

The Qaraqash List

Dr. Elise Anderson

Uyghur Human Rights Project

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This testimony describes and assesses the significance of the Qaraqash (Karakax) List, a database detailing personal information about 311 detainees in a subdistrict of Qaraqash county, Hotan, based on a report written and published by the Uyghur Human Rights Project in February 2020.

METHODS OF RESEARCH EMPLOYED

The testimony is based on a report titled “Ideological Transformation: Records of Mass Detention from Qaraqash, Hotan,” which describes and analyzes the significance of a leaked database from Qaraqash county, Hotan prefecture, East Turkistan.¹ UHRP obtained the document, which has come to be known widely as the “Qaraqash List” (alt. “Karakax List”), from Uyghur exile Abduweli Ayup, who received the document directly from Asiye Abdulaheb after a government employee in the Uyghur region leaked it to her as part of the same set of documents now known as the China Cables.²

Because the spreadsheet had been converted into a PDF file prior to our viewing it, we were unable to use metadata to verify its authenticity and instead used the contents of the document itself to do so. UHRP, along with other researchers who have reviewed and written about this document, felt confident in the spreadsheet’s authenticity based on: (1) linguistic cues in the document, including personal naming conventions particular to Uyghurs in the Hotan region; (2) factual information which corroborates details such as the ongoing policies in the region and the names of internment facilities in Qaraqash; (3) personal information in the database, including Chinese identification numbers, which we cross-checked to assess

¹ Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Ideological Transformation: Records of Mass Detention from Qaraqash, Hotan,” February 2020, <https://uhrp.org/report/ideological-transformation-records-mass-detention-qaraqash-hotan-html/>. Several other reports about the Qaraqash List were also published on the same day. See Adrian Zenz, “The Karakax List: Dissecting the Anatomy of Beijing’s Internment Drive in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk* 8 (2), February 2020, <https://www.jpolarisk.com/karakax/>; Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, “Watched, judged, detained: Leaked Chinese government records reveal detailed surveillance reports on Uyghur families and Beijing’s justification for mass detentions,” *CNN*, February 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/02/asia/xinjiang-china-karakax-document-intl-hnk/>.

² The China Cables are a batch of classified Chinese-government documents including a telegram, four bulletins, and a court document, which in sum give insight into the workings of the XUAR internment camp system and the surveillance system that is linked to it. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Exposed: China’s Operating Manuals for Mass Internment and Arrest by Algorithm,” *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, November 24, 2019, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/exposed-chinas-operating-manuals-for-mass-internment-and-arrest-by-algorithm/>. See also ICIJ, “The China Cables,” November 2019, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/>.

authenticity; (4) comparison to other government documents we have reviewed; and (5) discussion with experts, who agreed that the document appeared authentic.³

In the days that followed the publication of the Qaraqash List, Chinese state media predictably claimed that the list was inauthentic. However, in its reporting, *China Daily* inadvertently confirmed the authenticity of the document in a video featuring an individual whose information appeared on the Qaraqash List.⁴ Neither UHRP nor any other researchers working with the document had made this individual's information public in our reporting or in redacted excerpts prepared by UHRP. That Chinese state media knew the individual was on the list suggests that the list was authentic and already in the possession of a government and/or media representative.

We conducted a close reading and translation of the entire spreadsheet, which is titled “Internees related to ‘unreturned’ persons” (出境未归人员亲属送培学员), in order to determine its contents and significance. The spreadsheet contains detailed information in Mandarin about the family, social, and religious circles of a subset of detainees from throughout Qaraqash county, all of whom are 1) related to at least one person who is outside China and 2) under the jurisdiction of eight neighborhood offices in the Bostan subdistrict of the Qaraqash county seat. The document presents data on detainees and the members of their familial, social, and religious circles through information detailed in a series of cells including the following:

a. Entry numbers. Each entry begins with a unique number in numerical order between 1 and 667. Many detainees have repeat entries in the document, meaning that the total number of detainees listed in the document, 311, is lower than 667.

b. Facility of detention. The document refers to four detention centers: the No. 1 Training Center (第一培训中心), No. 2 Training Center (第二培训中心), No. 3 Training Center (第三培训中心), and No. 4 Training Center (第四培训中心). The document also lists a “health-care area” (医护区); it is unclear whether this area is located at one of the camps or is a separate facility in its own right.

c. Date interned. The document lists some (but not all) detainees' dates of internment. The entries stretch from April and May 2017 to October 28, 2018. We know that the document incorporates periodic new information on old cases, but the latest date which appears in the document is March 8, 2019, meaning either that it was obtained and leaked

³ For a detailed description of how another scholar verified the spreadsheet and its contents, see Zenz, “The Karakax List.”

