Detainment Camps in China

China’s totalitarian government has confined its citizens within the borders of its country and forced Communist teachings both politically and socially. Since President Xi Jinping came into a position of power, China is more isolated than ever and is constantly monitoring and filtering through all forms of media in an effort to publicly endorse the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), while also denouncing those in opposition. Recently, the Uighur populace, an ethnic group of Turkish Muslims living in Xinjiang, has been the target of the Chinese government's attempt to reform society with the use of detainment camps, a growing concern of the United Nations (UN). The careful manipulation of news and media by the Chinese government clouds the severity of the cruel detainment camps in China and hinders the UN’s ability to provide asylum to the Uighur Muslims. With the strict laws regulating every movement of the Uighur Muslims (in addition to extreme censorship), China’s immoral and islamophobic actions remain unaccounted for and will continue to demoralize the Uighur population until they are stripped of basic human rights. The UN should persuade other countries to take action against China and compel the Chinese government to shut down the detainment camps.

According to a report done by the Chinese Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), China has a population of over one billion people and nearly 800 million people have direct access to the internet (BBC). Because of this extensive reach to thousands of people,
China is able to publish communist ideology and block out any information contradicting the CCP. The government does this by:

[limiting] access to foreign news by restricting rebroadcasting and the reach of satellite TV, and by blocking websites using an extensive filtering system known as the ‘Great Firewall’ … with 772 million users (CNNIC January 2018), China has the world's largest internet-using population (Hughes).

These regulations are created with the sole purpose of controlling Chinese citizens’ view of the country and the outside world and completely deprives them of the truth. Not only does the government disseminate lies about other countries to protect the pride and respect of their own, but they also create fabrications to hide the corruption, economic complications, scandals, discrimination, and immense poverty within China. In response to UN panel member Nicolas Marugan’s comment on the detainment camps, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying claimed there was “no factual basis” or any evidence at all of these detainment camps even existing (Nebehay). The absolute control over media allows the government to portray whatever they want to other countries, while also hiding the various obstacles within its own, including the detainment camps.

As a result of all other websites and apps (like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Google) being blocked and no foreign broadcasting sources having access to Chinese citizens, the citizens have no choice but to turn to domestic services (Albert, Xu). Subsequently, the government is then able to create more opportunities for communist teachings to be incorporated into daily life. Major news outlets, like Global Times and XinhuaNet, are forced to publish only what is approved and accepted by the Chinese government; therefore, the news broadcasted by them is
biased and never entirely accurate. Global Times is a well known Chinese newspaper which perfectly reflects state policy and produces pro-CCP articles that depict China as a great nation. Rather than reporting on crucial events like government corruption and poverty, the news outlet focuses more on a public enemy to blame China’s shortcomings on. Moreover, in an effort to maintain this censorship, the Chinese government employed “thousands of cyber-police [to] watch the web [for] material deemed politically and socially sensitive” (Hughes). With no regard to the privacy of their citizens, the government has knowingly infiltrated their lives, constantly watching over every action taken by the Uighurs. This breach of rights further implicates China as an obsessive, controlling government and taints China’s reputation and credibility. Without knowledge of the world or even knowledge about what’s happening in their own country, the citizens would be too ignorant to voice any opposing views. Nevertheless, China’s media control has not come without a price. Due to increased spending on public security and additional costs from the construction and maintenance of the detainment camps, 30.46 million people still live in poverty (Jennings). Despite this, China still continues to spend roughly $25.6 billion on state security and nearly $231 billion on military budget (Liang). The increased government security comes as a direct result to the numerous reportings of Uighur Muslims as culprits of attacks on another ethnic group, the Han Chinese. The inaccurate information displayed all around China has predisposed many Chinese citizens against their neighbors, friends, and even family.

Regardless of the financial strain caused by the detainment camps, China continues to exaggerate its’ successes. Spokeswoman Hua Chunying refuted claims against excess spending on security instead of other government budgets like education or proper housing claiming that “people’s satisfaction with Xinjiang’s security and stability had risen dramatically” (Nebehay).
In response to detainment camps and overspending, Chunying evidently deflected and instead mentioned the unrelated reassuring events happening all throughout China that would put the country in a good light. In an opening review by the United Nations Human Rights Council vice foreign minister of China, Le Yucheng said, “‘China is here to seek cooperation.’. He pointed to China’s achievements in lifting millions of people from poverty, largely skirting its treatment of ethnic minorities” (Cumming-Bruce). As in most cases, nearly all government officials questioned about the detainment camps have either deflected and moved on to different topics, or simply pretended it does not exist. By avoiding all talks about the detainment camps, China is blatantly unwilling to take any form of responsibility or even admit to their indecent crimes.

