

Araştırma Makalesi

CHINA'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AGAINST UYGHURS: THE CASE OF UYGHURS IN TÜRKİYE

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Abstract

How does the Chinese government control and monitor its citizens beyond its borders? The present article seeks to answer this question by focusing on threats and intimidations faced by the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye and aims to improve scholarly understanding of the methods of transnational repression. The study explores the mechanisms of China's transnational repression and patterns in the experiences of the targets. Close examination of relevant studies on the transnational repression of the Chinese government and in-depth interviews with the Uyghur targets living in Türkiye show that Chinese state-sponsored actors use digital channels or direct phone calls to harass the Uyghurs living abroad. In most cases, targets' families back home are involved as intermediaries in the coercion or subjects of punishment if the target refuses to "collaborate." Results from the interviews reveal that Chinese state agencies at home and abroad, such as neighborhood working groups, police, embassies, and consulates, are involved in transnational repression.

Keywords: Transnational Repression, Uyghur, China, Türkiye, Diaspora.

ÇİN'İN UYGURLARA KARŞI ULUSÖTESİ BASKISI: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ UYGURLAR ÖRNEĞİ

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Öz

Çin hükûmeti sınırlarının ötesindeki vatandaşlarını nasıl kontrol ediyor ve izliyor? Bu makale, Türkiye'deki Uygur diasporasının karşılaştığı tehdit ve şantajlara odaklanarak bu soruyu yanıtlamayı ve ulusötesi baskı yöntemlerine ilişkin bilimsel katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Çin'in ulusötesi baskı mekanizmalarını ve hedeflerin deneyimlerindeki örgeleri araştırmaktadır. Çin hükûmetinin ulusötesi baskılarına ilişkin ilgili çalışmaların yakından incelenmesi ve Türkiye'de yaşayan Uygur mağdurlarıyla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler, Çin devleti destekli aktörlerin yurtdışında yaşayan Uygurları taciz etmek için dijital kanalları veya doğrudan telefon bağlantısını kullandığını göstermektedir. Mağdurun "iş birliği yapmayı" reddettiği çoğu durumda, memleketindeki aileleri, baskı aracı olarak kullanılmakta veya yaptırıma maruz kalmaktadır. Görüşmelerden elde edilen sonuçlar, mahalle çalışma grupları, polis, büyükelçilikler ve konsolosluklar gibi Çin'in yurtiçi ve yurtdışındaki devlet kurumlarının ulusötesi baskıya dahil olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulusötesi Baskı, Uygur, Çin, Türkiye, Diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

Uyghur people live in Uyghur Region (East Turkestan) – an annexed land by the Chinese government in 1948 and has been officially recognized as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region since 1955. The Uyghur region connects China with eight countries – Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. As China has been portraying itself as an assertive power in global politics over the last two decades, with projects such as Belt and Road Initiative and Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, the Uyghur region has become one of the most important gateways for China to expand its sphere of influence. Since 2016, the repressive policies of the Chinese state in the Uyghur region have reached a peak. With the appointment of Chen Quanguo, whole-scaled repressive policies were accelerated dramatically. In the initial phase, the Chinese government implemented a “re-engineering” of the society through the establishment of hundreds of “re-education” camps, facilities the Chinese government first denied the existence of but later chose to call “vocational training centers.” Repressive policies implemented in the Uyghur region go beyond the establishment of

"re-education" facilities. Reports and scholarly contributions reveal that forced labor, long prison terms, demolition of cultural sites, prohibition of religious practices, family separation, restriction of movements, and sterilization of women, among others, raise concerns over the eradication of Uyghur identity and culture (Clarke, 2021; Finley, 2022; Klimeš & Finley, 2020; Murphy et al., 2022; Roberts, 2021; Ruser, 2020; Smith Finley, 2021; Tobin, 2020; Turdush & Fiskesjö, 2021; Waller & Alborno, 2021; Zenz, 2020). All those malpractices collectively account for crimes against humanity, according to a UN report (OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China | OHCHR, n.d.), constituting genocide, according to an independent tribunal (Uyghur Tribunal, n.d.).

