Trabajo Fin de Grado

Uyghurs in Xinjiang

The Construction of a Suspect Community

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Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party has unleashed a strict system of control over the Uyghur minority inhabiting the Xinjiang region under the pretext of antiterrorism measures to safeguard the security of the People's Republic of China. This work seeks to explain how the Uyghurs have been constructed as a suspect community by the Chinese government. For that purpose, the analytical section of this thesis will look at the way the East Turkistan forces are portrayed as a threat by the government and how this is used as justification for the implementation of repressive extraordinary measures. Moreover, the second half of the analysis will aim to explain how the alleged threat has been generalized and how this has led to the construction of the whole Uyghur minority in China as a suspect community. This extrapolation in part takes place because of the establishment of imprecise legislation regarding terrorism and extremism, which leaves too much space for interpretation and therefore allows for virtually any Uyghur to be under suspicion.

Key words: Uyghur, Xinjiang, XUAR, East Turkistan, suspect community, securitization.

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List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
ETLO	East Turkistan Liberation Organization
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IRA	Irish Republican Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

1 Introduction

China's geopolitics and the way this giant interacts with the ethnic minorities within the region can be better understood by looking back at the so-called "Century of Humiliation". This era started with the First Opium War in 1839, which signaled the beginning of the end for the Qing Dynasty, and was said to end with the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During this period, China was suffering from internal and external pressures challenging the Qing rule. On the one hand, it was a time shaped by internal rebellions such as the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) and the Muslim revolts in Western China. On the other, China was facing strong foreign colonial pressures, which were reflected in the so-called *Unequal Treaties*, a series of enforced agreements and concessions to foreign powers (Kaufman, 2010). All of these humiliating defining events in the country's history led to the rise of a strong nationalist sentiment and a will to seek China's rightful place in the modern world (Callahan, 2004).

This narrative of China as an ex-victim of colonialism aiming to protect its integrity is used to justify the means through which the PRC has dealt with threats to its security throughout history (Anand, 2018). In particular, it has shaped China's treatment of the ethnic minorities within the country, particularly the Uyghur people. This mostly Muslim minority, inhabiting the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the Northwest of China, has a long history of conflicted interactions with the Chinese authorities since it was first conquered by the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century. Short after the fall of the Qing empire, a sense of anti-colonialism and self-determination started to arise among the Muslim community in China (Roberts, 2020). The relationship between the majoritarian ethnic group, the Han, and the Uyghur minority has been marked ever since by tensions caused by an ultimate desire to control the region.

The most recent manifestation of this troubled relationship was the arbitrary detention of over a million Uyghurs in China and their forced transferal to the so-called re-education camps, which has naturally drawn the attention of the international community (Amnesty International, 2018b). According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, over 380 facilities, including only re-education camps, detention centers and prisons, have been built in Xinjiang since 2017 (Ruser, 2020). However, these camps are only the most visible share of a much broader system of control over all Uyghurs inside

the XUAR (Roberts, 2020). The People's Republic of China has been criticized for its framing of the Uyghur persecution as a preventive measure against terrorist acts and for defining terrorism and extremism in such broad terms that all members of the Uyghur community have ultimately become suspects.

This Bachelor thesis aims to shed some light on the construction of the Uyghur people in China as a suspect community – i.e., meaning a group that has been portrayed as a potential threat to security. This will be done through the analysis of how this minority has been constructed as such by the Chinese Communist Party. It will be argued that the creation of this suspect community is the result of a two-phase process: first, the securitization of the East Turkistan forces; and second, the extrapolation of this alleged security threat to the whole Uyghur society in the XUAR.

The first part of this thesis explicitly explains what the main objectives of this work are, and what makes the topic of choice particularly interesting to analyze. Secondly, the *State of the Art* offers a literature overview on the current debate regarding the concept of suspect community, by comparing different currents of authors and their contributions to the theory. Secondly, through the theoretical framework, this paper examines what security is and how the concept has evolved throughout history, as well as the theory of securitization and how it is used to explain the construction of suspect communities. Thirdly, the work looks at the political background in China and the evolution of the Sino-Uyghur relationship in order to better understand the current conflict. The fourth section of this thesis clarifies the methodology employed to write it and focuses on the main sources of information. Then, there will be a case study that looks at how the East Turkistan forces have been securitized and how this has finally led the Uyghur minority to be constructed as a suspect community.

2 Objective and Motives

The main purpose of this study is to explain the process through which the Uyghur minority in China has been constructed as a suspect community and the role that the CCP has played in said process. Furthermore, in order to carry out a successful analysis, it is crucial to first study the securitization of the East Turkistan forces and how this ultimately led to the construction of all Uyghurs within China as a suspect community.