⁴ China Daily (@ChinaDaily), “‘Don't ruin my good life and willfully interfere in anything of us, I am living a good life,’ said Bulitiji Balati, one of the people on Adrian Zenz's ‘Karakax List,’” Twitter, February 23, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ChinaDaily/status/1231481315901394945>.

at that time or that there were simply no more versions of the document after this date. Adrian Zenz dates the spreadsheet to sometime before late June 2019.⁵

d. Detainee name. This cell lists each detainee first and last names, transliterated into Chinese characters from their original Uyghur versions.

e. ID number. This cell lists each detainee's 18-digit Chinese national ID number. All IDs belonging to the 311 detainees whose information is provided in the database begin with the digits 653222, signifying that the individuals were born in Qaraqash county.⁶

f. Responsible subdistrict office. Each detainee listed in the document falls under the administration of the Bostan subdistrict office. The Bostan subdistrict is centered on an area in the northeastern corner of the Qaraqash administrative center. In Chinese administrative governance, a subdistrict (街道) is a political-administrative designation given to township-size units attached to a larger urban area, as opposed to discrete townships or towns. Each subdistrict has its own bureaucratic management office, which we often render in English as the "subdistrict office" (街道办 or 街道办事处).

g. Responsible neighborhood office. This cell notes the neighborhood and related administrative office responsible for each detainee. All eight neighborhoods in Bostan subdistrict appear throughout the spreadsheet: Ümid (希望), Yipbazar (依甫巴扎), Yuhua (玉华), Shadliq (夏特勒克), Bostan (波斯坦), Yengisheher (英协海尔), Yuhe (玉河), and Üzüm (玉祖木).

h. Detainee address. Most of the entries list addresses. The document is unclear as to whether these addresses are those of each detainee's household registration.

i. Reason(s) for detention. Information in this column records the reason(s) for each detainee's detention.

j. Management level. A number of entries include notes about the "management level," including "normal" (普), "strict" (严), or "maximum" (强) management. We interpret the "management level" to refer to the degree of control and surveillance given by the authorities to detainees.

⁵ Zenz, "The Karakax List," section 1.3.

⁶ In his own report on the document, Dr. Adrian Zenz notes that a total of 2,802 adult persons and hundreds of minors appear in the list. He further writes, "Of these 2,802 [adults], 1,432 are shown with their full names and ID numbers, and 1,370 only by name, age, and often address and/or occupation. Of those with ID numbers, all have IDs from Xinjiang, 1,405 have IDs from Hotan Prefecture, and 1,372 have IDs from Karakax [sic] County." See Adrian Zenz, "The Karakax List."

k. “Three circles.” This is the most extensive column of the document. In it, the compilers have recorded detailed information about individuals (and in some cases, cultural and religious practices) connected to detainees in three categories: 1) immediate and extended family, 2) friends and neighbors, and 3) religious circle. Entries in this column include detailed information about individuals who are associated with each of the 311 detainees, such as their name, ethnicity, sex, ID number, age, employment place/status, and behavior status (e.g., “good behavior,” “ok behavior,” etc.). Other information included in some but not all entries includes detention status and any relevant prior criminal charges and/or sentence lengths for these associated individuals. Many entries also make note of the use of what we have translated as “three circles and six diagrams collision analysis” (三圈六图碰撞分析), which appears to be a method authorities are using to gather and analyze data.⁷

l. Evaluation. This column assesses whether a particular detainee should remain in internment or be released. In several cases, the evaluation appears not in the evaluation column but instead in the “three circles” column. Many, though not all, of the evaluations are marked with language identifying the employees of the subdistrict or neighborhood office as the recorders/compilers of this information, e.g., “A collision analysis carried out by subdistrict office community officials found [...]”