However, the repression extends beyond the Chinese border. Transnational repression affects Uyghurs living abroad, resulting in constant fear among the diaspora community, which is a growing phenomenon that attracts scholarly attention. The conventional definition of transnational repression is the home state's attempts to control or monitor residents abroad – a tool autocracies often use to extend their repression at home to citizens involved in political activism abroad (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020; Furstenberg et al., 2021; Tsourapas, 2021). The Uyghur case differs significantly from others as China's targeting is based on the ethno-religious identities of the individuals, not necessarily their political activism (Lemon et al., 2023). The repression directed at the Uyghur diaspora ranges from cyberattacks, intelligence gathering, threatening family members, and attempts to force individuals to spy on other Uyghurs.

How, then, does the Chinese government's transnational repression take place? Building on existing scholarship and firsthand interview data, the present article sheds light on the experience of the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye. The findings show that the Chinese state aims to surveil the Uyghur diaspora via established networks both in China and Türkiye, which involves grassroots organizations in the Uyghur region, such as neighborhood working groups, police, and Chinese missions and informants in Türkiye. Instrumentalizing the fear for the safety of family members, the police coerce or threaten Uyghurs to stop their political activism, produce pro-Chinese propaganda, and spy on other Uyghurs.

The next part of the paper discusses the literature on China's transnational repression of Uyghurs, which is followed by the

methodology of the paper. The third part summarizes critical findings. Part four delves into the mechanism of translational repression with an analysis of evidence from interviews with Uyghur targets. The final part concludes the findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CHINA'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION ON UYGHURS

The “*long arm*” of authoritarian states is described as the means by which states instrumentalize coercion to monitor and manipulate their dissidents beyond their borders, affecting the diaspora communities in exile (Lewis, 2015). There is a growing literature on how transnational repression has become a tool for authoritarian states to crack down on political activism in host countries (Dukalskis et al., 2023), which has a significant implication for global politics, from digital security to the protection of national sovereignty (Michaelsen & Thumfart, 2023; Tsourapas, 2022). These practices were previously conceptualized as “*counter-exile strategies*” (Shain, 2010) or “*transnational authoritarianism*” (Tsourapas, 2021). However, it can generally be understood as the efforts of states to silence critical voices who are residing in relatively free societies (host states) to prevent them from criticizing the political regime in the home states (Abushammalah, 2023). Various tools and practices are used as instruments of transnational repression, including family hostages (Moss et al., 2022), among others. Studies also show that the regime type of host states influences the forms and degrees of transnational repression. In autocratic host states, the repressor uses cooperation with authorities, in contrast, the repression becomes more direct in democratic host states (Michaelsen & Ruijgrok, 2023).

Given the rich scholarly contribution to the studies on transnational repression, there is less focus on China's methods and tools to target diaspora communities, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, Hongkongers, and other opposition groups. In recent years, China has initiated a whole-scaled crackdown in the Uyghur region, as Uyghurs are perceived as a major “*existential threat*” to the Chinese government (Tobin, 2020). The usage of digital surveillance in the period of mass detention is used to identify “*normal*” and “*abnormal*” behaviors of the workers (Byler, 2021), which is part of the compound, extensive, and wide range of repressive policies that use high-technology surveillance tools as instruments of repression to “*create obedient*

citizens" (Topal, 2023). The repressive policies in the region extend beyond its borders – to the Uyghur diaspora lives worldwide – with sizable community centers in post-Soviet Turkic republics, Türkiye, and Europe. that has become a target of China's "long arm."

One of the most comprehensive accounts of China's transnational repression of Uyghurs is dataset¹ collected by the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, which includes 5532 cases of Uyghurs facing intimidation, which has adopted a multi-stage methodology to identify the incidents conducted by the Chinese government, targeting non-Han citizens living abroad. According to the dataset, transnational repression of the Chinese government can be divided into three stages, as outlined by Saipira Furstenberg, John Heathershaw, Edward Lemon, David Lweis, and Alexander Cooley (Furstenberg et al., 2021) and adopted by the Central Asia Political Exiles (CAPE) database.² According to the categorization, the first stage is described as the "Put on Notice," which includes warnings and threats to individuals and family members. Stage two is the "Arrest/Detention" stage, in which targets of repression are subjected to long and short detentions and imprisonments overseen due to their activities at home. The third stage, "End Game," further results in formal extradition, informal rendition, and even assassination of the targets.