There are four main reasons why this paper can provide valuable insights. Firstly, despite China's narrative of the Uyghur detentions as a way to protect the nation's security, the recent events in Xinjiang as well as the PRC's Counter-Terrorism Law promulgated in 2015 have raised implacable criticism from human rights experts around the globe (Concerned Scholars, 2018). The new legislation was described by Amnesty International (2015) as "using national security as pretext to further attack religious freedom and silence government critics". Moreover, the media coverage on the mass incarceration of these Muslim minorities has also led to the public eye being concerned with the matter. Because it has become such a polemic and relevant issue from a political point of view, it has been deemed important to contribute to the literature on it by offering a comprehensive analysis that builds on China's historical background to explain its current situation.

Secondly, several academics such as Paddy Hillyard (1993), Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton (2009), and others which will be analyzed later on, have done extensive research on how certain groups have become discriminated against for their alleged links to terrorist groups. Their studies focus mainly on the treatment of Irish people in Britain during the IRA times, and on the Muslim community in the United Kingdom. There certainly is extensive research on the current situation Uyghurs are living in China and on the repercussions of the Global War on Terror and the anti-terrorist legislation on the persecution of this community. However, as of today, there are not published papers that contribute to the suspect community theory through an analysis of the Uyghur case. Therefore, it could be very interesting to look at the events taking place in the XUAR through this theory and assess its accuracy as an analytical tool for this matter.

Thirdly, I find the concept of suspect community to be fascinating yet complex to grasp. As it will be discussed in the theoretical framework, the main counterargument to it is a lack of evidence regarding the relationship of causality between anti-terrorist legislation and the formation of such communities. It is not intended to prove said causality, as I do not believe that the mass incarceration taking place is a direct consequence of the current counter-terrorism laws. However, I do believe that such an unprecise definition of terrorism allows for the persecution of innocent civilians. A vague definition of those who shall be regarded as suspect contributes to the creation of a wide net of individuals who will be wrongfully classified as such. That is why I believe that the suspect community thesis is a very valuable instrument to better understand the ultimate effect this regulation has on the Uyghur.

3   State of the Art

This section provides a brief overview of the main contributions that have been made to the suspect community theory in the last decades, as well as the major critiques challenging the notion. While all the authors that will be mentioned agree on a broad definition of suspect communities as groups of the population who have been depicted as a potential threat to security, they have shared different perspectives on how these communities come to exist. Some of them focus on the role of legislation and security practices as the main causes for their creation, and some others define suspect communities as a product of the imagination. The following paragraphs will further build on this distinction.

3.1   Defining suspect communities as a consequence of legislation and security practices

Firstly, there is a perspective that has played a major role in the suspect community debate, and it is the idea that suspect communities are socially constructed as such through the implementation of certain legislation and security practices.

The first author to ever apply the concept of 'suspect community' was Paddy Hillyard (1993) when referring to the Irish in Britain during the era of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). He argued that the creation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the anti-terrorist legislation passed as a response to the attacks of the IRA, led the Irish in Britain to be constructed as a suspect community (Hillyard, 1993). Hillyard focused on the experiences of those who were arrested under the PTA and on the effect this had on those who were suspected (Breen-Smyth, 2013). Not suspected in the conventional sense of the word, as believed to be guilty of an illegal act, but as part of a certain group that has been depicted as a security threat (Hillyard, 1993). In sum, Hillyard introduced the concept of suspect community as created through legislation and security practices and focused on studying the impact this had on the members of said community. Later on, his work reflected how he also applied this idea to Muslims in the context of the GWOT.

Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton built on Hillyard's definition, applying the term to the Muslim community in Britain. They defined a suspect community as:

A sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being 'problematic'. Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrongdoing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group. (2009: 649)

This definition is aligned with Hillyard's theory, as it emphasizes the role played by legislation and anti-terrorism policing in the formation of suspect communities. Furthermore, it also maintains the idea that 'suspect' is not meant in the regular sense of the word, but rather as the potential link to a certain sub-group. Likewise, Pantazis and Pemberton argue that the political discourse of the Global War on Terror had a defining effect on the construction of Muslims as a suspect community. They wrote about the war on terror as the key moment were 'Islamic fanaticism' was established as an existential threat, particularly for Western democracies. Of special interest was the case of the Muslim community in the United Kingdom, who was branded as the new 'enemy within', "justifying the introduction of counter-terrorist legislation and facilitating the construction of Muslims as a 'suspect community'" (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009: 646).

