

## Overview

*The Chinese government has committed human rights violations, including mass imprisonment, arbitrary detention, and freedom of expression, especially in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with limited condemnation from the United Nations. Additionally, the Xi administration continues to support the expansion of mass surveillance systems and national security campaigns.*

## Recent Developments

### China Left Unaccountable for Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang

On August 31, 2022, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet issued a report that accused China of grave human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.<sup>1</sup> While these accusations cover a broad range of human rights violations, the majority referred to the “extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups.”<sup>2</sup> This 45-page report detailed China’s mass imprisonment and the treatment in Xinjiang internment camps, family separations and reprisals, and other human rights concerns such as violations of religious, cultural and linguistic expression and identity, freedom of movement, reproductive rights, and forced labor.<sup>3</sup> Notably, Bachelet reported that the sterilization rate in Xinjiang was over 700 percent more than the average rate in mainland China.<sup>4</sup> Bachelet’s report urged the Chinese government to take immediate steps to release all arbitrarily detained individuals and to apprise families of their loved ones’ whereabouts.<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after the report was published, China issued a 122-page statement that denounced Bachelet’s document claiming that this report was being used as a political tool by the West and professed that this was strictly a campaign against terrorism and extremism in China.<sup>6</sup> Despite these claims from China, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that the Chinese government has systematically imprisoned over one million Uyghurs (among other Muslim groups) since 2017.<sup>7</sup> In July 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Xinjiang for the first time in eight years where he stated that the province should “maintain a firm grip on stability,” insinuating that the Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism (launched in 2014) was an ongoing success.<sup>8</sup>

On October 6, the UN Human Rights Council held a vote on whether to debate the crimes against humanity in Xinjiang; however, it was ultimately rejected by a 19 to 17 vote with 11 countries abstaining from the vote.<sup>9</sup> The majority of the members who voted “no” on the call to open a debate were Muslim-majority states including Indonesia, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, and UAE.<sup>10</sup> The global community, including many human rights NGOs, was outraged by this motion and publicly shamed the UN’s Human Rights Council.<sup>11</sup> On October 31, 50 state members of the UN released a joint statement that implored China to end human rights abuses (i.e., to implement recommendations given in Bachelet’s report) in Xinjiang on October 31.<sup>12</sup>

### Ongoing Oppression: Mass Surveillance and Human Rights Abuses

On September 5, 2022, Human Rights Watch released a report announcing new evidence of mass DNA blood sample collection in the Tibet Autonomous Region.<sup>13</sup> This new information makes it evident the police are collecting blood samples without any cause and the Tibetan people cannot decline to provide their DNA to the state.<sup>14</sup> A report from Lhasa municipality revealed that DNA samples from children at kindergartens were taken in April of this year.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has justified biometric

surveillance by stating the need for public safety; however, the government has stated outright that DNA collection in Tibet is strictly for “population control.”<sup>16</sup>

In early September of this year, a Hong Kong judge found five authors guilty of writing the “seditious” children’s book series, *Sheep Village*.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, the judge found the defendants guilty of “conspiring to print, publish, distribute or display seditious publications” under the Crimes Ordinance.<sup>18</sup> On September 10, the same five defendants were sentenced to 19 months in prison.<sup>19</sup> The ruling is associated with China’s recent National Security Law for Hong Kong that was implemented after Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protests.<sup>20</sup>

As of September 2022, the tens of millions of people who have been subjected to full or partial lockdowns in China are now deprived of food, medicine, and other essential items.<sup>21</sup> As these lockdowns continue, millions of Chinese residents have lost their jobs as the cost of food has increased.<sup>22</sup> These conditions have even caused forms of extreme measures of protest.<sup>23</sup> In August, an Ele.me food delivery driver stabbed himself in front of a delivery hub out of protest after he was fined for resigning and requesting unpaid wages.<sup>24</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping secured his third term as the leader of China in mid-October during the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China where he reaffirmed his commitment to China’s “Zero-COVID” policy.<sup>25</sup>

## Background & Analysis

Since President Xi Jinping became the leader of the Chinese Communist Party in 2013, he has systematically weeded out some government officials and has replaced them with Xi loyalists.<sup>26</sup> In turn, this has paved the way for Xi Jinping to impose his ideology and launch government campaigns that have oppressed civil and social liberties in the name of national security and public safety. One of Xi’s largest campaigns is the “Chinese Dream” which was also launched in 2013.<sup>27</sup> In addition to an attempt to rejuvenate nationalism in China, this campaign seeks to create an ethnically homogenous nation by assimilating ethnic minorities into a unified Han Chinese cultural identity.<sup>28</sup> This ideology and nationalistic rhetoric only deepens the conflict and human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Xi has stated his desire to eradicate (or “transform”) any religious beliefs, faith, practice, and rituals that do not align with Chinese culture and society.<sup>29</sup> The administration’s “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” makes this “purging” more excusable (from the perspective of most government officials and Chinese nationalists) because of China’s claims of preventing terrorism and extremism.<sup>30</sup>

Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative (launched in 2013) reasserted China’s position as a global superpower. Because this global infrastructure expands trade between China and 140 other countries, China has used its influence to dissuade other states from taking any action regarding China’s myriad of human rights abuses. This was exemplified through its influence in the UN Human Rights Council’s vote to not debate human rights violations in Xinjiang. It was also evident when Chinese authorities implored Bachelet not to publish her report; however, she ultimately went public with it after deciding not to seek a second term as High Commissioner.<sup>31</sup>

In a concerted effort to homogenize China, Xi’s administration has heightened its surveillance of Chinese residents to highly unethical levels. This is conveyed through the DNA collection in Tibet to its excessive use of face-identification cameras. This effort has also been the impetus for laws such as the National Security Law in Hong Kong (established in 2020) that has led to the arrest of more than 200 people and 12 children.<sup>32</sup> This is an unprecedented time in China; on the other hand, there are many parallels to the Mao Zedong era. If China continues to deny its citizens basic civil and social rights, there may be significant backlash from the Chinese people.

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