A growing number of scholarly attentions to China's transnational repression against Uyghurs show that forms of transnational repression, such as online harassment and threats to family, are often used as a precursor to a harsher method, making Uyghurs more vulnerable to coercive forms of repression (Jardine, 2022). It is argued that China's campaign of repression has shifted in emphasis from Central and South Asia to Southeast Asia to the Middle East following the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2012 (No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs - Uyghur Human Rights Project, n.d.). Studies also show that Uyghurs living in liberal democracies across North America, Asia Pacific, and Europe are also in a vulnerable position because of transnational repression. Survey data shows that 95.8% of the participants in a study carried out by Oxus Society feel threatened, and 73.5% of them have experienced digital risks, threats, or other kinds of online harassment

¹ Available at <https://oxussociety.org/projects/transnational-repression/>

² Central Asia Political Exiles database. Available at <https://fpc.org.uk/practices-patterns-extraterritorial-security-introducing-central-asian-political-exiles-cape-database/>

(“Your Family Will Suffer”: How China Is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies – The Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, n.d.). Similarly, Amnesty International collected information from approximately 400 Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and members of other ethnic communities living in 22 countries across five continents and released a report entitled “*Nowhere Feels Safe*.” (Nowhere Feels Safe - Amnesty International, n.d.) Amnesty International highlighted that the Uyghur diaspora community is experiencing an enormous amount of stress, depression, and a constant feeling of danger, regardless of where they live, in the US or the EU. Reports focusing on the experience of Uyghurs in Türkiye facing intimidation from the Chinese state shed light on the issue, further showing a need for a more in-depth look into the mechanism of transnational repression (Tobin & Elima, 2023; Uluyol, 2023).

Türkiye is one of the most critical cases to examine transnational repression against the Uyghur diaspora. First, because of the size and historical ties of the Uyghur diaspora to the host state. Second, the more recent political and economic dynamics of Türkiye-China relations. The former puts Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye as the primary target for the Chinese state, whereas the latter makes Uyghurs living in Türkiye vulnerable to transnational repression.

Türkiye is home to one of the largest Uyghur diasporas in the world. Of the total population of Uyghur living in Türkiye, estimated to be 35,000–45,000, about 10,000 are refugees (Beydulla, 2019). Furthermore, Türkiye has been the safest place for Uyghurs historically, as early as the 1950s, with more than 2000 people, including the political elite of the second East Turkestan Republic, escaping the Chinese regime to seek refuge in Türkiye. Türkiye, once again, became the place for Uyghur students from Egypt to seek help in 2017 amid the large-scale extradition wave, despite having some problems (Karluk, 2018). Some Uyghur activists claim that the Chinese government arrested their family members for paying a visit to Türkiye or sending their children to Türkiye for higher education.³ Furthermore, the Chinese government has a record of banning Turkish flags and Türkiye-related symbols in the Uyghur region.⁴

³ “A Son’s Demand: Free My Mother Suriye Tursun - Campaign For Uyghurs.” n.d. Accessed August 26, 2022. <https://campaignforuyghurs.org/a-sons-demand-free-my-mother-suriye-tursun/>.

⁴ “Çin’in Yasakları Arasında Türk Bayrağı Da Var! - Kırm Haber Ajansı - QHA.” n.d. Accessed August 26, 2022. <https://qha.com.tr/haberler/cin-in-yasaklari-arasinda-turk-bayragi-da-var/26918/>.

Furthermore, Uyghurs have a significant influence on the bilateral relationship between Türkiye and China (Eliküçük Yıldırım, 2021). As Türkiye develops its relationship with China politically and economically, rights violations against Uyghurs are sidelined in the Turkish government agenda, especially starting from the initiation of the Belt and Road Initiative. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Turkish Prime Minister, called the 5th of July Massacre “almost a genocide” in 2009, being one of the loudest voices to criticize Chinese atrocities in Urumqi. However, over the last decade, Türkiye showed less support for the Uyghur cause, often highlighting the issue to be “discussed behind closed doors” in official engagements with China, mostly due to the rising expectation from China in terms of economic cooperation (Öniş & Yalikusun, 2021). More concerningly, an extradition bill between Türkiye and China is waiting to be ratified by Türkiye (Köprülü, 2021). Such a position of the Turkish government further complicates the lives of Uyghurs living in Türkiye, especially those who are critical of the Turkish government’s foreign policy towards China or activists lobbying against the Chinese influence in Türkiye (Klimeš, 2020). Meanwhile, China is increasing its influence over domestic media in Türkiye to improve its positive image among the Turkish public (Üngör, 2022).

