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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

The Belt Road Project as A Triggering Element of the Securitization of the Uyghur Issue

Uygur Meselesinin Güvenlikleştirilmesini Tetikleyen Bir Unsur Olarak Kuşak Yol Projesi

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Abstract
The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is considered based on its ethnocultural, religious, and historical diversity. In its national security documents, known as the White Paper, China associates the region with extremism, separatism, and terrorism; and thus recognizes the Uyghurs as a threat. At the crossroads of OBOR's (One Belt One Road) three separate land corridors, Xinjiang, which has a crucial place in Beijing's hegemony-building process, is a region regarded critical from a geopolitical and geo-economics perspective. In this context, Beijing securitizes the Uyghurs, with whom China claims that its own values, political goals, and perception of the future are not compatible, from the "threat" point of view. This approach can also be interpreted through the conceptual elements envisaged by the Copenhagen School, such as immigration waves, horizontal and vertical competition, and depopulation.

Keywords
China, OBOR, Bingtuan, Copenhagen school, Securitization theory

Öz
Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi, sahip olduğu etno-kültürel, dinsel ve tarihsel farklılık ekseninde değerlendirilmektedir. Çin, White Paper olarak bilinen ulusal güvenlik belgelerinde, bölgeyi, aşırılıkçılık, ayrılıkçılık ve terör ile ilişkilendirmekte ve bu anlamda Uygurları bir tehdit olarak görmektedir. Pekin'in hegemonya inşa sürecinde çok önemli bir yeri olan Tek Kuşak Tek Yol Projesi'nin üç ayrı kara koridorunun bağlantı noktası olan Sincan, bu anlamda jeopolitik/jeoekonomik önemi kritik olarak değerlendirilebilecek bir bölgedir. Bu bağlamda, Pekin, kendi değerleri, siyasal hedefleri ve gelecek algısıyla uyum içerisinde olmadığını iddia ettiği Uygurları "tehdit" ekseninde güvenlikleştirmektedir. Bu süreç, göç dalgaları, yatay ve dikey rekabet ile nüfus azalması gibi Kopenhag Okulu'nun öngördüğü kavramsal unsurlarla da anlamlandırılabilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler
Çin, Tek Kuşak Tek Yol Projesi, Bingtuan, Kopenhag Okulu, Güvenlikleştirme teorisi

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Introduction

Situated in the west of China, and known to be one of the last two regions incorporated into the country, Xinjiang is known to have much closer relations with Central Asia in historical and socio-cultural terms. Xinjiang, where a considerable number of different ethnic groups, mainly Uyghurs, have coexisted for years, has been firmly connected to the central government through diverse programs implemented by Beijing. The identity-related demands of the Uyghurs are not a new phenomenon. Indeed, even before the declaration of the People's Republic of China (PRC), they made several moves on the way to independence. Today, however, the identity and political demands of Uyghurs are perceived by Beijing as a national security matter of urgency. Based on its national security documents, China sees extremism, separatism, and terrorism as the main predicaments to cope with. Beijing, which considers Muslim Uyghurs to be extremists and separatists by associating them with certain terror groups, regards keeping them under control as one of its primary goals. It is seen at this point that Uyghurs are "securitized" as a threat to national security by giving meaning to them with a "negative" perception. It can be stated that this identity is subject to menaces such as immigration, horizontal and vertical competition, and depopulation within the framework of societal security, which is a sub-sector of the "Securitization" approach developed by the Copenhagen School. The development that puts Xinjiang and the Uyghur issue at the center of international politics is that three different land corridors of the OBOR initiative launched by Beijing start from Xinjiang or connect there. The future of this project, which is of great importance in the process of establishing China's hegemony, is also closely linked to stability in Xinjiang.

In the literature, it is seen that the OBOR Initiative and the issues related to China's Uyghur problem tend to be evaluated separately. It is seen that the initiative is mostly evaluated within the framework of China's foreign policy actions and hegemony building process. Voon and Xu (2020) think that this initiative institutionalizes China's soft power and at the same time reveals Beijing's demand for a multipolar international system. On the other hand, Chan (2017) states that the US opposes the OBOR because it sees it as a very important move that can increase China's global visibility. Zotova and Kolosov (2019), on the other hand, underline that, for the time being, China, with which Russia has shared a critical stance towards Western hegemony and its demand for systemic multipolarity, does not oppose this move, since it is building an event specific to Eurasia. Shakhanova and Garlick (2020) also state that they are working on integrating the Eurasian Economic Union and the OBOR in the medium term. Blanchard and Flint (2017) evaluated the AIIB and Silk Road Fund, which are extensions of the OBOR. When the literature on China's Uyghur problem is examined, Bhattacharya (2003) connects the separatism in the Uyghur region with Chinese nationalism, noting that Chinese nationalism based on Han identity ignores ethnic minorities and points out that this situation triggers separatist movements of minorities. Aslam and Wenjei (2016), who deal with the Uyghur problem within the framework of Confucianism, state that the view of Chinese Cultural Norms on ethnic identity is within the framework of "barbarian minorities" and "civilized Han Chinese". It draws attention to the fact that China's minority problems can be solved by ensuring equality between different ethnic groups in the context of the Confucianism, which approaches the event within the framework of values and behavioral norms rather than material differences. Liu and Peters (2017) states that the ambitious Great Leap West

policy, which the Chinese government initiated in 1999 to develop the western provinces of the country, contributed to the improvement of the economic situation of Han Chinese in the region more than Uyghurs, contrary to expectations. They state that in addition to the investments in question, controlling the intra-regional balances and the migration of Han Chinese to the region can play an important role in solving the problem. Çaksu (2020) states that in order to build a homogeneous cultural structure in China, the Chinese government has followed a policy of oppression and persecution against the Uyghurs, with the help of advanced monitoring technologies. He claims that the main motivations of this policy are largely Islamophobia and the geo-strategical importance of the Uyghur lands. Mukherjee (2010) states that since the Uyghurs are seen as a threat to the stability of the state, China has taken extremely harsh measures against this group. Particularly at this point, he stated that the group's religious belief (i.e. Islam) was targeted as it was in contrast to the nationalist policies that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had followed for many years.

In fact, many studies on the subject focus on the political and economic aspects of the problem. However, the process works mostly as an identity-based dispute within the framework of Uyghur identity. And the most important reason why this conflict is handled more comprehensively and institutionally by the Chinese state is the developments related to the OBOR. It is seen that this issue is overlooked in most of the studies in the field. In this framework, this identity-based conflict has been subjected to content analysis within the framework of Social security, which is the main reference object of the Securitization approach.

In this context, the main question of the study is whether the OBOR triggered the process of securitization of the Uyghurs settled in the Xinjiang region by China. Attempts have been made to better understand this issue by analyzing the practices that mainly target the identity within the framework of Societal Security, which is a sub-sector of the securitization approach, especially after the project came to the agenda. In this context, one of the main constraints of the study is that the military and economic dimensions of the subject are largely excluded due to the use of the societal security sub-sector, which focuses on identity-based reference objects. In addition, since the effect of the OBOR on securitization practices is examined, another constraint is that the study mostly focuses on the time period after the project was officially brought to the agenda. On the other hand, another constraint of the study is the necessity of compiling the evidence on securitization from secondary sources in general, since China has an authoritarian approach.

In this study, first of all, a general overview of the OBOR will be briefly presented. Then, the social, economic, and political outlook of the XUAR will be examined, and the OBOR corridors connected to the region will be elaborated. Finally, the kind of "securitization" practices that have been carried out for Uyghurs to ensure the stability of the region, which is of such critical importance within the scope of OBOR, will be examined within the framework of the conceptual content of the Copenhagen School.

General Overview of the One Belt and One Road Initiative

OBOR, set out as a global infrastructure development move announced by Xi Jinping in Astana in 2013, is seen as an attempt to revitalize the Silk Road. It was anticipated

that more than 60 countries from different geographical regions would take part in this initiative, which will be designed under the control of Beijing and consists of 6 separate land routes called the "Belt," as well as a maritime transport corridor (Irshad, Xin and Arshad, 2015: 200-207). The move by Xi Jinping and the CCP could also be regarded as an initiative that reflects China's soft power and highlights the multipolarity approach to which Beijing gives significant importance (Voon and Xu, 2020: 120-131). Beijing is well aware that the country's soft power capabilities cannot be coordinated by "internal political" initiatives, but by economic factors that have been sustainably consolidated since 1978 (Szekely-Doby, 2018: 277-296). The CCP aims to expand the country's economic power over a wide geographical area, starting from the regions surrounding it, through infrastructure investments, grant/loan support, and direct and indirect investments.

OBOR aims to create a wide-ranging commercial potential from China to Europe and the Middle East by eliminating physical barriers on the historical Silk Road through various infrastructure projects. Combined with the Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Oceania and East Africa will also be part of this commercial integration. It is stated that this project, which is estimated to have a total cost of 4-8 trillion U.S. dollars, will probably account for at least 60% of the world's population and 35% of the global economy. In addition, the mentioned trade size under OBOR will account for about 40% of the world's total trade (Campbell, 2017).

The U.S. does not consider this initiative favorably on the grounds that it could be a critical initiative that would increase China's global dominance and eliminate the longstanding hegemony of the West (Chan, 2017: 568-590). Washington's Western partners, on the other hand, seem to be keen to benefit from the commercial and financial advantages offered by Beijing. So, the infrastructure opportunities that will be improved by China will integrate Asia and Europe in terms of commercial and transport possibilities, and a new engine of global growth can be created. Russia, which is a leading political actor in terms of either being part of the three highway routes (belt) to be developed under OBOR, or the transit corridor of the mentioned routes, is not building a barrier against Beijing for now (Zotova and Kolosov, 2019: 306-314). This is mainly due to Russia and China's criticism of the West and demand for systematic multipolarity, which is also reflected in the U.N. Security Council, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and even the BRICS (Gürcan, 2020: 127-151). Some studies are even being carried out on the possibility of integrating Russia's initiative of Eurasian Economic Union, which is interpreted as an attempt to build a Moscow-driven regional hegemony in the former Soviet geography, with OBOR in the medium term (Shakhanova and Garlick, 2020: 33-57). Thus, Russia's accumulation of knowledge, socio-cultural activity, and military capacity regarding Central and West Asia can be combined with China's financial/commercial influence and technological capacity.

OBOR has been built not only by establishing a network of bilateral and multilateral relations, but also in the context of the institutional structures laid out by Beijing. The first of these is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which was established in 2013. This initiative, which will provide financial resources for infrastructure investments to be made under OBOR, thus aims to help regional integration and development. Established with a capital of $ 100 billion, the bank's biggest partner is China. Beijing has

a 26.63% voting power on decisions made by the bank's board of directors (Lichtenstein, 2018). Another corporate initiative highlighted under the OBOR is the Silk Road Fund. Announced by Xi in 2014, this fund is an initiative independent of the AIIB and other Chinese banks and is also not considered under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This initiative, which has been put forward to meet the needs of the business considered within the scope of the project, is independent of infrastructure investments. China has projected the size of the fund as approximately $ 40 billion. (Blanchard and Flint, 2017: 223-245).

