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Statement for the Uyghur Tribunal: Working with “The Xinjiang Papers”

Between the second Uyghur Tribunal sessions in September 2021 and final hearings in November 2021, I was contacted by Tribunal members and asked if I was willing to authenticate a cache of Chinese documents believed to be the same content as the “[absolutely no mercy](#)” document leak acquired by the New York Times in 2019. I was asked to review transcriptions and analysis of Dr Adrian Zenz, titled “the Xinjiang Papers”. The NYT story and additional documents are first-hand accounts of party-state policy and its institutional operations, therefore, I agreed to review the documents as a matter of duty to the public interest and my own intellectual curiosity. Any researcher with Chinese language skills can find references and quotes from the documents online but not the full texts, a familiar experience from sourcing official documents in researching Chinese politics and Xinjiang policy. For example, full texts of widely quoted Xinjiang Working Group Meetings to assess policy responses to the 2009 violence were never publicly circulated. Most concepts and policies in the “Xinjiang Papers” (e.g., “Sinicisation”, “Three Evils”, “Great Revival”) are familiar from my work and circulate widely in official media, party announcements, local news on cadre meetings, “patriotic education” texts, and political slogans. In my judgement, the papers are genuine and follow established patterns in official Chinese documentation: formatting of letter heads observed living in Xinjiang, titles and structures from researching official documents, narrative structure of policy explanations from conducting discourse analysis, and content referring to concepts, policies, and practices widely observed across China.

My method of analysis proceeded in the following steps: 1. read documents in full, 2. select document relevant to my expertise for close analysis (no.10), 3. translate full selected text, 4. analyse selected document, 5. re-read full document cache, 6. check Dr Zenz’ transcripts, 7. peer-review Dr Zenz’ analysis, 8. re-read documents and my own analysis. Through this process I formed a professional judgement, prior to reviewing Dr Zenz’ analysis and used the review process to re-assess and strengthen my translations and analysis. Dr Zenz’ authentication methods are rigorous, his explanation of the documents accurate, and the core argument that state violence in Xinjiang intensified under orders and supervision from the central party-state is logically consistent and strongly evidenced. As guides to action for cadres and leaders, the documents are technical and not immediately meaningful to non-experts of party-state institutions and ideology. Nevertheless, the documents demonstrate how policies in Xinjiang, including construction of “re-education” camps, “population optimisation”, and “Sinicisation” of religion, have been designed, disseminated, and their implementation monitored and policed by the top levels of the party-state. These documents are the most significant and detailed evidence available of the construction, implementation, and monitoring of policy in Xinjiang and are of enormous significance to the work of the Uyghur Tribunal and any scholar of Chinese politics.

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Peer Review of “The Xinjiang Papers” By Dr. Adrian Zenz for The Uyghur Tribunal

This reviewer finds the content of “The Xinjiang Papers: An Introduction” to be an accurate account based on clearly authenticated documents and of sound judgement regarding the significance and meaning of the documents. The documents are the most significant and detailed evidence available of the construction, implementation, and monitoring of policy in Xinjiang under Xi Jinping. The documents are, therefore, of enormous significance to the work of the Uyghur Tribunal and any scholar of Chinese politics. **Dr Zenz’ transcriptions are accurate, and the core argument that violent targeting of Uyghurs intensified in response to central party directives on implementing and monitoring official policy is clearly made, logically sound, and supported with strong evidence.** The “Xinjiang Papers”, therefore, are expected to contribute significantly to the Tribunal hearings. The documents are a leaked cache and require considerable background knowledge in official Chinese politics to authenticate and to analyse, therefore significant time was spent by the reviewer verifying the documents and Dr Zenz’ own methods. The following methods of authentication and fact-checking from the ‘Introduction’ should be highlighted and commended for their accuracy and rigour:

- Authentication using New York Times leaks (p.9 and appendices)
- Authentication using standard policy documents for comparison (p.14)
- Use of publicly available sources that quote the documents verbatim (p.14-16)
- Tracking the use of repeated terms across documents (p17, 19, and 23-24)
- Tracking document number 5’s content against the publicly available white paper (though many other sources would be as effective) (p.23)
- For the documents that are harder to verify (i.e., attributing quotes to Chen Quanguo), evidence of repeated terms from the documents in other sources is provided (p.19).