The present study on China’s transnational repression against Uyghurs in Türkiye contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it examines first-hand interview data with Uyghur victims most of whom are not politically active. This is contrary to most of other cases studies who focus more on the experience of activists who are vocal in exile (Schenkkan & Linzer, 2021). Second, it examines not only the forms of repression, but also the network of agencies at play both in home and host states. Third, it focuses on one of the most vulnerable diaspora groups whose host state has been increasingly aligned with the home state.

METHODOLOGY

This study relies on survey data from 93 Uyghur participants living in Türkiye and in-depth interviews with 17 targets of China’s transnational repression, selected from the survey participants by the research objectives. As the aim of the study is to explore the patterns in transnational repression since 2016 and exclusively focuses on the Uyghur diaspora living in Türkiye, the survey was designed for the

Uyghurs who left China after 2010, have relatives living in the Uyghur region, and have or had lived in Türkiye. Responses that do not match those criteria were excluded from the analysis.

The survey had four parts. The first part was dedicated to name,⁵ age, gender, contact information, and contact preference.⁶ The second part was about respondents experience in Türkiye,⁷ followed by the third part, their experience returning back to the Uyghur region.⁸ The last part was designed for those contacted by the Chinese police at least once since 2016.⁹ Out of 93 participants, 42 of them reported being harassed by the Chinese state agencies at least once since 2016. Based on their responses, the researcher selected 20 from the 42 survey participants for the semi-structured interview, 17 of them accepted the interview request and gave consent to use their responses in the study, with the condition of total anonymity. The semi-structured interviews centered around questions about their experience with the Chinese state agencies before and in the aftermath of the harassment and the demand from the state agencies. Furthermore, participants were also asked questions related to their family members and if and how they were involved in the harassment. Lastly, the ones who were willing to share were given an opportunity to describe how they responded to the harassment of the Chinese state.

Reaching the targets of China's transnational repression is challenging because of the following two reasons. Firstly, Uyghurs living abroad are the direct targets of the Chinese government as they have long been labeled as a potential threat to state security, especially those living in Türkiye – a country categorized as “*sensitive*” by China. Therefore, it is difficult for the Uyghur diaspora to speak out about their experiences with the public or with experts. Secondly, Uyghurs constantly fear being exposed to Chinese spies abroad. Providing their personal information and experience with the Chinese police to third parties might endanger their and their direct families' safety. Therefore, it is difficult to access the Uyghurs who faced transnational repression. It becomes more challenging to access to those who have not been politically active, as they tend to avoid the attention of the Chinese state. Therefore, promising total anonymity of their responses

⁵ Participants need not to respond with their real name.

⁶ In case participants are willing to participate in the interview.

⁷ Residency status, time of arrival, sense of safety, trust in diaspora community etc.

⁸ If applicable. Participants were directed to part four if they had not return to the Uyghur region.

⁹ If applicable. Survey ends here if the participants were not contacted by the police at least once since 2016.

and the researcher's identity as a Uyghur scholar working on Uyghur rights gained the participants' trust, resulting in diverse and representative responses. Most interview participants informed the researcher that it was their first time talking about their experience with police harassment.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

There are 93 respondents to the survey of the study. At the time of the survey, the youngest respondent was 18, and the oldest respondent was 53 years old, among whom 22 were female and 71 were male. Forty-four of the respondents had long-term residence permits, 40 had Turkish citizenship, seven had other permits such as student residence permits, work permits, or humanitarian permits, and two had no legal documents. Among the respondents, 74 reported that they have not been able to contact their family members in the Uyghur region since at least 2017, and 42 of them reported being harassed by Chinese police or state agents.

Table 1. Survey with Uyghur Diaspora in Türkiye, conducted in March 2022.

	Survey Result (of 93 respondents)
Age	Youngest 18, eldest 53;
Gender	Female 22, male 71;
Status in Türkiye	Long term residence permits 44, Turkish citizens 40, other permits 7, no legal status 2;
Family Contact	74 reported being unable to contact family in China since 2017.
Transnational Repression	42 reported transnational repression.

