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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Xinjiang Police Files: Re-Education Camp Security and Political Paranoia in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

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From 2017, the Chinese state detained Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in so-called Vocational Skills Education and Training Centres (VSECs). Previously, witnesses and leaked state documents outlined the securitised nature of these re-education facilities. Now, the "Xinjiang Police Files," a major cache of classified files obtained by a third party from internal XUAR police networks, provides an unprecedented inside view. Detailed re-education camp security instructions describe special police units carrying military assault weapons and show guards handcuffing detainees. The files include thousands of images of detained Uyghurs and show that in 2017/18, over 12 percent of Uyghur adults were detained. Candid internal speeches show leading officials' impassioned demands to treat persons from ethnic groups like dangerous criminals, and to readily open fire to stop escapees and to safeguard the camps. This article authenticates and contextualises the Xinjiang Police Files within the growing field of published internal XUAR government documents. Scholars have argued that political paranoia is a common feature of atrocity crimes. Here, it is suggested that the pre-emptive internment of large numbers of ordinary citizens can be explained as a devolution into political paranoia that promotes exaggerated threat perceptions.

从 2017 年起，中国政府将新疆的维吾尔等少数民族居民关押在自治区所谓的职业技能教育培训中心（VSECs）。之前的证人证词和流出的政府文件已勾画出政治再教育营中警力管理的轮廓。本文选用最新的“新疆公安文件”，即一大批由第三方从新疆公安内部网络截获的机密文件，将之与不断流出的新疆政府内部文件相互印证、比对结合，从前所未有的内部视角展示 2017/18 年度超过 12% 的维吾尔成年人在关押期间的实际境遇：被视为危险罪犯，戴上手铐，若试图逃跑手持军用攻击型武器的特警会随时开火。有学者认为，政治偏执妄想症是暴行暴政的共同特征。本研究旨在探讨大范围先发制人式关押普通公民的心理侧写和社会效应，阐述施政者向政治偏执妄想症的退变以及对维吾尔等少数民族威胁性的夸大。

Keywords: Xinjiang, re-education, police, securitisation, Chen Quanguo

关键词：新疆，教育转化，警察，警察化，陈全国

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Introduction and Methodology

From 2017, the Chinese state embarked on a campaign of mass internment in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in the northwest of the People's Republic of China that has swept up perhaps over a million members of ethnic groups into re-education camps (Zenz 2018b, 2019b). Researchers have referred to this campaign as a “high-tech penal colony” (Byler 2021, 23) and as “the country’s most intense campaign of coercive social re-engineering since the Cultural Revolution” (Zenz 2018a, 125).

The securitised nature of Xinjiang’s so-called Vocational Skills Education and Training Centres (VSETC; *zhiye jinneng jiaoyu peixun zhongxin* 职业技能教育培训中心) has early on been the subject of intense scrutiny amidst Beijing’s assertions that these are merely “boarding schools” whose “students” are free to take leave (Sudworth 2019; Wang 2019). From 2018, witness accounts and analyses of government documents and satellite images have documented the prison-like nature of what are effectively re-education camps. The state itself has stated that VSETCs are designed to “wash brains”, “cleanse hearts”, and “remove evil” (Zenz 2019b, Section 2).

The current literature evaluating security-related aspects of Beijing’s crackdown in the region has so far predominantly focused on police recruitment (Zenz and Leibold 2019); the technologies, operations and social aspects of state surveillance (Leibold 2019b, Kam and Clarke 2021); the experiences of re-education camp detainees (Byler 2021; Khatchadourian 2021); and the wider framing of Uyghurs as inherently “dangerous” or “untrustworthy” persons (Roberts 2020; Tobin 2020; Zenz 2020a, 2021b). Several studies have examined the conceptual framing, security features, funding, or police staffing of the region’s various internment facilities (Rajagopalan, Killing and Buschek 2020; Ruser 2020; Zenz 2018b, 2018c, 2019b). Additionally, research has investigated the role of China’s leadership in masterminding and implementing the internment campaign (Leibold 2019a; Zenz 2020a, 2021d; Zenz and Leibold 2017).

Unexpectedly, the author received what he refers to as the “Xinjiang Police Files”: a cache of internal police documents and images that conclusively demonstrate the securitised and coercive nature of VSETCs as prison-like re-education facilities. This article focuses on the review and authentication of speeches by Xinjiang’s former Party Secretary Chen Quanguo related to re-education camp security, directives related to the police operations of these facilities, as well as the authentication of images, many of which depict detainees. The resulting findings fill an important gap in our under-

standing of several aspects of Beijing's re-education campaign, notably the role of leading XUAR officials in demanding total securitisation, and detailed evidence of how re-education facilities are to be guarded by heavily armed special police forces.

The Xinjiang Police Files were obtained by a third party from the outside through hacking into computer systems operated by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) of the counties of Konasheher (*shufu xian* 疏附县), located in Kashgar Prefecture, and Tekes (*tekesi xian* 特克斯县) in Ili Prefecture, both regions traditionally dominated by non-Han ethnic groups. The person who unexpectedly reached out to the author to provide the files acted on a solely individual basis, attached no conditions to their provision or publication, and wishes to remain anonymous due to personal safety concerns. While some of the material had been stored in encrypted form, the individual was able to decrypt part of the files through mechanisms that were communicated to the author. The author himself was not involved in any part of the process required to obtain or decrypt the files.

The Xinjiang Police Files span tens of thousands of files dating from the 2000s to the end of 2018. They include a wide range of documents, several of them explicitly marked as "confidential" (*jimi* 机密) or "internal" (*neibu* 内部). These include transcripts of internal speeches by local and regional XUAR officials, including statements made by former XUAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo (2016 to 2021). The files also contain detailed internal operations directives for the police stationed at the Konasheher New Vocational Skills Education and Training Centre (VSETC) (*shufu xian xin zhiye jineng jiaoyu peixun zhongxin* 疏附县新职业技能教育培训中心). Internal spreadsheets from Konasheher show the personal information of approx. 286,000 individuals – basically the entire county population in 2018.¹ They indicate that approx. 12.3 to 12.7 percent of the county's ethnic adults were in some form of internment in re-education, detention, or prison facilities, providing new evidence for the vast scale of the mass internments (see Zenz 2022 for a detailed discussion). This means that Konasheher's combined per capita internment/imprisonment rate was over 64 times higher than China's national imprisonment rate (von Kameke 2021).² The files also indicate that all of these facilities, including formal prisons, effectively act as sites of arbitrary internment.

The Xinjiang Police Files also contain the personal information and exact status of nearly all detainees of the Konasheher New VSETC and the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC (around 8,000 detainees), including their camp building number and

¹ According to government statistics, the Konasheher county adult population in 2018 was approx. 284,000 (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2019, table 3-9).

² China's national figure excludes an unknown number of persons who may potentially still be detained in the formally abolished Re-education Through Labor (RETL) camps, or those held in detention centres.

(often) floor level. The file cache also encompasses over 5,000 images of persons in Konasheher who were taken in by police to be photographed, either at a police station or a re-education camp. Of these 2,884 can be confirmed to have been detained. Other documents include internal police PowerPoint presentations, some for training police and security staff – for example in the use of handcuffs, in close combat, or in the search and arrest of suspects. Original images and descriptions of the 2,884 detained persons, dozens of internal police PowerPoints, files outlining local security drills, and images and scans of multiple government documents can be accessed on the website www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org set up by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. All originals and several translations of documents from the cache that are cited in this paper can be accessed at the open access storage of the University of Vienna (links are included in the list of references).

First, this article reviews internal speeches by high-ranking officials and policy documents to assess whether lower-level police directives are consistent with the statements and demands made by the region's leadership. This material is then compared to previously-published internal state documents.

Second, this article examines the nature and authenticity of the over 5,000 images of persons taken at police stations or detention centres. Based on image-linked ID numbers, images were examined by age group, gender, and the location and sequence in which they were taken. The IDs were then compared to sets of other IDs contained in the files, as well as to external sources. Where available, image metadata such as date and camera serial number were analysed, permitting assessments of whether images were taken using identical or different cameras. Internment facility locations were corroborated using satellite imagery, construction bids, and geolocation analysis that matched internal documents and images of facilities with corresponding satellite images.³

The method of authenticating the material through a) assessing its internal consistency and b) comparing it with other available material contains certain limitations. A malicious actor seeking to discredit research on this topic may leak falsified evidence on purpose. This may be based on existing and publicly available evidence. However, the material contained in the Xinjiang Police Files is extremely extensive. In particular, the visual material (contained in both photographs and PowerPoint presentations) shows large numbers of what are obviously real-life scenes from Xinjiang, including very sensitive settings such as police stations, police trainings, the inside of the

³ Additionally, investigative research teams from a consortium of 13 major media outlets (including the BBC, Der Spiegel, Le Monde, El Pais, etc.) conducted their own independent Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) work on the Xinjiang Police Files, including geolocation assessments.

Konasheher police command centre (Figure 1), hundreds of portraits of police officers, and the insides of internment facilities. It also contains numerous images of original government documents, including a full and unredacted copy of one of the documents from the Xinjiang Papers (General Office 2017a; see Figure 2). All of this constitutes non-public or classified material. Arguably, the only entity that could have produced a data set of this type and magnitude is the Chinese government itself.



Figure 1. The inside of the Konasheher County Police Command Centre.⁴ Original filename: 20181018181440.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).

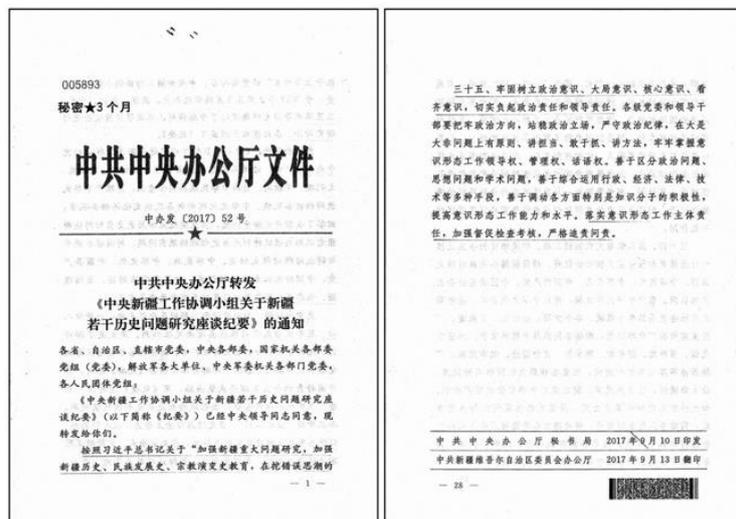


Figure 2. Unredacted copies (first and last pages) of a classified central government document that was previously published as part of the Xinjiang Papers (compare General Office 2017a).⁵ Original filenames: 1.jpg and 28.jpg (click on filenames to download the original images).

⁴ Image creation date: November 2, 2018 (no camera metadata available). Source: Shufu County PSB. This only shows the top image of two concatenated images.

⁵ Source: XUAR internal police networks.

Internal Government Documents from Xinjiang: An Overview and Conceptual Analysis

Between 2019 and 2021, several internal documents from Xinjiang were obtained and published by researchers and media outlets. Table 1 shows related publications in chronological order (this table includes only publishing initiatives that specifically pertained to internal government or other semi-public documents containing at least some information that is considered internal to the state).

