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# **A Palestine in the Making? : The Chinese Government's Preventive Measures and Challenges in Xinjiang \***

Kexiao CAO\*\*

## **Refereed Article**

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### **Abstract**

Due to the frequent terrorist attacks after the July 5<sup>th</sup> Riots in Urumqi, many scholars are pessimistic about Xinjiang's future. They considered Xinjiang the next Palestine. For instance, Uyghurs and Palestinians studied abroad and brought terrorist experiences back. The dominant groups are expropriating resources and discriminating against local ethnic groups. With high-level technologies, however, both governments could not suppress these attacks. This research compares these two regions (Xinjiang from 2009 to 2016 and the West Bank from 1967 until 2024) from internal and external factors related to security and stability. It argues that the possibility of Xinjiang falling into chaos is low in the short term because China has adopted economic assistance and technology in addition to hard-line measures, and cooperates with neighboring countries troubled by terrorism. Most importantly, China has a strong central government, and it regards the stability of Xinjiang related to its reign. Nevertheless, the lack of dialogue, the weaknesses in the rule of law and supervision, and the overlook of human rights pose hidden risks in this region. The potential widening income gap between Uyghurs and Han Chinese also adds uncertainty to this region in the long term.

**Keywords :** Xinjiang, Palestine, Uyghurs, economic policies, risks

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## 1. Introduction

The large-scale detention and control policies adopted by the Chinese government in Xinjiang are infamous. In the Chen Quanguo era, the hard-line policies were at their peak and aroused the attention and criticism of the international society. While researchers focus on the tough side of China's Xinjiang policy, such as the comprehensive surveillance system, forced sterilization, or forced labor, its soft side is often neglected.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese leaders have long expected to increase ethnic minorities' recognition in the Chinese nation through economic improvement and cultural education. However, due to some historical, cultural, and policy factors, the gap between Xinjiang and China's developed areas has become enormous. The lack of cultural education and preferential treatment policies also deepened conflicts. Under the governance of Chen Quanguo, Xinjiang has ensured security and stability through hard-line measures at the expense of human rights, economic development, and international public opinion. However, it raises concerns about how long China would continue its hard-line policies and whether these policies can keep it safe from terrorist or extremist attacks.

In December 2021, the Chinese government announced that Chen, who had ruled Xinjiang for five years, was no longer the Party Committee Secretary but would be appointed to a new position. Ma Xingrui, an expert in space technology, became Xinjiang's new leader. Although some media deemed Chen would become a member of CCP's Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, this personnel change symbolized his downward path. Eventually, Chen retired in October 2022. Three months before his retirement, China's top leader Xi Jinping revisited Xinjiang and gave the latest order. Due to Xi's unshakable position in China, the Xinjiang government made every effort to follow his instructions to restore Xinjiang's security and order. It also reflected how the central government gives weight to this region.

Many scholars studied the Uyghur-Han relations and China's ethnic policies in Xinjiang. Some made predictions about Xinjiang's future. Overall, more people have pessimistic visions. Wang Lixiong, Clarke, and Finley predicted Xinjiang would be Palestinization.<sup>2</sup> A term used to describe the refusal by Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel to adopt the lifestyle, language, culture, and politics of dominant Israeli-born secular Jews.<sup>3</sup> This term may originated from "Israelization," which is used as the cause of "Palestinization." Israelization means the adoption of values, activities, and behavior attributed by Israeli society to its population.<sup>4</sup> Scholars questioned the Chinese government's ability to ensure security in Xinjiang because of the frequent terrorist attacks at that time. Since the situation in Palestine was similar to that in Xinjiang, these researchers were concerned that Xinjiang would be in chaos if the Chinese government could not stabilize the security situation.

As scholars have noted, the range of terrorist attacks spread from Xinjiang to other provinces, and the Uyghur has connections with overseas terrorist attacks. In these respects, there are similarities between Xinjiang and Palestine. However, most of the forecasts were made in the early 2000s and 2010s when ethnic relations in Xinjiang were at a breaking point. Few expected swift policy shifts in Xinjiang. Hence, these forecasts may no longer reflect the current situation. Besides, "Palestinianization" remains a vague concept. Therefore, I define it

<sup>1</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang (pre-publication version)," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 3 (2020): 30.

<sup>2</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "The Wang Lixiong prophecy: 'Palestinization' in Xinjiang and the consequences of Chinese state securitization of religion," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Keren-Kratz, Menachem, "Westernization and Israelization within Israel's extreme Orthodox Haredi society," *Israel Studies Review* 31, no. 2 (2016): 113.

in this study as the resistance by the occupied against the occupier's assimilation policies to ensure long-term control over a disputed region. The occupier has advanced technological advantage but can not counteract the (terror) attacks by the governed. This ultimately leads to regional instability and economic stagnation. Different from common conflicts, "Palestinization" depicts a scenario that includes long-time occupation and resistance, strict security measures, complicated political and ethnic backgrounds, and wide international attention.

This research mainly compares Xinjiang with Israel-occupied territory in Palestine, especially the West Bank. The comparison period is the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region from 2009 (the Urumqi riots) to 2016 and the West Bank from 1967 until now (2024).<sup>5</sup> I analyze their ways to curb extremism and terrorism and explore the problems and risks that may harm Xinjiang's stability and prosperity. By comparing Xinjiang and Palestine, the contribution of this paper is to gain an in-depth understanding of the similarities and differences between different regions on conflicts and governance issues, further explore the importance of human rights and ethnic issues in modern state governance, provide experience and lessons for other multi-ethnic countries and regions, and promote social harmony and economic prosperity.

I argue that the legal status of the two regions and the policy measures adopted by the two governments are different. These distinctions affect security and stability. Internally, China has advantages in technology, funds, and a powerful central government. Externally, the expansion and strengthening of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) further limit the ability of overseas Uyghur nationalists to carry out attacks. The Chinese government will continue to adopt a dual approach of violent repression and economic development, as it deals with the Tibet issue. Despite some scholars and media believing that the Chinese government will not stop the oppression of Uyghurs, this research tends to be cautiously optimistic. The possibility of "Palestinianization" is relatively low during a specific period when China maintains its armed forces in the region. However, the lack of dialogue due to China's speech control, the weaknesses in the rule of law and supervision, and the overlook of human rights pose hidden risks in Xinjiang. If these issues cannot be effectively resolved, the situation remains highly uncertain in the long term.

While analyzing Xinjiang's ethnic policies, I conducted a two-week investigation in some cities and small villages in Xinjiang in September 2019. The interviewees include local people and insiders. The investigation helps understand the situation of Xinjiang and the lives of Xinjiang people. However, the Chinese government's zero-corona policy from 2020 to 2022 has made inter-region movement nearly impossible. Besides, due to the sensitivity of the issue in China, this research cannot disclose too many details.

## 2. The Origin of Unpeaceful Palestine

The Palestine region has a long history of conflicts. Israel was established in 1947 based on the UN Security Council's Resolution 181.<sup>6</sup> However, the Jews, whose total population was less than one-seventh of the Arabs, obtained 57% of the land. In the following decades, Israelis gained most of the territories of this area after a series of victories. The Resolution 242 in 1967 demanded Israel to retreat from the territory it occupied.<sup>7</sup> Although Israel withdrew from some lands it took up, controversies still existed. On November 15, 1988, the Palestinian

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<sup>5</sup> The last terrorist attack reported officially was in December, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> UN Document, A/RES/181(II), PART II, Boundaries, B. The Jewish State, para1-3, November 29, 1947.

<sup>7</sup> UN Document, S/RES/242 (1967), 1. (i), November 22, 1967.

National Council (PNC) passed the Declaration of Independence. The next day, the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Palestine Liberation Organization transmitted it to the UN in Algeria.<sup>8</sup> After the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel and Palestine reached a temporary rapprochement, and Israel promised to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho area.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, they soon came to an impasse because shortly after signing, Israel's prime minister Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist, and both sides began attacking each other.