The author contacted 20 of the 42 respondents who reported harassment and conducted in-depth interviews with 17 of them. Among the 17 interviewees,

a) Eight of them explicitly mentioned that they are offered or pressured to take part in Chinese propaganda. This ranges from participation in consulate activities to writing articles praising the Chinese Communist Party for foreign media.

b) Twelve of them said they were pressured to stay silent or delete their social media posts if they were politically active. These also include those who mentioned the police directly (or indirectly by family), reminding them to be “loyal,” “stay out of dangerous people and organizations,” “don't say anything against our government,” and similar warnings.

c) Twelve of them said they were pressured to be informants or provide information about other Uyghurs. The pressure generally takes the form of an “invitation for collaboration” where the police ask for information about other Uyghurs and/or organizations or ask the interviewee to take pictures in Uyghur-concentrated avenues such as Uyghur restaurants.

d) Fifteen of them were contacted directly by the police. This can be in the form of a direct call, WhatsApp message, iMessage, WeChat call from a device of police/community workers, or direct call/message from police from the device of a family member. All interviewees were under the category of direct contact if they heard the voice of the police/community workers or saw the face of the police/community workers during their communication with family members.

e) Twelve of them were contacted indirectly through family members. In some cases, they had both direct and indirect contact types separately.

f) Five of them were contacted by the consulate/embassy in Istanbul and Ankara.

g) Four of them were contacted by the police right after or related to their passport renewal applications.

h) Five of them were offered financial incentives in the form of scholarships, subsidies, or rewards for their cooperation. Two participants were former recipients of the Xinjiang Scholarship who stopped taking the scholarship in 2016-17.

The results of the survey and interviews indicate three critical dimensions of the transnational repression against Uyghurs in Türkiye. First, the scale of repression is community-wise. Most of the participants reported the inability to contact families back in their home state (74/93), and almost half (42/93) reported harassment from the police or other state agencies. This indicates a high level of exposure of the Uyghur diaspora to China's repression. Second, the

forms of repression are diverse. Some participants reported having been pressured by China to produce pro-China propaganda, while others were silenced through family hostages. Targets are sometimes pushed to spy on other Uyghurs, either through family intimidation or financial incentives. The findings also show that passport renewal procedures might also have been used as a tool of repression. Hence, it shows that China's transnational repression is not uniform; instead, it is tailored in accordance with the background and experience of the target. Third, repression comes from various channels. Interview results show that police, neighborhood working groups, or Chinese foreign missions contacted them through different communication channels, including direct phone calls or social media.

ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS: EXPERIENCE OF UYGHUR TARGETS

The Chinese government has been keeping a record of Uyghurs living abroad, with detailed information about their life outside China. This is done through a collection of official documents, forms filled by the family members at home, and through its intelligence agents gathering personal information of diaspora members. The findings from the interviews show that the Chinese state actors are well informed about the situation of Uyghurs before they contact them. One of the interviewees said her mother asked her to add two police officers to her WeChat. When she refused to add them, her mom cried over the phone. She explained the reason: *"The police officers are responsible for a student abroad to "educate them" and inform them how to behave in a foreign country. There are at least two police assigned for every student from our neighborhood."*¹⁰

There are several ways the Chinese police make their first move. In some cases, it is through family members of the target, while in other cases, they are directly in contact with the target. The most common channels are WeChat, WhatsApp, and Phone calls. Other channels reported during the interviews include QQ, Instagram, Facebook, iMessage, Messenger, and E-mails. The targets get a call,

¹⁰ All quotes in this paper are directly from interview data unless otherwise specified. To protect the security of interviewees, all responses are strictly anonymized; any details that might reveal the identity of the interviewee are not used in the study. All voice recordings, if interviewees gave consent, were deleted after transcription. All interviews were conducted in the Uyghur language, and then relevant parts were translated into English.

friend request, or short message unexpectedly without any precautions. In some cases, the police would harass their family members before the direct contact. One interviewee mentioned the following details:

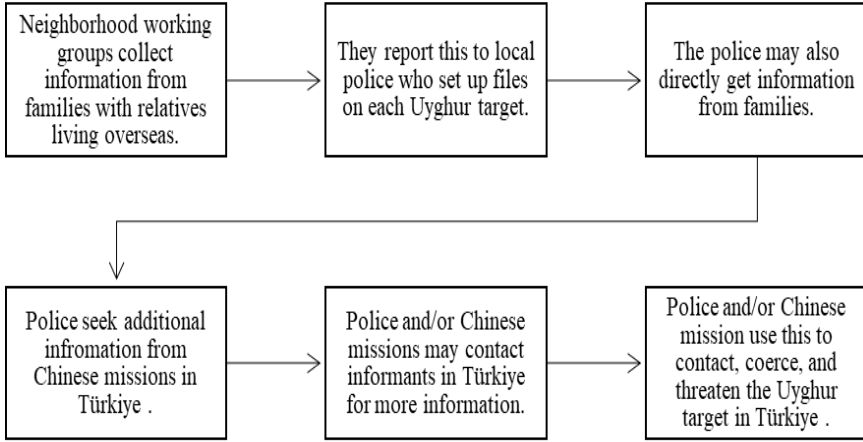
“The police have harassed my family members since I came to Türkiye. That is why my family did not want me to visit them, even before 2016. The police constantly asked for my materials from my mother, including my student certificate, residence permit, student ID, the phone number I use in Türkiye, etc. I would send those documents to my mom; then, she would pass them to the person in charge.”

