, Iran, the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.²³ Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia stand out as notable exceptions, as does Qatar which withdrew its support after initially signing. New Zealand is also not immune from Beijing’s pressure as Jacinda Ardern’s Labour Party refused to debate a parliamentary motion that described China’s actions in East Turkistan as genocide.²⁴ The next section discusses the evidence of human rights abuses targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities alluded to in the first letter.

Figure 1. The Six Economic Corridors Straddling Asia, Europe and Africa ²⁵

²² The official letter can be accessed in Arabic, Mandarin, English, French, Russian, and Spanish at <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F41%2FG%2F11&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop>.

²³ Catherine Putz, “Which Countries Are For or Against China’s Xinjiang Policies?,” *Diplomat*, July 15, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>

²⁴ Tess McClure, “New Zealand Draws Back from Calling Chinese Abuses of Uyghurs Genocide,” *Guardian*, May, 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/new-zealand-draws-back-from-calling-chinese-abuses-of-uyghurs-genocide>

²⁵ HKTDC (Hong Kong Trade Development Council), “An Overview of Central Asian Markets on the Silk Road Economic Belt,” November 19, 2015, <https://beltandroad.hktadc.com/en/insights/overview-central-asian-markets-silk-road-economic-belt>.



Source: HKTDC (2015)

III. China's treatment of the Uyghurs and other Turkic people: A look at the evidence

In December 2018, Scott Busby, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor at the US Department of State, estimated based on “intelligence community and open source reporting” that “[s]ince April 2017, Chinese authorities have detained at least 800,000, and possibly more than 2 million, Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minorities in internment camps for indefinite periods of time” in East Turkistan.”²⁶ Distinguishing between “those imprisoned and those who are attending part-time

²⁶ Scott Busby, “Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Scott Busby,” Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy, December 4, 2018, 18, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418_Busby_Testimony.pdf.

‘re-education’ programs,” a more accurate estimate puts the number of interned people at 1.5 million in 2019.²⁷

An official 137-page leaked Chinese government document (known as the Karakax List)²⁸ shows that they are detained and interned in these camps for ‘crimes’ which include; (i) having worn ‘a veil many years ago,’ (ii) having grown ‘a long beard years ago,’²⁹ (iii) because ‘wife wore a veil,’ (iv) having relatives abroad, or (v) for having ‘applied for a passport but never left.’ Another reason is simply for being categorized as ‘untrustworthy.’ Zenz defines the latter as “a general category of suspicion that is hard to grasp. It represents persons whom the state feels cannot be as easily understood or controlled as it wants them to be.”³⁰ Other signs taken as indicative of ‘religious extremism’ in the literature include “praying regularly; inviting too many people to one’s wedding... reciting an Islamic verse at a funeral; washing bodies according to Islamic custom... teaching the Qur’an to one’s children; asking an imam to name one’s children; attending the mosque regularly; studying or teaching ‘unauthorized’ forms of Islam; praying at a mosque other than on a Friday... making the pilgrimage to Mecca.”³¹

²⁷ For a detailed explanation of how the estimated number of interned people are deduced, see Patrick deHahn, “More than 1 Million Muslims Are Detained in China—But How Did We Get That Number?,” *Quartz*, July 4, 2019, <https://qz.com/1599393/how-researchers-estimate-1-million-uyghurs-are-detained-in-xinjiang/>.

²⁸ For the Chinese redacted version (first 12 rows only), see https://www.jpolrisk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PDF_Ch_3pg_fully-redacted.pdf. For the English redacted version (first 12 rows only), see <https://www.jpolrisk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Karakax-List-English-rows-1-12-redacted.pdf>

²⁹ Adrian Zenz, “The Karakax List: Dissecting the Anatomy of Beijing’s Internment Drive in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk* 8, no. 2 (2020): 21, https://www.jpolrisk.com/karakax/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=e62e77ca434b3e61ea3dd7cdab0ad611ecb0430f-1582057337-0-Af7pJpRINQuB9WsvlgadP5uL0JpD0x5ZDOFVUES8UMk8-S3JVV4c85B1EkC_tY2INie3K5WUUtXsxtYxDL4siEr2xOOQbOo2khBhz99xU04xARkwOsrej5BOKan8F_k1izJN1IH_wke0m9ipOTqktOpWqDNJY2B5Atk9XV1Eq0FKZMwSvxpZeYMHXs3ta1aChnH48diXRGisBgAE9wnhNrRUbz14SHdGDutHR7JoXY-SCqr-sDD6yzB4sveKYnAjD1NWCjnzXSOHeMMJx0CwsUFAiAMSOhwntbP-9iXmXDS_F#_ftn2.

³⁰ Zenz, “The Karakax List,” 17.

³¹ Joanne Smith Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-Terrorism Evolved into State Terror?” *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1586348>; China Law Translate, “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-Extremification,” March 30, 2017, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/>; Michael Clarke, “Colonialism and Cultural Erasure in Xinjiang,” The Lowy Institute, September 25, 2020, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/colonialism-and-cultural-erasure-xinjiang>.

For the Uyghurs and other Turkic people interned, evidence shows that the Chinese state has subjected them to forced labor, which multinational companies like Amazon and Apple benefit from.³² In 2018, 570 000 individuals were also forcibly sent to pick cotton.³³ There is also substantial evidence of a state campaign to forcibly sterilize women in the most populous Uyghur regions, and reports of detained women being “given unknown drugs and injections that caused irregular bleeding and a loss of menstruation cycles.”³⁴ In addition, there are also charges of “torture and inhuman treatment of detainees, the forced separation of children from their parents, the denial of the right to practice their religion or speak their language... forced organ harvesting, enforced disappearances and killings in detention.”³⁵

More recently, an investigation by the BBC reported Uyghur detainees describing “systematic rape” inside these camps.³⁶ In a BBC video report, Gulzira Auelkhan tells how she was ordered to “remove their [Uyghur women’s] clothes and handcuff them to their beds so they cannot move” so that Han men could rape them.³⁷ Below is an account from one of the survivors:

³² Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, and Nathan Ruser, “Uyghurs for Sale Report,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>.