The essential criticism directed at Beijing under the OBOR is that credits and loans given to countries considered within the scope of the project can cause these countries to become dependent on China in the long run. This is called a "debt trap," claiming that China also makes the countries involved in OBOR financially dependent on itself (Lai, Lin and Sidaway, 2020: 109-124). This approach assumes that this dependency will start with economic factors, which are considered as infrastructure elements, and will eventually evolve into the superstructure, that is, political dependency. It is expected that the actors located on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road route and the Central and West Asian countries surrounding China will be incorporated into this dependence in the medium term if they do not appropriately deal with China's credit/loan initiative under OBOR. In this context, Sri Lanka's transfer of Hambantota port to China in exchange for its debts to Beijing can be given as an example (Jones and Hameiri, 2020).

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Connected Commercial Corridors Under OBOR

The Social, Economic, and Political Outlook of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

XUAR, which covers one-sixth of China's territory and lies in the northwest, is also the last part of the territory to be annexed to China (1949). Although it is the largest administrative zone in terms of territory, Xinjiang's economic development level is significantly behind the regions in the east and south of China. Nevertheless, the region's GDP has increased at an annual rate of 8.3% since 1952 (1.22 trillion Yuan as of 2019). China has invested 2.35 trillion Yuan (according to 2019 figures) for the region's economic development since the region was incorporated into Beijing (Xinhua, 2019). It can be stated that these investments are mainly centered on industrial steps focused on transport (land routes, railways, high-speed trains, and airlines) networks, energy, and mining, in order to connect the region to the rest of the country. It is also known that Xinjiang, which had an annual export of $ 20 billion as of 2018, has still not reached the average Chinese export level. One of the main focuses of the CCP on Xinjiang is to reduce the poverty rate in the region. The CCP reports that between 2014 and 2018, 2.3 million people were living above the poverty line in Xinjiang. It even states that the poverty rate has fallen from 19.4% to 6.1%, underlining that all this is a result of Beijing's development efforts in the region (Xinhua, 2019).

Xinjiang is recognized as the "Far West," adjacent to Central Asia. Even the Tarim Basin, where Kashgar is located and constitutes the south of Xinjiang, is considered to

be included in Central Asia for its historical and socio-cultural background (Karasar, 2002). Geographically, the north of Xinjiang seems to be more integrated with Beijing in social, economic, and political terms, while the Kashgar-based Tarim Basin is less closely aligned with Beijing. This is probably because the Uyghurs, who are known as the region's local inhabitants and are still the most populous ethnic group in Xinjiang, are predominantly settled in the Tarim Basin (Toops, 2000: 155-170). Indeed, while the northern part (Dzungaria), where Urumqi is located, which is also the administrative center of Xinjiang, is a dense and rapidly developing region of Han Chinese, this is not the case for the Uyghur-dominated Tarim Basin. There is no doubt that this is due to China encouraging Han immigration towards Dzungaria and increasing investment in industry, infrastructure, and services in this region, where the Hans are starting to constitute the majority (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015: 428-445). The Uyghurs, known as the local people of Xinjiang, have been regarded as "mistrusting" and unreliable by China, which they have struggled with for centuries and do not aspire to be a part of. The fact that Uyghurs do not consider themselves Chinese and are different from Beijing in both socio-cultural, historical, and political terms has also fuelled their unrest (Roberts, 2009: 361-381). Uyghurs have long lived in the Tarim Basin throughout history, and still, stand out with their presence in this region. It can be stated, however, that Uyghurs are in the minority compared to the Han people in northern Xinjiang and especially in Urumqi (Howell and Fan, 2011: 119-139).

The fundamental security threat facing the country is described in the Chinese national security documents, also referred to as the White Paper, with separatism, extremism, and terrorism (CGTN, 2019). In this context, we see that China is uneasy about its territorial integrity and is concerned that the threat may arise from ethnic/religious tendencies. Beijing even states that actors/states aiming at hurting China's position as a global power can favor attempts to eliminate China's territorial integrity. The concepts of extremism, separatism, and terrorism are the central apparatuses that Beijing mainly uses when it comes to the case of Xinjiang, since the region has a multi-ethnic structure, and different religious groups also exist in different parts of Xinjiang. The people of Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mongol (Oirat), Hui, Tajik, and Han origin are the main groups of society in the region (Kozhirova, Khazmuratova and Marmontova, 2016: 72-80). Although a considerable Han population has been placed in the region with planned immigration programs (especially in Urumqi and its surroundings in the North and Dzungaria in general), the Uyghurs, whose relations with the Chinese administration are often pretty tense, are the most populated ethnic group in the region. Indeed, about 12 million of the region's population are of Uyghur origin (Xinhua, 2020). Nevertheless, as we mentioned earlier, Uyghurs are mostly concentrated in the Tarim Basin, south of Xinjiang. They have attempted a few times to establish an independent state in Xinjiang in the past. As well as the Yettishar Khanate in the 19th century, some formations such as the First East Turkestan Republic (Islamic Republic of East Turkestan) between 1933 and 1934, the East Turkestan Republic between 1944 and 1949, which was abolished during the establishment of the current Chinese administration, are considered a reflection of this situation (Ke, 2018). Added to this, Uyghurs are not the only ethnic group in the region who have been uncomfortable with Chinese rule. It is well known that the Kazakh population living in the north of Xinjiang, in particular, often expresses complaints regarding China and also seeks support from Kazakhstan in this regard (Eurasianet, 2021).

Especially since the mid-1990s, we see that various organizations connected with Uyghurs have been associated with "separatism" and "terrorism" by Beijing. The terrorist actions in certain parts of China, especially in Xinjiang (specifically Urumqi), have been commonly referred to as separatist organizations integrated into the Uyghur identity by the CCP since the second half of the 1990s. The East Turkestan Independence Movement, which holds many organizations/civic initiatives, is the most prominent in this respect (Evans, 2017). In this structure, which is considered an umbrella organization, there are also different initiatives such as the East Turkestan National Awakening Movement and the East Turkistan Government in exile, headquartered in Washington (Kashgarian, 2020).

However, another issue that the CCP regards as being identical to the Uyghur identity is the religion-based organizations that are considered in the context of "extremism" according to the Chinese National Security documents. In fact, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, known by its acronym ETIM and stated as being linked to Al-Qaeda, and the extension of this movement, the East Turkestan Islamic Party, is considered in this manner (Lee, 2015: 85-99). Beijing's main argument is that these organizations have contact with radical movements based in Afghanistan and the Fergana Valley, and that Al Qaeda aims to move radical terrorist actions to Xinjiang. The East Turkestan Islamic Party, formerly known as ETIM, has also been recognized as a "terrorist organization" by the United Nations (U.N., 2011). The fact that China regards Uyghurs as a pro-ETIM, pro-extremist group in general, creates discontent among Uyghurs. From this point of view, all the difficulties faced by Uyghurs, especially regarding socio-cultural and economic factors, could be submerged in the issue of radical terror.

Beijing is now trying to make Xinjiang the terminal point of OBOR, and in this sense, to integrate the region into the industrialized centers through investments. In Xinjiang, which is of such great importance, the possible threats that are likely to harm OBOR must be suppressed or destroyed while they are yet to be born. It is assumed in this regard that attempts are being made to bring discomfort to the Uyghurs, who are at the center of the initiative, from Beijing, insignificant and suppressed by the hands of a comprehensive program (Chung, 2018: 185-201). In order to eliminate the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities' transnational ties to Central Asia, Beijing cooperates with these countries under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This cooperation has also become the basic principles of the SCO based on the fight against separatism, extremism, and terrorism (Yuan, 2010: 855-869). Thus, China's main objective is to ensure the support or neutrality of the Central Asian countries (even Russia) which are now facing similar challenges (especially extremism) in their territories, regarding the policies pursued in Xinjiang.

One of the factors that makes Xinjiang so critical for China is the region's energy potential. The region accounts for more than 20% of China's total energy reserves, taking into account fossil fuels such as natural gas, oil, and coal. We should also note that Beijing's investments in the region's energy reserves have steadily increased in recent years and have not yet reached their full potential. Xinjiang is also considered the most critical region in China in terms of "renewable resources," consisting of wind, thermal and solar energy production. Reaching a total electric power generation capacity of 35.83 million kWh, the region is a major contributor to the country's goal of generating carbon-

free energy. Electric power production from wind and solar energy has increased by 135% as of 2021 compared to 2015. The amount of electricity projected to be transferred from Xinjiang to other parts of the country is expected to reach 110 billion kWh by 2022. Moreover, 27 billion kWh of this amount is expected to be produced from renewable energy sources (Evwind, 2021). As for hydropower production, we should state that the region ranks fourth in China. When it comes to fossil fuels, Xinjiang ranks first in the country, accounting for 38% of coal production, 21.5% of oil production, and 23.3% of natural gas. Both the Dzungaria (Karamay), Tarim (Aksu), and Turpan-Hami basins are rich in fossil fuels. The oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors account for about 60% of the region's economy; and the region has a large reserve that has still not been discovered (Overton, 2016). Oil and natural gas in Xinjiang are transported through West-East pipelines to regions where China's industrial centers are located. The Lunnan-Shanghai, Khorgas-Gansu-Guangzhou (Guangdong), and Khorgos-Fuzhou (Fujian) pipelines are critically important in this sense. The Central Asia-China Natural Gas Pipeline, which connects to Xinjiang, specifically through Khorgos, from Central Asia (Kazakhstan), is being integrated into Khorgos-based projects. There are also other projects that would deliver reserves in the Tarim Basin to Sichuan and from there to Shanghai (Wang, 2016). The stability and security in Xinjiang, which is of such a critical role in energy reserves, is regarded by the CCP as an actual national security problem.

China has implemented a management model in Xinjiang, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (also known as Bingtuan). This came into force in 1954 during the Mao era and is a paramilitary structure that aims to ensure the security of the region as well as its development. Bingtuan, which has built a number of medium-sized cities, towns, villages, and farms in the region, also keeps administrative control in these places that it established. This administrative structuring, headquartered in Urumqi, serves 2.6 million people today (Zhu and Blachford, 2016: 25-40). The main reason for forming Bingtuan was to encourage development in an underdeveloped and remote region, promoting social stability and peace, ensuring border security. This structure also provides many public services such as education, health, and transportation to the public in the cities and towns it manages. Bingtuan, which conducts its economic activities under the name China Xinjiang Group, maintains direct contact with the central government in Beijing and manages the cities and towns under its own responsibility (it has built ten cities until now) independently of the regional government in Xinjiang. This organization, consisting of 14 divisions and 185 regiments which also function in the military sense, is widespread throughout Xinjiang. In addition to Urumqi and Kashgar, cities such as Hotan, Kumul, Aksu, Bayangolin, Sanci, Bortala, Karamay (West and East), Tarbagatay, and Altay are the cities where these 14 divisions are based (Zhu and Blachford, 2016: 10-13).