Figure 1 shows how information collection and police contact are part of China's transnational repression. Most of the participants told the researcher that the neighborhood working group (or, in some cases, local police) constantly asks their family members to provide the most recent updates of their relatives in Türkiye. These updates include residence permit (or residence permit application), student ID, student certificate, addresses, and phone numbers. Then, the local police document everyone within their administration who lives abroad, which is cross-checked by their contact. Interviewees told the researcher that most of the time, the police ask about Uyghur from their neighborhood, district, or city. One interviewee said the police asked about other Uyghurs she knows and emphasized, *“We are only interested in those from our town; others are not in our consideration.”*

Similarly, another interviewee said:

“The police asked if I knew anyone from our city living in Türkiye. The police know that I live in a Uyghur-populated district in Istanbul, so sometimes, they directly ask the names of the Uyghurs. Once, they asked about details of the funeral of someone from my town who passed away in Türkiye, only one day after the funeral. I personally did not know that person, but I was shocked how the police became aware of that funeral in a short period. “Tell us everything,” he said.”

Figure 1: Steps of Surveillance



Multiple interviewees mentioned that the Chinese police asked them to keep in touch with the consulate and provide proof of participation in consulate activities to avoid “troubles.” Some students went to the embassy or consulate to apply for a scholarship and to get an official letter indicating their “ties” with the embassy/consulate. In the most recent counter-report, published by the Chinese government in response to an assessment of the situation in the Uyghur region published by the UN Human Rights Office, it is claimed that Chinese foreign missions have held more than 28 video conferences over the Pandemic during which Uyghur students abroad spoke to their family members. But one would question why Uyghur students needed a videoconference organized by the Chinese embassy to talk to their parents. One of our interviewees was invited to the video conference; he described his experience:

“I applied for passport renewal in 2021. The Chinese consulate contacted me. The person in charge said, “We have been helping minority students with their passport renewals, but you will not get a renewal because you have been in contact with the wrong people.” The Chinese consulate contacted me another time, inviting me to participate in a “video conference” with my family members under the condition that I would stop my political activism. I declined because I knew they would ask for more. I do not have any contact (with my family) now.”

The findings suggest that Chinese state agencies often request the targets to become a “source” of intelligence. The request comes with some offers. The police promised the Uyghurs stable income, smooth communication with their family members, the safety of their family members, renewal of their Chinese passport, and other benefits if they were willing to collaborate. Police told one target, *“I think your partner’s salary would not be enough for you all. Don’t you want to make some extra money by simply answering a few of my questions? Maybe it would be great to have a car as your kid is still small.”*

Another interviewee shared a similar experience and the “offer” of the police:

“I think the police knew my financial situation here in Türkiye, probably from their informants. I was in a financially difficult position a while ago. Only a few people around me knew the situation. The police reached out to me and said, “if you collaborate with and listen to us, all your problems can be solved. We can help you financially.”; “Your mom said she misses you,” he added. I started to suspect almost every Uyghur around me.”

Analysis of the first police contact experience of the interviewees illustrates a pattern. The most common type of contact is through their family members. In this type of contact, the targets receive a call (mostly on WeChat) from their family members. The other common way the police reach the targets is a direct call/message from the police. In this case, the police generally talk to or message the target directly, sometimes with friendly but, most of the time, threatening tones.

“When I became politically active, the police sent voices of my parents who were crying and telling me not to do illegal things. “Don’t worry about us, we are fine. Please do not participate in illegal events or become a member of bad organizations,” my mother said. I did not reply, thinking that the police would ask me to do things and might harm my parent if I refused. After some time, someone called me via WhatsApp (with a Dubai number). “I want you to speak to your parents, but you have to stop your political activism,” the police said. I started to argue with the police and told him I would expose him to international media. He stopped calling. Recently, the same person left a message on Messenger and told me, “I have spoken to your mother. If you want, I can let you speak to her... Your family is waiting for your message...Your grandmother’s health situation is not good. Do you even care about your family?” the police said. He sent a recent

photo of my mother. I kept silent because I knew the police would want more if I replied."