³³ Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor in Xinjiang: Labor Transfer and the Mobilization of Ethnic Minorities to Pick Cotton,” Centre for Global Policy, 2020b, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/china/coercive-labor-in-xinjiang-labor-transfer-and-the-mobilization-of-ethnic-minorities-to-pick-cotton/>; see also John Sudworth, “China’s ‘Tainted’ Cotton,” BBC, December 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/nz0g306v8c/china-tainted-cotton>. For the video report, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t28nnviKar4Sudworth2020>.

³⁴ Adrian Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP’s Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang,” The Jamestown Foundation, June 2020, updated March 17, 2021, 1, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-REVISED-March-17-2021.pdf?x22698>.

³⁵ BHRC (Bar Human Rights Committee), “Responsibility of States under International Law to Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, China,” briefing paper, 2020, 7, https://www.barhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-Responsibility-of-States-to-Uyghurs_Final.pdf; see also Matthew P. Robertson, “Organ Procurement and Extrajudicial Execution in China: A Review of the Evidence,” Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, 2020, 36–41, https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/OrganProcurementandExtrajudicialExecutioninChina_VOC2020.pdf.

³⁶ Matthew Hill, David Campanale, and Joel Gunter, “‘Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone’: Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape,” BBC, February 2, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-55794071>.

³⁷ BBC, “China’s Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape,” February 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6bPGI10Cts>.

“They don't only rape but also bite all over your body, you don't know if they are human or animal”

“They didn't spare any part of the body, they bit everywhere leaving horrible marks. It was disgusting to look at.”

“I've experienced that three times. And it is not just one person who torments you, not just one predator. Each time they were two or three men.”³⁸

Outside these internment camps, the Muslim-majority ethnic minority are under mass surveillance by the Chinese state who use mobile apps, and AI facial recognition technology developed by start-ups and multinationals like Huawei, that can track down Turkic people and “send a ‘Uighur alarm’ to police if it detected a member of the minority group.”³⁹ This campaign of extreme surveillance and “extrajudicial internment and compulsory indoctrination of Muslims” has been confirmed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists after their investigation into classified Chinese government documents leaked in November 2019 (China Cables).⁴⁰

The Chinese state's campaign of community-wide surveillance is not limited to public spaces. As part of the state's strategy of ‘Terror Capitalism’ in colonized East Turkistan, it has recruited “more than a million Chinese civilians (most members of the Han ethnic majority) to aid the military and police in their campaign by occupying the homes of the region's Uighurs and other Muslim minorities.”⁴¹ China posits that this ‘Become Family’ program, dating back to

³⁸ Hill, Campanale, and Gunter, “Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone.”

³⁹ Paul Mozur, “One Month, 500,000 Face Scans: How China Is Using A.I. to Profile a Minority,” *New York Times*, April, 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html>; Eva Dou and Drew Harwell, “Huawei Worked on Several Surveillance Systems Promoted to Identify Ethnicity, Documents Show,” *Washington Post*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/12/12/huawei-uyghurs-identify/>.

⁴⁰ For details, see Fergus Shiel, “About the China Cables Investigation,” International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 23, 2019, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/about-the-china-cables-investigation/>.

⁴¹ Darren Byler, *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City* (United States: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2021); Darren Byler, “China's Nightmare Homestay,” *Foreign Policy*, October 26, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/26/china-nightmare-homestay-xinjiang-uyghur-monitor/>.

2014, is a way to identify ‘religious extremism,’ signs of which are whether Uyghurs greet relatives and friends with the popular Muslim greeting, *salām ‘alaykum* (peace be upon you), and whether they have a copy of the Qur’an in their house.⁴²

Alongside the increased militarization of East Turkistan, making it “one of the most heavily policed areas in the world,”⁴³ this campaign of “state terror,” as Finley puts it, is manifested by “demographic securitization (accelerated Han in-migration, ethnic displacement), linguistic securitization (imposition of Chinese-medium education) and religious securitization (repression of Islamic practices).”⁴⁴ To comprehend the process of ‘demographic securitization,’ consider that in 1949, Hans (China’s majority ethnic group) and Uyghurs accounted for 7% and 75% of the overall regional population, respectively. As of the 2010 Census, the proportions stood at 40% and 46% respectively.⁴⁵ The state’s sponsored policy of Han migration to East Turkistan, through the Production and Construction Corps since the 1990s,⁴⁶ as a means of accomplishing the Sinification of the region and extracting local natural resources shape what Adrian Zenz calls a policy of “Han settler colonialism.”⁴⁷ While it has been argued that the Hans in East Turkistan should not be viewed as a homogenous group or simply as an extension of the state-apparatus,⁴⁸ the evidence shows that they, on the whole, benefit disproportionately from the wealth generated in the region while Uyghurs suffer racism and discrimination on account of their ethnicity.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, ‘linguistic securitization’ is enshrined in government policy that has banned the instruction of ethnic minority languages in, at minimum, schools in Yining city and Hotan prefecture (in East Turkistan) since 2017 and mandated that “Mandarin Chinese

⁴² Byler, “China’s Nightmare Homestay.”

⁴³ Philip Wen, Olzhas Auyezov, Thomas Peter, Christian Inton, and Simon Scarr, “Tracking China’s Muslim Gulag,” Reuters, November 29, 2018, <https://graphics.reuters.com/MUSLIMS-CAMPS-CHINA/010081G52NH/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict,” 2.

⁴⁵ Liu and Peters, “The Hanification of Xinjiang, China,” 268.

⁴⁶ James D. Seymour, “Xinjiang’s Production and Construction Corps, and the Sinification of Eastern Turkestan,” *Inner Asia* 2, no. 2 (2000): 171–93, <https://doi.org/10.1163/146481700793647805>.

⁴⁷ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control,” 3.

⁴⁸ Agnieszka Joniak-Lüthi, “Han Migration to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Between State Schemes and Migrants’ Strategies,” *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 138, no. 2 (2013): 155–74.

⁴⁹ Castets, “What’s Really Happening?”