Commercial Corridors Integrated into OBOR and Xinjiang

Three of the commercial corridors considered under OBOR are directly connected to Xinjiang. Xinjiang is actually the main terminal point where commercial corridors extending into northeastern and southeastern China reach before opening up to Central and Western Asia. The first of the commercial corridors set out under OBOR is the "New Eurasian Land Bridge." Stretching parallel from the south to the previously built

Eurasian Land Bridge, this line is an initiative that is projected to extend from China to Kazakhstan, and from there to Russia, reaching Rotterdam in the Netherlands. It will run along a distance of 11,870 km from the Port of Lianyungang in Jiangsu Province in northeastern China to Rotterdam. This line, which will reach Altynkol railway station in Kazakhstan from Khorgos, located in Xinjiang in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, on the border with Kazakhstan, is also an extension of the Jinghe-Yining-Khorgos Railway (Hoh, 2019: 241-276). The Jinghe-Yining-Khorgos Railway also connects Urumqi with the New Eurasian land corridor and Central Asia. Within the scope of this initiative, Khorgos is structured as a commercial hub and is described as a "Special Economic Area" where trade and purchasing can be performed without a visa. We should also note here that Khorgos has become a "dry port" for commercial goods, and a "Special Economic Area" has been built on both sides of the border (the name of the town resting on the Kazakhstan side is also Khorgos) (Ruehl, 2019). Passenger transportation has also started on this line from Urumqi to Nur-Sultan (Astana) since 2017. It is evident that the transition from Central Asia to Europe as part of the new Eurasian Corridor will be from the territory of Russia based on the Caspian Sea. But it is also anticipated in the medium term that an alternative line that would extend from Kazakhstan to the South Caucasus and from there to Turkey and the Balkans will be considered first. China's particular interest in the Marmaray immersed tube tunnel under the Bosphorus is closely related to the effort to create an integrated transport alternative to OBOR, also called the "Iron Silk Road" (Kulaksız, 2019: 48-64).

The second transport route on Beijing's agenda within the framework of OBOR is known as the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCAWEC). Up to 22-23 countries are anticipated to take part in this initiative, which will reach Europe, starting from Xinjiang, passing through Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East, Turkey, and the Balkans. Countries among those expected to be at the forefront under CCAWEC are Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, and Turkey. The control and operation of this route, also called the Middle Corridor, is much more complicated than the other two initiatives of Xinjiang origin (Guo and Fidan, 2018). Although Central Asian countries other than Turkmenistan cooperate with China under the SCO, they attach importance to not being seen as politically dependent on Beijing in terms of the trade/economic dependence that will be built under the OBOR. On the other hand, relations with Turkey have always become tense because of the policies implemented in Xinjiang towards Uyghurs. Also, especially religious extremism and terrorist activities in the Fergana Valley jeopardize the commercial corridor that China will build under OBOR (Haiquan, 2017: 129-147).

Turkey is an essential partner for China with its investment in initiatives to promote transport and logistics opportunities. In this sense, Marmaray will be an important transfer point in the operation of the Middle Corridor (Kulaksız, 2019: 57-60). The Chinese company COSCO has purchased a 67% stake of the Port of Piraeus in Greece, making a substantial effort to integrate CCAWEC and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (CGTN, 2019). China is also taking steps to develop oil and gas fields in Iran. The construction of the Tehran-Mashhad railway and the Tehran-Qum-Isfahan high-speed railway line is being carried out by Chinese companies. China is also investing

in developing the transport and energy infrastructures of Central Asian countries. The Central Asia-China Natural Gas Pipeline, one of the strategic elements of CCAWEC, was also realized through Chinese investments in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Highway networks that are under construction in the region and connect the mentioned countries, as well as investments in the oil refinery in Kara-Balta in Kyrgyzstan, should also be considered within the scope of OBOR (Hart, 2016). In November 2019, a freight train belonging to China Railways passed through this corridor for the first time. Although this route, which departs from Xian and reaches Prague in 18 days by passing through Xinjiang, has significantly shortened the distance, considerable investment is still needed on this path.

The last transportation corridor centered in Xinjiang is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It can even be stated that this corridor is the route on which the most work is done within the steps taken under the Project. CPEC, whose infrastructure projects have been carried out since 2013, is an initiative whose total cost is expected to be $ 62 billion. However, it is also likely that this expense will increase (Xinhua, 2019). With major investments in Pakistan's transport and energy infrastructure, highway, railway, and pipeline construction processes are being integrated on a route from Xinjiang to Gwadar port on the coast of the Arabian Sea. China intends to bypass Central Asia by this route, which will connect to Kashgar, south of Xinjiang, and transfer its own exported goods to the Arabian Sea via this route. Beijing also aims to bring some of the oil and natural gas from the Middle East and East Africa to Xinjiang without passing through the Strait of Malacca, thanks to pipelines that will be built on this route. In this way, Xinjiang, mainly Kashgar (Tarim Basin), will also turn into an energy hub (Schwemlein, 2019: 3-12).

This route was firstly used with the arrival of the first Chinese cargo to Gwadar in 2016. However, it still remains incomplete. We understand that Beijing made Kashgar, which it sees as the starting point of this route, a "special trade zone" in 2010, when OBOR had not yet been officially declared. Kashgar is located at the connection point at Xinjiang of the Karakoram Highway (it is connected from this point to China National Highway No. G314), which is regarded as the main route of the CPEC (Chen, Joseph and Tariq, 2018: 61-69). Indeed, we know that the Karakoram Highway has also been modernized under the CPEC and that Gwadar is the last stop of this route connecting Kashgar to Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore, the most important cities of Pakistan. We also see that Beijing is also developing the Karachi-Peshawar Railway in Pakistan so that faster trains use this line, and this line connects to the southern Xinjiang Railway in Kashgar. That is, this railway system is being developed parallel to Karakoram Highway (Devonshire-Ellis, 2020). The South Xinjiang Railway, completed in December 1999, connects Kashgar to other cities in the Tarim Basin (Yarkand, Yecheng, and Hotan) via the Kashgar-Hotan connection, and then to Urumqi and east of China. The railway, which starts from Pakistan and reaches Kashgar via Khunjerab Pass, is connected from Kashgar to Xinjiang and then from Turpan to other parts of China via the Lanzhou-Xinjiang network and Gansu. Given that Kashgar is also connected to Kyrgyzstan via the Torugart Pass by another transport corridor, other than the CPEC (Toops, 2016: 352-360), the region's significance is more explicitly understood.

Securitization Approach and Societal Security

Securitization Approach

Security is generally considered based on national security, from a realist and liberal perspective. Yet, national security has neither been fully framed nor provided for within the scope of a state. The alternative route to a broader security concept requires the threats even outside of the military ones to be included in the security agenda as well (Waever, 1995: 49-51). In this context, securitization theorists suggest that, unlike the traditional understanding, the security agenda should also be opened up to different threats. Within this framework, they have tried to build a new and more radical understanding of security work by securitizing non-military threats along with military ones (Buzan et al., 1998: 4). Buzan has expanded the debate on security that he initiated from the military field to political, economic, environmental, and social sectors. This argument obviously suggests that security starts from the military field but is also increasingly shifting towards these new sectors (Waever, 1995:52).

Securitization theorists point out that there are three fundamental elements in an act of securitization. The first is the "reference object", which is the subject of securitization. The second is the "securitizing actor", which expresses security as a verbal action; and the third is the "functional actors", which have a significant impact on the appearance of the security image through their actions (Balzacq, 2005:178).

To the question "what makes something really a security problem?", Waever answers that the events that threaten the sovereignty and independence of a state and deprive it of the capacity for self-government are a security problem. For this reason, such a threat should be responded to by exerting maximum effort (Waever, 1995:54). The unique nature of these mentioned threats provides justification for the use of extraordinary measures to deal with them. Implementing security plays a key role in legitimizing the use of force, but more generally this practice opens up a space for the state to take action or take alternative measures for the sake of combating existential threats (Buzan et al., 1998: 21-22).

The right to call a development a security problem is a privileged choice granted to the state and its elites. In other words, an issue simply turns into a security problem when the state elites declare it in this manner. Benefiting from the language theory, Waever states that security is a verbal action, responding to the question "what is security?" As a verbal action, the security itself does not indicate a real situation; in fact, its verbalization creates it (Waever, 1995: 54-55. and Balzacq, 2005: 176-177). On the other hand, the identification of something as an existential threat to any reference object is not adequate for securitization, and this is defined as an "attempt to securitize". An issue is only being securitized when the audience agrees that is the case (Buzan et al., 1998: 24-25).

In this respect, there are three essential components of securitization: The threat leading towards the existence of an object; putting the threat on the political agenda of the state through a "verbal action" process by the political elites and demanding urgent measures to deal with it; and the approval of taking urgent measures by accepting the threat to the existence (Akgül Açıkmeşe, 2011: 61).

According to the Copenhagen School theorists, there is no reason to define a situation in terms of security if this is not a security issue. In this sense, it is not likely that an

issue can be overcome politically just by calling it a security matter; on the contrary, the only potential way to deal with this problem is to avoid using this expression (Waever, 1995: 56). For this reason, the School gives reasons to identify and solve problems through routine political processes, excluding them from being a security issue. The School recommends that security be limited to issues related to the survival of the state, while other issues should not be securitized and resolved only by debating them in routine political processes (Bilgin, 2010: 83). At this point, this concept, which has been introduced into the terminology of security by the Copenhagen School and is also referred to as "desecuritization", can be characterized as the anti-thesis of securitization. In fact, according to the securitization theorists, the classification or securitization of an issue as a security issue is considered to be a failure of the normal political process. Desecuritization, on the other hand, is where an issue that was once considered a threat is a threat no longer. In this way, the extraordinary measures required to eliminate the threat are nullified, paving the way for the normalization of the issue and its resolution through negotiations in the political process (McDonald, 2008: 6 and Sandıklı and Emeklier, 2012: 54).

Societal Security

The most common issues that are considered as a threat to societal security are summarized by Waever (2008: 158-159) and Buzan et al. (1998: 121) as follows:

> 1. Migration – The people of X are invaded by the people of Y, or lose their characteristics because of that people; so the community of X will probably not exist as before, because others will eventually constitute the population. The identity of X gradually differs due to the change in the structure of the population (such as the migration of the Chinese to Tibet, the Russians to Latvia). 2. Horizontal competition – Even if there is still the 'X' people living in a country, the way of life of the people of 'X' will ultimately change due to the prominent cultural and linguistic influences of the neighboring culture of 'Y' (for example, Canada's fear of being Americanized). 3. Vertical competition - People will stop seeing themselves as X, because there is either an integration project (for example, Yugoslavia, the EU), or a separatist-"regionalist" project (for example, Quebec, Catalan, Kurdish). These projects force them to move towards more broad or narrowed identities. (…) 4. Another probable fourth issue is the depopulation due to plague, war, famine, natural disaster, or genocide policies.