Date of first publication	Title	Contents	Source of data	Published by
November 2019	Xinjiang Papers (partial disclosure)	Over 11 classified and top-secret speeches and documents from the central government and the XUAR. The Times published only a brief summary of some of the documents.	Anonymous source in Xinjiang via anonymous intermediaries.	New York Times (Ramzy and Buckley 2019)
November 2019	China Cables	Classified policy document regarding the operations and security of VSETCs in Xinjiang, as well as four shorter bulletins.	Anonymous source in Xinjiang, via exiled Uyghur Asiye Abdulaheb.	ICIJ (2019) / Adrian Zenz (2019b)
November 2019	Xinjiang QQ Files	A set of ca. 25,000 internal files from local government work groups in several counties in Xinjiang, including spreadsheets of persons with their internment status.	Obtained by Adrian Zenz via local social networks in Xinjiang (w/o hacking)	Zenz (2019a, 2019b); many victims were entered into the Xinjiang Victims Database
February 2020	Karakax List	Internal spreadsheet from Karakax County detailing the internment of 311 persons (with reasons for their internment and the incremental reasoning behind their release).	Anonymous source in Xinjiang, via exiled Uyghur Asiye Abdulaheb.	Zenz (2020a) / multiple media outlets
January 2021	Urumqi Police Database	Internal database of the Urumqi City PSB and the XUAR PSB (ca. 250 million data entries).	Obtained by anonymous source from within Xinjiang police networks in 2019 (unclear if leaked or hacked)	The Intercept (Grauer 2021)
March 2021	Nankai Report	Public research report by a group of academics from Nankai University on labour transfers of Uyghurs to other parts of China, with a discussion of related security measures.	Nankai University publication, first identified by Asiye Abdulaheb, archived by Adrian Zenz	Zenz (2021a) / BBC (Sudworth 2021)
November 2021	Xinjiang Papers (full disclosure of 11 files)	11 classified and top-secret speeches and policy documents from central government and XUAR related to Beijing's policies in the region.	Anonymous source in Xinjiang via intermediaries, provided to the Uyghur Tribunal.	Zenz (2021c, 2021d) via Uyghur Tribunal (publication of the full transcripts)
April 2022	Xinjiang Police Files	Thousands of internal files from internal PSB networks in Konasheher and Tekes Counties, including speeches by officials, instructions for re-education camp police, and images of detained persons.	Obtained by anonymous individual through hacking.	Zenz (this publication)

Table 1. Chronology of the publication of internal XUAR state documents.

Each of the previous leaks provided a limited but highly targeted amount of new information that shed important new light on the nature of this atrocity. Moreover, they did so at different administrative levels, with the Xinjiang Papers representing the highest level (central government), and the Urumqi Police Database and the Xinjiang QQ Files the lowest. Conceptually speaking, one can classify the material into four administrative levels:⁶

1. Central government level
2. XUAR regional autonomous (provincial) level
3. Prefectural or county-level policy directives
4. Local policy implementation (in townships, villages, work units) as evident from specific work reports or spreadsheets

At the highest administrative level, the Xinjiang Papers were unique in that they gave insights into the thinking of General Secretary Xi Jinping on the situation in Xinjiang, as well as featuring the order of XUAR leaders to “round up all who should be rounded up” *ying shou jin shou* 应收尽收 (Zenz 2021c, table 6 on page 23). When published in full in December 2021, the Papers provided the academic community with an insider view of the top-level policy design dynamics *dingceng sheji* 顶层设计⁷ of XUAR policymaking; nearly all major policy initiatives that evolved in the region since 2016 were either directly mandated or at least clearly encouraged by the central leadership (Zenz 2021c). As noted by Tobin, the Papers complement an understanding of the oppressions in the XUAR that had until then been predominantly framed through the lens of regional-level policy implementation. Here, the Papers provided specific insights into the discourses that explicate the genesis and evolution of these policies (Tobin 2021).

At a lower but still XUAR-wide conceptual level, the China Cables, especially their main document (a classified state telegram), furnished the first strong proof that, internally, the Chinese state viewed the re-education “centres” as highly securitised facilities that had to be run like prisons (Zenz 2019b; Autonomous Region Party Political and Legal Affairs Commission 2017b). Previously, information about the security features of these “centres” had been obtained from government websites, procurement bid

⁶ This categorisation reflects a simplified version of Chinese administrative levels, which include the central government, provinces and autonomous regions, prefectures and prefecture-level cities, counties / county-level cities / urban districts, townships / towns / urban subdistricts, and villages / urban neighborhoods (compare Heilmann 2017, 73, 86, 100). This simplification was performed by the author based on the nature of the available internal government material and related bureaucratic processes.

⁷ Top-level design constitutes a more centralised and streamlined policymaking approach, introduced by Xi in 2013 (Alpermann and Schubert 2019, 200).

documents, or satellite images. Reading about camp security procedures from an official and stamped internal document signed by Xinjiang's second most powerful official at the time, the former Deputy Party Secretary and former Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission Zhu Hailun, gave that leak a special quality and unique authority. Also, the fact that this was a XUAR-wide directive that mandated an improved "establishment of Vocational Skills Education and Training Service Bureaus at the prefecture and county levels" furnished important support for estimating the scale and scope of the re-education campaign (Autonomous Region Party Political and Legal Affairs Commission 2017b, 8; Zenz 2019b, Section 6).

At the time, this was complemented by evidence derived from a large leak of internal documents that the author obtained in the second half of 2019 through social media networks used by local government units that were operated through Tencent's QQ app (Zenz 2019b). This cache, now for the first time dubbed by the author the "Xinjiang QQ Files", consists of over a dozen sets of internal local (township) government files. In October 2019, months after the author first used these files in a research paper on parent-child separation (Zenz 2019a), XUAR authorities mandated a thorough clean-up of local data, including the shifting of file sets to secured databases and offline IT systems, with a special focus on removing evidence listing people's "detention status" (Associated Press 2019). Among the Xinjiang QQ Files were internal government spreadsheets predominantly from Yarkand County (Kashgar Prefecture) that contained lists of detained persons by household. From this material, the author was able to calculate internment shares for entire populations, assessing that most of those sent to internment facilities were heads of households, their sons, or other male figures (Zenz 2019b, Section 9.2.2). The average ages of those in re-education were much higher than those claimed by the Chinese state, with the oldest person being 77 years old. This is corroborated by the Xinjiang Police Files. By February 2022, internment data from the Xinjiang QQ Files made up nearly half (7,972 of 17,237) of all victims listed in the Xinjiang Victims Database who were interned under Chen Quanguo (Xinjiang Victims Database 2022).⁸

In terms of policy evidence, the China Cables were quite narrow in scope. Focused on specific aspects of VSETC management, they did not explain who exactly was to be detained and for what presumed reason, nor answer many other questions surrounding the campaign. Some of these knowledge gaps were filled by the Karakax List, which represented an entirely different type of document. Rather than coming with

⁸ After exporting the dataset with the filter option "exclude pre-Chen Quanguo victims", each data row that contained the keyword 'Zenz' in the column 'About the testifier' was counted as a match.

official formatting, dates, authorship, or stamps, it is an unmarked, undated, and unsigned spreadsheet saved as a simple PDF document (Zenz 2020a). However, the lack of formatting was compensated by the List's detailed contents. Outlining the fate of 311 detained persons, the unique feature of the Karakax List was the conceptual associations embedded in it: each data row shows a person with the reasons for their internment, an appraisal of their family situation, and the reasoning behind whether they could be released or not. Notably, it showed that many Uyghurs had merely been detained because they were classified as "untrustworthy persons" 不放心人员, and that the primary reason for their detention was violations of birth control policies.

The Urumqi Police Database files provided an insider view into real-time police surveillance operations through data recorded at police checkpoints and from records created at police meetings (Grauer 2021; Byler et al. 2020-21, 7). It helped us to understand how the authorities flag "suspicious" persons and utilise extensive digital monitoring to create links between diverse pieces of gathered data, including financial transactions, physical movement, biometric data, phone call records, and social media behaviour. This dynamic data flow is then fed into regular local police reports. Both this database and the Xinjiang QQ Files provide detailed insights into local records that are created in the process of implementing security-related policies. The Urumqi Police Database focused substantially on data that is dynamically created in the process of surveillance, which may generate so-called push notifications in the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) 一体化推送 that require authorities to investigate or detain persons (Human Rights Watch 2019). The Xinjiang QQ Files contain predominantly static data that at times show the outcome of this surveillance, such as internment status and prison sentences.

Not all pivotal documentary evidence has been internal or classified. While the Nankai Report was originally in the public domain (although it has since been removed and effectively become an internal document), it carried a unique authority by virtue of having been published by a well-known academic institution. It provided timely new insight into securitised labour transfers, notably transfers of Uyghurs to other provinces. The Nankai Report also contained unique admissions by these academics, one of them a dean and former deputy Secretary-General of the Tianjin municipal government, on the nature of the internment campaign: that the "education and training centres" (VSETCs) were a "drastic short-term measure" that was "absolutely necessary and effective" (Zenz 2021a, 14).

The Xinjiang Police Files span a wide range of internal documents across different administrative levels. They include statements by XUAR leaders such as Chen Quanguo and other officials that are exceptionally unrestrained in nature. This is likely because they are oral speech transcripts and not formally-published speeches or policy

documents. Even when confidential and internal, the more formal types of documents simply do not feature the unfiltered, raw bouts of personal opinion and emotive overtones that are contained in these transcripts. The Xinjiang Papers, while containing several fairly direct statements by Xi Jinping and XUAR officials, have not revealed some of the “smoking gun” admissions that would conclusively and authoritatively answer some of our remaining questions regarding Beijing’s unprecedented re-education drive in the region. This is where the Xinjiang Police Files fill an important gap. The speech transcripts are titled “transcription from recording” 根据录音整理 (compare for example Liu 2015). While they lack official formatting – they are just plain Word documents with a simple header – their content is unprecedented in terms of the insight given into these leaders’ actual personal thinking. To date, documents of this type from Xinjiang have never been published in the public domain.

Besides XUAR-level documents such as leaders’ speeches, the Xinjiang Police Files include mostly security-related documents at all lower administrative levels. These include announcements *tongzhi* 通知, often transmitted in the form of state telegrams or cables, *fadian* 发电; work demands *gongzuo yaoqiu* 工作要求 related to a specific work aspect; work plans *gongzuo fang’an* 工作方案; implementation plans *shishi fang’an* 实施方案; briefings *qingkuang tongbao* 情况通报; and specific products of policy implementation such as work reports *gongzuo baogao* 工作报告 and spreadsheets. Altogether, they span the entire policy cycle, covering measures that are to be implemented, are being implemented, or have been implemented and are being reported or evaluated. Chen’s two speech transcripts in particular are unique in that they provide us not only with unusually frank policy implementation directives, but also with some of the thought processes and attitudes behind these policies.