‘must be resolutely and fully implemented’ for the three years of preschool, and ‘promoted’ from the first years of elementary and middle school.”⁵⁰ Finally, ‘religious securitization’ can be understood as the repression Muslims face in not being allowed: (i) to name their newborns Muslim names like Muhammed;⁵¹ (ii) to travel to perform pilgrimage freely and requiring them “to prove that they are patriotic and law-abiding before they are allowed to undertake the hajj”;⁵² (iii) to fast or pray during Ramadan (monitored by the Han ‘relative’ living in their home).⁵³ Muslims are also forced to eat pork and sell cigarettes and alcohol in their restaurants and shops (products Islam prohibits consumption of and profit from).⁵⁴ Meanwhile, bar the elderly, men are prohibited from growing beards, and women from wearing the veil, and people are encouraged to report women who wear a face covering to the police.⁵⁵ Estimates based on satellite imagery show that since 2017, 65% of mosques “have been destroyed or damaged as a result of government policies” and “30% of important Islamic sacred sites (shrines, cemeteries and pilgrimage routes, including many protected under Chinese law) have been demolished.”⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Joshua Lipes, “China Bans Uyghur Language in Schools in Key Xinjiang Prefecture,” Radio Free Asia, July 28, 2017, updated August 4, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/language-07282017143037.html>; see also Liusetta Mudie, “China Bans Use of Uyghur, Kazakh Textbooks, Materials in Xinjiang Schools,” Radio Free Asia, October 13, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/ethnic-textbooks-10132017135316.html>.

⁵¹ S. Richardson, “China Bans Many Muslim Baby Names in Xinjiang,” Human Rights Watch, April 24, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/25/china-bans-many-muslim-baby-names-xinjiang>.

⁵² IOHR (International Observatory Human Rights), “China Bans Private Hajj Pilgrimages in Latest Move to Suppress Its Muslim Population,” October 14, 2020, <https://observatoryihr.org/news/china-bans-private-hajj-pilgrimages-in-latest-move-to-suppress-its-muslim-population/>.

⁵³ Amnesty International, “‘Forgive My Children for Not Fasting’: Ramadan in Xinjiang,” May 3, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/05/forgive-my-children-ramadan-in-xinjiang/>; Al Jazeera, “China Bans Muslims from Fasting Ramadan in Xinjiang,” June 18, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/6/18/china-bans-muslims-from-fasting-ramadan-in-xinjiang>.

⁵⁴ T. Regencia, “Uighurs Forced to Eat Pork as China Expands Xinjiang Pig Farms,” Al Jazeera, December 4, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/4/holduighurs-forced-to-eat-pork-as-hog-farming-in-xinjiang-expands>; Simon Denyer, “China Orders Muslim Shopkeepers to Sell Alcohol, Cigarettes, to ‘Weaken’ Islam,” *Washington Post*, May 5, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/05/05/china-orders-muslim-shopkeepers-to-sell-alcohol-cigarettes-to-weaken-islam/>.

⁵⁵ BBC, “China Uighurs: Xinjiang Ban on Long Beards and Veils,” April 1, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-39460538>.

⁵⁶ Nathan Ruser, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, and Tilla Hoja, “Cultural Erasure: Tracing the destruction of Uyghur and Islamic spaces in Xinjiang,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Policy Brief Report no. 38, 2020, 3,

China justifies its approach in East Turkistan in terms of counter-terrorism and fighting Uyghur separatists,⁵⁷ particularly in response to the 2009 Urumqi riots that left 197 people dead (which Chinese officials list as mostly Han),⁵⁸ the Tiananmen square car attack in October 2013 that left five people dead,⁵⁹ the March 2014 knife attack that killed 31 people and injured 141,⁶⁰ and a knife attack that left eight people dead in February 2017.⁶¹ However, the application of a community-wide punishment, enshrined in the state's 'Strike Hard Against Terrorism' policy in 2014 makes this campaign a racist and Islamophobic government-led effort. Moreover, labelling them as violent separatists conveniently ignores the fact that Uyghurs, like Tibetans, are an occupied people who have sustained decades of violent and repressive campaigns by the Chinese government trying to forcibly assimilate them and eradicate their ethnic identity, faith, culture, and way of life.⁶²

IV. But is it really 'genocide'?

a. China breaching the Genocide Convention

Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) (UN General Assembly 1948), to which China is party, states that:

<https://www.aspi.org.au/report/cultural-erasure>; see also The Xinjiang Data Project, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2020, <https://xjdp.aspi.org.au/>.

⁵⁷ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici, "Understanding China's 'Preventive Repression' in Xinjiang," Brookings, March 2, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/04/understanding-chinas-preventive-repression-in-xinjiang/>.

⁵⁸ Max Duncan, "China Says Police Shot Dead 12 Uighurs this Month," Reuters, July 18, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang/china-says-police-shot-dead-12-uighurs-this-month-idUSTRE56H1LN20090718>.

⁵⁹ Reuters, "Five Killed as Car Ploughs into Crowd in Beijing's Tiananmen Square," October 28, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-tiananmen-idUSBRE99R05F20131028>.

⁶⁰ BBC, "Four Sentenced in China over Kunming Station Attack," September 12, 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-29170238>.

⁶¹ BBC, "China Uighurs."

⁶² Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," September 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiang> S.

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

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁶³

Based on the evidence discussed above, including leaked government documents, it is apparent that each of these five conditions is met, some to a greater extent than others. In fact, in March 2021, an independent report published by the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, produced by academics and experts in international law, genocide studies, and Chinese ethnic studies concluded, “the People’s Republic of China (China) bears State responsibility for committing genocide against the Uyghurs in breach of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention) based on an extensive review of the available evidence and application of international law to the evidence of the facts on the ground.”⁶⁴ The team reached their conclusion after reviewing more evidence than there is scope to discuss in this paper, including “evidence that could be collected and verified from public Chinese State communications, leaked Chinese State communications, eye-witness testimony, and open-source research methods such as public satellite-image analysis, analysis

⁶³ UN General Assembly, “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” United Nations, Treaty Series, no. 78, December 9, 1948, 1–4, [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf).