The Chinese government imposes a sense of fear on its citizens through the use of propaganda sprouted from Islamophobia and extremism to justify their actions against the Uighurs. These detainment camps are often referred to as ‘re-education camps’ where the Uighur Muslims willingly commit themselves for the sake of becoming the ideal citizen. The goal of the Chinese government is to painfully strip away any devotion to Islam and replace it with the atheist teachings of the CCP. Through the use of propaganda such as television documentaries portraying pleasant and comforting environments within the detainment camp and various bigoted newspaper articles, China has convinced many citizens, as well as foreigners, that these ‘re-education camps’ are extremely beneficial to society. In fact, many prominent government officials have boldly supported claims that these camps will counter terrorism and anti-CCP behavior like to prevent letting Xinjiang become the Syria of China (Millward). In a recent meeting with the UN, Yucheng said the camps were “a preventive measure to deter people from terrorism and enable them to fit into society.” (Cumming-Bruce). However, this claim is a mere
deception to hide what the governments true objective is; to uproot the Uighur Muslims and to transform all of China into a uniform population with one pro-communist belief. In doing so, however, the Chinese government has violated many human rights and refuses to acknowledge any wrongdoing. The propaganda released in order to alienate the Uighurs has taken a dramatic effect as more and more people turn islamophobic and begin to distrust the Uighurs.

Going forth, China has also resorted to indoctrination and intense forms of abuse such as waterboarding to eliminate any previous devotion to Islam. The re-education camps have been compared to concentration camps where the Uighurs are tortured (physically and psychologically), torn apart from their families, and forced to endure intense labor. Inside, the Uighurs are told to sing patriotic hymns and run around till the point of exhaustion; if they refused or unable to perform the task before them, they were denied food (Buckley). The vigorous scrutiny the Uighurs are under puts immense pressure not only on themselves but also on the rest of their family. One minute crime, however insignificant it may be, is enough for the police to apprehend Uighurs and place them into the detainment camps no matter age, wealth, or occupation. The mass incarceration has traumatized families and communities and has left Uighur Muslims hopeless in the face of their dictatorial government. While family visits are allowed, the Uighurs who are detained are forced to wait weeks or even months before they can be reunited with their families again. On top of that, if trials for the Uighurs are even granted, they are delayed for extensive periods and intentionally prolonged till the Uighurs are transformed into an atheist, patriotic citizen. Due to the remorseless crimes of the Chinese government, the Uighur Muslims have been detained in camps where they are torturing and forced to denounce their religion to conform to CCP principles and beliefs.
Despite the heinous reality of the detention camps, the Chinese government, however, seems to justify their actions by claiming that the camps are rewarding and promising to the safety of all Chinese citizens. In an interview by Xinhua News on counterterrorism with the chairman of the Government of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Shohrat Zakir states that:

In the past 21 months, no violent-terrorist attacks have occurred and the number of criminal cases, including those endangering public security, has dropped significantly. Public security has notably improved with religious extremism effectively contained, while people are now feeling more secure. We have laid a good foundation for completely solving the deeply-rooted problems that affect the region’s long-term stability (Bo).

The Chinese government’s attempts to cover up the camps as a positive influence on society distracts the UN from intervening because there is no plausible evidence confirming China’s involvement with the creation of the detention camps. By countering the criticism faced by the opposition, or the “anti-China forces”, China diverts the attention to the productive outcome of the ‘re-education’ centers (Nebehay). However, with various information leaks from within China claiming the exact opposite, the UN, as well as representatives from Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, and the US have urged China to close down the detention camps and “respect freedom of religion, expression, and association” (Cumming-Bruce). The justification of the detention camps by the Chinese government lacks rational reasoning and is based off of a prejudiced beliefs.

The exploitation and censorship of media, in addition to Chinese isolation from other countries, has deterred the United Nations, as well as the rest of the world, from the serious
human rights violations occurring within China. Without intervention from the UN, China, spearheaded by the CCP, will remain exempt from consequences for the hateful and inhumane crimes committed by the government. The authoritative control over media in China allows the government to hide major events from the UN and the world and enables them to divest the oppressed Uighurs. People all over the world can help by raising awareness and spreading the news globally to shine negative press on China. They can also push their government to take action and protest to end mass detainment. With the whole world against China, they will be unable to hide and deny allegations any further. Moreover, stopping business and trade with China until reforms are enacted may also lead to proactive results. With the lives of the Uighurs Muslims at stake, it is necessary for the UN to take action and make China enact new reforms for the sake of its citizens.


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