XUAR Regional-Level Speeches and Directives Regarding the “Absolute Security” of Re-Education Internment Facilities

Document no.8 from the Xinjiang Papers contains key points of a February 2018 speech by Chen Quanguo that highlight the so-called “4+2 work requirement” *gongzuo yaoqiu* 工作要求: namely the need to ensure the “absolute security of Vocational Skills Education and Training Centres and Internment Facilities” (Chen Quanguo Autonomous Region Party Committee 2018; see table 6 in Zenz 2021c, 23). Essentially the same phrase is found in the opening sections of the main telegram of the China Cables that mandated a series of related security measures, notably the “Five Prevents” *wufang* 五防, which include escape prevention (Autonomous Region Party Political and Legal Affairs Commission 2017b, 2-3; compare Zenz 2019b, Section 4).

Chinese state speeches, policy texts, and related directives or implementation reports form series of intertextual chains, whereby official texts draw on other texts (Zhou and Qin 2020, 3). This process is facilitated by mantra-like recurrences of what Heilmann aptly described as “[p]olitically binding standard phrases” (*tifa* 提法) that steer political discourse and streamline policy implementation (Heilmann 2017, 313).

The Xinjiang Police Files reflect the overarching significance of *tifa* such as “4+2” (or at times: “4+1”), which are dominant in related county- and local-level documents. For example, all of the longer and more comprehensive documents detailing the security procedures at the two Konasheher VSETCs contain this *tifa*, along with the explicit statement that this is a “thing” *jian shi* 件事 (i.e. requirement) of Chen Quanguo. These frequent attendant references or appeals to the personal authority of Chen (and of Xi Jinping) point towards the personalisation inherent in what Heilmann refers to as a “crisis mode” of policymaking and governance more prevalent under Xi (Heilmann 2017, 161). This is especially pertinent in politically sensitive regions such as Xinjiang, where the features of a “crisis mode” highlighted by Heilmann – notably increased centralisation, personalisation, militant mobilisation rhetoric, increased influence of disciplinary and security organs, and a greater role of ideology in decision-making – are abundantly evident (*ibid.*).

The newly obtained material contains a transcript of an internal June 18, 2018, speech by Chen Quanguo in the context of the visit of Zhao Kezhi 赵克志, PRC State Councillor and head of the national PSB (Chen Quanguo 2018). The veracity of this important document can be assessed in several ways. First, Zhao did visit Xinjiang as stated in the speech transcript. Second, Chen makes multiple assertions about what

Zhao said and thought, all of which can be assessed as accurate because Zhao’s (classified) speech is also part of the Xinjiang Police Files as a “secret document” *miji wenjian* 密级文件 (Figure 3; Zhao Kezhi 2018). This speech constitutes perhaps the most important document of the Xinjiang Police Files because it very directly implicates the central government – and Xi Jinping himself – in the campaign of mass internment (see the author’s separate publication analysing its contents and significance in Zenz 2022).

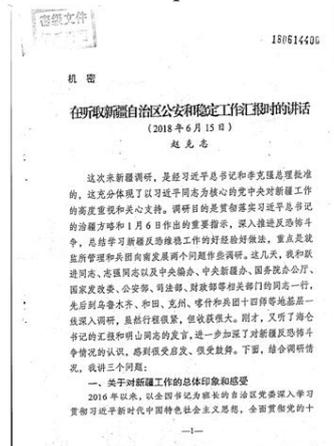


Figure 3. Screenshot of the first page of Zhao Kezhi’s June 15, 2018, speech, given in Urumqi. Source: Konasheher County PSB.

The title and context of Zhao’s speech can in turn be corroborated from official reports on the related event that took place in Urumqi on June 15, 2018 (Beihai shi 2018). In addition, the timing and title of Chen’s speech, which the internal document

states as having been given at the “Autonomous Region Cadres’ Plenary Meeting” 自治区干部大会上的讲话, are confirmed in a related state report (XUAR local chronicle 2018).

As in his previous internal speeches, Chen notes the supreme importance of the “4+2 work requirement” – the “absolute security of prisons, detention centres and training [VSETC] facilities” 监所培训中心绝对安全 (Chen Quanguo 2018, 13). Noting that officials must do a good job with the “Five Prevents,” he then argues that:

No one should ever plan to attack internment facilities, [they have] multiple lines of defence, as soon as there is someone who moves [against them], fire must resolutely be opened [on them]. 谁也不能打监所的主意，多重防线、铜墙铁壁，只要有动的，果断开枪。(Chen Quanguo 2018, 5)

Further below, Chen goes on to say that the authorities should have opened fire during the 2009 Urumqi Riots, and that if anyone were now to challenge the authorities as was done during that incident, security forces must “decisively attack”, that is to say “first kill and then report” 先击毙再报告 (Chen Quanguo 2018, 13). He notes that the PRC is “not the Soviet Union,” because “we have the wise leadership of General Secretary Xi Jinping and the backing of 1.3 billion of the people and millions of troops” (Chen Quanguo 2018, 8).⁹ If anyone were to attempt to split even an inch from Chinese soil, they would be “courting death” 找死 (Chen Quanguo 2018, 12).

Chen’s preoccupation with the security of the internment facilities and the stringent measures surrounding the arrest of those who “should be rounded up” goes to considerable extremes. In a transcript of an internal speech from May 28, 2017, he lambasts the PSB of Kizilsu Prefecture, an ethnic minority region in southern Xinjiang, for an overly soft approach when detaining re-education targets (Chen Quanguo 2017, 10).¹⁰ Chen argues that when police make arrests, especially of those returning from other countries, they should “arrest them as soon as they see them” and “deal with them as with serious criminal offenders,” handcuff them, blindfold them, and “use ankle shackles if needed” (Chen Quanguo 2017, 10).¹¹

An August 31, 2017, implementation plan *shishi fang’an* 实施方案 issued by the Ili Prefecture PSB and included in the Xinjiang Police Files confirms the application of

⁹ Original text: 十三亿人民，几百万人民军队部队做后盾

¹⁰ While this speech does not contain a year of publication, it was held on May 28th, and the contents states that that day was the third day of Ramadan, which corresponds to the start of Ramadan on the evening of May 26th, 2017 (<https://archive.ph/0eVKX>).

¹¹ Original text: 见一个，抓一个，按照重犯对待处理 and 必要的话脚镣要给他带上

these directives, adding that the escort of detainees requires detailed advanced planning to ensure that sufficient numbers of special police *tejing* 特警 and armed police *wujing* 武警 forces are deployed (Ili Prefecture PSB 2017, 41-42). The plan emphasises that the shackling and hooding of detainees must not be lax, strictly forbidding negligent practices such as placing hoods on detainees in ways that do not fully cover their faces. This prefecture-level document was issued one day after Chen Quanguo’s video speech from August 30, 2017 (contained in the Xinjiang Papers), in which he reiterated the need to ensure the “Five Prevents” and the “absolute security” of “prisons, detention centres and training facilities” (Chen Quanguo shuji 2017 nian, 5).

Testimonies of Uyghur returnees to China such as that of ‘Iman’ (pseudonym) confirm that this was applied in practice – he was arrested like a criminal simply because he had been a student in the U.S. (Special correspondent 2018). Iman was hooded and handcuffed during transport, and his escorting officers told him they were being “lenient” since he was “supposed to be shackled, too.” The same was reported by Omir Bekali, who was arrested by five officers in two police cars immediately upon his return from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang for a family visit. Bekali testified that:

I was handcuffed and a black hood was placed on my head. They said this was the rule and they did this to everyone. ... [T]hey took me to a detention centre. I had to change into a prison uniform, and I was then placed in a cell with thirteen young men. They were all Uyghurs and in shackles. I was kept there, also in shackles... (Bekali 2021)



Figure 4. Screenshots of a police training PowerPoint for the use of handcuffs.

Source: Konasheher PSB (Memetursun Emet, n.d.).

In his May 2017 speech, Chen boasts that 100,000 police officers and People’s Armed Police forces were “engaged in the pursuit and capture” *jinxing zhuibu* 进行追捕 of suspects (Chen Quanguo 2017, 11). Wang Leizhan (pseudonym), a retired Han police officer who was sent to Xinjiang in 2018 along with thousands of other police officers from other provinces, testified that they were “immediately sent out to arrest” suspects (Wang 2021, 2). Wang stated that “[t]here was a national Chinese policy to arrest Uyghurs because they are automatically considered enemies/terrorists by this national

policy” (Wang 2021, 2). This indiscriminate framing of an entire ethnic group is directly commensurate with the attitudes towards Uyghurs reflected in Chen’s internal speeches.

Chen then tells police forces to “shoot dead” *jibi* 击毙 anyone who even attempts to escape by running a few steps (Chen Quanguo 2017, 11). Similarly, if there is a security incident, police must “shoot all terrorists dead” 把爆恐分子全击毙 so that not one police officer or member of the public will be injured or killed (ibid., 8). He employs the words from Xi Jinping’s speech given while touring Xinjiang in April 2014, to “strike devastating [or: annihilating] blows” 给予毁灭性打击 and, similarly to Xi’s exhortation to show “absolutely no mercy” 毫不留情 when attacking the state’s enemies, Chen argues that these “annihilating blows” must be struck “without any mercy” 毫不手软 (Central Office Bulletin 2014a, 7-8; Chen Quanguo 2017, 3-4).

Overall, Chen’s ruthless approach to tackling those whom the state perceives as potential or actual enemies is arguably derived from or at least influenced by the words and attitudes of China’s head of state. Compared to Xi, however, Chen’s words reflect a devolution into a heightened and arguably highly exaggerated threat perception. Whereas Xi noted that Xinjiang’s largely unarmed rural police had sustained heavy casualties when attacked by well-prepared opponents with large knives (Central Office Bulletin 2014a, 8), Chen speaks of a need to brutally subdue what are effectively unarmed, isolated, and unsuspecting individuals with droves of heavily equipped police forces. Predictably, the system ensures that these attitudes continue to filter down, strongly shaping local implementation and police tactics. For example, the self-reflections of the head of a local Konasheher County convenience police station contain similarly ruthless language, notably with two mentions of Xi Jinping’s “strike annihilating blows” and four mentions of the term “enemy” *di* 敌 in the course of a 6 ½ page document (Reshit Nizamudin, n.d.).

Chen’s demand to open fire immediately when a detainee attempts to escape contrasts sharply with nationwide guidance. For example, Su and He describe a “high-profile national policy clarification” issued by Meng Jianzhu, then Minister of Public Security, who in the late 2000s “admonished the police to limit, or refrain from, using weapons or policing devices” (2010, 157-184). They further quote from a document issued by the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) Disciplinary Investigation Committee stipulating that “indiscriminate use of police force” can lead to a “double dismissal” of responsible local officials from both post and party membership.

Some of the measures demanded by Chen are used by the authorities elsewhere in China only for the most dangerous criminals. A 2004 directive from the High People’s

Court in Henan Province outlines security measures for escorting criminal suspects to court (Gao and Zhao 2004). The strongest security measures are mandated for “underworld” gangsters and gang criminals, members of the Falun Gong, murderers, violent criminals, and persons who may “seriously endanger society.” The document mandates at least two police guards per suspect, and that the escorting police must wear combat uniforms with stab-proof vests, helmets, handguns, handcuffs, and other police equipment. However, the directive does not state that suspects must be cuffed, shackled, and hooded – a practice described in internment-related XUAR police documents as mandatory for the transfer of VSETC detainees, and referred to as the “Three Wears” *sandai* 三戴 or *sandai* 三带 (Ili Prefecture PSB 2017; Security Department 2018). The author could not find any reference to the Three Wears or related practices on the websites of other Chinese provinces. VSETC detainees are therefore subjected to more stringent security measures than gang criminals in other parts of the country.