⁶⁴ Newlines Institute For Strategy and Policy, “The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention,” 2021, 3, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3-2.pdf>.

of information circulating on the Chinese internet, and any other available source.”

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The same month, four barristers at Essex Court Chambers, a UK-based law barristers chambers, in their legal opinion written after receiving instructions from the World Uyghur Congress and Global Legal Action Network, concluded that “there is a very credible case that acts carried out by the Chinese government against the Uyghur people in XUAR [Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region] amount to crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide.”⁶⁶ In response, the Chinese government imposed sanctions on Essex Court Chambers, despite it not being a law firm and having “no collective or distinct legal identity of any kind.”⁶⁷ China has often resorted to intimidation tactics harassing members of the Uyghur diaspora overseas,⁶⁸ and has also sanctioned academics and human rights experts such as, Baroness Kennedy QC and Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, for their work investigating the Uyghur genocide. At a state level, the American, Canadian, Lithuanian, and Dutch governments have all described the treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities as genocide. While UK parliamentarians also declared China’s treatment a genocide,⁶⁹ it is worth noting that members of the same parliament voted thrice against the ‘genocide amendment’ to Trade Bill 2019-21.⁷⁰ In June 2021, the UK Government also rejected a set of proposals advanced by the Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy Committee to stop UK companies from profiting from Uyghur slave labor.

⁶⁵ Newlines Institute For Strategy and Policy, “The Uyghur Genocide,” 2.

⁶⁶ Alison Macdonald, Jackie McArthur, Naomi Hart, and Lorraine Aboagye, “International Criminal Responsibility for Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide Against the Uyghur Population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” January 26, 2021, 1, https://14ee1ae3-14ee-4012-91cf-a6a3b7dc3d8b.usrfiles.com/ugd/14ee1a_3f31c56ca64a461592ffc2690c9bb737.pdf.

⁶⁷ Essex Court Chambers, “Essex Court Chambers Statement on Sanctions Imposed by Chinese Government,” March 26, 2021, <https://essexcourt.com/essex-court-chambers-statement-on-sanctions-imposed-by-chinese-government/>.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, “China: Uyghurs Living Abroad Tell of Campaign of Intimidation,” February 2, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/china-uyghurs-living-abroad-tell-of-campaign-of-intimidation/>.

⁶⁹ Details of the vote held on 22 March 2021 are available at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-03-22/debates/BD70E5C2-9163-4FB8-9B9B-2D451586A01B/TradeBill>.

⁷⁰ Details of the Trade Bill 2019-21 are available at <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2729>.

b. Claims disputing a genocide is taking place

Despite the authoritative evidence that Beijing is undertaking a genocidal campaign against Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic people, some have resisted calls to describe what is happening in East Turkistan as a genocide. In this section, I address the two principal arguments relied on to advance that position.

Claim 1: Beijing is indiscriminate in its repression, it does not only target Turkic people.

Some might argue that the Chinese state's repression extends across its territory and is applicable to all ethnic groups, not just Turkic people. Moreover, since these events have not been described as genocide on the global stage, it would be incorrect to describe what is happening now in East Turkistan as a genocide. For instance, China has a history of 'reforming' people for their political and religious beliefs by imprisoning them in labor camps (*láogǎi*) as exemplified by Beijing's 're-education through labor' strategy which was official state policy from 1957 to 2013.⁷¹ *Jiabiangou* labor camp is one of the earliest examples of this. Similarly, followers of Falun Gong in the 1990s were also subjected to 're-education' and evidence suggests that they too were victims of organ harvesting.⁷² Moreover, Christian groups also face persecution in China with a plan to advance 'Chinese Christianity' which entails 'retranslating and annotating' the Bible to ensure the 'correct understanding' of the text.⁷³ Additionally, there is evidence that China has authorized the practice of involuntary sterilization to enforce its one-child policy in

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch, "Reeducation Through Labor in China," 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/campaigns/china-98/laojiao.htm>; Amnesty International, "China's 'Re-Education Through Labour' Camps: Replacing One System of Repression with Another?" December 17, 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/12/china-s-re-education-through-labour-camps-replacing-one-system-repression-another/>.

⁷² David Matas and David Kilgour, "Bloody Harvest: Revised Report into Allegations of Organ Harvesting of Falun Gong Practitioners in China," 2007, <https://organharvestinvestigation.net/>; see also Robertson, "Organ Procurement and Extrajudicial Execution," 35–36.

⁷³ Lily Kuo, "In China, They're Closing Churches, Jailing Pastors—and Even Rewriting Scripture," *Guardian*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/china-christians-religious-persecution-translation-bible>.

other areas of the country as early as the 1970s.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the use of AI mass surveillance is to control its entire population, not just the Turkic people.⁷⁵

While this is all true, arguing that since some of these crimes are not described as a genocide invalidates the current situation in East Turkistan being described as such, might mean we need to re-evaluate the past, not whitewash the present. It also ignores previous efforts by Beijing to subvert any criticism of these past events. For instance, in 2014, after the Spanish High Court issued an arrest warrant for former Chinese government leaders in their connection with the persecution of Falun Gong members and genocide related to Tibet, China threatened economic repercussions which led the Spanish government at the time to change the law and “limit the judiciary’s powers to investigate human rights abuse cases in other countries.”⁷⁶ That aside, it is worth noting that, in the case of the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities, all the aforementioned state-led coercive tactics are being used simultaneously, making the community the target of an extraordinary level of sustained and multifaceted state violence. Another critical feature of the repression experienced by this community which supports the genocide argument is Beijing’s strategy of demographically engineering Uyghur and other Turkic communities. This is captured by the following.

First, research shows that the government is, in some areas, targeting to sterilize up to 34% of married Uyghur women of childbearing age. The sterilization campaigns are not only politically but also financially supported by the state; “[f]or 2020, the Xinjiang Health Commission budget featured another \$19.5 million (140 million RMB)” for such sterilization campaigns.⁷⁷ Beijing’s Campaign of mass sterilization is corroborated by leaked government documents (the Karakax List) showing that “violations of birth control policies constituted the most commonly cited reason”

⁷⁴ Martin King Whyte, “Modifying China’s One-Child Policy,” E-International Relations, February 2, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/02/02/modifying-chinas-one-child-policy/>.