3.2 Defining suspect communities as an imaginary construct

Contrary to the previous approach, there is also a different current of authors who do not see suspect communities as the result of explicit regulation or security discourses, but as a product of the human imagination.

In 1983, Benedict Anderson introduced the concept of imagined communities when referring to nationalism. In his work, Anderson talked about nationalism as a way of imagining a community and thus, creating it (Calhoun, 2016). He introduced the concept of imagined communities as groupings created in the mind of its alleged members. Nations, as described by Anderson, were imagined because their members would never know most of their fellow-members and still, in the minds of each one of them, they were able to picture their community and felt as though they belonged in it (Anderson, 2006). If this was to be applied to the Muslim case mentioned by Pantazis and Pemberton, it would imply that Muslims did not become a suspect community because they were more vulnerable to counter-terrorism practices, but because they felt as though

there was something bringing them all together with every Muslim, whether they knew of their existence or not.

Marie Breen-Smyth bases her work on suspect communities on the findings of the beforementioned authors and introduces the notion of imagined communities as described in Anderson's findings. In line with Anderson's work, she argues suspect communities are not solely a consequence of anti-terrorism legislation and security practices, but also something imaginary. She defines suspect communities as "created in and by the securitized imagination" (Breen-Smyth, 2013: 223). Nevertheless, she does not undermine the crucial role of security practices and legislation and explains how they lead to the 'othering' of suspect communities (Breen-Smyth, 2013).

It should be noted that while Anderson (2006) sees these groups as born out of the imagination of its members, Breen-Smyth defends that it is not just consolidated in the mind of its members, but in the mind of the beholder (Breen-Smyth, 2013). Hence, according to Breen-Smyth (2013) it is not Muslims feeling as though they belong to a community that constitutes the community itself, but rather they are constituted as such in the mind of those who are suspicious of them. The discourse of the suspicious public comes from a place of insecurity and fear and is further encouraged by the community's portrayal by the media and political actors (Breen-Smyth, 2013).

3.3 A critical response to suspect community theories

Steven Greer (2010) is skeptical about the validity of suspect community theory. In his responses to Pantazis and Pemberton and to Marie Breen-Smyth he claims that there is a lack of significant evidence to support his peers' findings. Greer (2010) highlights the importance of distinguishing between the 'official' and 'unofficial' senses of the term suspect community, what he refers to as the 'state version' and the 'civil society version' of the suspect community thesis respectively. According to him, while there is evidence to support the existence of Islamophobia among the non-Muslim population of the United Kingdom, there is no proof that anti-terrorist laws in the United Kingdom have turned the Muslim community into a suspect one (Greer, 2010). He therefore disagrees with both Hillyard's and Pantazis and Pemberton's arguments and claims that "turning Muslims into a suspect community cannot be attributed directly to the legislation itself" (Greer, 2010: 1176).

Greer's objections to Marie Breen-Smyth's *Theorizing the suspect community* (2013), are based upon the same idea: first, there is no evidence to support that the community exists "in the public suspicious mind", and second, the meaning of this statement is unclear (Greer, 2014: 470). This critique is aligned with Greer's general opinion on suspect community theory that there is no credible evidence that shows that Muslims are under official suspicion and that, even if there was, there is no evidence that the mere fact of being Muslim is the reason for such suspicion (Greer, 2014). He goes on to state that for this thesis to be relevant and useful for future analysis, there should be evidence of both these aspects.

3.4   Conclusions

One can argue that while Hillyard, Pantazis and Pemberton focus on the role of the state and law in the creation of suspect communities; Breen-Smyth, Anderson and Greer pay higher attention to the cultural, political and ideological discourse that also contributes to the formation of said groups. When considering both perspectives as complementary one can create a much broader and adequate means for understanding the creation of a suspect community.

This thesis will build on the mentioned authors' work, as well as on the securitization theory as presented by the Copenhagen School, which will be further explained in the following section, to study the way in which suspect communities are constructed as such. Additionally, in the analytical portion of this work this will be applied to the Uyghur case in China.

4 Theoretical Framework

Issues become security matters when they are portrayed as such by a specific actor, and by doing so, a process of securitization takes place. In short, when something is depicted as a security threat, it is securitized, and it becomes a security threat to that particular referent object. This is exactly what occurs when a subgroup is constructed as suspect, and that explains why in order to successfully apply suspect community theory, one first needs to understand the notion of security and, building on that, the process of securitization. Therefore, this chapter will initially offer an overview of how the concept of security has changed over time, specifying which definition will be applied for this paper. Subsequently, it will provide a brief explanation of the securitization process as described by the Copenhagen School, and of how this theory can be applied to the Uyghur case.