The issue of "migration" and migrants, which are considered to be among the most challenging matters that pose a threat to societal security, are always thought to be elements that disrupt the normal course of life in political and economic discussions and everyday conversations. In addition, migrants and refugees are not simply considered as elements that disrupt the ordinary life of a large number of people but are also seen as a factor that endangers the collective lifestyle of a human community. For this reason, security studies present the issue of migration as a threat to societal security (Huysmans, 2006: 45-46). There are two reasons for securitization regarding migration; the first one is mostly related to the external borders of a country and is related to the fact that migrants are not admitted to the country or are not allowed to settle down due to the fact that they bring terrorism and crime with them. The second reason is mostly related to internal borders and is based on the belief that migrants will pose a threat to the peace and stability of a country in the long run. Therefore, it is envisaged that they are not given equal

citizenship rights with the citizens of the country. As a whole, migrants are presented as a threat to public order, peaceful coexistence, the well-being of the state system, the labor market, and cultural identity (Banai and Kreide, 2017: 907).

Another threat category, "horizontal competition", is that social groups with prominent cultural structures exert influence on the culture of the weak; which can be seen also in the case of the reconstruction of the cultural structures of the occupied enemy societies by the victorious states (such as the Americanization of Japan and Germany). In addition, "horizontal competition" can also be used to eliminate the "cultural barriers" used as a tool in modern trade policy. In this context, while importing states put cultural values at the forefront to justify the protectionism they support, exporters try to weaken local cultural values in order to eliminate this opportunity (Waever, 2008: 160).

"Vertical competition", on the other hand, is probably a threat category that is being implemented more intentionally compared to other ones. It is mainly based on integration or separatism projects implemented within a state. In this context, integration projects aimed at creating a common culture to embody a state, seek to control some or all of the mechanisms of cultural recreation such as schools, churches, and language rights. However, minorities may lose their ability to recreate their own culture if there is excessive integration pressure exerted on the different ethnic and linguistic groups living in the country within the framework of this project. This, in turn, may push them to implement separatist projects. "Vertical competition" has two dimensions. First, the threat to the minority group is more abstract, it is related to transformation, and people begin to think of themselves as something else. Second, political decisions taken to prevent the recreation of a culture (such as migration, bureaucratic practices) influence the identity of the minority group, and the targeted cultural identity is deprived of the opportunity to control the institutions necessary for recreation (Waever, 2008: 161. and Buzan et al., 1998: 122).

Another issue that is considered a threat to societal security, "depopulation", hurts the continuity of identity by threatening the existence of the human factor, which is the backbone of culture. However, policies that are largely led by the desire to eliminate an identity or group through some means, such as ethnic cleansing, are more often the subject of societal security (Waever, 2008: 159-160).

On the other hand, the reference objects whose existence is threatened by the above four elements and whose existence is defined within the scope of the societal sector are "identity", "religion", and "gender" in general. Maybe the most important one among these reference objects is "identity". Since identities are constantly changing and are not long-lasting and objective, defending an identity is a controversial issue indeed. Nevertheless, once an identity is securitized, it is as if something that has existed since the very beginning and has long been built is being defended. The fact that national identity is at the heart of political authority makes national identity more effective and significant than other identities. Thus, national identity can be more easily securitized and turn into a position that can include all other identities in the case of any conflict (Waever, 2008: 155-156).

Another reference object within the scope of societal security is "religion". Religious communities are important self-continuing self-identities and groups. Since they also

have institutional structures, encompassing formalized authority and rule-making, they can be a reference object for societal security. When a real conflict occurs due to threats to a belief system, a process just like that seen in social and military security issues, where groups will act with 'us' and 'them' mentality, protect their members from the threat of their enemies, and be concerned about the cohesion of the social group, also begins to happen in this sphere of religion. But only working on the dynamics of societal security in this way will cause us to distance ourselves from the core of the situation, as it will reduce religion to the community and exclude the dimension of faith. Because religion is not only related to the formation of social groups, but also of faith communities, it has a religious aspect as well, and therefore it is necessary to deal with both dimensions equally (Waever, 2008: 165-167). Religious identity is often identified with some official or semi-official leader who claims to be able to speak for the religious community. In many cases, however, there is no generally accepted strict hierarchy within these groups. Therefore, some local groups can make their own appeals on behalf of all Muslims and take security action against the West or their local collaborators. Large religious communities differ in formalized and generally accepted authority schemes. (Buzan et al., 1998: 124).

Another reference object on the agenda of societal security is "gender". In order for gender to be included within the scope of societal security, it is necessary to take action to uphold 'we', defined by the concept of gender. But that does not mean that men are trying to eliminate the category of women, both physically and socially. It can be mentioned that the issue is securitized in terms of gender in these two cases as follows: Firstly, sexuality is made the center of excessive securitization by including other types of sexuality, such as homosexuality, into this category. Secondly, men and women are built with gender roles that compete with each other, and this is the case in which what is threatened is being a woman or non-dominant states of masculinity (Waever, 2008: 168-169).

Securitization of the Uyghur Issue

Okur (2017: 51-52) states that the "Middle Corridor" stands out among the pillars within the framework of the Belt Road Project, which China initiated in order to establish an intensive transportation infrastructure that will allow the transportation between Asia-Europe-Middle East-Africa to be carried out by land for economic and strategic purposes. It draws attention that this corridor, which passes through Xinjiang and is densely populated with Turkish and Muslim populations, brings China's relations with the Turkic world and the Uyghurs[1] to the agenda. In this context, he points out that the identity characteristics of the middle corridor in question are among the parameters to be considered in terms of establishing a long-term and stable cooperation, and in this context, the issue of the future of the Uyghur Turks gains importance.

At this point, it can be stated that the CCP has been trying to securitize the issue by identifying the separatism, extremism, and terrorism that are listed as the primary security

1 The Uyghurs are Turkic people, predominantly Muslim, who are concentrated almost entirely in the province of Xinjiang (Fuller, 2016: 10). For other sources on the fact that Uyghurs are of Turkish origin, see Uyghur Human Rights Project, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Uyghurs of East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or XUAR, People's Republic of China)," Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 5., Amnesty International, "Uyghur Ethnic Identity Under Threat in China," 2009, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA17/010/2009/en/, p. 1. and Kunal Mukherjee, "The Uyghur Question in Contemporary China," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2010, p. 425.

concerns faced by China in the Chinese National Security Documents[2], also referred to as the White Paper, with the Uyghurs. It seems that the CCP is directly targeting the Uyghur identity in its securitization efforts. Therefore, it is evident that the main referent object which is under threat is "identity." It is seen that after the announcement of the project in 2013, Chinese government has implemented projects aimed at the local people's religion and culture, which are considered inseparable components of identity. One of the most important projects in this regard is the lockdown of the region's inhabitants into camps called "re-education camps." Zenz (2018: 105) stated that according to the aforementioned state media reports, the re-education camp activities targeting the Uyghur population started at the end of 2013 and were institutionalized over time. At this point, it is more than a coincidence that the very ambitious OBOR and the establishment of the training camps targeting the Uyghurs in the region occurred simultaneously. Zenz (2018:106) noted that since the inception of Xi Jinping's "Belt and Road Initiative" in late 2013, maintaining stability in this volatile region has become an even greater priority. He also drew attention to the fact that the region's becoming a "core" within the framework of the OBOR coincided with the peaking of the resistance actions in the region. Chinese President Xi Jinping responded to these terrorist acts by calling for "walls made of copper and steel" and "nets spread from the earth to the sky" to catch and control terrorists. In late August 2016, Chen Quanguo, the region's new Communist Party Secretary, embarked on a massive human and technological securitization move that turned the region into one of the most heavily fortified and policed districts in the world.[3] And within the framework of these measures, re-education camps have also started to become widespread. (Zenz, 2018:106).

From the spring of 2017, the Xinjiang administration began to detain about 5% to 15% of the Muslim population in Xinjiang, the majority of whom are residents and males in the south of the region. In order to accommodate these detainees, Xinjiang administrative and Bingtuan settlement authorities went out to tender to build high walls, locked cells surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers, locked corridors, and to construct and equip dozens of large concentration camps secured with video surveillance systems (Millward and Peterson, 2020: 6). NGOs and newspapers reveal that the mass detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang re-education camps began in March or early April 2017. The former camp employees and "re-education" instructors explained the conditions in the camps, stating especially the existence of political indoctrination, Chinese language learning, forcing the Uyghurs to get away from religion and culture, overcrowded rooms, beating, physical and psychological torture, rape, and forced sterilization. In addition, reports regarding the camps claim that during this period, the belief in Islam and its cultural heritage were significantly harmed in Xinjiang (Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2020: 3).

2 Please see Govt. White Papers, "II. National Defense Policy," 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/book/194485.htm., Govt. White Papers, "Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang," 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_8013442.htm. and Govt. White Papers, "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang," 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_8011005.htm.

3 For detailed information on the security measures and military measures that Chen implemented in Xinjiang, please see. Adrian Zenz, "Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing's Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang", *China Brief*, Vol. 17, No.12, 2017, pp. 4-6.

In addition, a conference was held in Newcastle in October 2014 with the participation of ethnic conflict experts from the region. In addition to the reasons for the escalation of violence especially since 2014, it was discussed how these events were related to the increasing state securitization since the Urumqi rebellion in 2009. The conference concluded that a broad state securitization was designed in the form of demographic securitization (immigration of Han Chinese to the region and ethnic displacement), linguistic securitization (imposition of Chinese in education) and religious securitization (suppression of Islamic practices), as well as measures including the deployment of increased numbers of soldiers and public security personnel in the region (Finley, 2019: 2).

It can be seen that after the announcement of the project by the Chinese government, pressure against the people of the region have exponentially increased, especially targeting identity, and the region have been subjected to practices that can lead to forcing people to migrate and even to carry out genocide. In this respect, we decided that the situation faced by the Uyghurs, the inhabitants of the region, should be analyzed within the framework of societal security, which is one of the sub-sectors of the Securitization Theory developed by the Copenhagen School and is based on identity, religion, and gender as referent objects, and immigration, horizontal competition, vertical competition and depopulation as potential threats.

Referent Object: Identity

Security is about identity as well as how communities and individuals identify themselves as members of a community (Buzan et al., 1998: 119). Identity is the central concept in the societal sector. If any community defines a development or potential situation as a threat to its own existence, it means that societal insecurity is present. The concept is not defined based on nations. Societal security is defined as large and self-sustaining identity groups that can self-generate independently of the state. What these groups are, depends on time and space from an empirical point of view. These groups are mostly national in present-day Europe, but in other regions they may also be religious or ethnic groups. Therefore, the concept of societal security can also be interpreted as "identity security" (Waever, 2008: 155 and Buzan et al., 1998: 119).