With the rise of Netanyahu and the presence of many small parties, the Israeli government found it hard to reach a consensus on the Palestinian issue. On the one hand, Israel is concerned about terrorist attacks and continues establishing settlements and the separation barrier in the Palestinian territories.<sup>10</sup> It uses its economic and military advantages to contain Palestine's development. On the other hand, it is challenging to unify opinions within the Palestinian Authority (PA). The two biggest parties, Fatah, advocates peaceful negotiations, but Hamas claims to use force as a solution. Due to the asymmetry of power with Israel, Hamas often fires rockets to attack Israel or its settlements. Some scholars equate Han Chinese to Jews and Palestinians who advocate force with Uyghur activists. Those who advocate peace and compromise in Palestine are equivalent to the peace faction among the Uyghurs. Palestinian extremists claim to build their country by exterminating Israel, while Uyghur extremists use terrorist attacks to realize their desire for independence.

### 3. Is Xinjiang a Palestine in the Making?

The continuous terrorist attacks in the mid-2010s and Chen Quanguo's Xinjiang policy increased the world's concerns about the future of Xinjiang. Although the Xinjiang government once implemented military measures on its people in the early years of the People's Republic of China, it has rarely embarked on large-scale counter-insurgency operations since then. The central government gradually turned to economic means to promote Xinjiang's stability. Still, the Uyghur-Han conflict broke out in 2009. Considering the continuous terrorist attacks in the early 2010s, the chronic nature of the problem, and protests in Tibet, Hong Kong, and Inner Mongolia, it is reasonable to doubt whether Beijing can solve all these problems thoroughly and properly.

Clarke is one of the scholars who believes that Xinjiang may become the next Palestine. He regards three factors that have worsened Xinjiang's situation. The first is the political and ethnic boundaries between the Uyghur, the Han, and the Chinese government.<sup>11</sup> Although these boundaries are persistently drawn due to race and religion, the extent of their impact has varied over time. The ten-year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) weakened such boundaries because the focus in politics was shifted from nation to class. However, with the end of political movements, inconsistent solutions were introduced to target different ethnic groups. The Han population continuously influx into Xinjiang. These changes made the ethnic differences obvious and made conflicts more pronounced. It is compared to Israel's settlements in the West Bank. Palestinians disagree with it but are powerless to stop the settling policy. At present, the number of Jews is steadily increasing. Similarly, the Chinese government's "repression, restriction, and investment" has widened the gap.<sup>12</sup> China's energy investment projects in Xinjiang have enabled Han Chinese to take advantage of language and cultural advantages

<sup>8</sup> UN Document, A/43/827/S/20278, Annex I, November 16, 1988.

<sup>9</sup> UN Document, A/48/486/S/26560, Article VI, para-2, October 11, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Eidelman, Ronen, "The separation wall in Palestine: Artists love to hate it," *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas, and Possibilities* 21, (2011): 95.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke, Michael, "China and the Uyghurs: the 'Palestinization' of Xinjiang," *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 3 (2015): 127.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

to occupy high-profit industries, thereby separating them from most Uyghurs engaged in agricultural activities. The economic gap between Israelis and Palestinians is also large. Based on the World Bank's data, the GDP per capita of Israel in 2022 was 54,659 dollars, and Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) was 3,789. The former is more than fourteen times higher than the latter.

The second reason is that some extremist Uyghurs draw upon other terrorist groups' experiences and then back to China.<sup>13</sup> It refers to the Uyghur who has worked in or has connections with ISIS, Taliban, or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Central Asia and the Middle East. Also, as some scholars indicated, it was a failure for China to link the Uyghur to radical Islamic movements to justify its actions because it complicated and internationalized the issue. Exaggerating Uyghurs' anger does nothing to solve the problem but worsens the opposition. Some Muslim countries in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East maintain sympathy for Uyghurs due to their connections in religion and blood. As a result, China's solution hampered its relations with these countries.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Beijing continuously deepening people's recognition of Uyghurs' connections with "three forces" or external forces, emphasizing ethnic unity, and strengthening security and counterterrorism measures have intensified violence.<sup>15</sup> Conflicts due to cultural and religious differences are over-interpreted as ethnic hatred. Shichor argued that China's leaders do not regard, and have never regarded, Uyghur separatist activism in Xinjiang as a real threat. They only want to neutralize and suppress the sprouts of national separatism, while Uyghurs are still relatively harmless.<sup>16</sup> Some of the dissatisfaction of Uyghurs is not for independence, but because the government did not respect their interests. Beijing's overlook of the local government's poor governance may have forced some Uyghurs to become radical and deepen people's discrimination and distrust.

Other scholars and researchers, such as Wang and Finley, argued that there were parallels between Israel-Palestine and China-Xinjiang.<sup>17</sup> The first similarity is the occupation of contested territory. Palestine is considered an inherent territory by some Israelis and Palestinians. Uyghur nationalists regard themselves as the indigenous people of this land but the Chinese government believes Xinjiang was not taken up by any single ethnic group but by immigrants and people with interracial marriages. Besides, both regions have state-led demographic transfer. Wang and Finley maintained that Israel's establishment of settlements in the West Bank is the same as the Chinese government's migration of the Han population to Xinjiang.

In addition, Finley maintains that the dominant group is expropriating resources.<sup>18</sup> The West Bank and Gaza occupation has harmed Palestine's agriculture and industry. China's cross-regional transportation of resources is also considered to be plundering Xinjiang's resources. The rich minerals and energy in the west are transferred to the developed eastern area. Anand defines it as an internal colonial project.<sup>19</sup> The transfer of resources did not bring local economic development but widened the gaps between different regions and ethnic groups.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 132.

<sup>16</sup> Shichor, Yitzhak, "Blow up: internal and external challenges of Uyghur separatism and Islamic radicalism to Chinese rule in Xinjiang," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 32, no. 2 (2005): 125.

<sup>17</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "The Wang Lixiong prophecy: 'Palestinization' in Xinjiang and the consequences of Chinese state securitization of religion," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Anand, Dibyesh, "Colonization with Chinese characteristics: politics of (in) security in Xinjiang and Tibet," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 129.

Moreover, inter-ethnic inequalities and discrimination exist.<sup>20</sup> The Israeli government deployed Anti-Terror units to suppress protests, and the Chinese government implemented additional security checks for Uyghurs.<sup>21</sup> Some hotels even refused to accept people from Xinjiang, regardless of ethnicity, a few years ago when terrorist attacks still happened frequently. The government did not punish such discriminatory behavior. To improve overall national security, both countries violated Muslims' human rights and advocated Islamophobia. The governments did not actively control the spread of such hate speeches.

Also, both states practice securitization.<sup>22</sup> Israel imposed curfews and martial law frequently to curb the Palestinian resistance movement. China sent millions of Uyghurs to the Re-education Center for vocational training and patriotic education to prevent terrorism and separatism.<sup>23</sup> The government implemented real-name authentication and restrictions on some daily necessities, such as kitchen knives and matches. Moreover, the states have implemented restrictions on religion.<sup>24</sup> The Chinese government claims it respects the freedom of religion while emphasizing religion must be sinicized.

Schuster compared the differences between Palestinians and Uyghurs. He pointed out that Palestinians had engaged in all forms of resistance, while Uyghurs were experts in avoiding and circumventing the government.<sup>25</sup> Besides, Schuster claimed that the techniques of Uyghurs continued to leap from poems to terrorist attacks.<sup>26</sup> Another aspect is that Uyghurs usually resort to indirect resistance instead of direct methods, such as rallies and vocalities of expression.