Our team also cross-referenced names and ID numbers to determine the number of 311 detainees represented in the document, which contains a total of 667 entries. In addition, we combed through the document to collate statistics about the camps where the detainees were held, the reasons given for their detentions, and the *shequ* officials’ judgments about the detainees’ status; we also utilized the available data to identify important demographic and other trends. Additionally, we analyzed the degree to which the list appeared to have been integrated with other aspects of security and surveillance systems used to enact Party-state policies in the region, including the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), Becoming Family program, and the forced labor system, among others. (Please see the [full UHRP report](#) for a more detailed discussion of the document’s contents and significance.)

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Uyghurs have been a consistent target of Chinese state repression for decades. The Uyghur homeland, which many Uyghurs long preferred to call by various names including (but not limited to) East Turkistan, only became known as “Xinjiang” (a Mandarin placename meaning “new territory” or “new dominion”) in 1884, when the Qing established loose rule over the land and began using “Xinjiang” in its documents. In 1949, upon the establishment of the People’s

⁷ This “three circles and six diagrams collision analysis” appears to be a novel term that warrants future investigation and scrutiny.

Republic of China, the Chinese military invaded and claimed to “peacefully liberate” the Uyghur Region, where the population was roughly 80% Uyghur and 6% Han, an act that many Uyghurs and other indigenous peoples in the region saw as an act of colonization. The region became formally known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955.⁸

Uyghurs have complained of unequal treatment under the law and increasingly egregious rights abuses at the hands of the Party-state throughout the decades since the establishment of the PRC, including in the Cultural Revolution (c. 1966–76), from which the region was not spared. Following a brief period of openness in the 1980s, which many Uyghurs remember as a “golden era” when Uyghur community life felt free and full of promise, the state began clamping down on space for a Uyghur civil society. Scholars writing about the region on the basis of both historical and ethnographic research have documented these complaints, identifying broad patterns and trends in state repression. Gardner Bovingdon, for instance, identified a pattern beginning in the ‘90s whereby the Party-state responded with increasingly hardline measures to all expressions of Uyghur discontent, each time pushing back harder than before. In effect, the Party-state sent a message that they would allow no space for Uyghurs to have a civil society or to express dissatisfaction with any aspects of PRC governance.⁹

The pattern identified by Bovingdon provides a useful lens for examining political and other developments in the region throughout the 2000s and 2010s, as the Party-state continued to implement increasingly hardline measures targeted at Uyghurs—a distinctive ethnic and cultural group—and progressively erase the already diminished rights they enjoyed. Meanwhile, in the early 2000s, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) came to provide a further narrative and policy frame for Chinese Party-state treatment of the Uyghurs. As Sean Roberts demonstrates, “terrorism” became pretense for Party-state-led crackdowns on Uyghurs despite a lack of compelling evidence for linkages between Uyghurs and global jihadist movements.¹⁰

The patterns identified by Bovingdon and Roberts intensified further following the events that unfolded on and around July 5, 2009, when a peaceful Uyghur-led demonstration in Ürümchi calling for justice for the Uyghur victims of a Han vigilante mob in Shaoguan devolved into an ethnic riot and show of state force following police intervention.¹¹ The July 2009 events

⁸ Any historical overview is necessarily selective and limited in scope; I am painting broad strokes here. For a detailed history of the region, see James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (2nd edition), New York: Columbia University Press; London: C. Hurst Co., 2021 (originally published 2007).

⁹ Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*, Columbia University Press (New York, NY): 2010.

¹⁰ Sean Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China’s Campaign against Xinjiang’s Muslims*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ), 2020.

¹¹ The events on and around July 5, 2009, are contested. The Chinese government insists that only 197 people, most of whom were Han, were killed in the violence. International media has repeated this statistic *ad nauseum* and often uncritically. Other documentary evidence, including some collated and analyzed by UHRP, suggests that many more Uyghur deaths occurred on and around July 5, and that thousands of Uyghurs disappeared at the hands of the state in

in Ürümchi marked a watershed moment in the history of the Uyghur Region. State-led surveillance had long existed in the Uyghur Region, as throughout the PRC—often in the form of human informants and record-keeping by means of government-organized units such as the *danwei* (Ch. work unit) as well as the *on a'ile* (Uy. “ten households”), a system whereby neighbors at the village level would be grouped together to spy and inform on one another. But surveillance took a much more sophisticated technological turn following the XUAR authorities’ hard-line response to the events in Ürümchi. In January 2011, the *Associated Press* used statistics from government officials in the XUAR to report that approximately 40,000 high-definition surveillance cameras, which were covered with “riot-proof protective shells,” had been installed throughout the region in the lead-up to the one-year anniversary of the unrest.¹² Meanwhile, policing increased dramatically in the region from 2012 onward, and ultimately went on to reach unprecedented highs in 2016.¹³