Historically, Xinjiang is a transit point for transportation between Asia and Europe. The so-called Silk Road, which connects the ancient civilizations of East and West, passes through these vast lands. This geographical location has led Xinjiang to turn into a place where diverse peoples and cultures coexist and integrate (Aslam and Wenjie, 2016: 46-47).

According to contemporary Uyghur intellectuals, the idea of Uyghur nationalism or Turkish nationalism[4] came up immediately after the Manchu's conquest of East Turkestan

4 Although, many scientists, as well as some organizations, define Uyghurs as Turks by ethnicity today; the Chinese government, on its website "White Papers of Government," with the title "I. Xinjiang Has Long Been an Inseparable Part of Chinese Territory," under the title "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang," asserts that Uyghurs are not descendants of Turks, and that the Uyghur ethnic group emerged as a result of a long process of immigration and ethnic integration. Claiming that the ancestors of the Uyghurs were the Ouigour people who lived on the Mongol Plateau during the Sui and Tang dynasties, it states that historically, in order to resist the oppression and enslavement actions of the Turks, the Ouigour people united with some Tiele tribes to make the Ouigour tribal alliance. See. Govt.

in 1759. Leading Uyghur poets and writers of the period developed literature of public opposition to protest Manchu oppression (Bhattacharya, 2003: 361-362). The first demands for independence can be traced back to an uprising started by a tribal chieftain named Yakub Bey in 1865. Although he was eventually defeated in 1877, it could be said that his 12-year reign formed the basis of the Uyghur independence movement, based on religion and ethnicity. Furthermore, Uyghurs have gained experience in state-building twice in the past, including the "East Turkestan Turkish-Islamic Republic" between 1931 and 1934 and the "East Turkestan Republic" between 1944-1949. It can essentially be argued here that these short-lived experiences generated a kind of pre-national identity (Bhattacharya, 2003: 362).

Rudelson (1994: 291-292) claimed that the redefinition of the Uyghurs, whose numbers today reach about 12 million and make up the majority of Xinjiang, began in 1931 when Chinese policymakers tried to manipulate the dominance of Uyghur identity at the eastern Xinjiang oasis of Hami, and to drag the region into ethnic turmoil. The violence caused by this disturbance made the local Uyghur population confront the Han Chinese and the Tungans (also known as Chinese Muslims or Hui). This ethnic violence has paved the way for a resurgence of Uyghur identity. With the help of Soviet advisers, Chinese government officials calmed the inter-ethnic tension by applying a Soviet ethnic classification and policy similar to that used in Soviet Central Asia, giving each ethnic group political rights that are equivalent to minority status. Furthermore, at the end of this process, the oasis inhabitants of Xinjiang began to be identified as Uyghurs. This new definition created a clear distinction between Turks or modern-day Uyghurs, Tungans, and Han Chinese, ultimately making Uyghurs the largest nationality in Xinjiang. In this context, it can be stated that the official recognition of ethnic minorities and the autonomous regions system – emphasizing harmony between a region and a specific population – reveal even the distinctive characteristics of the Uyghurs. As a result, it can be argued that the CCP's minority policy and the Minzu Regional Autonomy actually allowed Uyghurs to think of Xinjiang as their "own" territory, rather than solidifying Chinese nation-building (Guerif, 2010: 21-22).

When the repressive atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution began to fade in the 1980s, Uyghur opposition to Chinese rule became increasingly nationalist. Many Uyghur intellectuals living outside have claimed that their counterparts living in China are reluctant to write about their own history and culture for fear of persecution. Furthermore, the fact that the Uyghurs do not speak Chinese has significantly fuelled the hostility that many Han Chinese feel towards them. Memories of the repression of the Cultural Revolution, in which all kinds of diversity were severely restricted and thus all kinds of pluralism were limited, are still strong (Mukherjee, 2010: 427).

The rise in Uyghur nationalism during the post-Cold War period is also noteworthy. Uyghur nationalism not only stems from their own ethnic identity, but is also reinforced by the practices of the Chinese state, whose government policy is increasingly shaped by nationalism. Just like Tibet, Xinjiang appears to be an ethnic minority movement

White Papers, "I. Xinjiang Has Long Been an Inseparable Part of Chinese Territory," 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2019-03/19/content_74587184.htm. For similar claims on this issue, see. Govt. Whip Papers, "II. Xinjiang Has Never Been "East Turkistan,"" 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2019-07/22/content_75017212.htm.

striving for identity and the right to self-determination. Unlike Tibet, Xinjiang is a more complicated minority issue because of its links to broader Islamic identity matters in Central and Western Asia. This Islamic aspect and ethnic consciousness seem like combined to create an atmosphere of ethnoreligious conflict in Xinjiang (Bhattacharya, 2003: 357-358).

Separatism is Xinjiang deteriorated after September 11, when the war on international terrorism infected the region and allowed the Chinese to blur the distinction between separatism and terrorism. Although the Chinese government rarely referred to terrorism as a secondary factor in 2001, it reframed the Uyghur separatism struggle as the fight against global terrorism, especially after the September 11 attacks. Labeling the Uyghurs as a terrorist threat within the framework of the logic of combating global terrorism has transformed the relationship between the state and the Uyghurs. At this point, while separatists can be considered as a dissatisfied or problematic mass due to their current situation, terrorists must be suppressed, destroyed and/or kept under control as a variable threat to the whole society and humanity. At this point, the process of exclusion of Uyghurs from Chinese society started with the Urumqi rebellion in 2009, and with this event, the state started to see them as potential terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. In this context, when China launched its own war on terrorism in 2014 and Jinping called for "terrorists to be chased like rats in the streets", the process of ostracizing and humiliating Uyghurs began (Finley, 2019: 14 and Topal, 2021:5).

Xinjiang signifies a contention between an ethnic minority and a Han nationalist majority. And this contention is perceived by Beijing as an unambiguous security threat to the Chinese state. In this context, Bhattacharya (2003: 358) claimed that China is trying to devitalize the Uyghur identity, compared to the greater Chinese identity, in a way that is compatible with the declared goals of national unity and security. Over the years, Uyghurs' attempts to make their grievances heard and peacefully exercise their most basic human rights have been met with repression by the Chinese government. The refusal of legitimate channels to express their grievances and discontent in this way has encouraged people who have not been involved in the activities of the political opposition to take part in these activities, thereby causing a considerable rise in violence (Mukherjee, 2010: p. 427).

Threats: Immigration, Horizontal Competition, Vertical Competition, and Depopulation

In the societal security framework, immigration, horizontal competition, vertical competition, and depopulation are considered as possible threats to the referent object. In this regard, in the following part of the study, we tried to analyze the risks arising from these threats to the "identity," which we identified as a referent object in the example of Xinjiang.

Immigration

Immigration, which Waever (2008: 158-159) defines as, "The people of X are invaded by the people of Y or lose their characteristics because of that people; the community of X will not exist as before, because others will make up the population. The identity X becomes varied due to the change in the structure of the population (such as the immigration of the Chinese to Tibet, the Russian to Latvia)", appears to become an important threat

category in the case of Xinjiang. The threat of migration is a valid dynamic mostly within the same region and in neighboring regions (Buzan et al., 1998: 125). In this context, it can be said that the threat of immigration, which is an important factor in the emergence of the Xinjiang problem, stemmed from the migration of Han Chinese and Uyghurs living in the same region, the former to the lands where the latter lived. The migration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang has a long historical background.[5]

Because of this immigration, the Han population increased by about 32 percent from 1990 to 2000, while the Uyghur population rose only about half that rate. In 1949, 94 percent of East Turkestan's 4.2 million population was non-Han people. However, the population census in 2000 indicates that more than 40 percent of the province's population of 18.4 million at that time was Han, and this figure does not include a large number of migrant workers, military and security personnel, or Bingtuan members. The population density during this period shifted from the traditional Uyghur areas of the Southern Tarim Basin to the north, and to more "Hanificated" areas along the existing railways (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2006: 9).

During the first three decades of communist rule, many Han immigrants coming to Xinjiang were motivated by the obligation to "be a volunteer" for state-organized campaigns, as well as political ideals and developmental discourses. The main focus of this early immigration was not economic profit. But, in terms of immigration, the late 1980s marked a significant break from the past. Immigration as a gain-driven effort began to dominate, but it was also implemented as a strategy to avoid the one-child policy or to stay away from domestic disputes (Joniak-Lüthi, 2013: 157).

5 Demographic figures dating back to the 19th century confirm that the Uyghur population in East Turkestan constituted a majority in the early periods. For example, population census records in 1887 indicate that 1,132,000 of the total population of 1,238,583 in East Turkestan's three most densely populated areas were Uyghurs. See. Uyghur Human Rights Project, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Uyghurs of East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or XUAR, People's Republic of China)," Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 19. However, after 1821, the Qing dynasty began to encourage mass "Han immigration" to Xinjiang to fortify the region's border defense. The Uyghurs were forced to migrate from southern Xinjiang to Ili in the north, and the Han and Hui people were also prompted to migrate from inland areas to Xinjiang on the grounds of promoting production and social adaptation in Xinjiang. After the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the Uyghur rebels in Xinjiang declared their independence in October 1933, but Xinjiang was eventually turned into one of the autonomous regions under the PRC in October 1955. See. Aslam F. and Wenjie, Y., "Confucian Philosophy and Chinese Ethnic Minority Policy: A Case Study of Xinjiang," *Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2016, p. 47. In 1949, when the PRC was founded, the Han population of Xinjiang accounted for just over six percent (291,000) of the total population of 4,333,400. Turkic-speaking farmers and the inhabitants of the Oasis, called Uyghur, accounted for about 75% (3,291,100) of Xinjiang's population at that time. See. Joniak-Lüthi A., "Han Migration to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region: Between State Schemes and Migrants' Strategies," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, Special Issue: Mobility and Identity in Central Asia*, No. 138, 2013, p. 157. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, especially after the dispute between China and the Soviet Union, the Chinese government actively placed Han Chinese in border provinces such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Heilongjiang to fortify the border as much as possible due to the possible threat from the Soviets. Han migrants were sent to join the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), also called Bingtuan, which the central government directly administered. In addition to joining Bingtuan, skilled Han immigrants also moved and strategically placed in the area to develop Xinjiang's infrastructure, especially natural resource extraction industries such as oil, and gas. By the end of the 1990s, Han Chinese were making up 95% of the technical workers in the oil exploration program in the Taklamakan Desert. In short, immigration to Xinjiang was encouraged by the central government on such grounds as supporting the newly established administrative unit and taking charge within the administration. In other words, it is possible to state that the main organizer of immigration is the Chinese government on paramilitary or political grounds. See. Howell, A. and Fan, C.C., "Migration and Inequality in Xinjiang: A Survey of Han and Uyghur Migrants in Urumqi," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 2011, p. 120.