Nonetheless, Schuster only stated that these two cases had similarities to justify a comparison but did not explain the basis and standard by which the two can be compared. The lack of academic comparison occurs in the vast majority of studies analyzing Xinjiang with Palestine. For instance, Kurds, an ethnic minority that mainly live in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, face a similar or even worse situation than Uyghurs. The Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK), a representative of Kurdish nationalists, advocates separatism and takes extreme actions, such as suicide bombings against the governments.<sup>27</sup> Governments also use repression and other methods to reject their demands. More than 30,000 people died because of the clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK militants.<sup>28</sup> However, according to Trading Economics, which measures the impact of terrorism by calculating lives lost, injuries, property damages, and psychological influence, the number of Turkey has steadily dropped from 8.177 in 2016 to 5.6 in 2022 (0 indicates no impact, while 10 means the highest impact). Considering Turkey's high absolute index but declining trend, it is ambiguous and amphibolous to put it into the "Palestinization" category. Therefore, whether a country has "Palestinization" requires more rigorous analysis.

<sup>20</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "The Wang Lixiong prophecy: 'Palestinization' in Xinjiang and the consequences of Chinese state securitization of religion," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid: 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>23</sup> Wang Nan, "Analysis of the Israeli Factor in Palestinian Economic Development," *Arab World Studies*, no. 3 (May 2008): 33.

<sup>24</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "The Wang Lixiong prophecy: 'Palestinization' in Xinjiang and the consequences of Chinese state securitization of religion," *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (2019): 2.

<sup>25</sup> Schuster, Daniel James, *Resisting under Occupation. A Palestinian-Uyghur Comparison* (Anchor Academic Publishing, 2017), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Maziar Motamedi, "Ankara bomb blast: What's Turkey's troubled history with the PKK?" *Aljazeera*, October 3, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/3/ankara-blast-whats-turkeys-troubled-history-with-the-pkk>.

<sup>28</sup> Ergil, Dogu, "The Kurdish Question in Turkey," *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (July 2000): 122.



#### 4. Factual Differences between Xinjiang and Israel-Occupied Palestine

As explained above, scholars showed similar situations between Xinjiang and the West Bank of Palestine. However, part of the analysis is inaccurate because the Uyghur-Han relations do not reach the level of hatred between Israelis and Palestinians. For instance, settlements set up by Israel cannot be equated to Han immigrants in Xinjiang. There is a big difference in the way the two allocate resources. Whether close cooperation between Hamas and foreign groups is still questionable. China also does not have Israeli-style multi-party politics. Although high-level officials may have different opinions, they will remain consistent when specific policies are decided. Overlooking these differences may lead to inaccurate conclusions.

First, despite some Uyghurs claim to establish or re-establish their East Turkestan, Xinjiang is generally not considered to have territorial disputes in international society. The state that some Uyghurs claim can not represent a sovereign state. Based on the Article 1 of the *Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States* in 1933, the state should possess four qualifications — a permanent population, a defined territory, government, and capacity to enter into relations with the other states. The influence sphere of the second East Turkestan Republic only covers three northern regions instead of the entire Xinjiang. Although the provisional government it formed had received support from the USSR, it had never been recognized by any international organization or other countries until its end in 1946. Controversy over the ownership of Xinjiang is also not a consensus among Uyghurs. However, Palestine contains the four elements of the state although it is a limited recognition country. As the World Bank and World Population Review show, the population of Palestine was around 4.9 million, and 138 of the UN's 193 members have recognized it until April 2022.

Second, the government-led Jewish settlements in Palestine and Han immigrants to Xinjiang should not fall into the same category. Israel secured mass lands after the Six-Day War and viewed the territories as leverage for peace and recognition.<sup>29</sup> Since the end of the 1970s, some influential Zionists gradually made settlement expansion a state-sponsored project.<sup>30</sup> For example, Ariel Sharon, Israel's Defense Minister in the 1980s and the Prime Minister in the 2000s, promoted the expansion eagerly. Although Yitzhak Rabin, who served as prime minister twice in the 1970s and 1990s, promised to reduce funding for settlements and not to take any action to change the status quo, Israel's settlements have surged significantly after his assassination and right-wing Likud's return to power. Criticism of Israel from the international community is strong because the Israeli settlements violate international law. Israel is one of the signatories to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Article 49 of the Convention prohibits the occupying power from transferring its persons to the occupied territory, regardless of their motive.<sup>31</sup> The Israeli government's placement of mass Jews in settlements violates international law. As Israel's population increases, so does the number of new settlers. Nevertheless, the U.S. government has long provided political support to Israel. It has vetoed 32 Security Council resolutions critical of Israel since 1982.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the international society has not necessarily punished Israel on the Palestinian issue.

<sup>29</sup> Tenenbaum, Karen, and Ehud Eiran, "Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza: A brief history," *Negotiation Journal* 21, no. 2 (2005): 172.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 173.

<sup>31</sup> The Geneva Conventions. *Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*. Article 49. August 12, 1949.

<sup>32</sup> Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby," *London Review of Books* 28, no. 6 (2006): 4.



In comparison, while some Uyghurs accuse the Chinese government of making a Han-dominated Xinjiang, historical factors should not be overlooked. In addition to a small number of indigenous Han Chinese, mass young laborers were recruited from the central and eastern regions after the CCP established its power to develop Xinjiang's economy. The establishment of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) during the Cold War was to guard against the USSR and India. Similarly, the Chinese government once implemented the Third Front Construction to prevent potential (nuclear) attacks from the Soviets and the U.S. during the Cold War. China transferred millions of workers, experts, and armies to the southwest and northwest areas. People from poorer provinces also voluntarily go there for more job opportunities. These population movements shrank job opportunities for some ethnic minorities who are not good at Mandarin. Although these policies have side effects, they do not violate international law.

Third, it is inappropriate to equate the causes of death for Uyghurs and Palestinians. Israel's approach to dealing with the Palestinian issue has caused painful and intense death. Based on the Data on casualties of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 6,269 Palestinians were killed or injured. Around 22.5% of fatalities were children from 2008 to the end of March 2023 (15 years). Most casualties came from Israeli government attacks on civilians. Bombs or explosives from airplanes are the biggest causes of death.<sup>33</sup> They were sometimes indiscriminate in firing heavy weapons. Even today, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues with heavy casualties. Although it may sound dehumanizing to compare the casualties, from 1990 to 2016 (36 years), the number in China was around 3,000, including 2,000 killed or injured in the July 5 Riots.<sup>34</sup> The attackers were not from the government. Violent and terrorist attacks in Xinjiang disappeared after 2016.

Fourth, scholars point out that both Uyghur and Palestinian militant groups have ties to foreign terrorist groups. According to the Global Times report, the Chinese government estimated around 300 Chinese were fighting together with ISIS.<sup>35</sup> However, Hamas's ties with neighboring Hezbollah in Lebanon and the distant al-Qaeda in Afghanistan are weak and divergent. Chen and Peng argue that there is no evidence that Hamas has a direct connection with them.<sup>36</sup> They mainly support each other politically and morally because these groups have different scopes of activities and goals. Al-Qaeda is criticized by mainstream Islamic society since it implements extremist and terrorist activities.<sup>37</sup> Hezbollah belongs to the Shia, opposite to Sunni Hamas. While Hamas attacked Israel, it spent 95% annual budget on social services from 2004 to 2005.<sup>38</sup> Hizballah also focuses on livelihood issues and political power. Therefore, the claims that Palestinians have imparted their experience to overseas groups are hard to substantiate. Supporters of the Uyghur independence movement are relatively weak. They may be more dependent on and influenced by outside forces. The sameness pointed out by some scholars is difficult to establish.

<sup>33</sup> Yulius Brahmantya Priambada, "Opening the World's Eyes to the Humanitarian Threat in Palestine," *KOMPAS*, October 14, 2023, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/10/14/en-membuka-mata-dunia-pada-tingginya-ancaman-kemanusiaan-di-palestina>.