The year 2014 proved another watershed in the period immediately preceding the current campaign. That year, XUAR leadership blamed a series of attacks in Ürümchi, Kunming, and elsewhere on Uyghur jihadists. By that Spring, authorities, then under the leadership of Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian,¹⁴ announced two “counter-terrorism” campaigns: a “Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism” (严厉打击暴力恐怖活动专项行动) and simultaneous “People’s War on Terror” (反恐人民战争). The “counter-terrorism” policy of these campaigns included heavily militarized policing and tech-based surveillance alongside a system of grid-based policing and new developments in big-data gathering.¹⁵ In June of that same year, authorities in the autonomous-region rolled out the *bianminka*, or “People’s Convenient Card,” essentially a passbook-style system that ultimately prevented many Uyghurs—particularly those with rural household registrations—from living or traveling outside their place of registration. The *bianminka*, which was not implemented equally among people of different ethnic backgrounds, effectively served an apartheid-style tool that removed poor Uyghur migrants from cities such as Ürümchi and bound them into place in their rural home communities, where they could be more easily monitored and controlled by local officials.¹⁶ In 2015, with the *bianminka*

the days, weeks, and months that followed the initial violence. Many Uyghurs refer to the events as the “Ürümchi Massacre.” See Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Can Anyone Hear Us?: Voices from the 2009 Unrest in Ürümchi,” July 1, 2010, <https://uhrp.org/report/can-anyone-hear-us-voices-2009-unrest-urumchi/>.

¹² Associated Press, “China puts Urumqi under ‘full surveillance’,” printed in *The Guardian*, January 25, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/25/china-urumqi-under-full-surveillance>.

¹³ Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, “Xinjiang’s Rapidly Evolving Security State,” *China Brief* 17 (4), Jamestown Foundation, March 14, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiangs-rapidly-evolving-security-state/>.

¹⁴ Party leadership replaced Wang Lequan with Zhang Chunxian after dissatisfaction with how Wang handled the events of July 2009.

¹⁵ Julia Famularo, “‘Fighting the Enemy with Fists and Daggers’: The Chinese Communist Party’s Counter-Terrorism Policy in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” in *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China: Domestic and Foreign Policy Dimensions*, ed. Michael Clarke (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 2018.

¹⁶ While the adoption of the *bianminka* system was one of the most significant events in the Uyghur Region in 2014, it went under-reported in the international press and still has yet to receive full scrutiny from scholars and analysts for its role in the events that immediately preceded the mass internment campaign of 2017 and current human-rights

policy still restricting the movement of many people, regional authorities briefly relaxed formerly stringent passport application policies for Uyghurs, whom they had long discriminated against through routine passport denials. As a result, thousands of Uyghurs went through the process of applying for passports, the application for which required they submit biometric data to the authorities.¹⁷ Sean Roberts speculates that this period of relaxed passport applications for Uyghurs might have been intended for the purposes of an early mass biometric data-gathering drive, as the passport application process included submitting voice samples, DNA, and 3D images.¹⁸ In 2017, authorities throughout the region went on to gather biometric data on a massive scale through a “free physical examinations for all” program.¹⁹