In the 1990s, net immigration to Xinjiang increased from 0.4% to 2.4%, making Xinjiang one of the most important routes for migrant workers after Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. As a developing industrial base, with its large construction projects, Xinjiang has provided employment opportunities for a large number of Han migrant workers who first settled in the industrial belt to the north of the Tengri Tagh/Tianshan Mountains and began to move into southern Xinjiang in the last decade (Joniak-Lüthi, 2013: 167-168). The mass immigration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang has been encouraged by Beijing for decades, on grounds such as calming local unrest and developing the economically underdeveloped region, which has rich mineral and oil resources (Grieger, 2014: 2).

Since the 1980s, the spatial pattern of immigration in China appears to have been dominated from rural to urban areas and from western and central to eastern provinces. In this sense, immigration rates continued to be high, and Xinjiang, which ranked fourth after Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong in terms of net inter-provincial immigration for the period of 1985-1995, became one of the most dynamic regions in China. This atmosphere triggered ethnic conflict between the newcomers (Han Chinese) and the region's local population (Uyghurs). The clashes between Han and Uyghurs intensified, and casualties were also reported in these conflicts. In June 2009, ethnic tension centered on the streets of Urumqi, where Uyghurs and Han Chinese clashed, turned into one of the bloodiest clashes in Xinjiang since 1949. Many observers believe that these clashes possibly arose from the intense Han immigration to the region, which was perceived by many Uyghurs as having an adverse impact on their livelihood and way of life. This claim, in fact, is not unfounded. The proportion of Han Chinese in Xinjiang increased dramatically from 6.7% (220,000) to 40% (8.4 million) between 1949 and 2008. This marks the most extensive demographic change that has occurred in a major region since the founding of the PRC. It is entirely expected that such movements of immigration, which occur in a short time, should cause disputes between newcomers and hosts (Howell and Fan, 2011: 122).

On the other hand, some Uyghurs migrated out of the region for reasons such as their worsening living conditions and the reopening of the borders, and these movements generally took place in three waves. The first immigration wave occurred following the Communists' takeover of Xinjiang in late 1949, mainly involving Uyghur political leaders and intellectuals who fled to Turkey via India. The second wave was a reaction to the difficulties caused by the Great Leap Forward in 1962, when more than 60,000 Uyghurs migrated from China to the USSR. The last major immigration was triggered by the reopening of borders for trade in the late 1980s, during the post-Mao Reform Era (Guerif, 2010: 5). Alongside this, poor Uyghur villagers have been encouraged to migrate to the south of China to earn a living as migrant workers in labor-intensive factories since 2006. On the one hand, Han immigration to the region is promoted; and on the other hand, a policy is implemented to make Uyghurs, the native people of the region, migrate out of the region. As a result of all these population policies, the 2010 population census indicates that the number of Han Chinese (41%) in the region at that time was nearly equal to the number of Uyghurs (43%). This demographic change has exacerbated ethnic tensions in the region (Grieger, 2014: 2).

According to the results of the 7th National Population Census conducted in 2020, the

population of the Han ethnic group out of the total population of Xinjiang was 10,920,098 people, accounting for 42.24 percent of the total population, while the population of ethnic minorities was 14,932,247 people, accounting for 57.76 of the total population. The population of the Uyghur ethnic group was 11,624,257, which accounts for 44.96% of the total population of the region and 77.85% of the ethnic minority. When compared to 2010, the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang increased by 1,865,061 people, reaching a rise of 14.27%. The population of Uyghurs in the region increased by 1,623 million, a growth of 16.2 percent. On the other hand, the population of the Han increased by 2.174 million, including 1.948 million people who migrated from other provinces, indicating a significant number of Han immigration to the region (Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Toronto, 2021).

One of the most important reasons for the Urumqi rebellion that broke out in Xinjiang in 2009 and the acts of violence, especially by the state, at the beginning of 2010 was the immigration of Han Chinese to the region where the Uyghurs constituted the majority. The increase in the Han population in the region from 6 percent to 40 percent in the last fifty years has significantly increased the fear of assimilation among the Uyghurs and endangers the Uyghurs group identity (Topal, 2021: 6). It is also seen that this Han immigration has created a dual ethnic composition structure. While the majority of the Han people concentrated around Urumqi in the north are much better off economically, most of the Uyghurs around Kashgar, located south of Xinjiang, live in relatively poor conditions. The unequal circumstances between the North and South, created mainly by immigration, produce great discontent among Uyghurs, further escalating ethnic tensions and, in particular, leading securitization of the Uyghur identity in order to protect itself against the influx of Hans into the region (Bhattacharya, 2003: 368).

Horizontal Competition

It can be argued that horizontal competition, which Waever (2008: 158-159) describes as, "Although the X people still live there, the way of life of the X people will change due to the prominent cultural and linguistic influences of the neighboring culture Y (for example, Canada is cautious of being Americanized)," is one of the threat categories that is effective in the securitization of the Xinjiang issue. Horizontal competition can occur at all levels, and it is seen that minorities within a state are particularly concerned about the negative effects of the dominant culture on their identities (Buzan et al., 1998: 125). It is quite obvious that the Uyghurs residing in the Xinjiang region have a similar concern.

According to traditional Chinese cultural norms, ethnic identity is based on the distinction between "barbaric" minorities and "civilized" Han people. The old Chinese considered Chinese culture to be "the most advanced civilization in the world, which would sooner or later affect the surrounding Barbarians as well." This approach points to the fact that those who are involved in the cultural circle of Chinese civilization become members of this civilized world through the "Han" culture, which is at the heart of this culture. Those who are uncivilized remain barbarians who need to be "educated" (Aslam and Wenjie, 2016: 41).

As a reflection, Confucianism suggests that diverse minorities be blended in unified adaptation and live together peacefully in mutual respect and dependence. The dominant framework that Confucian scholars deal with the minority problem is the Yi-Xia doctrine

(Xia means Han Chinese, while Yi means Barbarians, foreigners, or minorities). Confucian obedience involves minority groups adhering to Confucian norms, maintaining unity and proper relations. The peaceful coexistence of minorities is only possible if they follow the principles or norms of the "Xia" (Aslam and Wenjie, 2016: 41-42).

In this context, it can be stated that China, on the way to national unity and political integration, is trying to pursue assimilative policies that not only try to include local identities in the Chinese identity, but also allow local identities face the danger of extinction. This assimilation policy, which is the fundamental principle of China's approach towards minorities, also reflects the continuity of the Chinese imperial policy. Chinese imperial policy is based on the conceptualization of the Chinese state not as a nation but as a civilization (Bhattacharya, 2003: 362-363).

Beijing considers that the stability of Xinjiang depends on the integration of Uyghurs within China's extensive family of nationalities. From the Chinese authorities' perspective, integration refers to the political, cultural, social, and economic structuring of a much larger state in which minorities maintain their own culture and identity but are influenced by the majority and do not seek secession (Liu and Peters, 2017: 268). But the Uyghurs began to feel that their culture was under threat from the Chinese because of Beijing's statements that the Old City of Kashgar -The Uyghur cultural center- would be demolished and replaced with a new city. They are also concerned about restrictions imposed on the use of the Uyghur language in schools and encouraging Muslim state employees to abandon fasting during Ramadan. Uyghurs perceive these measures as government repression and methods of eliminating Muslim culture (Israeli, 2010: 92).

In the example of Xinjiang, it can be stated that the Chinese government is targeting elements such as language, religion, and ethnicity, which are the most important components of identity. In this context, according to Amnesty International (2009: 2), Chinese authorities are pursuing a language policy that seems to make the school system in Xinjiang "bilingual," but in fact, to make Chinese the only language of education.[6] This policy began in the 1990s when the Uyghur language became no longer the language of education in universities. By 2002, the largest university in Xinjiang stopped teaching in Uyghur, and a bilingual education policy, Mandarin, was introduced as the main language of education in primary, secondary, and high schools, and the Uyghur language was declared to be unable to keep up with the 21st century. In line with this new policy, many Uyghur teachers lost their jobs to Han teachers on the grounds that they had failed Mandarin proficiency exams (Grieger, 2014: 2).

2016 was a turning point for China's securitization initiatives. Within the framework of the anti-terrorism law of December 2015, many aspects of the social life, cultural activities and religion of the Uyghurs were defined as security issues, causing them to

6 Especially the practice called "Xinjiang classes" can be said to be an extremely crucial step in putting this bilingualism into practice. The establishment of "Xinjiang classes" in 12 Chinese cities in 1997 provided a new model for compulsory Chinese language education and making the Uyghur language marginalized. "Xinjiang classes" is a practice aimed at getting the most successful minority students in East Turkestan out of their cultural environment and enrolling them in classes with Chinese education in high schools in major cities in the inner parts of China. Wang Lequan, Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, also confirmed that the main objective of the "Xinjiang classes" is not academic preparation, but "political education." For more information, see Uyghur Human Rights Project, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Uyghurs of East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or XUAR, People's Republic of China)," Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 18.

conceptualize them as terrorists, radicals, and extremists. With the implementation of this policy, state repression and surveillance activities against the Uyghurs became legal within the framework of the fight against terrorism because the law in question was an important step in the securitization of the issue by expanding the powers of the Chinese government authorities to take extraordinary measures against such communities (Topal, 2021: 7).

Also, one of the most critical aspects of the Chinese oppression of the Uyghur identity is that it targets Islam. Since the September 11 attacks on the United States, the Chinese government has imposed restrictions on the religious rights of the Muslim population in Xinjiang, banned certain religious practices in the holy month of Ramadan, demolished and closed mosques,[7] and increased official controls on Muslim clerics in the region (Bhattacharya, 2003: 370-371). Local authorities exercise strict control over mosques and clergy by interfering with the appointment of local imams, deploying police inside and outside mosques, and closely monitoring all religious activities. All government employees in Xinjiang, including teachers, police officers, and civil servants, risk losing their jobs if they engage in religious activities. Chinese authorities also put many obstacles in the way of Uyghurs trying to travel to Mecca to perform the Hajj rites, which is mandatory for all Muslims. Moreover, those under 18 are not allowed to enter mosques or receive any religious education, and many young Uyghurs fear they would be expelled from school if they entered a mosque or were spotted praying at home (Amnesty International, 2009: 3). It seems clear that the Chinese government has imposed strict restrictions on the religious freedom of residents in the region. Restrictions on the practice of Islam in Xinjiang also undermine Uyghur identity, as Islam is a fundamental part of Uyghur culture and life (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2006: 22).

The new trial program promoting interethnic marriages was launched in August 2014 in the Qiemo district, on the grounds of alleviating ethnic tensions with the help of financial incentives. Under this program, newly married couples of different ethnicities are granted an annual cash payment of 10,000 yuan (about 1250 euros) for five years, as well as subsidies for housing, health, and education. Furthermore, it is aimed to limit the size of the Uyghur family by making the one-child policy mandatory with a new family planning policy that is projected to be implemented for South Xinjiang. Thus, it aims to end the rule that urban Uyghurs are allowed to have two and rural Uyghurs have three children (Grieger, 2014: 2).