In another section of his May 28, 2017, speech, Chen refers to Xinjiang’s mass internment as “humane” *renxinghua* 人性化, because detainees can enjoy air-conditioning and daily meat rations (Chen Quanguo 2017, 4-5). This claim clashes markedly with witness testimonies, and lower-level documents also shed doubt on it. The August 31, 2017, Ili Prefecture implementation plan tells internment facilities to implement measures to prevent heat strokes during the hot summer months (Ili Prefecture PSB 2017). Making no mention of air-conditioning, the plan instead tells the facilities to install mechanical ventilation and give detainees boiled water and mung bean soup as preventative methods. Further on, Chen again highlights the “humane” nature of re-education, claiming that detainees can receive visitors and that those on good behaviour can have visitors stay for two days in guest rooms (Chen Quanguo 2017, 7).

However, he then immediately notes that there is a “bottom line” that cannot be crossed: detainees cannot be released, because “once they are let out, problems will [immediately] appear, that is the reality in Xinjiang” (Chen Quanguo 2017, 7).¹² Chen argues that they “must not be let out,” because “some may not necessarily have been transformed [re-educated] well even after 3 or 5 years.”¹³ He notes that “many of those who now cause issues had already been in [re-education] classes” and that some who were involved in the 2009 Urumqi Riots were detained for several years, but then “were let out and still killed people” (Chen Quanguo 2017,11).¹⁴

¹² Original text: 但是有一条底限，就是不能出去，一放就出问题，这就是新疆的实际

¹³ Original text: 有的可能 3 年有的 5 年还不一定能转化好

¹⁴ Original text: 现在出事的好多都是已经进了班的，包括“7·5”关了几年了，出来还杀人，怎么办

In this unusually forthright account, Chen is clearly conflicted, effectively admitting that brainwashing people may not actually turn them into docile citizens. This may be why after 2018/2019 the region ended up sentencing large numbers of re-education detainees to long prison terms (Bunin 2021a; Human Rights Watch 2021).

Maintaining “Absolute Security”: The Internal Security Procedures of Re-Education and Internment Facilities in Konasheher and Tekes Counties

Internment Facility Security Procedures

The security measures surrounding Xinjiang’s re-education camps are rarely discussed in publicly available material. Previously, the author had analysed government procurement and construction bids related to “transformation through education” *jiayou zhuanhua* 教育转化 and VSETC facilities that called for security features such as walls, fencing, watchtowers, surveillance systems, or armed police stations on facility compounds (Zenz 2018a). These features are visible on satellite imagery (Rajagopalan, Killing, and Buschek 2020). The author’s subsequent November 2019 research report cited government documents mandating escape prevention measures *fang tuotao* 防脱逃 as part of the “Five Prevents” and the purchase of “police equipment” for re-education facilities (Zenz 2019b). The report also found evidence of a heavy police presence: Qira (Cele) County’s 2018 budget stated that 810, or 31 percent, of the county’s auxiliary police officers *xie jing* 协警 were assigned to the county’s VSETCs. Wang, the retired Han police officer, testified that Xinjiang’s “re-education centres” were run just like criminal detention centres (Wang 2021, 2).

The main telegram of the China Cables mandated comprehensive escape prevention measures, including the installation of police stations at front gates, a 24-hour security guard system, and double-locked dormitory, corridor, and floor doors in student buildings. Doors must be locked immediately after they are opened or closed, and strict measures must be in place to “prevent escapes during class, eating periods, toilet breaks, bath time, medical treatment, family visits, etc.” (Autonomous Region Party Political and Legal Affairs Commission 2017a, 1). The internal instructions for the Konasheher New VSETC police forces cover every one of these scenarios, directly implementing the security mandates outlined in the China Cables.¹⁵

¹⁵ The China Cables’ main telegram was dated November 2017, and those files among the Konasheher VSETC police instructions that contain dates are from early 2018.

While details about lower-level police officers, including those stationed in the camps, are difficult to verify through public sources, the identity of Konasheher's second-highest police officer at the time (2018), Memetsalijan Seley 买买提沙力江·赛来义 (Figure 5), can be confirmed through the Payzawat County government website (Jiashi xian 2021). It confirms his date of birth, date when he entered the CCP, his degree and university, and his position in Konasheher's police force. The Xinjiang Police Files show that in October 2018 he became head of the Konasheher County Public Security Bureau Education and Training Security Work Supervision Leading Group 疏附县公安局教培安保工作督导领导小组, which is generally responsible for overseeing camp security (Shufuxian gonganju 2018). In an impassioned speech to his leaders that is contained in the files, Memetsalijan Seley refers to fellow Uyghurs who believe in the independence of East Turkestan as "scumbags" and traitors (Memetsalijan Seley n.d.). He confesses that he himself used to be "bewitched," but stresses that he currently does not believe in any religion and does not care whether food is halal or not. More specifically, VSETC police forces are grouped under the County PSB Education and Training Police Brigade 县公安局教培警务大队, which is the county-level entity charged with implementing VSETC security, including the "Five Prevents" (Shufuxian gonganju jiaopei n.d.). In 2018 in Konasheher, this brigade was headed by Deputy Chief Gu Wei (Figure 6). In terms of Xinjiang's ethnic division of labour, it is notable that in a county with a Uyghur population share of over 90 percent, this important position was assigned to a Han.



Figures 5 and 6. Description in footnote.¹⁶

¹⁶ Left-hand: Memetsalijan Seley 买买提沙力江·赛来义, in 2018 head of the Konasheher County Public Security Bureau Education and Training Security Work Supervision Leading Group (image file created on May 6, 2018). He has a BA in law from the Northwest University of Political Science and Law. Right-hand: Gu Wei 古伟, in 2018 Deputy Chief of the Konasheher PSB and Deputy Chief of the Education and Training Centre Police Brigade (image file created on January 25, 2018). A Han from Shandong province, he has a degree in criminology. Source for both officers' personal information: Zaizhi mingjing (n.d.).

One of the first re-education facilities discussed in the Xinjiang Police Files is the Konasheher New VSETC. Government construction bids indicate that a Legal System Transformation Through Education School 法制教育转化学校 was to be built behind the new detention centre and near Yishi Laimuqi road, facts that are confirmed by satellite imagery (Figures 7 to 9; Zhaobiao pindao 2017; Zhaobiao danwei 2017). Internal spreadsheets that are part of the file cache show that the terms Transformation Through Education School 教育转化学校 and VSETC are used interchangeably by the authorities. It appears that re-education facility terminology was standardised between 2017 and the publication of the official white paper on Education and Training in October 2018, which equated “re-education facilities” 教育转化结构 with VSETCs (Xinjiang People’s Congress 2018).

Satellite images confirm that camp construction had started by May 2017, and the dates of the internal police computer files range from late 2017 to September 2018 (stated inside the files or reflected in file creation timestamps). This may be the reason why it is referred to as the “New” camp, given that the other structures (the Industrial Park VSETC and the Party School) were pre-existing in 2017. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) classifies this camp as a tier 2 facility, with fewer visible security features than a prison (ASPI 2020b).

The camp features four large buildings and a high surrounding wall with three exterior watchtowers, besides a watchtower in the centre of the compound. Each of the four larger buildings is surrounded by high fencing that provides securitised areas for outdoor activities, a feature found in many of these facilities (Zenz, 2019b). Along with many other lower security re-education facilities, this camp was desecuritized and possibly decommissioned by May 2019 (Zenz 2020a, Section 2.2; Ruser 2020).

The file outlining the “anti-escape plan for outdoor activities” 室外活动防逃跑处置预案 notes that the camp has four “study areas” *xuequ* 学区 designated as A to D, and that each of them has a security perimeter *jingjie xian* 警戒线 (Shiwai huodong, n.d.). On satellite imagery, this directly corresponds to the four large buildings with their fenced-off outdoor areas (Figure 7). A spreadsheet showing all formally employed police staff (excluding auxiliary police or guards) indicates that each of the four study buildings has police assigned to each of the four floors, labelled for example A1 to A4 for building A (Shufuxian xin zhiye jineng 2018). Satellite images show that these buildings do in fact have four floors (Figure 8). Files related to the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC show that each building is additionally guarded by between 16 and 45 auxiliary police (Shufuxian gongyecheng 2018).



Figure 7. Source: Google Earth (39.35909344, 75.86358263), image from August 2018.

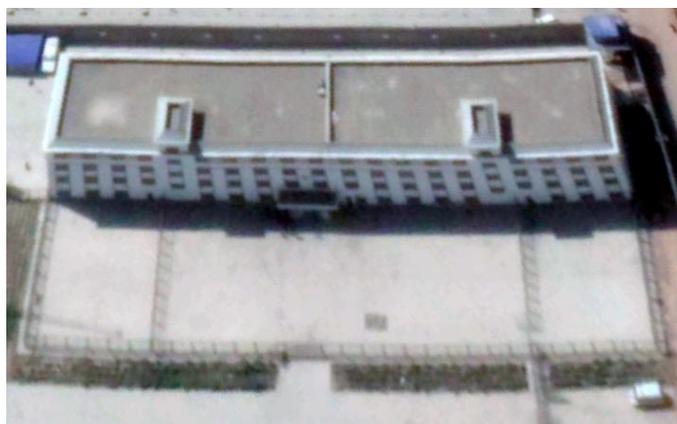


Figure 8. Source: Google Earth (39.35909344, 75.86358263), image from August 2018.



Figure 9. Source: Google Earth (39.35909344, 75.86358263), image from August 2018.

The camp is guarded by 54 formally-employed police (three of whom were subsequently seconded to other places), with 25 of them belonging to the special police

tejing 特警 and two to the secret police *guobao* 国保 (Shufuxian xin zhiye jineng 2018). These are assisted by 280 auxiliary policemen (Fujing kaoqin n.d.). By comparison, in September 2018, the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC had 46 formally employed police and 284 auxiliary police (Shufuxian gongyecheng 2018). According to an internal spreadsheet prepared for the Political and Legal Committee from August 2018, the camp had 3,722 detainees, indicating a police:detainee ratio of 1:11 (Zhengfawei 2018). The Konasheher New VSETC police staffing spreadsheet shows that in September 2018, 30 of the 54 formally employed police, 18 of 25 special police or duty officers, and all six officers in leading positions were Han, confirming a strong ethnic preference for the more sensitive re-education security functions (Shufuxian xin zhiye jineng 2018). The camp's two secret police officers are Uyghur and Han, likely for linguistic reasons, with the Han holding the superior position. In contrast, 258 of the 280 auxiliary guards (92 percent) are Uyghurs (Fujing kaoqin n.d.). A quarter (13 of 54) of the formally employed police officers had been drafted from other provinces, as described by Wang Leizhan (Shufuxian xin zhiye jineng 2018; Wang 2021).