In May 2016, officials announced that the *bianminka* system would be phased out, likely in anticipation of Chen Quanguo’s appointment as XUAR Party Secretary on August 29 of that year.²⁰ Chen’s appointment would prove another watershed moment in the region’s history. Shortly after Chen’s appointment as Party Secretary, XUAR authorities continued to expand the existing security and surveillance apparatus in the region. Adrian Zenz and James Leibold found that in 2016 alone, the XUAR authorities advertised more than 31,687 police jobs, many of them third-tier contract positions for police assistants. The number of advertised jobs account for an increase of more than three times the number of jobs advertised in the previous year.²¹ In 2016 the authorities also began a program of human surveillance called “Becoming Family” (结对认亲), a new iteration of the *fanghuiju* (访惠聚) program initiated in 2014 to “send down” cadres to visit and surveil Uyghurs in rural townships and villages; they went on to initiate a third wave of “relatives” visits in 2017. By late 2018, more than 1 million individuals who call themselves “family members,” most of whom are Han, had been sent into Uyghurs’ homes to spy and report on the families.²² At some point in this period (c. 2016–17), authorities also began using a policing app known as the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (一体化联合作战平台), or

crisis. See “The Race Card,” *Economist*, September 3, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/china/2016/09/03/the-race-card> and Mercy A. Kuo, “Uyghur Biodata Collection in China: Insights from Darren Byler,” *The Diplomat*, December 28, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/uyghur-biodata-collection-in-china/>.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch. “China: Passports Arbitrarily Recalled in Xinjiang,” November 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/22/china-passports-arbitrarily-recalled-xinjiang>.

¹⁸ See Roberts, *China’s War on the Uyghurs*, pp. 186–87.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, “China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions: Private Information Gathered by Police, Under Guise of Public Health Program,” December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/china-minority-region-collects-dna-millions>.

²⁰ “The Race Card,” *Economist*.

²¹ Zenz and Leibold, “Xinjiang’s Rapidly Evolving Security State.”

²² Darren Byler, “China’s Government Has Ordered a Million Citizens to Occupy Uighur Homes. Here’s What They Think They’re Doing,” *China File*, October 24, 2018, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/postcard/million-citizens-occupy-uighur-homes-xinjiang>; see also HRW, “China’s Algorithms of Repression.” No recently published source gives an updated figure for the number of cadres who are currently participating in the “Becoming Family” program, or for the total number of participants over time. However, Professor Timothy Grose, an expert on the region, continues to find first-hand evidence of Becoming Family and other surveillance efforts from Chinese-government websites and social media, which he then shares on his Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/@timothyagrose>).

IJOP, a predictive policing app that collects a vast array of microdata, including such details as electricity use and ownership of exercise equipment, to build a composite picture of individuals.²³ The collated information is leveraged to determine who is a “threat” to the Party-state and, as a result, who should be detained, interned, and possibly even imprisoned.²⁴

The Chinese Party-state has been surveilling and monitoring Uyghurs in the Uyghur Region for decades. From the start of a new securitization push following the events of July 2009 in Ürümqi into the campaign of mass detention that began shortly after Chen Quanguo’s appointment to the role of Party Secretary in 2016, the Party-state has utilized new developments in big-data gathering and surveillance technologies to build a totalizing surveillance state with key features that include a vast policing network, surveillance cameras, checkpoints, apps, and programs of neighborhood-level human surveillance. It is in this context that the Qaraqash List was compiled. The spreadsheet was remarkable at the time it was leaked to the international press because it gave observers the first granular-level view of the individuals affected by the mass internment campaign. The list also shed light on the policies being implemented across the region, which utilize a sophisticated technological infrastructure alongside clumsier, more error-ridden forms of human surveillance to gather and store massive amounts of data allowing representative of the government to recast normal, everyday cultural and religious behaviors as “suspicious” and even “criminal.”

Key takeaways and implications of the Qaraqash List, along with a subsequent leaked list known as the “Aksu List,” include the following:

- Evidence for linkages between the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) and the information gathered and stored on individual Uyghurs at the subdistrict and neighborhood levels of geopolitical administration in the Uyghur Region;
- Linkages between this information and other government policies and tools, including the Becoming Family program and the program of forced labor;
- The scope and intent of data-gathering, and the direct relationships between that data and various forms of repression playing out in the Uyghur Region today;
- The role of guilt-by-association in Chinese Party-state repression of Uyghurs; and
- Evidence that the Party-state has effectively criminalized everyday life as it restructures Uyghur society from the ground up.

²³ Writing about the IJOP is unclear about the time when the technology was developed and rolled out for use in the region.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “China’s Algorithms of Repression: Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Police Mass Surveillance App,” May 1, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass>.

I will be glad to discuss these points, as well as answer any questions regarding factual evidence for core crimes and the PRC response to Tribunal proceedings and accusations of crimes, in my oral testimony.