⁷⁵ Paul Mozur, “Inside China’s Dystopian Dreams: A.I., Shame and Lots of Cameras,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/business/china-surveillance-technology.html>.

⁷⁶ J. A. Romero, “Supreme Court Upholds Dismissal of Tibet Genocide Investigation,” *El País*, April 22, 2015, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2015/04/22/inenglish/1429711400_446213.html.

⁷⁷ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control,” 17.

for internment.⁷⁸ Second, just one year after China launched the ‘Strike Hard Against Terrorism’ policy in East Turkistan, the region witnessed an exceptional fall in population growth. Specifically, “growth rates fell by 84 percent in the two largest Uyghur prefectures between 2015 and 2018, and declined further in several minority regions in 2019. [Meanwhile] [f]or 2020, one Uyghur region set an unprecedented near-zero birth rate target: a mere 1.05 per mille, compared to 19.66 per mille in 2018. This was intended to be achieved through ‘family planning work.’”⁷⁹ Finally, the same research report finds that the proportion “of women aged 18 to 49 who were either widowed or in menopause have more than doubled since the onset of the internment campaign in one particular Uyghur region.”⁸⁰ Importantly, Zenz shows how the drive to demographically engineer the landscape in East Turkistan by severely reducing the populations of ethnic minorities and increasing the number of Han Chinese is part of an explicit intention to eradicate (or drastically reduce) ethnic minority populations.⁸¹ Together, all the above provides convincing evidence that a genocide is taking place. Specifically, it shows a clear state strategy intended “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” by “imposing measures intended to prevent births” among Uyghurs and other Turkic people, in direct contravention of the Genocide Convention. It is noteworthy that China withheld the release of crucial population data in the latest *2020 Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*, thereby limiting important future independent research into the trend and magnitude of the demographic change occurring in the region.

Claim 2: Accusations of genocide are based on falsified evidence manufactured as part of a ‘Western’ plot to weaken China.

A second reason for arguing this is not a genocide is far more sinister. The argument is advanced by some that the evidence from which the conclusions of a genocide are derived are fabricated. Proponents of this position go on to suggest

⁷⁸ Zenz, “The Karakax List,” 22.

⁷⁹ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control,” 2.

⁸⁰ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control,” 3.

⁸¹ Adrian Zenz, “‘End the Dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group’: An Analysis of Beijing’s Population Optimization Strategy in Southern Xinjiang,” Central Asian Survey, 2021, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3862512>.

that the Uyghur genocide is manufactured by the ‘West,’ mainly the US, to destabilize China. In particular, critics of Zenz have suggested the allegations of state-mandated birth control of the Uyghur population are based on doctored data.⁸² These criticisms are then relied upon to ridicule the charge of a genocide and promote the idea that accusations of Uyghur persecution are but a ‘Western’ ploy. Given the instrumental role Zenz’s work (cited in this paper) has played in bringing the scale of the abuse in East Turkistan to light and making the case for it being labelled as genocide, it is essential to make brief mention of these accusations.

Much of the academic criticism, which Chinese state media has gone on to promulgate,⁸³ comes from Lin Fangfei, Associate Professor at Xinjiang University. It’s easy to get lost in the *ad hominem* attacks, but for a focused discussion on the substance of the allegations, Zenz provides a comprehensive rebuttal to the accusations of data manipulation made by Fangfei.⁸⁴ To the best of my knowledge, Fangfei did not follow up with a reply. It is also worth mentioning that where mistakes were made in the initial report, notably the title error on Figure 6,⁸⁵ these are corrected in the subsequent updated March 2021 version. Other Zenz critics also rely on Fangfei’s work.⁸⁶ Moreover, many of the critics’ sources for refuting Zenz’s work center on attacking Zenz’s person, and rely on official Chinese government sources and state-sanctioned news outlets such as Global Times who openly refer to Uyghur activists outside China as “scum.”⁸⁷

⁸² Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control”; for critics, see L. Fangfei, “Responding to Adrian Zenz’s Lies on Xinjiang’s Birth Control: A Survey on Fertility Willingness of Ethnic Minority Women in Xinjiang,” Xinjiang University, September 14, 2020, <https://archive.is/ZaWta>.

⁸³ CGTN, “Six Lies in Adrian Zenz’s Xinjiang Report of ‘Genocide,’” September 14, 2020, <https://archive.is/jvGRs>.

⁸⁴ Adrian Zenz, “A Response to the Report Compiled by Lin Fangfei, Associate Professor at Xinjiang University,” October 6, 2020, <https://adrianzenz.medium.com/a-response-to-the-report-compiled-by-lin-fangfei-associate-professor-at-xinjiang-university-bdad4bbb97f9>; Fangfei, “Responding to Adrian Zenz’s Lies.”

⁸⁵ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control,” 14.

⁸⁶ See Gareth Porter and Max Blumenthal, “US State Department Accusation of China ‘Genocide’ Relied on Data Abuse and Baseless Claims by Far-Right Ideologue,” The Gray Zone, February 18, 2021, <https://thegrayzone.com/2021/02/18/us-media-reports-chinese-genocide-relied-on-fraudulent-far-right-researcher/>.

⁸⁷ Liu Xin and Fan Lingzhi, “Relatives of So-Called Uyghur Activists Slam Pompeo’s Detention Claim,” Global Times, November 17, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1170249.shtml>.

The charge of a ‘Western’ plot to destabilize China appears particularly appealing when one considers the fact that Adrian Zenz is a Senior Fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, and that his report highlighting Beijing’s campaign of mass sterilization was published by Jamestown Foundation,⁸⁸ both of which are right-wing conservative think tanks with US government links. Similarly, other foundational reports such as Xu et al. and Ruser et al.⁸⁹ were published by Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a think tank partly funded by the Australian Department of Defence. The former report was also financially supported by the UK Foreign Office. However, it is important to note that these affiliations are not something any of the report authors try to hide, and the institutions’ names and funders are clearly evident on the reports for readers to investigate. Indeed, while it would be naïve to think that the US would not be advantaged by, and actively work towards, an economically and politically weakened China, it is a grave intellectual leap to connect dots that are not supported by evidence and descend into conspiratorial thinking.