<sup>34</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang* (Foreign Language Press, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Si Yang, "Yisilanguo he xinjiang: weizuren shifou jiaru yisilanguo (ISIS and Xinjiang: Are Uyghurs joining ISIS)?" *Voice of America*, March 3, 2015, <https://www.voachinese.com/a/isis-uyghurs-20150302/2665113.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Chen Tianshe, Peng Chao, "Analysis on Similarities and Differences among Hamas, Hizballah, Al-Qaeda and Their Relations," *West Asia and Africa* 1, (2015): 35.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Zuhur, Sherifa, *Hamas and Israel: conflicting strategies of group-based politics* (US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 11.

## 5. Why Xinjiang Not “Palestinization?”

The previous part explained the factual difference between Xinjiang and Palestine. In this section, this research will focus on factors that prevent countries from falling into chaos caused by terrorism or extremism. In Xinjiang, the frequency of terrorist attacks has declined in recent years. Based on Trading Economics, China's terrorism index increased sharply after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and peaked in 2015. After that year, however, it declined rapidly. The index for 2021 is 1.86, about even with the 2008 nadir. On a country-by-country basis, this score is better than the Netherlands (2.08), Russia (4.22), Palestine (4.74), and Israel (4.78). Therefore, it is necessary to analyze what factors prevent China from being deadlocked over security in Xinjiang.

### 5.1 Strategies for Preventing Extremism and Terrorism

Many countries are plagued by extremist and terrorist attacks, which makes governments and international organizations put forward various countermeasures to reduce the impact of terrorist activities from the roots and methods. For instance, the British government's strategy is called “CONTEST.”<sup>39</sup> Its basic organizing structure includes four Ps. They are pursuing stopping terrorist attacks by reducing their intent, preventing people from becoming terrorists or supporting them by lowering their capability, strengthening the protection against terrorist attacks to reduce vulnerability, and preparing to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.<sup>40</sup>

Among these four points, “pursue” and “prevent” are two vital issues of precaution. To achieve this goal, Britain proposed some concrete solutions. At the legislative level, it emphasizes giving more power to law enforcement officers to prevent possible extreme terrorist attacks, extending prison sentences, and evaluating and managing released prisoners. At the technical level, cooperating with high-tech companies ensures that no terrorist propaganda will appear on the internet. The report also suggests Britain use its economic, diplomatic, and intelligence advantage to collaborate with its partners or provide assistance overseas.<sup>41</sup> Besides, it is necessary to investigate hidden risks and help people who have engaged to relinquish.<sup>42</sup> However, it is worth noting that “CONTEST” did not elaborate much on preventing terrorism through investment in economics and education.

The UN has also conducted an in-depth study on terrorism and extremism. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime divides the solutions to violent extremism into prevention (PVE) and countermeasures (CVE).<sup>43</sup> While many ways can be used to stop individuals or groups from using violence, McCants and Watts argued that there is no clear definition of CVE.<sup>44</sup> Some countermeasures can also be applied to poverty reduction or other relief measures. Therefore, some scholars turned to PVE, which emphasizes finding the source and evaluating the issue systematically.<sup>45</sup> The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism's project includes four parts: equipping youth with knowledge to participate in peacebuilding; fostering exchange and cooperation; supporting

<sup>39</sup> Gearson, John, and Hugo Rosemont, “Contest as strategy: Reassessing Britain's counterterrorism approach,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 12 (2015): 1038-1039.

<sup>40</sup> His Majesty's Government, *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism (June 2018)* (APS Group, 2018), 31.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>43</sup> UN Document. A/70/674, para. 41. December 24, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

civic engagement; and promoting intercultural understanding.<sup>46</sup> The project focuses on youth since their proportion is higher than seniors in volatile areas. Their thoughts are relatively easy to change.

The central government of China usually gives guidelines rather than detailed measures. Local governments take specific steps in line with the guidelines. Geng Shuang, Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the UN, discoursed four approaches to China's strategy at the Sixth Committee of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly under the subject 'Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism.' He called on multilateralism and shared the information at the regional and state level. International society should improve the legal framework against terrorism. Utilize high-tech to help under-developed countries, and prevent terrorist groups from having them. As China's influence grows and Russia's power in Central Asia weakens, China attempts to strengthen collaboration with the region's Islamic governments. It hopes to use its technical advantage to prevent terrorists from entering Xinjiang. Lastly, Geng emphasized that the elimination of terrorism needs to solve the education and employment problems of young people to break the vicious cycle. The first three of his suggestions are related to international cooperation, and the last solution is from an internal perspective.

This research will analyze China's advantages based on the above elements of combating and preventing extremism and terrorism. Although the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism listed seven priority areas and subdivided them into multiple sub-items, this research will also refer to the UK's 4Ps and China's proposal. However, it is worth noting that researchers do not have a consensus on the factors that lead to terrorism and extremism. Some are still controversial. For instance, James argues that factors generally believed to aggravate terrorism, such as poor economic development, life expectancy, and employment opportunities, do not support the crux.<sup>47</sup> Still, this research cites poverty as a potential variable that caused differences between Xinjiang and the West Bank. The biggest difference is that China views Uyghurs as nationals, while Israel views Palestinians as competitors and nationals of other countries. Besides, China has a strong central government. It has advantages in poverty reduction and education, technology, and multilevel and multilateral cooperation.

### 5.1.1 Education, Vocational Training, and Poverty Reduction

Many researchers and organizations believe education and vocational training help develop a region or country's economy and protect people from terrorism or extremism.<sup>48</sup> However, voices that challenge this argument are increasing. Krueger and Malečková found that a reduction in poverty or an increase in educational attainment does not help reduce terrorism.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Abadie stated that the terrorism risks in poorer countries are not necessarily higher.<sup>50</sup> Many terrorists came from households that have higher-than-average incomes. Piazza found that ethnic minorities living in countries that had more economic discrimination were more likely to experience terrorist attacks.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Cantin tried to defend the traditional argument. He regarded that poverty can create a favorable environment where terrorist groups might flourish.<sup>52</sup> People may gradually

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. *Youth PVE: preventing violent extremism*: 6. SHS-2020/WS/1. 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Piazza, James A, "Rooted in poverty?: Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages," *Terrorism and political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 170.

<sup>48</sup> European Commission, *Dealing with extremism in an educational environment in the Western Balkans* (Publications Office of the European Union, 2023), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Krueger, Alan B., and Jitka Malečková, "Education, poverty and terrorism: Is there a causal connection?" *Journal of Economic perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2002): 119.

<sup>50</sup> Abadie, Alberto, "Poverty, political freedom, and the roots of terrorism," *American Economic Review* 96, no. 2 (2006): 50.

<sup>51</sup> Piazza, James A, "Poverty, minority economic discrimination, and domestic terrorism," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (2011): 339.

<sup>52</sup> Cantin, Marc-Olivier, "Reexamining the terrorism-poverty nexus," *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, (2018): 1.

adapt and accept their extremist narratives. Therefore, while the roles of economic and educational factors are still debatable, improved conditions can still help curb extremism or terrorism.

Palestine's backwardness in the economy is largely due to Israel's containment. In terms of agriculture, Israel forcibly occupied Palestinian arable lands, controlled water sources, and destroyed fertile land for road and power grid construction.<sup>53</sup> In the industry field, it restricts Palestinians from obtaining production licenses, occupying high-end industries, and controlling the financial sector.<sup>54</sup> Since Israel is using its military and technological advantages to limit the development of the Palestinian area, the UN reported on February 19, 2021, that nearly half of the population of Palestine needs humanitarian assistance and is classified as a lower middle-income country.