- Crosschecking fonts from official documents (p.32)
- The verification of document types, familiar to the author from their own observations while researching documents and living in Xinjiang (p.29-33).
- the reviewer fully agrees with the author's reinterpretation of the "infection" narrative, which clearly describes the influence of thought and behaviour in many contexts unrelated to medical concerns (p.26).

To use terminology from academic peer review process, this essay would be accepted for publication and the following comments should be viewed a scholarly engagement with the author's work and optional comments to improve the piece. The following comments do not suggest any inaccuracy regarding the content of the documents or the author's core argument. These are primarily minor typos or matters of word choice that do not affect the transcription, explanations of the documents, or the author's conclusions. There are also points to clarify for a non-Chinese speaking audience who are often unfamiliar with these types of documents and the language contained within. There also comments on areas to expand or relate to pre-existing literature and policies if publishing for a broader audience. These may or may not be relevant to the Tribunal's work but matter for the sake of historical record and commitment to accuracy and truth. The comments on the 'Introduction' are divided for the Tribunal's convenience into matters of fact, clarity, and opinion, actions in response to which should be considered at the discretion of the author. It should also be noted that for sake of brevity, the review comments are focused on minor corrections and do not outline the many positive aspects or provide approving commentary on sections that need no corrections.

Comments: 'The Xinjiang Papers – An Introduction'

Matters of fact

- **Source of the document leak:** The files could have been collated for the purpose of leaking evidence *or* could be part of a standardised collection of documents for study or political education of cadres (p.5 and 7), as suggested on discussions of document study (p.7-8 and document 1 analysis, p.3). The political study of collections of documents distributed in physical folders and not for public sale is a standard practice which means we cannot know if the source collated these documents themselves or if they are an official collection studied by cadres. The official presentation of the collection of speeches

included in “document no.1” suggests the latter is possible as it begins with a notice (*tongzhi*) from the XUAR Government. These issues bear no relevance to the content of the documents but is significant to establishing the source of the document cache and if one wishes to assess which political actors and levels of government have knowledge of the practices described in the analysis. If the documents are collated as part of political education (p.10), then these may be the same documents as analysed by the NYT but from an entirely different leak. This would also explain the disparities between the two document sets. The same missing pages noted on p.13 could also be interpreted either way.

- Although it is not incorrect to translate *Yijian* as “opinion”, it is better translated as “suggestions” in this context. These “suggestions” (*yijian*) are a standardised mode of command from central party to lower levels of government that Anglophone audiences should not confuse with statements of opinion (p.7).

Matters of clarity

- Sinicise should be capitalised as it refers to “Sinicisation” policy, a proper noun, which also avoids assessment of the policy’s effectiveness or possibility of achieving its goals (p.4).
- The link between Belt-and-Road to domestic security is made regularly but this appears to be the most explicit explanation of the link. Also, it would be more accurate to describe the BRI as Xi’s signature *foreign* policy project (p.4).
- We already knew of the “intense stability period” described, for example, from announcements by the XUAR Government in its 2018 work report. However, this is the first time we have direct evidence that Xi used this terminology to frame his commands to the XUAR government (p.4).
- Chen Quanguo “personally ordered...”. The line of authority between Xi, Chen, and these orders should be made explicit. Chen gave these orders after being ordered by Xi to do so (p.4).
- Clarify if the redactions on the documents are *additional* to the original redactions or if these are entirely different redactions (p.4-5).
- The discussion of NYT’s false attribution of surveillance (p.13): many of the documents cover supervision and management (*guanli*) of policy implementation, including personnel recruitment, training, and behaviour. It is possible the NYT used “surveillance” in a broader sense than the author

implies or that the NYT was using the term loosely to sell newspapers given the public's greater interest in technology over the dangers of authoritarianism.

- **Translation:** note that *jīyào* generally refers to summary of a meeting's contents. *Gāngyào* can also be translated as “essentials”. The translations given are accurate but may not confer some of these meanings for a reader unfamiliar with the language of official documents (p.31).
- **Translation:** the *tí* in *tétí* implies forwarding or suggesting something (i.e., the contents of the document) whereas *jiājǐ* is a simple adjective denoting urgency. Again, the translation provided is not inaccurate but may not confer the full meaning for those unfamiliar with the language (p.32)
- “Melting pot” (*rónglǔ*) is better translated as “smelting furnace”. This is a literal translation but also confers the coercive dimensions of the smelting process, distinct from the specific conceptualisation of “multiculturalism” as a “melting pot” in liberal democracies, particularly the USA (p.34-35).