Indeed, to conclude that the persecution of Uyghurs is an anti-Chinese conspiracy designed by Western powers would require an ominous alliance between governments and civil society, to which academics, politicians, think tanks, the Uyghur diaspora, lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, media outlets, from different countries and across multiple continents, are all committed. Such dedication to the oath of omerta is intellectually impossible to entertain by any serious academic, particularly in light of the lack of substantive evidence for such a charge other than prejudiced conjecture. Indeed, it would be to dismiss:

- i. the multiplicity of sources used to reach this conclusion, including leaked Chinese government documents (e.g., China Cables, the Karakax List), official Chinese government statistical publications (e.g., Chinese Statistical Yearbooks), eye-witness testimony, video evidence from interned Uyghurs, satellite images, testimony from Uyghur diasporas around the world who have undergone harassment and whose family back in East

⁸⁸ Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control.”

⁸⁹ Xu et al., “Uyghurs for Sale Report”; Ruser et al., “Cultural Erasure.”

Turkistan have disappeared, as well as evidence provided by a former Chinese police officer.⁹⁰ Importantly, these independent sources have been found to corroborate each other.

ii. that Adrian Zenz is not the only source of information, but that other academics and bodies have also conducted their own investigations. For example, the China Cables were analyzed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists who brought together “75 journalists from ICIJ and 17 media partner organizations in 14 countries... to report on the documents and their significance. They spoke with more than 40 Uighurs in 10 countries, including Kazakhstan, Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Canada, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands and the United States of America, and numerous experts.”⁹¹ Other contributors include (but are not limited to): the BBC, independent academics (e.g., David Byler, Stanley Toops), 16 UN independent experts (who are not UN staff) appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, The Uyghur Tribunal, and the New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy whose panel comprised more than 30 experts including academics and lawyers across different continents.

iii. the fact that when reports first surfaced of detention camps China vehemently denied that such camps existed for months. It was only in light of increasing evidence and global pressure that Beijing finally recognized the camps existed, thereafter changing their global strategy to one normalizing the camps as ‘vocational training.’⁹²

iv. that through their campaign of mass surveillance, Beijing has a policy of controlling all information coming out of East Turkistan, by severely

⁹⁰ “Former Xinjiang Police Officer Describes Torture in Uyghur Detention Centers,” Uyghur Tribunal, June 8, 2021, <https://uyghurtribunal.com/coda-story-uyghur-tribunal-coverage/>.

⁹¹ Shiel, “About the China Cables Investigation.”

⁹² Lily Kuo, “From Denial to Pride: How China Changed Its Language on Xinjiang’s Camps,” *Guardian*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/from-denial-to-pride-how-china-changed-its-language-on-xinjiangs-camps>.

restricting reporting and assigning security officials to spy on and tail foreign journalists.⁹³

v. China's attempts to shut down any criticism of the situation in East Turkistan by resorting to a campaign of intimidation, harassment, and sanctions towards those who highlight their abuses, be they members of the Uyghur community abroad,⁹⁴ lawyers, human rights activists, Members of Parliament,⁹⁵ or journalists.⁹⁶ More recently, as stated above, China withheld the release of crucial population data in the latest *2020 Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* that limits vital research into the demographic changes occurring in East Turkistan. More specifically, Zenz reports that the release includes: "no birth rates by region, no ethnic population breakdown, no total population breakdown by region, and no data on birth control."⁹⁷

In sum, there is conclusive evidence that China is committing genocide against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in East Turkistan, and any suggestions to the contrary can be soundly refuted. The next section highlights the centrality of social justice in Islam, and outlines the obligation on Muslims to re-evaluate their consumption habits in light of this suffering.

V. The Islamic imperative to act

Justice is in an integral constituent of Islam "rooted in God's Divine nature" with God describing Himself as *al-ʿAdl* (The Utterly Just) and *al-Hakam* (The Impartial

⁹³ Andrew McCormick, "How Extensive Restrictions Have Shaped the Story in Xinjiang, China," *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/uighur-xinjiang.php>.

⁹⁴ Amnesty International, "China: Uyghurs Living Abroad."

⁹⁵ Sophia Yan, "Raab Says Chinese Government 'Sanctions Its Critics' as UK MPs Banned over Xinjiang," *Telegraph*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/25/jain-duncan-smith-among-sanctioned-china-criticism-xinjiang/>.

⁹⁶ Emma Graham-Harrison, "BBC Journalist Leaves China after Beijing Criticises Uighurs Coverage," *Guardian*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/31/bbc-journalist-john-sudworth-leaves-china-amid-criticism-of-netw-orks-coverage>.

⁹⁷ For details, see Adrian Zenz's twitter post on April 14, 2021: https://twitter.com/adrianzenz/status/1382397174684680197?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet.

Judge).⁹⁸ The centrality of social justice is captured in the Qur'an where God exhorts the believers to stand firm for justice *even if against themselves*: "You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives."⁹⁹ So fundamental is social justice to Islam that, in the hadith *qudsī* recorded in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, God outlawed oppression upon Himself saying, "O My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another."¹⁰⁰ Importantly, the prohibition of oppression in Islam extends not just to human beings but to all of God's creations, including insects, plants, animals, and the environment.¹⁰¹ This is lucidly captured in Abū Bakr's (may God be pleased with him)—the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)—famous command to his army as they set off on a military campaign:

Do not kill women or children or an aged, infirm person. Do not cut down fruit-bearing trees. Do not destroy an inhabited place. Do not slaughter sheep or camels except for food. Do not burn bees and do not scatter them.¹⁰²

In *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*,¹⁰³ the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also reproaches a group of companions (may God be pleased with them) who burnt an ant-hill to clear an area to set up camp during an expedition. If Islamic military jurisprudence, derived from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings be upon him), forbid Muslims from burning insects, killing animals indiscriminately, and cutting trees even during warfare, what then of the oppression of fellow human beings?