Israel's overpowering of the Palestinians has caused the latter to respond with terrorism, putting the inhabitants of Palestine in a twofold disadvantage in terms of political and economic status. Excessive suppression have forced both sides to invest abundant resources in this regard. If the economic situation in Palestine does not improve, the resulting problems, such as unemployment and lack of education, will make the problem difficult to solve for a long time. Based on UNICEF's data about education and adolescents in Palestine, 25% of boys and 7% of girls have dropped out of school by age 15. Youth unemployment rates reached 40% in the West Bank and 62% in Gaza.<sup>55</sup> While the Oslo Accords created the PA to negotiate with Israel, due to Israel's occupation and colonization, the PA has the responsibility as a government but lacks sufficient resources to exercise power effectively.<sup>56</sup> It prioritizes achieving Israel's counter-terrorism goals, but some radical organizations continue to carry out terrorist attacks. As a result, it has been difficult for the Palestinian region's economy to achieve rapid development. Based on the World Bank's Palestinian Territories Poverty & Equity and Macroeconomics, Trade & Investment Global Practices, in 2021, the GDP per capita of Gaza was 1,440 dollars, around a quarter of the West Bank's. Nevertheless, the GDP per capita of Israel was 52,170 dollars. More than fourteen times of Palestine.

China has long focused on economic development but overlooked the economic gap. According to the *Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 2022* released on March 28, 2023, the GDP per capita of Xinjiang increased from around 3,800 in 2010 to 10,000 dollars in 2022. Nonetheless, the financial gap between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities or cities and countrysides enlarged. Ethnic minorities once advantageous in population and income see Han Chinese as coming for their resources and competing for jobs. After the July 5 Riots, the government turned to patriotic education, poverty alleviation, and common prosperity to narrow economic gaps and prevent ethnic minorities from turning to terrorism and extremism. Most separatists arrested so far for engaging in terrorist activities have been poorly educated unemployed young men. A Uyghur said that jobless, unmarried Uyghur men were most likely to speak out about their aspirations for independence.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the government employed mass ethnic minorities in security through government spending and transferred some to the middle and Eastern regions where factories demanded labor with higher salaries.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Nan, "Analysis of the Israeli Factor in Palestinian Economic Development," *Arab World Studies* 3(May 2008): 32-33.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 34.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Leech, Philip, "After 'Security First': An Analysis of Security Transition and 'Statebuilding' in the West Bank 2007-11," *New Middle Eastern Studies* 4, (2014): 3. <<http://www.brismes.ac.uk/nmes/archives/1337>>.

<sup>57</sup> Smith Finley, Joanne, "Four Generations of Uyghurs: The Shift towards Ethno-political Ideologies among Xinjiang's Youth," *Inner Asia* 2, no. 2 (2000): 211.

Beijing asked developed provinces to transfer fiscal payments to Xinjiang. On September 26, President Xi delivered an important speech at the Third Central Xinjiang Work Symposium. He stated that the fiscal transfer to the XPCC was 2 trillion yuan from 2014 to 2019. Private and state-owned enterprises had invested nearly 2.4 trillion yuan. The 19 provinces and cities that joined the “pairing assistance” program are required to grant 0.3% to 0.6% of their annual budget to Xinjiang every year. In 2020, the Chinese government claimed that China had eliminated absolute poverty. Based on the 2010 standard, the poverty standard is 2,300 yuan (constant price) per person per year. Although the economic gap between Uyghurs and Han Chinese once widened, with the improvement of living conditions and the increase of employment of low- and middle-income Uyghurs, their attention may partly turn to themselves and their families instead of terrorist attacks.

In the Chen Quanguo era, Xinjiang’s civil servants and public officials were under tremendous pressure to achieve this goal. Based on my interviews, their missions include stability maintenance and poverty alleviation. They had to be responsible for poverty alleviation in pairs with poor households and visit low-income families for free after work. There were two types of civil servants working for security maintenance in Xinjiang. The first type is village cadres. Southern Xinjiang is occupied by ethnic minorities. This region’s modernization is far behind that of northern Xinjiang. As the Chinese government sees poverty as the reason that extremist ideology attracts Uyghurs, basic-level civil servants were under vast pressure to increase farmers’ income and prevent the penetration of terrorist, extremist, and separatist ideologies. A village cadre with two years of experience said the natural conditions of these places were hard. Most villagers had no knowledge or skills. Some even had not received enough education. Hence, the villagers were easy to be taught and brainwashed by terrorism and extremism. Some villagers depended on the government’s subsidies and were not willing to change their lives. So, village cadres needed to help villagers get rid of poverty by asking these villagers to work on their lands or sell products. This goal was not so hard for those cadres working in villages with relatively few poverty-stricken people. However, these cadres still could not enjoy their holidays, like the Spring Festival, the most important festival for Han Chinese, and other significant festivals for minority cadres. They had to visit low-income families, bringing necessities such as rice, oil, and coal.

The life of these village cadres was monotonous. After finishing their daytime work, they needed to have meetings, sum up and report their work, and evaluate villagers’ minds in the evening. In the end, they still need to attend different meetings, such as studying the documents from President Xi Jinping or the local government. The process usually started at 9 in the morning and ended at midnight. The high-intensity work made most cadres tired, but after the success of poverty alleviation, many cadres also got a sense of satisfaction. One interviewee said that the Uyghur in this village appreciated his effort to improve their life.

Another campaign civil servants had to do was “visit the people, care for the people’s livelihoods, win people’s hearts.” The resident working group arrived in 8,668 villages, 759 teams, and 1,985 communities to visit ethnic minorities’ families.<sup>58</sup> The campaign started around 2017, and the government initially proposed to last three years. It is called “make pairs (*jieduizi*).” Pairs refer to party members and normal people, the Han and ethnic minorities, or leaders and workers. State staff also have to join this activity. The difference between state staff and civil servants is that the former have jobs. So, *jieduizi* could be seen as unpaid work. Every civil servant and state staff has at least one recipient family. The recipient family may increase to three based on the helpers’

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<sup>58</sup> Wang Lixiong, *Wo de xiyu, ni de dongtu* (*My West Land, Your East Country*) (Locus Publishing, 2007), 89.

income or position. Unlike village cadres, the recipients are local people. The mission is to help ethnic minorities out of poverty and maintain stability. When important festivals come, they cannot rest even if they are on holiday, but visit recipient families with some basic life necessities such as cooking oil, powder, and coal. An informant said that all the costs come from their own pockets. The government did not cover this part of the cost. Due to domestic social control crackdown on violent terrorists, and transnational cooperation with Central Asian countries, mass violence has largely disappeared. Hence, Ma Xingrui restored the weekends for civil servants in Xinjiang in January 2022. Ma's reduction of public officials' burden is mainly based on the fact that Xinjiang has no security risks, and it shows to the outside that Xinjiang is normalizing like other cities.

### 5.1.2 The Internet and Social Media

The Internet and social media have become new platforms for extremist and terrorist groups to propagate them. Yariv and Weimann stated that the nature of the Internet makes it convenient for terrorist groups to act.<sup>59</sup> People from any corner of the world can access it anonymously. Terrorist sites often describe themselves as peace-loving groups, while defining their targets as violent. Besides, these groups declare that force is a last resort since the enemy does not accept their peaceful proposal. They also use freedom of expression and political prisoners to defend their behaviors.<sup>60</sup> Terrorist groups also found famous social media as suitable platforms to propagate. They use these technology platforms to organize and coordinate terrorist activities in countries with high terrorist indexes.<sup>61</sup> Scholars found that Facebook penetration and terrorism have a positive relationship.<sup>62</sup> Other social media, such as YouTube, is a world-wide-renowned video-sharing website. Videos have the advantage of conveying more information than pure text content. Terrorist groups can take advantage of its 'post-hoc' review system by uploading bomb-making or violent videos before being reported or deleted.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, these videos are often viewed by hundreds of thousands of people before being processed.

Israel has a large influence on Palestine's press. It hinders the production, distribution, and reading of Palestinian newspapers.<sup>64</sup> Besides, journalists take great risks. In 2011, Israeli authorities arrested Abu Arafah for his report that Israeli forces had arrested 120 Hamas members.<sup>65</sup> The censorship from Israel forces the Palestinian press to adopt self-censorship. Also, Israel is a world leader in the development of surveillance and security technologies.<sup>66</sup> The multi-layered censorship helps keep Israel safe.