Matters of opinion

- “anecdotal accounts” should read “on-the-ground accounts”. These have been invaluable and overwhelmingly accurate since the onset of the current crisis and should be celebrated as such (p.17).
- References to the “3 Districts Revolution” can be found widely across party-state documents and education materials. However, these do not acknowledge “mistakes” and simply integrate the “Ili rebellion” into a narrative of a continuous China for which Uyghurs and Kazakhs fought (p.23).
- “Distorted religious atmosphere” (宗教氛围扭曲) (p.23) could also be translated as a “the religious atmosphere is distorting”. The distinction being that the latter implies religion per se distorts the “normal” or “mainstream” social order.
- Document 10 does not refer to Xinjiang though it may be worth noting how it uses the term “hotspots” to describe regions affected by “extremist ideology” that would include the region (p.24)
- Discussion of document 3 could be related to the same narrative in document 10 that policy implementation was failing, therefore more supervision and surveillance from the centre was required (p.25)
- It may be worth noting that “for internal circulation only” (*neibu faxing*) is a standard phrase used on similar documents (e.g., “the 50 Whys” patriotic education text discussed by the reviewer at previous Tribunal sessions”) and

that the designator referring to online distribution here is new, reflecting both the importance of the documents analysed and the increasing digitalization of information and dissemination (p.29).

- The lack of reprint may reflect that the physical document is the original print (p.30).

Review Comments: ‘The Xinjiang Papers – Document no.1’

As noted in the author’s analysis, Xi Jinping’s speeches in these documents are widely quoted and referenced across Chinese media. I have used those sources in my own research due to their significance in assessing the policy shift towards ethnic assimilation, or “fusion”, and increasing centralisation of policymaking and implementation under Xi. However, this is the first time the original documents have become publicly available. These documents are highly significant for understanding the content of policy in Xinjiang and the structure and institutional operations of the party-state. The positive comments from the start of this review on the author’s authentication methods apply here, particularly in comparisons with the NYT documents (p.3-4), general style of official documentation, and quotes from the documents in publicly available sources (p.4-6). The author should be commended for avoiding exaggeration and even including inconvenient facts (e.g., “The existence of a Central Office Bulletin with the issue number 21 cannot be independently verified”, p.2), while also providing and weighing up alternative evidence (e.g., quotes from the documents in official Chinese media, references to the speeches in study sessions and media coverage, etc) to establish the facts around the production and circulation of the documents. **The author’s core argument that crackdowns on the Uyghur population intensified and accelerated in response to Xi’s commands is clearly made, logically consistent, and strongly evidenced.** Most comments below pertain to historical context and relations between new and old policies, that are not the core focus of the work of the Tribunal but need to be noted for intellectual rigour and to clarify the historical record.

- While the exact phrase “cannot be found anywhere on the Chinese internet” (p.7), it is worth noting that an “intense stability period” is mentioned elsewhere, for example in the 2018 Xinjiang Work Report. These references are several years after the speeches analysed and support the case that Xi has ordered, implemented, and monitored these policies.
- “people’s democratic dictatorship” does include the organisations and practices to which the author refers (p.7-8). However, it has broader meaning within Mao’s thought and refers to China’s “stage of historical development”, a “proletarian dictatorship”, prior to the apparently inevitable unfolding of a classless society. This “stage” of history was more palatably referred to as the “primary stage of socialism” under Jiang and Hu. The terms are both used to explain why the party-state maintains such high levels of political and

economic inequality despite its popular legitimation through symbols of rapid revolution and equality. Xi's shift back to using the "dictatorship" term reflects his ideology that force and active policy, rather than natural logics of markets or the "direction of history", can resolve social "contradictions" in China and specifically, in Xinjiang policy as mentioned in analysis of document 2 (p.9). Also, see XUAR Government Work Reports and Ma Rong's (2018) essay on how Xi has resolved China's contradictions through active security policies over passive economic focus.