The camp has six convenience police stations, one for each study area (A to D), a central station for the facility, and one for the main gate, which is clearly visible on satellite images, along with numerous white police cars (Figure 9; Jiaopei jingwu dadui n.d.). Most of the special police are assigned to the Strike Group *daji zu* 打击组 that must comprise 27 members in total (Jiaopei jingwu dadui n.d.). The camp's strike group's responsibilities are to:

- a) Perform regular drills for the “Five Prevents”;
- b) Perform armed patrols to “intimidate” *zhenshe* 震慑 detainees;
- c) Guard detainees when they need to be escorted, including for medical care;
- d) Guard detainees during class hours, carrying shields, batons, and handcuffs, together with the officer responsible for each teaching building floor;
- e) Suppress riots.

The psychological tactic of “intimidating” or “detering” detainees through armed patrols is also used in the Konasheher detention centre 疏附县看守所, which in January 2017 reported that security staff were patrolling the facility every half hour “fully armed” 全副武装 in order to deter detainees from hatching escape plans (Shufuxian kanshousuo 2017).

Images taken inside the Tekes County Detention Centre 特克斯县看守所 - an internment facility that is shown on the images as being used for re-education purposes - corroborate the security procedures outlined for Konasheher. Both male and female detainees are guarded by police as they stand in line, apparently to sing or recite (Figure 10). Detainees are made to watch what appears to be a televised speech given by Nurlan Abdumalin 努尔兰·阿不都满金 (then governor of Ili Prefecture) as police stand guard, one of them with a large club in his hand (Figure 11).



Figure 10. Original file names: [IMG_3337.JPG](#) and [IMG_3352.JPG](#) (click on file-names to download the original images).¹⁷



Figure 11. Original file name: [IMG_4150.JPG](#) (click on filename to download the original image).¹⁸

The Konasheher New VSETC security guidelines further state that detainees who need medical care can only be sent to a hospital based on a stringently securitised procedure, which might explain why former detainees have reported that even urgent

¹⁷ Source: Tekes County Detention Centre. Images taken on September 3, 2017, at 10:44am and 10:52am with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). The author edited the right-hand image, improving its contrast.

¹⁸ Source: Tekes County Detention Centre. Image taken on September 28, 2017, at 19:36pm with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). The image has been slightly cropped by the author.

medical care needs are often neglected (Jiuyi zhidu n.d.; Amnesty International 2021, 91). After obtaining formal permission from the camp leadership, the detainee must be escorted by at least four persons: two police, an official, and a medical staff-member. Physical restraints (cuffs, shackles) must be applied, and escorts without police forces are strictly prohibited. Images from the Tekes County detention centre show an elderly detainee receiving an injection (Figure 12). For this procedure, he is handcuffed, and two police officers, one holding a large wooden club, are standing at the ready. Multiple camp survivors testified that they received injections without their consent (Amnesty International 2021, 90-91).



Figure 12. Elderly detainee receives an injection at the Tekes County detention centre, wearing handcuffs. Original file name: IMG_0196.JPG (click on filename to download the original image).¹⁹

If detainees seek to escape or create trouble during outdoor activities, video calls with family members, or times when they can shower or receive haircuts, elaborate security procedures are enacted, which here can only be briefly summarised. The incident must be reported to the county leadership and the entire camp must be sealed off. When the armed strike group arrives, they surround and then enter the affected building. If detainees fail to obey spoken commands, police “can” first fire a warning shot before shooting at detainees. Perhaps following the words of Chen Quanguo, none of the instructions tell police to stop detainees in non-lethal ways, such as attempting to shoot at their legs. Rather, they mandate that if the verbal warning is not obeyed, the troublemakers are to be “shot dead” (*jibi* 击毙; see Dianhua shipin huijian n.d.; Songyi taopao n.d.; Shangke qijian n.d.; Lifa xizao n.d.). These procedures are not just limited to the New VSETC. At least two of the security directives mention re-education camp security policies that apply to all Konasheher VSETCs, one of them bearing the title “Shufu County VSETC preparation plan for dealing with student escapes” 疏附县职

¹⁹ Source: Tekes County Detention Centre. Images taken on August 25, 2018, at 11:26am with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). The original image was cropped and edited by the author (a section of the image was enlarged and inserted into the bottom right side of the frame).

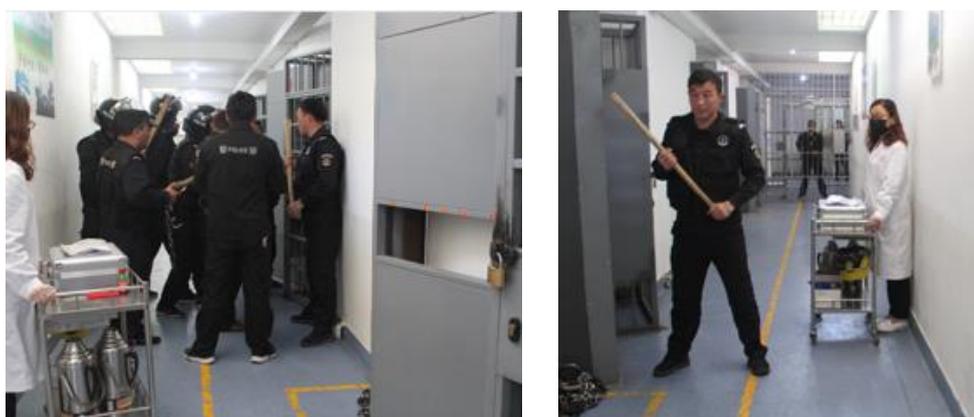
职业技能教育培训中心处置学员逃跑预案 (Lifa xizao n.d.). During outdoor activities, detainees are to be guarded by seven security guards, including two armed police officers.

Images of an armed SWAT team engaged in an apparent anti-riot or anti-escape drill in an internment facility in Tekes County visualise this process. The first two images (Figures 13 and 14) from February 2018 show a heavy presence of armed police in green combat gear behind the SWAT team which enters the scene with large wooden clubs and full riot gear.



Figures 13 and 14. Original file names: [IMG_7742.JPG](#) and [IMG_7743.JPG](#) (click on filenames to download the originals).²⁰

The second set of images from September 2018 (Figures 15 to 18) shows the full process from police arriving on the scene, through the arrest of detainees using hoods, cuffs, and shackles, to the interrogation of an arrested detainee in a so-called tiger chair, with a SWAT officer standing at the ready. The timestamps encoded in the image metadata indicate that the process from entering the room to interrogating detainees in a tiger chair took only about four minutes.



²⁰ Source: Tekes County Detention Centre. Images taken on February 14, 2018 at 12:30pm with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). The images have been slightly cropped by the author.



Figures 15 to 18. Original file names: [IMG_0398.JPG](#), [IMG_0405.JPG](#), [IMG_0408.JPG](#) and [IMG_0410.JPG](#) (click on filenames to download the original images).²¹

The Konasheher New VSETC security directives state that when escape attempts take place during outdoor activities, the convenience police station by the camp entrance, staffed with 19 guards, must block the adjacent public road (Shiwai huodong n.d.). The incident is then suppressed through both the Central Security Strike Team 中心安保打击组 with 18 staff and the on-site Armed Police Strike Team 驻点武警打击组 composed of 11 staff.

The Xinjiang Police Files also contain several documents detailing security response procedures for incidents at the Tekes County VSETC, which appear to be fully commensurate with the security drills for the Tekes Detention Centre depicted in the image material. The “anti-disturbance plan” 防闹事处置预案 provides a detailed overview of how camp police are deployed to suppress incidents, riots, or escape attempts (Tekes County VSETC Patrol and Prevention Brigade n.d.). Figure 19 shows the diverse composition of the Tekes County Detention Centre strike team, composed of armed police in full combat gear and officers with wooden clubs and shields. All are depicted wearing stab-proof vests, which is also a requirement stated in the Konasheher New VSETC documents. According to the Tekes VSETC police instructions, armed internment camp police forces use the QBZ-95 assault rifle, which is the standard assault rifle of the People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Armed Police. The Xinjiang Police Files contain a police training PowerPoint, marked as “confidential” 机密, that depicts the QBZ-95 with a bayonet (Jianshe Industry 2013). Vera Zhou, formerly detained in a camp in Tacheng Prefecture, stated that she was escorted out of her camp by police pointing bayoneted automatic rifles at her back (Byler 2021, 33).

²¹ Source: Tekes County Detention Centre. Images taken on September 25, 2018 at 16:28, 16:30, 16:31 and 16:32 with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). The images have been cropped by the author.

Besides the QBZ-95 assault rifle, internment camp police forces are described as using Type 92 handguns and Type 97 anti-riot guns that can fire non-lethal bullets, while the head of the camp police station operates a QBB-95 machine gun. The document mandates that when responding to incidents, the forces are to “decisively carry out armed strikes” 果断实施武力打击, language that does not indicate a measured approach to emergency situations. It does, however, reflect Chen Quanguo’s demand that not even one single person must escape alive from a detention facility.



Figure 19.²² Original file name: **IMG_7750.JPG** (click on filename to download the original image).

Of particular interest is the ethnic division of labour in these scenarios. The Tekes document names each police officer with their weapons: all officers with ethnic minority names are to use batons, shields, or U-shaped forks, while only officers with Han Chinese names are described as carrying guns.

Figures 12 to 19 show internment camp guards holding very large wooden clubs instead of the much smaller police batons described in the security procedures. This is consistent with a witness testimony. Erbaqyt Otarbai, a Kazakh who was interned in a re-education camp in Tacheng Prefecture, described guards beating detainees with wooden clubs “around 1.5 meters long” (Byler 2021, 105). Detainees were beaten on their buttocks until they were barely able to sit.

New detainees are subjected to a strict physical inspection and health check (Ruxiao zhidu n.d.). They must be questioned or interrogated *xunwen* 讯问, and the camp rules and their legal rights and obligations are to be read to them. The interrogation

²² Source for right-hand image: Tekes County Detention Centre. Image taken on February 14, 2018 at 12:35pm with a Canon EOS60 DSLR and an EF-S18-55mm zoom lens (camera serial number: 0421500837). Camera metadata and the sequential numbering of image file names indicate that this image was taken in the context of the anti-escape drill depicted in figures 13 to 18 above. The open-source intelligence team of the German magazine Der Spiegel geolocated the Tekes Detention Centre based on the right-hand image (left-hand image is from Google Earth). This is indicated in the images above by the colored arrows and the red box (location is 43°11'52.53"N 81°49'29.12"E). One can even see the two grey doors next to the purple arrow in both images. In addition, the author found that this facility constitutes a relocation of the previous detention facility in 2011/12, which corresponds to historical satellite imagery (Zhaoshang wangluo n.d.). The location of the detention centre is described 阔步街五环外: “五环外” means outside the 5th ring road and 阔步街 refers to Kuobu street. Both of these align with Google and Baidu maps locations.

and detention rooms are the only places in the camp where staff are to check during regular security inspections whether doors, windows, or walls are “damaged” *sunhuai* 损坏.

The document that outlines watchtower guard duties specifies that watchtower guards are to be armed with QBU-88 sniper rifles and tripod-mounted military-grade machine guns 持班用机枪 (referring to the QBB-95) to provide “suppressive fire” against potential intruders (Zhigaodian gongzuo n.d.).