On the other hand, the PA, which has a peaceful relationship with Israel, is dependent on manpower to maintain security. In 2013, civil servants working in the security sector took up 44% of the total.<sup>67</sup> As the Palestinian issue involves multiple interests, the situation has become complicated. Since Israel controls at least 60% of the West Bank and has overwhelming power, the Palestinian security sector provides information about its police recruits to Israel and reports progress to the U.S. Israel and the U.S. constraints Palestine's development, which harms its

<sup>59</sup> Tsifti, Yariv, and Gabriel Weimann, "www. terrorism. com: Terror on the Internet," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, no. 5 (2002): 317.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid: 322.

<sup>61</sup> Asongu, Simplice A., Stella-Marie I. Orim, and Rexon T. Nting, "Terrorism and social media: global evidence," *Journal of Global Information Technology Management* 22, no. 3 (2019): 18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>63</sup> Dean, Geoff, and Peter Bell, "The dark side of social media: review of online terrorism," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology* 3, 4(2012): 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> Nossek, Hillel, and Khalil Rinnawi, "Censorship and freedom of the press under changing political regimes: Palestinian media from Israeli occupation to the Palestinian Authority," *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 65, no. 2 (2003): 199.

<sup>65</sup> Editors of "Committee to Protect Journalists," "Israeli forces arrest Palestinian journalist Amer Abu Arafah in West Bank," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, July 19, 2022,

<https://cpj.org/2022/07/israeli-forces-arrest-palestinian-journalist-amer-abu-arafa-in-west-bank/>.

<sup>66</sup> Stevens, Andrew, "Surveillance policies, practices and technologies in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories: Assessing the security state," *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (2011): 1.

<sup>67</sup> Amrov, Sabrien, and Alaa Tartir, "After Gaza, What Price Palestine's Security Sector," *Al-Shabaka Policy Brief* 8, (2014): 3.



technological development. Furthermore, partisan divisions in Palestine and fragmentation of the territory also make long-term planning hard to achieve for the government.

China also has technological capabilities that can monitor the virtual world and reality. China is developing more rapidly in the application of high-tech to counterterrorist and extremist attacks. It began implementing subway security checks across the country after the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010. In the early 2010s, the face recognition system was gradually popularized. Moreover, during the Chen Quanguo period, dense police posts were built in large cities like Urumqi. Even in an emergency, the police can arrive within three to five minutes. Since Xinjiang was in the stage of frequent violent terrorist attacks at that time, in addition to security checks and face recognition systems, Xinjiang also conducted ID checks on people in Xinjiang, including tourists, and spot checks on mobile phones and computers, and measures to strengthen the supervision of purchasing lighters and kitchen knives. Based on Bit-CCTV's *2022 Global Security Top 50 List*, China has four of the top ten security companies, including the No. 1 Hikvision. Fifteen Chinese companies are in the top fifty (excluding Taiwan).

In addition, China's Internet control makes it difficult for Chinese netizens to connect to world-class websites, such as YouTube, X (Twitter), and Facebook through normal ways. Chinese local alternatives are strictly regulated by the government. For example, Weibo, Bilibili, and Baidu. The company itself also does biting reviews on the content posted by users. Therefore, the management of the Internet makes it hard for external violent terrorist propaganda to flow into China, the self-censorship of domestic Internet companies and government monitoring have erected a high wall.

Xinjiang's security policies are backed by the country's economic and technological strength. This multi-layered surveillance network and security measures make it difficult for terrorists to find loopholes. However, they brought inconvenience and pressure on residents and governors and harmed the autonomous region's economic development. Historically, China's dynasties have shown a trend of strengthening central power from ancient times to the present. The development of science and technology has enhanced the Chinese government's ability to manage the local. As Xi Jinping emphasized, political security comes first. The prevention and resolution of national security risks should be put in a prominent position. Therefore, although Beijing transferred Ma Xinrui, who is good at economics, to Xinjiang to replace Chen Quanguo, measures including internet surveillance and security checks remain in place.

### 5.1.3 The Differences at State-level and Regional-level

The UN divides the main body of preventing terrorism and extremism into three levels.<sup>68</sup> The top level is a global framework under the guidance of the UN. The next level is regional cooperation, and the basic unit is the state. It recommends states make plans and adopt effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure policies work.<sup>69</sup> While states remain the main body of counter-terrorism, regional and global cooperations have become more important than before as terrorists have begun to use national borders to evade capture.

At the state level, China and Palestine have different political systems. Legally, Palestine is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party. However, in reality, the PA only rules the West Bank. The President, Abbas, has

<sup>68</sup> "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," United Nations, Office of Counter-Terrorism, accessed October 29, 2023, [https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan\\_action.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan_action.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



been in power for nearly twenty years. Besides, the regional situation is further aggravated by the variation between Fatah, Hamas, and other factions, but PA does not have enough control over them. As there is no effective parliamentary supervision of the government's work, the corruption problem is also severe.<sup>70</sup> Based on an investigation in 2014, 81% of Palestinians believe the PA is corrupt.<sup>71</sup> Besides, Human Rights Watch reported on January 23, 2023, that Israel restricts the free movement of Palestinians to prevent terrorist attacks and constrain Palestine's development. As a result, the Palestinian government has lost some government functions. In addition, Israel has a strong influence on the security and economy of the West Bank. However, due to the special relationship between Palestine and Israel, it is hard for Israel to fully control the West Bank as it can to ensure its own security. In January 2023, 9 Palestinians were killed in Jenin because of Israeli military clashes with Palestinian militants.<sup>72</sup>

China's national power and control over society are stronger than Palestine's. China is a unitary and one-party state. Although there are various opinions on political or economic issues, Party members are required to speak with one voice when implementing policies. Other democratic parties can not challenge the CCP. They only have the right to make suggestions and supervise. In 2014, when domestic violent attacks were at their peak, a Xi Jinping-led National Security Commission of the Communist Party of China was established. Xi emphasized China must adhere to a holistic view of national security which recognizes the significance of both internal and external securities. China's national security was more complicated than ever, but the security work system could not meet the actual needs.<sup>73</sup> Greitens pointed out that when the CCP uses national security, it means state or regime security instead of traditional military or diplomatic perspectives.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, to guarantee the party's long-term rule, it is willing to spend mass manpower and money. Although China is often criticized for its autocracy, the system is better at handling political violence. Lawrence and James analyzed international terrorism in sixteen countries from 1968 to 1978. They found that the containment and reduction of terrorist activity are facilitated by conditions of repression rather than reform.<sup>75</sup> Countries with weak multiparty systems are more prone to political violence than two- or three-party systems because they cannot govern coalitions, extremists, or "anti-system."<sup>76</sup> Jackman and Volpert found that multipartism fosters extreme right parties.<sup>77</sup> The actors in Palestine compete with each other. Moderate factions have to be more aggressive to compete for limited media attention, popular support, and recruits.<sup>78</sup> They may even sabotage the peace process deliberately while the Palestinian government cannot coordinate their actions. Israel also has this problem. Smaller and more radical parties are afforded disproportionate power in national policy decisions and portfolio distribution.<sup>79</sup> As a result, these radical parties made the situation in Palestine more complicated. Strong claims on both sides forced some to resort to violent attacks to gain an advantage, which made the issue harder to solve.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Lisiecka, "Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation: what next?" *European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)*, (May 2017): 2.

<sup>72</sup> Yonah Jeremy Bob, "Nine Palestinians killed in Jenin, Israeli security forces thwart terror attack," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 26, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/article-729685>.

<sup>73</sup> Xi Jinping, *Selected Important Documents since the 18th National Congress (Vol. 1)* (Central Literature Publishing House, 2014), 506.

<sup>74</sup> Greitens, Sheena Chestnut, "Internal Security and Grand Strategy: China's Approach to National Security under Xi Jinping," *statement before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on US-China Relations at the Chinese Communist Party's Centennial*, (2021): 1.