When the police call from a family member's account, the targets speak to their family members with police presence, and the family generally informs the targets that "they are not alone," expecting them to be careful with their wording. In this scenario, the family becomes a "mouth" for the police, hence the Chinese state, and passes "the official warnings" to the target living abroad. The interviewees told the researcher that they generally do not see the face of the police; only on some occasions the target hears the voice of the police. The family members generally "blame" the politically active target for not being a good Chinese citizen and "ask" them to be silent. In the other type of contact, the police directly call or message the targets. If they do not answer/reply, then the voice messages and photos of their family members are sent by the police.

"I did not answer the phones from unknown numbers. The police were in our house when they called. After I declined their calls several times, they sent a photo of my mother and father sitting in our living room. Afterward, they left a voice message and said, "We wanted to let you speak to your family. You did not answer our phones. Talk to your family; they will let you know the details." During the call, my family told me that the police knew I was part of a Uyghur organization and that I would be announced as a "terrorist" if I didn't provide inside information about the organization. They threatened my father and mother that they would be imprisoned for "funding" me – the terrorist. (Because they have sent me money). The police gave a deadline; it is approaching. I don't know how to save my family...."

One of the most striking examples of the Chinese police's threat and manipulation can be seen in one of the interviewee's experiences:

"We know you are not coming back," the police told me, "But we have your father and sister. If you don't collaborate (with us), you can never see them. They will suffer. You can't even imagine what we are capable of", he continued. The police asked for personal information, including photos of Uyghurs I know. I refused, deleted my WeChat account, and lost contact with everyone I knew in East Turkestan (around June 2016). The police contacted me again in 2018, only after I started to speak out. They let my father speak to me from their phones. The police asked me to stop going to protests. "We know what you are doing. We can have you back here if we want to. We have done it before; we will

do it again for you," they said. They asked my father to silence me. My father was detained in the camp for more than two years; he was hospitalized when I talked to him again in 2019 (with the police's intervention). I could talk to my father for about two months, but when I refused to provide what the police asked for, I lost contact with him again. They confiscated his phone. He disappeared, once again...."

Other targets experienced similar threats from the police. One of them told us his family contacted him after he started to speak out on social media; his family accused him of *"being the cause of all problems they are having at home."* Apparently, when Uyghurs speak out for their family members whom they have lost contact with, the police generally try to silence them by different means. First, by letting their family members *"convince"* them. If they still refused the *"advice"* of their family members and continued their political activism, the police started to threaten them, primarily by *"the possible detainment of rest of the family."*

"The Chinese consulate initially told me that my family refused to talk to me because I am a "terrorist"; only after speaking out about my mother, the police in my hometown contacted me. They let my family members talk to me to convince me to stop my activism. "We sent you there to study, but you have destroyed our family," my father told me in a sudden call from a Chinese number in June 2020. I knew that these words were not coming from his heart."

However, the police harass the Uyghurs, whether they are politically active or not. Because every Uyghur in the diaspora can be a potential informant who can provide important information about fellow Uyghurs. As seen in the above case and other similar ones, police contacted the Uyghurs when they started speaking out and criticizing the Chinese government's policies in the Uyghur region. The findings have identified another significant phenomenon that can trigger the Chinese police - applying for passport renewal. Four cases experienced similar harassment just after their passport renewal application.

"I applied for passport renewal in Istanbul. About a month after my application, police from my hometown contacted me. "Are you there?" the police asked, "it seems you have applied for passport renewal; as you know, it is a very complicated process, and it is only possible if we give a confirmation notice," he continued. It was not the first time. Previously, I added a police officer upon my mother's request and provided some documents, like a residence permit and student

certificate. But this time, the police started to ask more. "You can only get your passport if you collaborate with us," the police said several times. The police also asked me to get a Turkish SIM card and register a WhatsApp account for him. I declined their requests. And the police disappeared after several attempts to reconnect. I did not get the renewal."