- "Xi attributes Xinjiang's problems unilaterally to "religious extremism" (p.8). It is not clear if "unilaterally" refers to Xi's centralised decision-making or to attribution of a single cause to "Xinjiang's problems". It would be more accurate to say that "religious extremism" is a pivotal concern in Xi's explanation of the context behind policy in Xinjiang and its content. For example, the narratives explaining the need for "Sinicisation" of religion, like all Xinjiang policy, can be read as anti-foreign (e.g, removal of symbols of culture associated with external countries), anti-religion (e.g., widespread repression of religious practice), anti-Uyghur (e.g., focus on Southern Xinjiang, language policies, etc), or a combination of the three. As stated in document 10, and a familiar narrative from 2009, the party-state attacks the use of religion to justify "separatist activities" (*fenlie huodong*), which suggests it is aware that "separatism" (i.e., Uyghur ethnic identity) and "religious extremism" are related but distinct.
- **Translation:** 现实生活中 as "In reality" (p.8): this refers to "practical living" or could be translated as "real life". This may be significant because it is the language the party-state uses in its narrative that religion should not interfere with practical or "normal" life, implying that religion is impractical, non-modern, and irrational, in contrast to a practical and modern atheist life that all good citizens should lead.
- **Translation:** 精神 (p.8). This is a complicated word to translate as it can mean "spirit" as translated by the author when discussing religion or it can refer to "psychology" as translated when referring to the party-state's thinking on the impact of religion. For an Anglophone audience, this should either be noted for clarity or the word should be simply translated as "spirit". This helps show that the party-state's ideology is often guided by metaphors and the language of faith in the "overall direction of history" and Chinese or

Communist spirit, which partly explains why ‘alternative’ faiths are deemed threatening to its authority.

- **Translation:** “these are the main reasons for the active violent terrorist activities”. 原因 can be also mean “cause” rather “reason” and given the collocation with 导致 (“to guide”), I would translate this as “these are the main causes guiding...”. It would also be better to say “market” rather than “markets” as it refers specifically to the appeal of extremism not markets (or *the* market) in general.
- The region has always been viewed in terms of its geopolitical significance by China’s leaders and the BRI should be viewed in that historical context, rather than a cause behind a new shift towards geopolitical thinking. Similarly, the relationship between stability of Xinjiang and the whole nation was also highlighted after the 2009 violence as analysed in my publications ([2013](#); [2015](#); [2019](#); [2020](#); [2020](#); [2021](#); [forthcoming](#)) (p.11).
- “early warning mechanisms” (p.11): this language emerged after the first Xinjiang Working Group Meetings in 2010 under Hu.

Review Comments: ‘The Xinjiang Papers – Document no.2’

The positive prior comments on the author’s authentication methods again apply here, particularly in comparisons with the NYT documents (p.4-6), general style of official documentation, and quotes from the documents in publicly available sources (p.4-8). The comments below are translation issues that should be addressed and analytical matters that are inessential to authenticating the documents, explaining their meaning, or the core argument of the essay. **The author’s core argument that crackdowns on the Uyghur population intensified and accelerated in response to Xi’s commands and the explanation of texts is clear, logically sound, and well-evidenced.**

- **Translation:** “...modern cultural concepts that reflect transmit values” (p.16), should read “...modern cultural values, the content of which reflects ethnic minorities’ real lives...”. The translation provided captures the broad meaning but should be checked again.
- **Translation:** the “secularisation” quote (p.17) captures the broad meaning but needs checked again as details are missing. These are flowery metaphors and not essential to understanding the meaning of the text or the author’s argument but need checked for accuracy.
- **Translation:** 观念 (p.18): “views” is not inaccurate but this is often translated as “ways of thinking” as it doesn’t usually refer to specific opinion but denotes an outlook or way of thinking.
- Scarcity of water (p.19): it would be worth reminding the reader here of the political and security logics behind economic development policies that tie to Xi’s security focus. This link explain why ‘economic’ policies in the region appear irrational if considered through an economic lens (e.g., subsidies for unprofitable SOES and the Bingtuan, funding the cotton industry as the core of the economy, de facto subsidising of eastern Chinese homes and business with cheap energy from a less-developed region, forced labour, over-investment in Central Asia, etc).