<sup>75</sup> Piazza, James A, "Rooted in poverty?: Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages," *Terrorism and political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 163.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 165.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 172.

<sup>78</sup> Clauset, Aaron, et al., "The strategic calculus of terrorism: Substitution and competition in the Israel—Palestine conflict," *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 1 (2010): 26.

<sup>79</sup> Piazza, James A, "Rooted in poverty?: Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages," *Terrorism and political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 173.

At the regional level, multilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism prevents Xinjiang from “Palestinization.” Violent terrorist attacks are not limited by national borders. Globalization and differences in the ability of governments to control borders have made it easier than in the past for people with similar blood or religion to congregate and make weapons more accessible.<sup>80</sup> Since China, Russia, and Central Asian countries are under the threat of some Islamic extremist groups, they established SCO to deal with problems that a single state can not handle alone. Their threats include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Jamaat of Central Asian Mujahedins, the Islamic Party of Eastern Turkestan, and other terrorist and extremist groups. Members of ISIS also transferred from Syria or Iraq to Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. The cooperation reflects trust between governments on security issues, and this organization is still absorbing South Asian, Middle East, and Southeast Asian countries, such as India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sri Lanka, which makes it bigger and more influential. For China, due to the evidence that some Uyghur terrorists were under training or living in Egypt or Saudi Arabia, the participation of these countries will help further reduce the possibility of terrorist attacks in China.

Although there was a short period of mutual trust between Palestine and Israel, the relationship between the two countries is currently at a low ebb. Since the Knesset legalized around 4,000 settler houses on private Palestinian land, Palestine stopped its security cooperation with Israel.<sup>81</sup> Also, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)’s security coordination with Israel was criticized by Hamas as a policy of appeasement. The PLO suspended security coordination in 2015 to gain public support.<sup>82</sup> There are also sporadic attacks from individuals on Israelis.

The Middle East also lacks influential security cooperation organizations. The Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation states that it endeavors to safeguard and defend the national sovereignty of member states, but it is difficult to intervene in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Due to Israel’s encroachment on Palestinian territory, neighboring countries have a negative attitude towards Israel. Many people in these countries sympathize the Palestinian people who are also Muslims. Moreover, some of Palestine’s neighboring countries, such as Syria and Lebanon, are inherently volatile. They play a limited role in regional security issues. The U.S. is still an important player. However, its apparent partiality to Israel limits its role in maintaining security in the region. In comparison, the regional situation in Central Asia is relatively stable, the government has the power to control the people, and there are no complicated conflicts between countries like Palestine and Israel. Hence, external stability also makes Xinjiang less likely to “Palestinization.”

## 6. Problems and Risks in the Xinjiang Issue

China’s internal capacity, including developed technology, investment in security regardless of cost, economic development measures, and its external cooperation with surrounding countries in SCO that face similar challenges, prevent Xinjiang from falling into Palestinian-style chaos. After the mid-2010s, Xinjiang’s security environment improved significantly compared to previous years. Nonetheless, despite Chen Quanguo no longer serving as the top leader in Xinjiang, many problems still exist in this region.

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<sup>80</sup> “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,” United Nations, Office of Counter-Terrorism, accessed October 29, 2023, [https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan\\_action.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan_action.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Lisiecka, “Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation: what next?” *European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)*, (May 2017): 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid: 2.

As scholars like Clarke and Finley have pointed out, there is political and ethnic boundary between the Han and Uyghurs. The geographic disparity between the affluent northern Xinjiang, dominated by Han Chinese, and the relatively impoverished southern Xinjiang, where Uyghurs are the majority, remains unchanged. The mass detentions during the Chen Quanguo era will also become a common memory for many Uyghurs in the coming decades.

Also, the government discriminated against Muslim groups and implemented securitization measures. For instance, based on my survey in Xinjiang in 2019, the government monitored the statements of Xinjiang-born on WeChat -- China's most widely used instant messaging app. Security personnel in Xinjiang did not treat everyone equally. Instead, they subject non-Han groups to additional checks. Although regulations vary by region, the government has strictly controlled behaviors and attire that are considered to have potential tendencies toward religious extremism. In 2014, Urumqi implemented a regulation prohibiting Muslim women from wearing burka.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, men are restricted from growing beards. However, there are no such requirements for Han Chinese men. Other discriminatory actions include the infamous Re-education Centers. Among the over one million detainees, the majority are Uyghurs. A Uyghur has been detained for up to a year and a half simply for applying for a passport without reporting it to the local authorities. Detainees are required to learn Mandarin and undergo patriotic education. Some with poor health lost their lives due to the lack of timely medical treatment. Xinjiang's control and surveillance of speech make ethnic groups afraid or hard to dialogue. The authoritarian system also leaves much room for improvement in terms of respect for human rights and the rule of law. Although the high-pressure situation in Xinjiang has eased somewhat since Ma Xingrui came to power, the memory of the pain of losing loved ones and suffering discrimination casts a shadow on the future easing relations.

In addition, forced labor exists in the process of labor transfer carried out by the local government to increase the income of ethnic minorities. Ma Rong found that in Shufu County, thirty-two people returned to their hometown without authorization or reasons. They took up 0.8% of more than 4,000 people of labor transfer.<sup>84</sup> Although their wages were higher than those in their hometowns, they were more likely to conflict with Han workers due to religious and cultural differences.<sup>85</sup> Whether the local government was aiming to raise ethnic minority income or for other purposes, compulsory labor transfer was a violation of human rights. This behavior should be stopped and officials who violate the rules should be punished.

Increased dialogue and understanding is one of the solutions to violent extremism. Not having a conversation is sometimes more dangerous than arguing because people do not even know where the differences lie. Dialogue between Han Chinese and Uyghurs is still insufficient. Normal Uyghurs living in remote areas do not have the conditions to learn Mandarin. Those young Uyghurs living in big cities are prohibited from speaking their mother tongue at school. The Han are also unwilling to learn the Uyghur language due to the limited benefits. Searches on sensitive issues in Xinjiang on China's domestic internet are not displayed due to the government's control. Websites established by ethnic minorities have been shut down on charges of state secession.

<sup>83</sup> "Urumqi guiding: jin zhi zai gonggongchang suo chuandai mengmian zhaopao (Urumqi Regulations: Wearing masks or robes in public places is prohibited)," People's Procuratorate of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, accessed July 13, 2024, [http://www.xj.jcy.gov.cn/jcxw/201803/t20180327\\_2169739.shtml](http://www.xj.jcy.gov.cn/jcxw/201803/t20180327_2169739.shtml).

<sup>84</sup> Ma Rong, "Temporary Migration and its Impact of Ethnic Relations in China," *Chinese Journal of Population Science* 6, (2009): 9.

<sup>85</sup> Ma Rong, "Woguo bufen shaoshumin zu jiu ye renkou de zhi ye jie gou bian qian yu kuadi yu liudong — 2010 nian renkou pucha shuju de chubu fenxi (Employed population of some ethnic minorities in my country career structure changes and cross-regional mobility — Preliminary analysis of 2010 census data)," *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 33, no. 6 (Nov. 2013): 14.

Due to the Chinese government's forced Mandarin study policies in recent years, the more serious issue is not the language barrier, but the government's cover-up of past mistakes. Young argued that intercultural dialogue should be expanded beyond disputes especially involving culture to all discussions and conflicts.<sup>86</sup> However, ethnic issues are still considered sensitive and are subject to strict control. There is no evidence that the government has provided compensation to the mass Uyghurs who were mistakenly taken to re-education centers or whose relatives died inside. In the past, Hu Yaobang, a former leader of the Chinese Communist Party, redressed numerous wrongful cases after the Cultural Revolution, partially mitigating the damage it caused. Although the current U.S. accusations against China regarding Xinjiang make it difficult for Beijing to show weakness, genuine and effective dialogue between the Han Chinese and ethnic minorities will be challenging unless Beijing substantively apologizes and compensates those minorities who have been treated unfairly.