Detainees can talk to family members via video call for 10 minutes every 10 days (Dianhua guanli zhidu n.d.). The related room is secured with metal security doors and two security guards. One guard records each conversation. The day before each call, the camp informs the detainee’s family’s village committee of matters related to the detainee that “need to be understood.” If the content of the conversation or the mood of the detainee is deemed to be “abnormal,” staff members are to “take corresponding measures.” Detainees under “strict management” *yanguan* 严管, which constitutes a more severe form of internment than the “regular management” *puguan* 普管, and those with greater “ideological and emotional fluctuations” are to be brought into the call area handcuffed and guarded by three guards carrying police equipment. Adilbek, a Kazak farmer, was subjected to similar procedures when visited in the camp by family members (Byler 2021, 100). He was escorted to the visiting area hooded and hands cuffed behind his back. During the visit, hood and cuffs were removed and guards put down their clubs so that family members could not see them. He was instructed not to cry and only to speak well of the camp.

Interestingly and perhaps in keeping with statements in Chen’s speech, one document states that detainees are to be able to “eat enough according to the standard” 吃够标准, that there is to be sufficient medical attention, and that the customs and habits of ethnic minorities are to be respected (Huoshi guanli zhidu 2017). In contrast, former detainees recalled starvation food rations and virtually inedible meals (Khatchadourian 2021).

The Xinjiang Police Files’ documentation of the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC is comparatively brief. The ASPI appraised this as a tier 1 facility and a residential compound that was converted into an internment facility (ASPI 2020a). A government bid from June 2017 mandated the construction of a Legal System Transformation Through Education School 法制教育转化学校 at the Industrial Park Public Rental Housing District 工业园区公租房小区 (Zhaobiao danwei 2017).

Internal documents on the weekly status of the camp’s security note that in September 2018, the facility had 331 police staff and 4,528 detainees, resulting in a police:detainee

ratio of around 1:14 (Shufuxian gongyecheng 2018). About 23 percent (1,038) of detainees were female. 1,954 detainees were kept under “strict management” *yanguan* 严管. According to other camp records, six detainees were being kept in solitary confinement *dandu guanya* 单独关押 (Shufuxian gongyecheng zhiye 2018). According to an internal spreadsheet that may not have included some of the more specialised types of detainees, the camp had 4,290 detainees on August 8, 2018 (Zhengfawei 2018). The documents further indicate that the camp had recruited 446 detainees as informants and was using a plainclothes police agent to spy on detainees (Shufuxian gongyecheng 2018).

The Secure Transfer of Detainees

The document titled “Student Transfer Security Plan” ‘10.8 移送学员安保方案.doc’ discusses the extremely stringent security measures surrounding the transfer of 505 detainees on October 8, 2018, from the Industrial Park VSETC to the county Party School *xian dangxiao* 县党校 (Security Department 2018). The aforementioned construction bid for the new camps also spoke of a “party school training centre” 校点训中心, indicating another re-education facility (Xinjiang weiwu’er zizhi qu jianshe 2017).

Both male and female detainees were to be transferred shackled and hooded, with hands cuffed behind their backs. At least two security guards or one guard and one cadre were to guard each detainee. The bus convoy was accompanied by armed police in vehicles and the transfer involved close cooperation with traffic police and all police stations along the route.

The Konasheher transfer plan is consistent with eyewitness testimonies. Former detainee Amazhan Seit recounted that during transfers between internment facilities they were handcuffed and shackled together in pairs, hooded, and put into large police buses. There, they were guarded by “police with machine guns.” To quote:

I mean, we were all innocent. This was just for “study,” right? But we were being treated like real criminals, with leg shackles, handcuffs, and black hoods over our heads. Then they loaded us onto the bus with the hoods over our heads, so we couldn’t see anything, couldn’t see where they were taking us (Xinjiang Victims Database Entry 4981).

Similarly, Omir Bekali testified that he was cuffed, shackled, and hooded when being transferred between camps, and he was frequently cuffed and shackled while in detention (Figure 20; Varela 2021).



Figure 20. Omir Bekali demonstrates the conditions of his internment. Source: Varela 2021.

Disciplinary Challenges with Camp Police

A document issued by the Konasheher PSB discipline inspection committee on July 16, 2018, details the punishment of Wang Ruilei, a then 23-year-old Han special police officer from Shaanxi province, who began guard duties at the Konasheher New VSETC in April 2018 (Disciplinary Inspection Committee 2018). About three months later, while stationed at the camp watchtower, he was asleep during mealtime and also “did not like to eat the food served at the vocational training centre’s cafeteria.” He therefore ordered a traditional Uyghur chicken dish. Fearing that the camp surveillance system would record the food delivery, Wang disabled the system when the meal arrived. This however triggered an alert at the Kashgar Prefecture Stability Maintenance Command, which controls each surveillance camera in the prefecture’s re-education camp network. Wang received a demerit and was placed in confinement for three days.

This incident is arguably not just a lesson about Xinjiang’s internment camp surveillance system or the drudgery of being a camp guard, but also of the potential pitfalls in recruiting large numbers of young Han from other provinces for the region’s intense securitisation drive. Wang Leizhan, the retired Han police officer, testified that “as many as 150,000 police recruits were sent to Xinjiang [from other provinces] in the period when [he] was there” (Wang 2021, 1). In any security operation of such a scale, the occurrence of various types of incidents is unavoidable.

Images of Persons Registered and Detained in Konasheher County Internment Facilities

Assessing the Identities of the Depicted Persons

The research team led by the author coded a computer script that extracted personal information, including ID numbers and detention status (where available), from 454 spreadsheets contained in the Xinjiang Police Files, nearly all of them dated between 2017 and 2018. This yielded a dataset for approx. 301,000 unique individuals. Of them, 282,492 persons (184,803 adults) were non-Han ethnic citizens with an ID number indicating residence in Konasheher. The script evaluated likely internment status, which results in approximate figures that contain a relatively limited number of false positives and false negatives. Among the adults, approx. 23,447 or 12.7 percent had at least one data point indicating that they were in some form of internment or imprisonment (such as date of detention, reason for detention, name or location of internment facility, type and length of prison sentence or type of internment). Similarly, approx. 22,762 or 12.3 percent had at least two such data points, permitting us to state that over 12 percent of all ethnic Konasheher adults were in some form of internment or imprisonment. Among the approx. 23,447 interned ethnic adults, just over 10,000 had been “recommended” for detention or closer examination by the IJOP. A cursory examination of the nature of prison sentences handed these persons indicates that already at that time, the county used mass imprisonments as a form of arbitrary internment.

The file cache contains 5,074 photos of persons taken in police stations or detention centres.²³ The timestamps indicate that the images were taken between January 6 and July 25, 2018. Of these, the identities of 4,989 persons (4,565 adults and 424 minors) could be verified through the collated internal spreadsheet data. The author was also able to match 209 IDs of depicted persons with external data sources for additional verification.²⁴ A total of 2,884 depicted persons (among them 15 minors) had at least

²³ Persons who had turned 18 years by the end of 2017, right before the date by which most pictures were taken, were counted as adults. In addition, the author reviewed a spreadsheet showing the detainees of the two re-education camps in Konasheher and calculated whether they were detained prior to their 18th birthday. The 76 individuals for whom this was the case were counted as minors.

At least some of the image files were stored on the Konasheher police computer in the form of a compressed and encrypted archive with the file name “persons in re-education (6131) images and information” (jiaoyu zhuanhua ren yuan 6131 tupian yi ji xinxi 教育转化人员(6131)图片一级信息). The person who provided the files to the author was able to decrypt and retrieve most but not all of them. Several images contain visual errors, such as incorrect colors, mismatched alignments, or image files that show only the top section. The person told the author that these issues resulted from base64 encoding / decoding operations that occurred in the process of retrieving and decrypting the files. The images do not contain camera metadata, either because of post-processing or because they may have been taken with a camera device directly connected to a police computer.

The image filenames follow the format: ID number + underscore + timestamp (date and time when image was taken)

²⁴ Previously, the author had extracted 1.4 million ID numbers from citizens in Xinjiang from the approximately 25,000

two data points indicating some form of internment or imprisonment in 2017/2018, among them 15 minors (at the time). In 2018, the youngest of these detainees was 15 years old, and the oldest 73 years.

The photos came together with three spreadsheets from police stations and a detention centre linked to Tokzak Township 托克扎克镇 showing the identities (names and addresses) of 3,242 of the depicted persons and where and when images were taken (in police stations or detention centres; Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan n.d.).²⁵ According to the Xinjiang Papers, Xi Jinping himself visited a village in Tokzak Township in April 2014 during his Xinjiang inspection tour, and praised it in his top-secret speech for its effective implementation of grassroots securitisation (Central Office Bulletin 2014a, 23).

Material from the Xinjiang Police Files indicates that at least some of those photographed were detained before their images were taken. It also appears that the timing of the pictures is related to a government campaign to obtain biometric data from much of the population – internally referred to as the “two items of work” *liangxiang gongzuo* 两项工作 (Shufu Public Security Management Brigade 2018). By May 24, 2018, this work was reported to have been mostly completed.

Visual Inspection of the Image Material

The author then changed image filenames to begin with timestamps rather than IDs and copied the resulting files into folders according to the three above mentioned spreadsheets. This caused images to be sorted by the sequence and the location in which they were taken. Rapid playback in that order clearly corroborates that images that had been taken on the same day or at a similar time were taken in the same location – as evident from characteristic marks in the background wall, or visible artefacts

internal files contained in the Xinjiang QQ Files. The author could match 195 of them with IDs from the image set (Zenz 2020a). The author had also previously extracted 577,413 Xinjiang ID numbers from Xinjiang government web pages. Nine of them could be matched with IDs from the image set. In addition, the author compared the image IDs to a list derived from an unsecured online database of SenseNets, a Shenzhen facial recognition company that processes surveillance data (Wang and Kang 2019). It contains the ID numbers and names of 725,499 persons from Xinjiang (most from Hotan Prefecture). Three of them could be matched with IDs from the image set. The image IDs were also compared with IDs from 4,359 entries in the Xinjiang Victims Database, resulting in two matches. If the new evidence had been maliciously fabricated, the persons doing so would more likely have used a large amount of ID numbers that are already somewhere in the public domain.

²⁵ The author compared the timestamps in these spreadsheets with the timestamps coded in the image filenames and, after accounting for the fact that some persons had their image taken more than once, found only a very small number of instances with significant time discrepancies.

such as posters, doors, iron bars, or other detainees in the background (see e.g. figure 21).

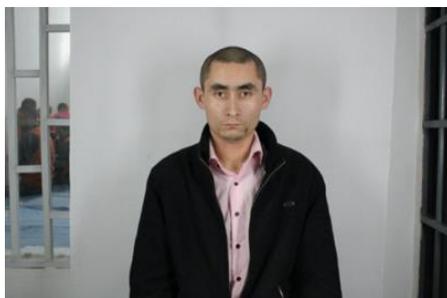


Figure 21. Image 653121199010151550_20180117133939935.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).²⁶

This visual inspection shows that photographed individuals were watched by minders: women by female staff in civilian dress, and men by police in SWAT gear carrying batons. Several of the men are shown with arms behind their backs, possibly indicating that they were handcuffed. A series of 100 pictures of men between April 10 and 14, 2018 were taken in the same location in the Konasheher detention centre, showing on the right side a metal door that opens to another room that is separated from other locations with thick metal bars.²⁷ Police officers wearing helmets and stab-proof vests are visible on multiple images (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Image 653121199106120839_20180410190118604.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).²⁸

Similarly, a series of 40 images of women shows the same woman minder with the same clothes and a name tag stating “Konasheher County Vocational Skills Education and Training Centre” 疏附县职业技能教育培训中心 (see e.g. figure 23).²⁹ This is a

²⁶ Source: Konasheher PSB. Image taken on January 17, 2018, at the Konasheher County Detention Centre (Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan (6131) n.d.). This man was interned at the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC.