The oppression faced by Uyghurs has been a continuous phenomenon for a long time. Starting in 2009 and gaining momentum from early 2017, it is reported that Chinese authorities have detained a considerable number of Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslim

7 There are numerous reliable reports that the historic and sacred sites of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been destroyed. In a recent survey conducted on 533 mosques across Xinjiang using satellite imagery, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) found that 31.9% of these mosques were destroyed, 32.8% were damaged, and only 35.3% were free of damage. If we generalize this data to all mosques in Xinjiang, it can be estimated that about 16,000 mosques have been damaged or destroyed since 2017, and 8,450 may also have been completely destroyed. It is seen that, especially since 2017, not only mosques, but also 30% of other sacred sites (including mausoleums, cemeteries, and places of pilgrimage) have been destroyed, and 27.8% have been damaged in some way. For more information, see Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity in Xinjiang? Applying the Legal Tests, 2020, pp. 5-6.

minorities in Xinjiang in so-called "radicalization" and "re-education" camps.[8] The mentioned campaign is claimed to cover the extermination of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities, arbitrary detentions, forced transfers, torture, forced castrating, and enslavement (Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2020: 7). It is noted that Xinjiang detention camps operate at various levels, from reform school to prison, and more than a million people are in custody.[9] But it is not known precisely how many people have been staying in the camps or how many detainees have been imprisoned (Millward and Peterson, 2020: 6). Although the PRC has officially declared that the purpose of this program is "poverty alleviation",[10] the claim that the activities of detention and working of detainees in these camps have been carried out voluntarily does not seem reasonable, and in some cases, this may even mean the use of slave labour (Millward and Peterson, 2020: 4).

The fact that more than a million Uyghurs and Muslims of other ethnic groups have been imprisoned in "re-education" camps, that at least 80,000 people were transferred from Xinjiang to different parts of the country between 2017 and 2019 to work in factories, and that up to 16,000 mosques were closed in the region are concrete examples of the assimilation policies of the Chinese government towards Uyghurs. Similarly, practices such as cultural destruction, transfer of workers to re-education centers and different parts of the country also prove that there is a systematic "attack" against Uyghurs and other citizens of Muslim origin (Asia Pacific Centre for the responsibility to protect, 2020: 4).

Although they live in the "Uyghur Autonomous Region," Uyghurs have little say in administrative decisions that determine their fate. This, to some extent, bears some

8 The Chinese government claims to have established the camps, which it describes as educational and training centers, to save the perpetrators of petty crimes or those who have been against the law and increase the effectiveness of terrorism and extremism from becoming victims of terrorism and extremism, and to eliminate terrorist activities without letting them be flourished, and now divides the people who are located in the centers and whom it qualifies as trainees into three groups. 1. Persons who are encouraged, coerced, or consented to take part in terrorist or extremist activities, and those involved in terrorist or extremist activities in the circumstances not severe enough to be considered a crime. 2. Persons who are encouraged, coerced or consented to take part in terrorist or extremist activities, or persons who have been involved in terrorist or extremist activities that pose a real danger but do not cause any harm in practice, whose personal flaw is not severe, who confess their crimes and regret their past actions, and the ones who can therefore be exempt from punishment and are willing to obey the law and receive an education. 3. Persons convicted of terrorist or extremist crimes and sentenced to prison and, who are still considered to pose a potential threat to society after serving their sentences, and who are determined by the courts to be educated in the centers in accordance with the law. See. Govt. White Papers, "V. Giving Top Priority to a Preventive Counterterrorism Approach," 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2019-03/19/content_74587141.htm.

9 Human rights groups report that at least a million people are imprisoned in the camps called as "re-education" centers. Reports published by the Chinese government indicate that 1.3 million people living in Xinjiang receive a "vocational training" program every year for six years. On the other hand, it is not known exactly how many of those who were reeducated were sent to specially built camps, or whether any of them received education again. However, about eight million of the region's total population of 22 million is estimated to have received the program. See. BBC, "Xinjiang: China Defends 'Education' Camps", 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54195325.

10 The Chinese national security documents, also called the White Paper, uphold these training camps. In this document, it is stated that "a group of professional centers has been established to prevent recurring terrorist incidents, eliminate the root of religious extremism, help trainees get a better education and acquire professional skills, enable them to find jobs and increase their income, and above all, to offer systematic education and training in response to a number of urgent needs to maintain social stability and long-term peace in Xinjiang," and the reason for the establishment of these camps has been tried to be elaborated. For more information, see Govt. Whip Papers, "I. Urgent Needs for Education and Training," 2019, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/2019-08/19/content_75114403.htm.

resemblance to the circumstances in other regions of the highly centralized Chinese state, but Uyghurs regard their own situation as even worse, due to its nature of identity as well. One of the best examples in this regard is the banning of even Uyghur non-governmental organizations in the region (Fuller and Starr, 2003: 19).

As a horizontal competition, one of the threat categories defined by societal security points out that the minorities' fear of being assimilated into a broader cultural category, wherever they are located, is also a social reality for Uyghurs. This fear has grown even further because of China's practices mentioned above. Especially after the OBOR announced in 2013, the opening of so-called re-education camps, which have gained momentum since 2017, and the fact that more than 8 million people have been trained in these camps so far, and considering the activities in the camps, are the main factors that further raise the fear of assimilation among Uyghurs. Therefore, Uyghurs have a feeling of deep distrust towards China's discourse of a multi-ethnic society and are especially afraid of being assimilated into the world of Han Chinese. For this reason, they see themselves as the ones fighting to protect themselves from the forces that they believe will destroy their homeland, language, culture, and traditions. They think that being assimilated in a cultural, religious, and linguistic sense will mean them the same as dying, so they take the course of securitization to better protect their identity against the Chinese cultural pressure (Fuller and Starr, 2003: 20).

Vertical Competition

Waever (2008: 158-159) describes the vertical competition as, "people will stop seeing themselves as X, because there is either an integration project (for example Yugoslavia, the EU) or a separatist project (for example, Quebec, Catalonia, etc.). These projects get them closer to wider or narrower identities (...)," and this can be considered among the threats that lead to the securitization of the Xinjiang issue.

Vertical competition manifests itself intensely both in political integration and separatist projects. It can even be seen when a separatist and an integration project coexist (Buzan et al., 1998: 124). Buzan et al. (1998: 135) argue that even if China does not disintegrate like the Soviet Union, it will be shaped by the vertical competition caused by the struggle between different ethnic layers within the country. One of these layers is undoubtedly the Uyghurs, the indigenous people of the Xinjiang. And, undoubtedly, the Xinjiang issue is fundamentally a secessionist project. It seeks separatism in order to get rid of the influence of the Chinese supremacist identity, which it perceives as a threat. And there is a long history of Xinjiang's aspiration to secede from China. In this sense, it can be stated that China's ambition to control Xinjiang on the grounds of ensuring national defense was raised as a result of the two independence movements led by the Uyghurs in the 1900s. Both independence attempts were somewhat linked to the Soviet Union, and one of them was even directly supported by the Soviet government. During the 1920s, due to the diplomatic initiatives taken by the region's designated ruler, Yang Zengxin, together with the geographical isolation of Xinjiang from the rest of China, strong trade links were established between the region and the Soviet Union. Also, during this time, significant cultural ties were established with the USSR and the Turkic peoples living within its borders, which lifted the isolation and barriers between Xinjiang and the Soviets. In

addition to the end of the isolation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the ongoing separation with the rest of China, both culturally and geographically, has led to dissatisfaction with the ruling Kuomintang Party and their assimilation policies. All these factors have further bolstered separatist tendencies in the region, leading to increased hostility between the Uyghurs and the Chinese state (Fuller, 2016: 12-13).

These separatist tendencies have also been recognized by China and have always been an issue of concern. This has led to acting with mistrust towards the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. In this context, the Chinese side has claimed that separatists and religious extremists in and outside China, who embraced the theories of "Pan-Turkism" and "Pan-Islamism", spread the discourse that the Uyghurs were the absolute "masters" of the region. It is also stated that the separatists claim that Xinjiang's ethnic culture is not identical to Chinese culture, and that Islam is the only religion practiced by ethnic groups in Xinjiang. It has also been claimed that all ethnic groups who speak Turkic language and believe in Islam are encouraged to take part in the creation of the theocratic state called "East Turkestan" (Govt. White Papers, 2019). In this sense, China has claimed that from the early 20th century to the late 1940s, "East Turkestan" forces promoted and spread the ideas of "Pan-Turkism," "Pan-Islamism," and violence and terror in order to divide and control Xinjiang. The above-mentioned separatist actions are also based mainly on these views and ideas that have been historically shaped (Govt. White Papers, 2019). The Chinese side argues that the separatists, acting based on these ideas, led to many rebellions in Xinjiang at the early 1950s, calling on the Uyghurs to "unite under the flag with the moon and the star to create an Islamic Republic." The riots in Ili and Tacheng on the Sino-Russian border in the 1960s and the riot of the "East Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party," and the armed rebellion of the Gang of Ahongnof in southern Xinjiang are considered among these rebellions. It is also claimed that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, religious extremism further penetrated Xinjiang and soon blended with terrorism, fueling social unrest and seriously undermining stability and security (Govt. White Papers, 2019). The Chinese government notes that especially after the September 11 attacks in the United States, "East Turkestan" forces in and outside China tried to establish an independent "East Turkestan" state through "Jihad" (holy war) and increased their cooperation in this direction. At this point, Chinese authorities assert that Uyghur separatists are using ethnic identity and religious belief to incite religious fanaticism, spread religious extremism, and encourage ordinary people to participate in violent and terrorist activities. The state officials also claim that they indoctrinate people with "Jihad" and encourage them to "die for their faith to go to heaven." It is pointed out that the followers of these movements have then turned into extremists and terrorists who kill innocent people mercilessly (Govt. White Papers, 2019).

The globalization trend that spread all over the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union has had a significant impact on the ethnoreligious interactions of Uyghurs with the outside world. The dissolution of the Soviet Union by tracing ethnic lines, and the Turkic states becoming independent, also fueled nationalist aspirations among Uyghurs. This led the Uyghurs to highlight certain religious-cultural differences as a way of achieving symbolic, spatial and social separation from the Han Chinese (Aslam and Wenjie, 2016: 50).

In response, China launched a mass propaganda campaign against separatism in 2000, following a series of pro-independence terrorist attacks. Accordingly, state media

reported that thousands of officials had been tasked to go from door to door in nearby villages of the far western city of Kashgar, warning residents not to support separatism or illegal religious activities. These warnings may be reflected in China's fears about the Islamist influence flowing from Central Asia and the impact of neighboring countries on separatism in the region, especially the influence of those in exile in Turkey, where Uyghurs have ethnic and linguistic bonds (Mukherjee, 2010: 428).