⁹⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Nazir Khan, "Divine Duty: Islam and Social Justice," *Yaqeen*, February 4, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/nazir-khan/divine-duty-islam-and-social-justice>.

⁹⁹ Qur'an 4:135. Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). This translation is used throughout.

¹⁰⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*: no. 2577a, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2577a>.

¹⁰¹ Each of these is a vast topic in and of itself, which cannot be discussed here due to space constraints. The reader is, however, encouraged to consult Sheikh Dr. Omar Suleiman's series, 40 Hadith on Social Justice, which discusses this topic extensively (see lecture no. 37 and no. 38 in particular). The lecture series is available at <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/series/40-hadiths-on-social-justice>.

¹⁰² *Muwattā Mālik*, bk. 21, hadith 971, <https://sunnah.com/malik/21>.

¹⁰³ *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, no. 5268, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud:5268>.

In fact, a fundamental act for spiritual salvation in Islam is to free a slave. As God declares in His Qur'an, "What will explain to you what the steep path is? It is to free a slave, to feed at a time of hunger an orphaned relative or a poor person in distress, and to be one of those who believe and urge one another to steadfastness and compassion."¹⁰⁴ Following this command, while also speaking out against the ill-treatment of slaves, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also encouraged his followers to free slaves, be they Muslim or non-Muslim,¹⁰⁵ asserting that "he who emancipates a slave, Allah will set free from Hell every limb (of his body) for every limb of his (slave's) body."¹⁰⁶

While the specific form of slavery God and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) are exhorting mankind to fight against has been eradicated, forced Chinese labor camps, as discussed above, are still very much a reality. Through *qiyās* (analogy), it can be deduced, therefore, that every Muslim is religiously obliged not to contribute to, and to take active steps to alleviate, the oppression and suffering of interned Uyghurs and other Turkic people, be they Muslim or not. Indeed, when the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) declared "that the person who enslaves a free person would not have their prayers accepted by God ... [t]he companions understood this as a universal principle affirming the freedom of all humankind from any kind of exploitation or abuse."¹⁰⁷

One might agree with the above but at the same time not recognize one's personal responsibility in light of this. This is because, like racism is sometimes erroneously understood only as present when explicit physical or verbal assault takes place, oppression is often also only recognized in its extreme forms; that is, as actions that involve blatant acts of violence, torture, and mental and physical aggression which tyrants and those in power directly inflict on people. Framing oppression in this way allows us to distance ourselves from being the oppressor. However, Islam does not endorse such simplistic conceptualizations that absolve people from

¹⁰⁴ Qur'an 90:12–17.

¹⁰⁵ Khan, "Divine Duty."

¹⁰⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1509b, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1509b>.

¹⁰⁷ Khan, "Divine Duty."

responsibility. Muslims are repeatedly reminded that people will be held to account for all the *rizq* (sustenance) they enjoyed throughout their lives. The centrality of ensuring Muslims do not perpetuate evil with the blessings God bestowed upon them is captured in the powerful hadith recorded in *Jāmi‘al-Tirmidhī* where the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) declares, “the feet of the son of Adam shall not move from before his Lord on the Day of Judgment, until he is asked about five things: About his life and what he did with it, about his youth and what he wore it out in, about his wealth and how he earned it, and spent it upon, and what he did with what he knew [i.e., about his knowledge and what he did with it].”¹⁰⁸

The obligation for Muslims to use their wealth for good and not evil forms the spiritual core of one of the five pillars of Islam, *zakat*. The latter is the obligation on all Muslims who can afford it to pay 2.5% of their excess wealth to the poor and destitute every year. While also serving as a mechanism for societal redistribution, on a spiritual front, the paying of *zakat* is a means to purify a Muslim’s wealth. It would, therefore, be paradoxical for a Muslim on the one hand to strive to purify their wealth as ordained by God, but then decide to spend their purified wealth on perpetuating injustice and the misery of others. Indeed, Islam is not a religion that divorces action from spiritual belief. As Muhammed Asad puts it in his seminal work, *The Road to Makkah*, when describing the message of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): “*Action is part of faith*: for God is not merely concerned with a person’s belief but also with his or her doings—especially such doings as affect other people besides oneself.”¹⁰⁹ The reality of Islam being a religion of action and standing up to social injustice is perfectly captured in the saying of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), “He who amongst you sees something abominable should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue, and if he has not strength enough to do it, (even) then he should (abhor it) from his heart, and that is the least of faith.”¹¹⁰ In referencing this hadith, Khan explains that “[i]n this

¹⁰⁸ *Jāmi‘al-Tirmidhī*, no. 2416, <https://sunnah.com/urn/725960>.

¹⁰⁹ Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Makkah* (India: Islamic Book Service, 1954 [2019]), 290 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 49a, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:49a>.

sense, Islam does not permit one to be a bystander to any form of injustice; one is morally obligated to do everything in one's power to eradicate oppression. Of course, this duty is accompanied by the requirement for wisdom to ensure that one's attempt to remove an evil does not backfire and lead to a greater evil."¹¹¹

The importance for Muslims to be vigilant of what they consume and expend their *rizq* (sustenance) on is repeated throughout the Qur'an. One such example is in Chapter 90 (*The City*), when in talking about mankind, God says "Does he think that no one will have power over him? 'I have squandered great wealth,' he says. Does he think no one has seen him?"¹¹² This link between consumption and spiritual purity is further captured by this powerful narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* where the Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings be upon him) "made mention of a person who travels widely [i.e., in the cause of God, such as in search of beneficial knowledge], his hair disheveled and covered with dust [i.e., he is visibly exhausted having put effort in his striving in the path of God]. He lifts his hand towards the sky (and thus makes the supplication): 'O Lord, O Lord,' whereas his diet is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful, and his nourishment is unlawful. How then can his supplication be accepted?"¹¹³ The association between an act of worship as integral as *du'ā'* (supplication) to purity of consumption, even for someone striving in the path of God, is an important reminder when considering our consumption habits and choices in light of the suffering of Uyghurs and other Turkic people in East Turkistan.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, China may veto any resolution that seeks to refer the situation in East Turkistan to the International Criminal Court. China has also made a reservation to Article IX of the Genocide Convention 1948 that provides for the referral of any dispute between State Parties to the International Court of Justice: *Reservation of the People's Republic of China to Article IX, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Paris, 9 December 1948, 78 UNTS 277*. In light of Beijing's powerful

¹¹¹ Khan, "Divine Duty."