The UN argues that if governments adopt international human rights norms, promote good governance, and uphold the rule of law, they can create an environment where extremism becomes less attractive.<sup>87</sup> For instance, prisoners should be treated fairly to prevent them from retaliating because of hatred after they leave prison. Discrimination against certain religions or groups of people should be prohibited. China did not mention this point. Perhaps it realized that insufficient awareness of human rights is one of its shortcomings. While Beijing always emphasizes its achievement of improving people's living standards through economic development, the economy can not solve all problems. China may have enough power to deter them, but it will increase the costs required to maintain security. Even if the government can make minority groups appear to comply on the surface, it cannot discern their inner thoughts. When control is relaxed, extreme activities may resurface. If Beijing is to address the root causes of terror and extremism, it has to improve both human rights and the rule of law. Making the law an important standard for determining right and wrong.

The government alone is not enough to safeguard human rights and the rule of law. Supervision from the people is also significant. Journalists are one of the most important powers. Journalists play a crucial role by ensuring the prompt and thorough investigation of threats to their safety.<sup>88</sup> The CCP has its watchdog to supervise its officials. Still, they do not have enough capacity to supervise all. For province-level or even state-level human rights violations, the role of journalists is necessary because they can help monitor whether officials' or enterprises' behavior is legal. With Xi Jinping's coming as president in 2012, Beijing has held tougher control over the media than before. The over-dependence on internal supervision may lead to the emergence of a second Chen Quanguo.

It is a complex issue to assess the possible Palestinization of Xinjiang in the future. Retrospecting the violent terrorist incidents that occurred in the past, we can find many characteristics and signs. From the economic aspect, ethnic minorities could not obtain fair education and employment opportunities due to language and religion. The income gap between them and Han Chinese continued to widen. From the characteristics of attacks, terrorists often use explosions or cold weapons in crowded public areas. The government was unable to deal with such random attacks. From the perspective of government policies and management, the management of religion was relaxed or even laissez-faire. Many policies lacked careful research and evaluation. Too strict control caused dissatisfaction and resistance. Some Uyghurs watched violent videos on the Internet and colluded with overseas

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<sup>86</sup> Young, Iris Marion, "Thoughts on multicultural dialogue," *Ethnicities* 1, no. 1 (2001): 121.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> "Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," United Nations, Office of Counter-Terrorism, accessed October 29, 2023, [https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan\\_action.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/plan_action.pdf).

terrorist groups. At the educational level, Uyghurs had difficulty obtaining formal education and were easily incited by extremists. Their recognition of the state was much lower than that of religion.

Beijing has learned some lessons from the past. For instance, it has strengthened control over violent terrorist videos, required Uyghur children to attend regular schools and learn Mandarin, and promoted Xinjiang's development through the Belt and Road Initiative, making Xinjiang a transit point connecting China with Central Asia and even Europe. On the positive side, the arrest of terrorists has been effective. Education and poverty alleviation measures can also enhance Uyghurs' national recognition and improve their living conditions. Nevertheless, most of these measures are coercive and lack communication with Uyghurs. Human rights violations may become an indelible pain in the hearts of Uyghurs. The government may find it difficult to know whether Uyghurs resist its patriotic education. The superficial harmony cannot hide the lack of real communication and exchanges. Besides, while Beijing's economic policies have contributed to Xinjiang's overall development, it is unclear whether they can reduce the income gap between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Past Xinjiang policies have always been a cycle of soft and hard lines. When Beijing's grip weakens, the risk of Palestinization would be high. Even if everything goes well, it may take decades to achieve the goal. Therefore, the future of Xinjiang remains uncertain.

## 7. Conclusion

The situation in Xinjiang changed dramatically after the July 5 Riots. Some scholars believed that Xinjiang would be "Palestinization." They regard that the Uyghur-Han conflict would escalate to a level difficult for the Chinese government to resolve. However, it is worth noting that "Palestinization" is still an informal descriptive expression.<sup>89</sup> This study maintains that the circumstances in Xinjiang are not comparable to those in Palestine. The critical reason is that the Chinese government sees Xinjiang as a part of its territory, core interests, and an issue related to the CCP's reign. However, the Israeli government regards Palestine as a resource competitor and terrorist attack-maker. A strong Palestine may become a threat to Israel. Hence, it constrains the capacity of the PA and limits the development of Palestine. This research also lists and analyzes the Chinese government's soft policies, such as transferring mass funds to provide jobs and reduce poverty. Besides, both China and neighboring Central Asian countries are facing the threat of terrorism and extremism, which enables them to cooperate through the establishment of security cooperation organizations.

This study mainly focuses on the soft side of China's ethnic policy. For the hard-line policies, the policy of forcibly detaining Uyghur in Re-education Centers is opposed. These measures lack legal justification and contravene widely accepted principles of respecting human rights, both within China and globally. However, evaluating soft policies requires categorization and differentiation. It is supported that efforts to introduce jobs to Uyghurs and other ethnic groups or directly assist them in engaging in high-income jobs employment are necessary. Given the longstanding widening income gap and the sense of relative deprivation experienced by low-income rural Uyghurs, providing stable employment opportunities could mitigate the allure of terrorism. The Belt and Road Initiative also plays a role in promoting the overall economic development of Xinjiang. Although Han Chinese are often criticized for occupying high-income jobs, which may cause dissatisfaction among some

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<sup>89</sup> Isotalo, Riina, *Managing Muslim Mobilities: Between Spiritual Geographies and the Global Security Regime* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 59.

Uyghurs, if low-income Uyghurs compare their situation to their previous jobs, it can still provide a degree of satisfaction. This could even lead to some Uyghur achieving incomes closer to or exceeding the average income of Han Chinese.

However, some soft policies are questionable. For example, Chen Quanguo's policy of visiting Muslim households and providing necessities during holidays placed significant pressure on local civil servants and teachers. Providing the same amount of living subsidies or directly distributing goods could achieve the same effect. Therefore, the more important task for civil servants is "monitoring" these low-income minority families. Uyghurs are also well aware of this. Such policies may damage ethnic relations. In addition, even if some government officials intend to improve the income of Uyghurs, they should not force Uyghurs to work in factories in developed regions. Such forced labor practices should be stopped. Furthermore, as aforementioned, it is necessary to develop new industries in Xinjiang through a national strategy. However, it remains to be seen whether these measures can narrow the income gap between the Han and Uyghur populations, thereby reducing the Uyghurs' sense of inequality. If the Belt and Road Initiative results in more high-income job opportunities for the Han Chinese, it could still provoke discontent among the Uyghurs.

Since Ma Xingrui took office, Xinjiang's policies have been gradually "softening." The fundamental reason remains that the Chinese government believes economic development is the key to solving the Uyghur issue. This approach can reduce poverty and unemployment, weakening the roots of extremism and terrorism. Also, it helps improve the international image and diplomatic relations, reducing criticism from the international community. Overall, China's soft policies may help Xinjiang avoid the risk of Palestinization in the short term. Still, the risks exist in the long term. Beijing's overemphasis on collective interests and the strengthening of internal control have increased the possibility of terrorists' hatred due to a lack of attention to human rights and supervision. These practices violate the spirit of the rule of law, damage China's image, and deepen the fear among ethnic minorities. Beijing's current approach focuses on economic development, supplemented by assimilation education and stability maintenance. Uyghurs' resentment may explode when the government loosens control. To prevent the tragedy from happening again, it is necessary for the Chinese government to gradually decentralize power, giving professional NGOs freedom to appease the original perpetrators, and allowing scholars and journalists to conduct investigations and research to monitor the government's behavior. Otherwise, it is not impossible to repeat the mistakes of Xinjiang under Chen Quanguo. Therefore, this research is cautiously optimistic about Xinjiang's future.

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