The increase in pressure on Uyghurs, primarily due to re-education camp-like practices, has triggered a surge of nationalism, causing growing concern in Beijing about "separatist" problems (Mukherjee, 2010: 428). Since Chinese authorities believe that pan-Turkist and Islamist groups have made an intensive effort to create a spirit of resistance among Xinjiang's Uyghurs, they also claim that they are right to act with suspicion towards separatist tendencies in the region (Fuller and Starr, 2003: 29). At this point, it can be stated that China's concerns that foreigners would challenge the country's territorial integrity in relation to the Uyghur issue have laid the groundwork for the securitization of the Xinjiang problem by China because of vertical competition.

Depopulation

Another issue considered by Waever (2008: 158-159) as a threat to societal security is "depopulation." Waever describes this as, "a possible fourth issue is the decline of the population due to plague, war, starvation, natural disaster, or genocide policies."

Among the incidents that caused depopulation and listed by Waever; genocide, in particular, can be said to have been influential in the Xinjiang issue. Genocide does not only mean exterminating a particular race through conscious policies. If any of the five acts contained in the second article of the UN Convention "Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" occur, it is stated that the crime of genocide has already been committed. The first is the murder of members of a group. The second is to cause serious physical or mental harm to members of a group. The third is to damage the living conditions by anticipating in advance that it would lead to the complete or partial physical extermination of a group. The fourth is to take measures to prevent births within a group. The fifth is the forced transfer of the children of a group to another one (United Nations, n.d.).

Although the Uyghur case does not directly meet the criteria for "the murder of members of a group," which is mentioned in the first article of the UN Genocide Convention; it is witnessed that the Chinese government has already arrested people without any concrete grounds, an has even executed some of them. In this context, Amnesty International has claimed that over the past six years, tens of thousands of people have been detained for investigation, hundreds and possibly even thousands have been charged or convicted under the Penal Code, and many Uyghurs have also been sentenced to death for committing crimes of "separatism" or "terrorism." It also notes that Uyghurs are, almost without exception, the only ethnic group in the PRC whose members have been executed for political crimes (Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2006: 15).

Another criterion that proves a genocide act, "taking measures to prevent births within a group," is the case in Xinjiang. Considering the case of Xinjiang, it is claimed that there are important and reliable reports that Uyghurs and other Turkish minorities have been subjected to forced sterilizations, birth control, and abortions. The evidence supported by

official government records indicates that between 2015 and 2018, there was a significant decrease in birth rates predominantly in Uyghur provinces, even a near-zero birth rate was targeted in particular Uyghur regions, and a major campaign was conducted in Xinjiang to neuter women or insert intrauterine devices, and a significant increase in the number of women with "menopause" in the region.[11] This evidence strongly shows that measures "aimed at preventing childbirth" have been imposed within the group (Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2020: 15).

Another type of genocide, which is stated in the Convention as "damaging the living conditions by anticipating in advance that it would lead to the complete or partial physical extermination of a group," can also be noticed in the example of Xinjiang. There is clear evidence that there is an intention to "change the way of life" of the Uyghur in Xinjiang. As mentioned in detail in the previous parts, the physical destruction of cultural and religious areas, the prohibition of cultural and religious traditions, and the "re-education" of the region's people to ensure that they are assimilated culturally may be given as examples in this regard. The statements in public by Chinese officials, including Xi himself, associating religious extremism (mainly defined as including Uyghur culture and Islam) with a disease or a virus that requires "painful, intrusive treatment" are also strong evidence of their intent to eliminate local people. The concept of "re-education" used in the camps in Xinjiang seems to be based on the intention of "transforming" Uyghurs rather than physically exterminating them. The Chinese expression "transformation through education" (jiaoyu zhuanhua) is used for the re-education performed in Xinjiang. Another claim regarding the structure and intent of the "re-education" camps also controversially suggests that the Chinese government's primary goal is not to destroy the Uyghur group physically or biologically, but to transform them into a group that fits into the mainstream and accepted Chinese social identity. However, considering these measures related to the destruction of the cultural and religious assets of Uyghurs, practices of birth control and forced transfer, as well as "re-education" and "transformation," anyone can argue that the deliberate intention of physical destruction can also be considered within this whole transformation framework (Asia Pacific Centre for the responsibility to protect, 2020: 17).

Additionally, it is also seen that decisions have been taken by international organizations and various states, especially the UN, to characterize all these practices, sometimes as attempted genocide, sometimes as direct genocide. In this context, the issue of China's practices against Uyghurs was on the agenda at the 46th session of the UN Human

11 While a one-child policy is being implemented in China, ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, including Uyghurs, are allowed to have up to three children. However, the Chinese government has begun to take drastic measures against the population in Xinjiang since 2017, when millions of Uyghurs were claimed to have been sent to concentration camps; and these measures include a strict family planning policy. Therefore, between 2017 and 2018, the birth rate in Xinjiang decreased from 15.8 per 1000 people to 10.7 per 1000 people. While the Chinese government has been desperately trying to increase birth rates across the country, official government documents indicate that castration rates in the region have risen to 243 per 100,000 people. This rate is enormously higher than the average of 33 per 100,000 people across the entire country. Besides, between 2016 and 2018, the use of IUD birth control devices across China decreased, while in Xinjiang, the rate of use of these devices increased to 963 per 100,000 people. Uyghur women who left the Xinjiang region said they were forced into birth control and sterilization. See. ANI News, "China not scrapping birth caps entirely due to strictly enforced family planning policies in Xinjiang: Expert," 2021, https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/china-not-scrapping-birth-caps-entirely-due-to-strictly-enforced-family-planning-policies-in-xinjiang-expert20210602081045/.

Rights Council between February 23 and March 19, 2021, called "China's Genocide of Uyghurs and Other Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China." In this context, the Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultation with the UN Human Rights Council, called the Council's attention to assessments with the growing global consensus that China's inhumane persecution of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region overlaps with the internationally recognized definition of "genocide." It has been noted in the report that the most common human rights violations suffered by Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang include arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, physical torture, coercive persuasion, sterilization, forced abortion, and infant killing. Despite China's claims of "fake news" and "unsubstantiated allegations," the report also states that extensive investigations have been conducted by international human rights and religious freedom organizations confirming the existence of such a genocide campaign, and that there are strong indications that China's campaign against Uyghurs could be called genocide (United Nations, 2021: 2).

This report also states that the U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo made a public statement on January 19, 2021, where he officially defined China's persecution of Uyghurs and other minorities not only as genocide, but also as a crime against humanity, and that Pompeo believes that this genocide still continues and that there have been attempts to systematically exterminate the Uyghurs by the Chinese party-state (United Nations, 2021: 2).

A series of meetings took place in October 2020, with the participation of academics, NGOs, and survivors of persecution in Xinjiang by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of Canada's House of Commons, lasting a total of two days and 12 hours. It is stated in the summit's final declaration that the Subcommittee has acknowledged that the CCP conducted human rights atrocities against Uyghurs and Muslims of Turkic origin and expressed concern that, if it allowed this to go unpunished, a dangerous "precedent" could be set, which would open up the door for other countries to believe that they could violate human rights and act against human dignity without punishment (United Nations, 2021: 2).

Particularly at the Subcommittee meetings both in 2018 and 2020, the Chinese persecution was first condemned and then stated that it was convinced that the CCP's activities are considered genocide by the Convention on "Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." The Subcommittee also stated that "the Canadian government is responsible not only for punishing the crime of genocide, but also for preventing the crime of genocide" (United Nations, 2021: 3).

In the UK, the initiative to characterize China's practices in Xinjiang as genocide has been brought up to the agenda by a proposed law on trade deals submitted by David Alton, Michael Forsyth, and Andrew Adonis. In this context, the amendment on the genocide aims to hold China responsible for its acts of genocide. A firm supporter of this arrangement, Lord Alton stated explicitly on his website that he was terrified to constantly hear the testimony of Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang regarding China's activities of forced labor, mass surveillance, enslavement, birth prevention, and

torture. Lord Alton noted that "genocide must even not be allowed to be mentioned" and claimed that the Parliament of the United Kingdom had the opportunity to take a stand against the genocidal persecution of Uyghurs by accepting the proposed amendment. However, on 19 January 2021, the article on genocide was rejected in the House of Commons by 308 votes against 319, in other words, by just a slim margin of 11 votes (United Nations, 2021: 3).

Conclusion

Relations between the Chinese and the Uyghurs, dates back to ancient times. This relationship has generally been dominated by competition and conflict. The region has always attracted the close attention of the Chinese central government, both because it is located on historic trade routes and because it serves as the critical gateway to Central Asia. At this point, the OBOR, a global infrastructure advancement and development initiative announced by Xi in Astana at 2013 as an attempt to revitalize the former Silk Road, has significantly altered the fate of the region and thereby the Uyghurs, the region's local inhabitants. This change can only be better understood by considering that 3 of the commercial corridors under OBOR are directly connected to Xinjiang.

This particular advantage has led to a further increase in the Chinese central government's interest in the region, especially resulting in an intensification of Chinese oppression of the Uyghurs, who make up the majority. The Chinese administration has largely benefited from the global consciousness of terrorism following the September 11 attacks in legitimizing its oppression at the region. In this sense, the Chinese government has tried to securitize the issue by identifying the political demands of the Uyghurs with terrorism rhetoric such as separatism and extremism.

The identity of the region's people has been targeted considerably and assimilated at this point. The population structure of the region has been changed in favor of Han Chinese with immigration in the historical process. There have been attempts to erode the Uyghur people's identity by targeting mainly the language and religion, which are considered the inseparable parts of identity. Furthermore, Uyghurs, whose ties to nearby Central Asian Republics and Turkey, with which are ethnically and linguistically close, increased considerably. Nevertheless, these ties were oppressed by the Chinese government on the grounds that they had separatist goals. And eventually, they were also subjected to various methods of genocide defined by the UN, such as controlling the birth rates of the region's people, forcing them to change their way of life.

Although it has historical roots, it can be said that the securitization approach for the Uyghur identity, which has started to become visible especially since the mid-2000s, became more widespread and organized with the OBOR. The most important indicator of this situation is undoubtedly the structures under the name of re-education camps, which were put into practice in Xinjiang on the same date as the announcement of the project, in 2013. About 8 million people in the region have allegedly been "trained" in these camps so far, and it is not known precisely how many people are currently living in these camps. It is claimed that people have been subjected to various practices of intimidation and assimilation under the name of "re-education". Undoubtedly, by targeting the components of Uyghur identity in these camps, it is aimed to assimilate the collective Uyghur identity

into the larger Chinese identity. Thus, it is aimed to eliminate the historical separatist tendencies in the Xinjiang region, which is one of the most important pillars of OBOR. It is seen that there are attempts to secure the survival of the ambitious OBOR, one of the most important economic pillars of Chinese hegemony. For this reason, since 2013, when the project was officially announced, the Uyghur identity has been made the subject of securitization in a more intense and organized way.

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