Review Comments: ‘The Xinjiang Papers – Document no.4’

The positive comments on the author’s authentication methods again apply here, particularly in comparisons with the NYT documents (p.2-3) and quotes from the documents in publicly available sources (p.3-7). The comments below are primarily translation and analytical matters that are inessential to authenticating the documents, explaining their meaning, or the core argument of the essay. **The author’s core argument that crackdowns on the Uyghur population intensified and accelerated in response to Xi’s commands and the explanation of texts is, once again, clear, logically sound, and well-evidenced.**

- The “long-term” and “unswerving” nature of the “struggle against separatism” is a common trope and was stated repeatedly by Hu and other leaders after the 2009 violence. It would be worth clarifying this because the thought behind these policies has long framed the region and its peoples as security threats but Xi has implemented new policies towards victory in that “struggle”. When Chen Quanguo and Erkin Tuniyaz use related phrases, a Chinese audience hears the reference both to longer-term narratives of history *and* Xi’s specific policies to resolve “contradictions” and accelerate the “direction of history” towards “fusion” and the “Great Revival” (p.6-7).

Reviewer Comments: ‘The Xinjiang Papers – An Analysis’

The analysis builds on rigorous authentication, accurate transcription, and complex translation work already commended in prior sections. **The core argument in the analysis that violent targeting of Uyghurs intensified in response to central party directives on implementing and monitoring official policy is clearly made, logically sound, and supported with strong evidence** (e.g., central directives to “optimize” the population, p.1-2; orders on mass internment practices, p.6-13; planned and coercive birth controls, p.16-20; central commands to use forced labour, p.22-24; intergenerational separation, p.26). The caution exercised by the author is welcomed when stating that these documents do not necessarily reveal hitherto unknown policies but provide significant evidence regarding their planning and implementation (p.2). The reviewer concurs with the author’s central assessment that the documents indicate “how the central government, including Xi Jinping himself, mandated policy directions and made both demands and suggestions that would either directly or fairly naturally and gradually result in subsequent practices witnessed after 2016 under Xinjiang’s new Party Secretary Chen Quanguo” (p.1). The author also effectively identifies how policy became more “draconian” between 2017 and 2018 with its “good method” celebrated and poor implementation punished (p.3), as well as identifying the central party-state’s “broader intention to reengineer Xinjiang’s ethnic cultures and communities” (p.3). These assessments reflect scholars’ prior knowledge of the PRC’s political system, the institutional changes under Xi, and policy in Xinjiang, discussed in previous Tribunal sessions including in my own submissions. However, these documents are the clearest evidence available thus far that Xi has directed and monitored specific policies, including mass internment, “Sinicisation” of religion, and “population optimization”. The documents and this analysis are, therefore, highly significant to the work of the Tribunal and future scholarship in Chinese politics. The comments which follow focus on issues of emphasis and are intended to improve the piece but do not repeat the comments on the introduction sections, all of which apply here, most significantly, to the methods of authentication of the documents and the tracking of speeches and policy implementation in response to central commands (p.6-14). The key facts outlined within and the explanation of the documents are sound and should be commended for their accuracy and clarity. The reviewer also concurs with the broad conclusions included on p.29 and with the assessment that there is a strong

case that each of the UN's genocide "risk factors" in its "[Framework for analysis for atrocity crimes](#)" have already been met.

- Li Keqiang's interpretation of the Uyghur metaphor (p.22) is either a misunderstanding of its meaning or willful ignorance to present it in a politically convenient form. It refers to Uyghur attachment to home and family and is often repeated alongside narratives that all Uyghur men like their mother's cooking the most! It does not refer to attitudes to work or politics.
- The discussion on ethnic policy (p.26-28) would be significantly strengthened by reminding the reader that maintenance of ethnic distinctions is largely tactical in the traditional official historical materialist framework that assumes identities 'wither away' with development. Xi's thought, however, is closer to Han chauvinism as the latest documents on official history confirm, which explains his intensification of ethnic targeting and state violence. Nevertheless, the reader needs to be reminded that ethnic distinctions as defined by Uyghurs (e.g., language and religion) are not tolerated by the party-state, therefore, these policies are designed to transform not maintain ethnic identities and boundaries.