Although many Uyghurs successfully got their Turkish citizenship, significant numbers of Uyghurs still need help with their expired or soon-expired Chinese passports. With an invalid passport, it is often impossible for Uyghurs to apply for a work permit or health insurance. Traveling to a third country would be impossible, too. So, many Uyghurs choose to apply for a passport renewal at the Chinese embassy and consulates. It is evident that the Chinese government is using the passport as a weapon to control Uyghurs living in the Uyghur region – using confiscation and punishment for having a passport. However, it is also the case for the Uyghurs residing abroad. Like the above case, three other interviewees informed the researcher that the police at home contacted them about a month after their passport renewal application, *"informing"* them that it is only possible to get approval if the Uyghurs provided what the police asked for.

Some of our interviewees chose to have minimum contact with the police and a certain degree of communication with their family members. But most of them have remained silent, which is believed to be their *"best"* option.

"It has been a dilemma for me. To choose between my cause and my family. The police ask for me to work for them to save my family at the expense of other families being destroyed by the information I may provide. I have been remaining silent. I neither accepted nor declined their offer. I ignore their calls and messages. Hoping they would leave my family and me alone. I don't know how long I can continue this way...."

Such a dilemma, choosing between their families and the community, caused enormous stress and psychological pressure for the Uyghur community living in the diaspora, combined with all other experiences such as the inability to contact their family members, traveling back to their homeland, and witnessing the other rights violations happening to the people in the region. *"It is impossible to continue this way, but it just doesn't end,"* one of the interviewees, describing the desperate situation he has been living under over the last five years. However, some Uyghurs think silence is not an efficient

way to stop Chinese police. One activist told the researcher that the police stopped harassing him only after he “attacked” the police back.

“The police gave up contacting me because I had recorded one of their threatening voicemails and shared it with international media. I generally carry two phones with me if the police and/or the Chinese consulate ever contact me again. The only way to stop them is to counterattack... I know it is risky, but I have nothing left to worry about....”

This dilemma affects the lives of thousands of Uyghurs living in the diaspora, regardless of their political orientation. It is more likely that politically active individuals receive more threats from the police. However, the Uyghurs trying “just to live a normal life” cannot escape from “China’s Long Arm” either. According to the survey results, nearly half of the respondents have experienced harassment from the Chinese police. Among the interviewees, almost all experienced police harassment several times; in all cases, family members living in the region were involved in one way or another. It is worth mentioning that these people, both the respondents and the interviewees, are the ones willing to share their experiences with the researcher. There might be more cases of police harassment and other forms of intimidation that the diaspora community experiences, which is hard to document.

CONCLUSION

Over the last couple of years, there has been a growing focus from the international community and scholars across the Globe on the ongoing genocide in the Uyghur region. The Chinese government has taken systematic, organized, and dramatic steps to eliminate Uyghur culture, religion, and language by implementing restrictive policies, which have accelerated in an unprecedented fashion since 2016. The establishment of re-education camps, forced sterilization, forced labor, demolition of mosques, eradication of the Uyghur elite, and other developments in the region have been recognized as genocidal intentions by the Uyghur Tribunal – an independent people’s tribunal to investigate China’s atrocity in the region. The report by the United Nations documented and recognized that China is committing crimes against humanity in the Uyghur region. The Chinese government’s genocidal policies and human rights violations are not bound to its borders. A growing number of reports and scholarly contributions on

transnational repression shed light on the Chinese government's targeting of Uyghurs and other communities living abroad. This present paper reflects China's transnational repression against the Uyghur diaspora in Türkiye.

Overall, the finding of the paper provides significant evidence for China's transnational repression of Uyghurs living in Türkiye since 2016. The evidence from the paper overlaps with the findings from existing reports and research on the topic. Yet, only focusing on one dimension - police harassment - contributes to a deeper understanding of how the Chinese police communicate, monitor, and threaten targets as part of China's transnational repression against Uyghurs. Results from the interviews reveal the pattern that the Chinese state follows in most of the harassment: the neighborhood working groups collect information about the person residing abroad (primarily through their family members). Then, the local police stations collaborate with the neighborhood working groups and document everyone in their administration. Afterward, the police ask for regular updates from the people in the diaspora and monitor their actions (with the help of intelligence units and embassies and consulates). The police ask Uyghurs to become informants for them and threaten Uyghurs if they refuse to collaborate. The findings indicate that most Uyghurs are vulnerable to harassment from the Chinese state. These malpractices not only constitute a direct threat to the fundamental freedoms of Uyghurs living abroad, but they also constitute a violation of the national sovereignty of host states such as Türkiye.

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