²⁷ Images with timestamps 20180410180105012 to 20180414110127789

²⁸ Source: Konasheher PSB. Image taken on April 10, 2018, at the Konasheher County Detention Centre (Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan (6131) n.d.). This man was interned at the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC.

²⁹ Images taken on May 25, 2018, at the 托克扎克镇 township, village no. 5 convenience police station, with

generic term that does not explicitly state the name of a particular VSETC. According to internal PSB spreadsheets from the cache, all but one of these women were detained at the Konasheher Industrial Park VSETC (Zhengfawei 2018).

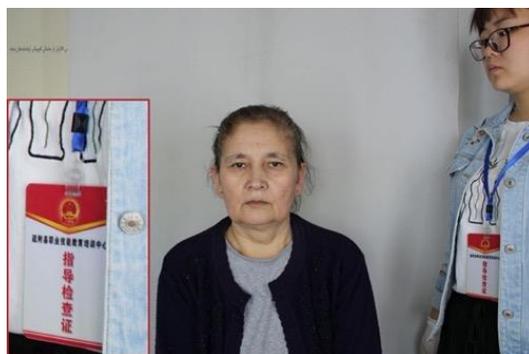


Figure 23. Image 653121196611031526_20180525183449723.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).³⁰

The 4,989 images where identities were additionally established through the internal spreadsheets also depict 424 minors. These were photographed in exactly the same locations as the adults.³¹ The photographed persons display a range of facial expressions, and settings indicates that they may not have been at liberty to express genuine emotions. Some of the photos of minors, for example, show them with a strained smirk, such as when a child in a subdued mood is exhorted to smile by an adult. Numerous persons, especially children, are wearing the same type of jacket or suit jacket, potentially to cover up dirty or worn clothing, or perhaps to render their appearance more uniform.

The research team verified the basic veracity of image-ID number associations by coding a script sorting detainees by age groups (under 30 years / 30 to 60 years / over 60 years) and gender (male / female), and copying the files into six corresponding folders.³² A visual inspection yielded a small number of obvious errors, such as image-ID pairs where persons are clearly of the opposite gender, or young children with the ID number of an older adult. Based on the author's experience with examining internal Chinese documents, it is common for government records from Xinjiang to contain

timestamps 20180525113818488 to 20180525185932332.

³⁰ Source: Konasheher PSB. Image taken on May 25, 2018 at the Tokzak Township village no.5 police sub-station 托克扎克镇5村警务室 (Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan (503) n.d.). The left-hand side shows a magnified section of the female minder's name tag.

³¹ Images appear to have been mostly taken by gender, with men / boys and women / girls being photographed in separate groups.

³² Chinese ID numbers contain 18 digits, with digits 7 to 13 showing the date of birth, and the 17th digit indicating the gender (even numbers are females).

certain – at times not unsubstantial – numbers of errors. The presence of a small number of incorrect image – ID associations is well within or below the expected range.

The Xinjiang Police Files also contain a spreadsheet titled “persons subjected to strike hard because of religion” 宗教被打击人员, which lists 330 persons who were sentenced because of illegal religious activities such as studying the Quran, along with their cropped headshots (Figures 24-27 left-hand images; Zongjiao daji renyuan n.d.). Several of them were then also photographed at the Konasheher detention centre (the two persons depicted in Figures 24-27 were photographed on January 6, 2018, at the same location within 57 minutes of each other). The older man, Tursun Kadir 吐尔逊·卡迪尔, was detained on April 2, 2017 and sentenced to 13 years in prison.³³ The file describing his case states that “from August 2014 to April 2017, the suspect Tursun Kadir grew a beard under the influence of religious extremism.”³⁴ After detention, his beard was evidently shaved.



Figures 24 to 27. Original names of the right-hand images: [653121196403060939_20180106193710347.jpg](#) and [653121197111081214_20180106203411919.jpg](#) (click on filenames to download the original images).³⁵

³³ Filename ‘疏附县涉案打击处理人员（服刑人员）.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

³⁴ Original text: 4.2014年8月至2017年4月·嫌疑人吐尔逊·卡迪尔受宗教极端思想影响留胡子. Filename ‘讲经.doc’, file creation timestamp: August 26, 2017. For privacy reasons, this file, which contains highly personal information, is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

³⁵ Source: Konasheher PSB. The right-hand images were edited by the author using the Adobe Photoshop “auto

A Closer Analysis of Select Photographed Persons

This section analyses several photographed persons to further authenticate the material through comparison with external sources and to corroborate its internal consistency. Images were also selected to show the diversity of detainees: a young teenager, a family, and an individual adult. Besides associating images with specific identities, this section explicates the process behind their detention and the reasons given for their internment.



Figure 28. Image 653121200304252424_20180320121324727.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).³⁶

The youngest photographed person is a Uyghur girl named Rahile Omer 热伊莱·吾马尔 who was first detained when she was only 14 years old (on September 28, 2017). Her image was taken by the authorities on March 20, 2018, and she was shown to be in “re-education” in the Industrial Park VSETC. Her detention had been “recommended” by an IJOP push notification.³⁷ The IJOP flagged her as a “Type 12 person” 第十二类人员, a largely self-referential category denoting persons with “danger clues” because they are in some way connected to an existing police case.³⁸ In Rahile’s case, this is basically guilt by association: according to other documents included in the file cache, she is the youngest daughter of a government official who was detained as part of Xinjiang’s “strike hard” campaign.³⁹

contrast” feature in order to make them more comparable to the left-hand images whose contrast had been optimised on police computers. The two left-hand images can be found in Zongjiao daji renyuan n.d.

³⁶ Source: Konasheher PSB. Image taken on March 20, 2018 at the Tokzak Township village no.5 police sub-station 托克扎克镇 5 村警务室 (Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan (503) n.d.).

³⁷ Filename ‘附件 22 严打收押 21 类人员.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

³⁸ Original text: yiti hua lianhe zuozhan pingtai tuisong wei an xiansuo, jing hecha she’an de guanlian ren 一体化联合作战平台推送危安线索，经核查涉案的关联人。

³⁹ File ‘2017 打击干部.xls’. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the

The documentation indicates that she was initially not detained because she was “14 years old, a non-adult student.”⁴⁰ Her parents were both detained on July 3, 2017. Her father was sent for re-education in the “strict management” section of the Industrial Park VSETC, the same camp as her. While Rahile is shown to be in “re-education” *jiaoyu zhuanhua* 教育转化, her father has been “provisionally sentenced” *yu pan* 预判, a designation that is also found in the Urumqi Police Database (see Bunin 2021b). Spreadsheets show that his picture was taken on February 20, 2018, at the Konasheher detention centre (Jiaoyu zhuanhua renyuan (6131) n.d.). The reason given for her father’s internment are the same as hers: he is a “Type 12 person,” again guilty by association. Her mother was sentenced to six years in prison for allegedly having “disturbed the social order” 聚众扰乱社会秩序罪, a generic charge handed nationwide to persons targeted by the state.⁴¹ In the documents, she is marked as a “Type 4 person,” which defines those who allegedly “possess Wahhabist ideology and currently engage in extremist religious speech and practice.” This inconsistency is indicative of the arbitrary nature by which Uyghurs are treated as enemies of the state.

The second case is that of a family. The image set contains photos of two of their children: Abduweli Ibrahim 阿卜杜外力·吾拉伊木 and Ayshe Ibrahim 阿伊谢·吾拉伊木, aged 7 and 8 years at the time when their photo was taken. They were photographed together with their mother Patigul Rozi on February 10, 2018, between 8.51 and 9.09pm. Separate records show that they are from a family of six from Tashmilik Township, Konasheher County.⁴² The two older siblings’ photos are not included in the Konasheher file cache because they were studying at middle schools in Urumqi. On August 18, 2017, their father Ghulam Tursun 吾拉伊木·图尔荪 was imprisoned for 10 years and 11 months for “disturbing the social order.” Interestingly, the real reason for his sentence is shown in the same data row: Ghulam engaged in “illegal study of the scriptures” and had one extra child.⁴³ He was imprisoned in the Huaqiao prison operated by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.⁴⁴

author for research purposes upon request.

⁴⁰ See previous note.

⁴¹ Filename ‘附件 22 严打收押 21 类人员.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. Filename ‘2017 年投监狱人员名单.xlsx’. For privacy reasons, these files are not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁴² Filename ‘阿里木.xls’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁴³ Filename ‘疏附县涉案打击处理人员（服刑人员）.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁴⁴ Filename ‘2017 危安(10407)decrypted.xlsx’. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.



Figures 29 to 32. Images 653121201009070649_20180210210944567.jpg, 65312120111017061X_20180210205941454.jpg, 653121197708050656.jpg and 653121198202100665_20180210205140633.jpg, locations unknown (click on file-names to download the original images).⁴⁵

The third case is Tunsagul Nurmemet (ID 653121199603151724), who has an independently verifiable entry in the Xinjiang Victims Database (Xinjiang Victims Database Entry 948).⁴⁶ The documents show that her father Nurmemet Bekir 努尔麦麦提·拜克尔 was sentenced to prison.⁴⁷ Tunsagul was flagged by the IJOP on June 25, 2017. Initially, she was not detained because she was a nursing mother.⁴⁸ She was then detained on August 18, 2017, and sentenced to 16 years on December 24, 2017 on the generic charges of “gathering a crowd to disrupt the social order” and “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” both unlikely crimes to be committed by a then 21-year-old nursing mother.⁴⁹ In the spring of 2018, she was listed as a detainee at one of the Konasheher VSETCs.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Images (except for the fathers’) were cropped by the author to reduce background. The location where the images were taken is unknown.

⁴⁶ The second match with the Xinjiang Victims Database is Osmanjan Roz (ID no. 653121198802030955).

⁴⁷ Filename ‘附件27疏附县涉案打击处理（判刑）人员亲属登记台账已过.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁴⁸ Filename ‘地区一体化推送人员台账汇总（总）.xlsx’, file creation timestamp: August 18, 2017. For privacy reasons, this file is not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁴⁹ Original text: 聚众扰乱社会程序罪·寻衅滋事罪

⁵⁰ Filename ‘数据导出.xls’, file creation timestamp: November 4, 2018. For privacy reasons, this file is not made

Konasheher PSB files



Name: 吐尼沙姑力·努尔麦麦提
 Detained August 18, 2017, but not kept in detention due to being a nursing mother.
 Status: sentenced (判刑) to 16 years on December 24, 2017.
 Home address: *xinjiang shufu xian wu ku sa ke zhen xie ha er ba ge cun 6 zu 103 hao* 新疆疏附县吾库萨克镇谢哈尔巴格村6组103号
 Occupation: homemaker (家庭妇女)
 Image taken on January 16, 2018, at the Konasheher detention centre.
 Sources: see footnote⁵¹

Xinjiang Victims Database (entry 948)



Name: Tunsagul Nurmemet 吐尼沙姑力·努尔麦麦提
 Detained August 2017
 Last reported status: re-education camp
 Home address: 103, Group No. 6, Musuma Village, Oqusaq Municipality, Konasheher County, Kashgar Prefecture, Xinjiang (*xinjiang shufu xian wu ku sa ke zhen mo su ma cun 6 zu 103 hao* 新疆疏附县吾库萨克镇莫苏马村6组103号)
 Occupation: homemaker
 Assumed location: Kashgar
 The victim was allegedly raped at the camp.