¹¹² Qur'an 90:5–7.

¹¹³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1015, <https://sunnah.com/muslim/12/83>.

position within the United Nations, and its economic heft, it will be challenging for meaningful international steps to be taken to prevent this genocide and forced labor from continuing. As such, individual action centered around making more informed consumption choices and boycotting products made in China and companies that exploit forced Uyghur labor, presents one of the most important avenues through which to fight against the atrocities being committed against Turkic people and alleviate their suffering.

That said, it is essential to remember that the effectiveness of actions is not the only prism through which Muslims should assess whether they should act or not. As previously discussed, the importance of acting against oppression is a Divine exhortation, making it authoritative in and of itself regardless of whether a person thinks their action will achieve its desired end or not. As such, the defeatist argument that individual action such as boycotting Chinese products and brands that support or profit from Uyghur misery are futile because they are inconsequential to the behemoth that is the Chinese economy or a multinational's balance sheet, only serves to justify inaction and the satiation of egocentric material desires.¹¹⁴

Indeed, taking such a resigned approach is in sharp opposition to Islamic ethos. As the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) declared, ‘If the Final Hour comes while you have a shoot of a plant in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it.’¹¹⁵ That means, that even if one knows that the end of times is *literally* about to occur, a believer should still strive to do what they can to complete a good deed. In saying this, we are reminded of the Qur'an recurrently stating (see for example Chapter 53, verses 38-42) that actions do not

¹¹⁴ Examples of companies to boycott would include the sponsors of the Beijing Winter Games 2022—Airbnb, Allianz, Coca-Cola, General Electric, Intel, Omega, Panasonic, Procter and Gamble, Samsung, Toyota, Snickers, and Visa—who are financially supporting the Chinese government and helping it “sportswash” the genocide (the full list of sponsors can be found here: <https://www.beijing2022.cn/en/>). Similarly, the following companies have all been reported to have profited from the exploitation of forced Uyghur labor: Adidas, Amazon, Apple, Calvin Klein, Dell, Gap, General Motors, Nike, Panasonic, Polo Ralph Lauren, Puma, Samsung, Sony, Tommy Hilfiger, Toshiba, Uniqlo, Victoria's Secret, Volkswagen, and Zara (for an exhaustive list, see Xu et al., “Uyghurs for Sale Report,” 5).

¹¹⁵ *Al-Albāni*, bk. 1, hadith 479, <https://sunnah.com/adab/27/4>.

only have a worldly consequence;¹¹⁶ and if undertaken with the right *niyya* (intention), they will be of benefit in the *ākhirah* (Hereafter).

VI. Conclusion

In this article I first provided a brief historical background of East Turkistan, thereby challenging the myth that China is only a victim of colonization, rather than also being its driver. I also outlined the economic and geographic advantages that make East Turkistan such a prized asset for Beijing.

Thereafter, I reviewed the available evidence pointing to a Uyghur genocide. The evidence assessed relied on leaked official Chinese government documents (e.g., China Cables, the Karakax List), eye-witness testimony, and reports and research published by expert academics and practitioners in the areas of Chinese studies, human rights, international law, and social science. Based on this evidence, and the definition outlined in the Genocide Convention, I concluded that there is little doubt that the Chinese state is engaged in a genocidal campaign against the Uyghurs and other Muslim Turkic minorities in East Turkistan. This is executed through, (i) a state-wide policy of arbitrary internments of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in forced labor camps and cotton fields; (ii) forced sterilization and systematic rape of Uyghur women; (iii) mass surveillance through AI, employing Han civilians to spy on Turkic people in their homes, and the militarization of East Turkistan; and, (iv) what Finley calls ‘demographic securitization,’¹¹⁷ as seen in ‘the Hanification of Xinjiang,’¹¹⁸ ‘linguistic securitization,’ exemplified through the criminalization of ethnic languages, and ‘religious securitization,’ which involves denying Turkic Muslims the right to practice their faith.

I also addressed two counterarguments to the claim that what is taking place is genocide. First, that Beijing applies its repression indiscriminately to all those who

¹¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion on social action in Islam, see Sheikh Abdullah Oduro’s 2018 khuṭba (sermon): “The Urgency of Civic Engagement,” <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/yaqeen-institute/civic-engagement>.

¹¹⁷ Finley, “Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict.”

¹¹⁸ Liu and Peters, “The Hanification of Xinjiang, China.”

oppose its policy of forced assimilation, not just Turkic people. Second, that the evidence concluding that a genocide is taking place is fraudulent. The first was rebutted by highlighting that what is happening in East Turkistan is particularly sinister given that unique actions that previously might have been applied by Beijing against perceived enemies are now all applied in concert against one group. Moreover, the exceptional state-organized sterilization targets and population growth control make what is happening to Uyghurs and other Muslim Turkic groups a genocide. Equally, the allegations of manipulated statistics were shown to have been comprehensively rebuked. The allegations that the Uyghur genocide is a Western plot against China were also shown to rely on arguments that require a significant conspiratorial intellectual leap in logical thinking, particularly in light of the multiplicity of evidence (in type and source) to the contrary.

Finally, through scriptural analysis of the Qur'an and Sunnah, I argued that Muslims have an obligation towards individual action to alleviate the suffering of fellow humans. This is particularly important in light of China's economic and political heft on the global stage, which is likely to make international and state action sluggish. Importantly, it was argued that these actions should not be solely evaluated in terms of their effect in bringing about change, but that they are valuable in and of themselves as an act of *'ibāda* (worship) decreed by God. Specifically, Muslims are commanded not to use their *rizq* (sustenance), in all its forms, to support, engage in, or profit from evil, but to stand firm against injustice and alleviate human suffering. And Allah knows best.