Figure 33. The right-hand image was edited by the author by improving contrast. Image file name: 653121199603151724_20180116202709963.jpg (click on filename to download the original image).

One would think that young, nursing mothers would not readily be considered a threat to the state. However, the Xinjiang Police Files make it clear that a failure to speedily detain them is no laughing matter. In a 2018 document outlining a “checklist of discovered problems” compiled by an external government work team, the county was told that its “daily judging” work as part of the “round up all who should be rounded up” had not been properly implemented. While nursing mothers are eligible to benefit from a one-year grace period during their lactation period, they are supposed to be sent to the re-education camp immediately afterwards. One mother’s grace period had ended on September 3, 2018. However, the local township party committee only began to investigate her on September 11, and therefore eight days too late. According to the work team’s reprimand, this shows that there “clearly is a problem with grasping the real-time tracking of rounding up those who have not [yet] been rounded up” (Beibu pianqu weiwen zhihuibu 2018, 11).

publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

⁵¹ Filenames ‘8村三类人员亲属台账.xls’ (file creation timestamp: November 4, 2018), ‘疏附县涉案打击处理人员(服刑人员)’ (file creation timestamp: October 27, 2018) and ‘地区一体化推送人员台账汇总(总).xlsx’ (file creation timestamp: August 18, 2017). For privacy reasons, these files are not made publicly available, but can be obtained from the author for research purposes upon request.

In sum, the evidence derived from these images and the related data is commensurate with existing research, including for example the Karakax List or the Urumqi Police Database. It demonstrates the arbitrary nature with which Uyghurs are labelled as dangerous or “extremist,” and thereby made into a target for detention, internment, and possibly imprisonment. The main difference from previously leaked internal documents is that the Xinjiang Police Files provide us with attendant image material that not only features cropped headshots but, in most cases, wide-angled portraits. These provide an ideal basis for authenticating the material and for providing further authoritative evidence for the securitised nature of Beijing’s re-education campaign.

Conclusions

The Xinjiang Police Files greatly complement our understanding of the highly securitised nature of Beijing’s re-education campaign, mostly notably at the implementation stage, for which conclusive evidence so far had been limited. The material points to an extreme example of Heilmann’s (2017) “crisis mode” of policymaking and implementation in a situation which the state not only portrays as an emergency, but also as a paramount national security challenge. Central government figures have argued in classified speeches that “[i]f the Xinjiang situation is not handled properly,” it will threaten the realisation of China’s “Two Centennial Goals,” the state’s most important political goals in the 21st century (Central Office Bulletin 2014b, 64). This intimate link between Xinjiang policy and major national political goals, also extensively highlighted by Xi Jinping in his internal speeches from 2014, explains the highly personalised, ideologised, militarised, and mobilisational nature of the region’s policy dynamics. Xi himself in his May 28, 2014, speech at the Second Central Xinjiang Work Forum had declared a “People’s War on Terror,” and, pointing directly to the nation’s militaristic and mobilisational policymaking and implementation capacity, exclaimed that “we Communists should be naturals at fighting a people’s war, we are the best at organising for a task” (Central Office Bulletin 2014b, 10).

Xinjiang’s policies after 2016 show even stronger signs of a “crisis mode” of policymaking. Personalisation became supreme. In his June 2018 speech, Chen Quanguo directly describes the personal mission to which no other than Xi himself assigned him: “the General Secretary sent me to Xinjiang in order to make a stable Xinjiang arise” (Chen Quanguo 2018, 9). In another speech, Chen highlights his personal motivation and dedication to this cause when noting that he had personally offered to Xi to work in Xinjiang for 10 years (Ma Xuejun n.d., 4). Similarly notable are the death

threats Chen utters in his speeches against those who would resist the state. His June 2018 speech, given close to the peak of the internment campaign, employs the term “death” (*si* 死) a dozen times, and is replete with stern warnings, references to a “life-or-death battle,” and exhortations against the ongoing imminent threat posed by a “pervasive” enemy.

The wider aims of Xinjiang’s campaign of mass internment have been framed in several ways, such as sociocultural assimilation, a coercive reengineering of ethnic societies, and the promotion of extremely intrusive state control for the achievement of “stability maintenance” *weiwen* 维稳 (Kam and Clarke 2021; Leibold 2019b; Zenz 2018a, 2020a). Xi’s words in 2014 foreshadowed the re-education campaign in several ways (Zenz 2021c, 3-4; 2021d, 6-15). Even so, important questions remain as to how Xinjiang’s security crackdown degenerated into treating such large numbers of ordinary ethnic citizens like dangerous villains. Existing scholarly approaches conceptualise the evolution of societal securitisation and surveillance, but they struggle to provide straightforward explanations of the expansion of highly coercive re-education techniques from much more limited target groups – such as those detained for acts of violent resistance – to wide swaths of the population. Moreover, while such an expansion can be explained with wider aims such as the coercive altering and assimilation of the entire Uyghur population, such explanatory frameworks still do not account for the extent to which Xinjiang’s leadership became immersed in their own threat perceptions.

Xinjiang scholars (including this author) have so far tended to frame state discourses of counterterrorism as a propagandistic façade concealing ulterior motives. However, after careful review of the material, the author is now inclined to think that the XUAR leadership appears to have quite thoroughly internalised official state discourses on terrorism, extremism, and related framings of the alleged threat that they pose to the state. Arguments that the state is simply using counterterrorism as a cover for achieving other political goals such as ethnocultural assimilation are at least partially valid. In light of the new evidence, they are, however, incomplete. Researchers into China’s domestic security previously argued that Beijing’s policy shift in Xinjiang cannot be solely explained through the lens of ethnic policy goals or leadership change (to Chen Quanguo), but that this shift also needs to be examined in light of the state’s changing perception of the international and domestic terrorism threat (Greitens, Lee and Yazici 2020). The author used to be critical of this view, given that the objective terrorism threat is entirely incommensurate with the extreme countermeasures adopted by the state. However, the author now suggests that the escalation of Xinjiang’s de-extremification measures should at least partially be explained by suggesting that the

state did sincerely adopt such a terror threat perception, but that this perception came to be greatly exaggerated.

Here, it is argued that the scale of Xinjiang's re-education campaign, the framing of entire ethnic groups as threats, and the attendant extreme preoccupations with security in the campaign's execution reflect a devolution into paranoia. In his review of the genocide literature, Moses argues that pre-emptive strikes against a perceived threat group indicate a political paranoia that scholars have defined as an "interpretative disorder constituted by hysterical threat assessments" (Moses 2011, 576; compare Robins and Post 1997, 7-14). Paranoia is not purely delusional but rooted in a reality (such as a few Uyghurs perpetrating violent acts of resistance) that becomes greatly exaggerated through interpretation. Genocide scholarship on the Holocaust suggests that Hitler and the Nazis were not just or even primarily driven by racism, but also by a political paranoia which led to a radicalisation of anti-Jewish measures. Moreover, these measures were escalated after Germany itself came to be faced with an external threat (war), triggering a more acutely crisis-oriented mode of policymaking and governance (Moses 2011). The paranoid-schizoid position uses projective identification and splitting to project the hated parts of the self out and onto the "Other," while simultaneously idealizing the good within oneself (Robins and Post 1997, 77). This psychological defence mechanism can explain how Xi Jinping, Chen Quanguo, and other leaders came to frame Uyghurs as a pathological threat, while simultaneously portraying themselves as their kind benefactors. As a result, persons like Chen can come to view re-education camps as institutions that reflect the kindness of the state and where living conditions are comparatively decent, filtering out any information to the contrary that they may have received from their subordinates.

Tobin noted how the state has exacerbated tensions between ethnic groups through exaggerated threat portrayals and securitising strategies (2020, 58, 225). Roberts (2020) suggested that Beijing's stance towards the Uyghurs frames them almost as a type of "biological threat" to society that must be contained. The author had previously analysed discourses of "optimising" the ethnic population structure in southern Xinjiang, and the strategy of embedding "problem" population segments such as Uyghurs with "positive" Han populations in order to mitigate what Chinese academics and officials perceive to be the region's "human problem" (Zenz 2021b). If the policy cycle is already imbued with phobia from the initial framing of the threat, its dynamics can become self-reinforcing. Paranoid threat perceptions justify paranoid responses, which in turn beget more paranoia through what Moses describes as the "self-fulfilling prophecy" effect of political paranoia:

Fatally, if the victim responds to their role in the paranoid's externalization, 'what began as fantasy is transformed into reality' – the self-fulfilling prophecy mentioned above. That is the fatal, productive power of paranoia. (Moses 2011, 576)

This, arguably, has been a driving factor behind Beijing's re-education campaign in Xinjiang. Xi had initially delineated the "enemy" as those who act directly (and often violently) against the state. Ultimately, however, anyone who cannot be controlled is "untrustworthy" because they could conceivably end up resisting the state in some form. This creates a devolutionary logic by which the "enemy" is no longer just those who actually engage in violent resistance, but also persons who are potentially "untrustworthy" because the state fails to ascertain their state of mind. Moses describes this as a striving for "permanent security," defined as the "unobtainable goal" of pursuing "absolute safety" – being invulnerable to threats (2021, 1). He argues that "[t]he paranoid and hubristic quest for permanent security escalates routine state...security practices" to a point where the government becomes liable to indiscriminately target entire groups with greatly reduced regard to collateral damage (Moses 2021, 43).

The solution to the "untrustworthy persons" problem is internment. In a June 13, 2018, video speech, Gao Qi, vice governor of Ili Prefecture and head of the prefecture police, stated that the region must "resolutely follow the demand of Party Secretary [Chen] Quanguo to place the untrustworthy in a trustworthy place...to slowly transform them" (Gao Qi 2018).⁵² However, a "trustworthy place" (re-education camp) full of "untrustworthy" persons is still a threat, and therefore to be guarded by heavily armed police. The paranoid focus on the potential for threat residing in non-violent but not yet "de-extremified" Uyghur citizens might explain Chen's literal obsession with the "absolute security" of already highly securitised internment facilities. No camp survivor has ever testified about successful escapes, but rather about abuse, starvation, complete hopelessness, and the suffering especially of the elderly. This vast cognitive dissonance between the state's extreme security measures vis-à-vis the helpless state of the detainees is precisely a product of the delusional threat assessment generated by the paranoid mind.

⁵² Original text: 坚决按照陈全国书记把不放心的人放到放心的地方的要求

Xinjiang Police Files – List of References with Download Links

Additional documents contained in the Xinjiang Police Files can be obtained from the website www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org.

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