4.1 The evolution of the concept of security

Security is not a static concept, but has experienced a significant evolution throughout history, particularly since the end of the Cold War era. Traditionally the focus of security theory and practices was the state, as it was understood in the military-political sense of the word (Buzan et al., 1998). In 1948, George Kennan described security as "the continued ability of the country to pursue the development of its internal life without serious interference, or threat of interference, from foreign powers" (Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2011: 2). In this definition it is being implied that the way to achieve the security of each individual is through achieving state security first. During this period, national security and military security were almost interchangeably used as synonyms (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). The use of force was seen as the main instrument to tackle and eradicate threats to the state and other forms of security practices were merely considered. This view of the state as the main referent of security and as the best way of achieving security for its population is inherently realist.

Accordingly, Walter Lippmann (1943) also defined security in a state-focused sense. He declared that a nation could be considered as secure if it was not in danger of having to sacrifice its core values in order to avoid war, and would be able, if challenged, to preserve those values by winning such a war. Again, his point of view reaffirmed the main role of military defense as the preferential solution for security matters. He

portrayed *hard* security as the right response, as he was implying that the only way to be safe involved either not going to war or a victory in that war. There is a complete disregard of the negative consequences going through war could have for individuals and their personal security, because as long as the state resulted triumphant, it would be considered secure, and so would its population.

Wolfers (1952) described national security as 'an ambiguous symbol'. He defended that it was not an element that can be talked about in absolute terms, that it was not something that one either has or has not. Rather he defined it as "a value of which a nation can have more or less and which it can aspire to have in greater or lesser measure" (Wolfers, 1952: 484). Wolfers believed that it was ambiguous in the sense that it did not mean exactly the same to every state. Nations and even groups within nations have a different understanding on what poses a threat to their security and therefore they could respond to a same external threat in drastically different manners (Wolfers, 1952).

Based on how security has been portrayed in the previous paragraphs it could be said that at the time it was almost an unquestioned concept, which was automatically associated to the state. Nevertheless, as the Cold War unraveled in the mid-1980s, academics and political actors started to question whether the traditional state-centric definition of the word was broad enough to explain the new threats the world was facing (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Eventually, there was a realization that the classical approach of International Security Studies failed to explain the new dynamics that shaped the non-bipolar world. And consequently, they also feared whether the 'use of force' response had just become too narrow, as military defense no longer seemed to be the right answer for all security problems. There was a shift in the perception of the state as the main object, as higher attention started to be paid to humanity instead. And consequently, there was a shift in the understanding of security too, more specifically, a process of *widening and deepening* of the notion (Escánez, 2015).

On one hand, the widening of security implied a desire to broaden the security agenda as to include a larger range of aspects such as economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Johan Galtung (1969) highlighted the importance of considering 'structural violence' and not just personal violence as directly perpetrated by a clearly identifiable actor. This era saw the rise of a new view on security, one that contemplated

a wider range of potential threats as security issues. It is not intended to say that military threats ceased to exist after the Cold War era, because that is not true. However, threats both to nations and to the well-being of individuals started to derive from a wider set of challenges, such as "economic collapse, political oppression, scarcity, overpopulation, ethnic rivalry, the destruction of nature, terrorism, crime and disease" (Booth, 1991: 318). Security could not be simply described as a freedom from threat or freedom from fear, but also as *freedom from want* (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). Ken Booth defined security as emancipation, as the "freeing of people from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do" (1991: 319). In order to achieve true emancipation (and therefore, security), one needs to be freed from constraints like personal violence or war, but also from oppression, poverty, illness, etc.

On the other hand, the deepening of security referred to a change from a strict focus on the security of the state (national security) toward a broader focus on the security of people (Wæver, 1995). There was a transition from a state-centric view of security to a human-centric approach. Therefore, it was no longer believed that the security of the state was the key to provide security to society, but rather it was thought that by safeguarding individuals' security, the broader community would be secure. The term 'human security' was introduced in the *Human Development Report* published by the United Nations Development Programme in 1994, which very accurately described the need for this new perspective as follows:

> *The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly [...] Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives. For many of them, security symbolized protection from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards*. (United Nations Development Programme, 1994: 22)

The report suggested that the dominant notion of security should be broadened and deepened and named seven critical areas needed to be included: economic, health, food, environmental, community, personal, and political security. The recognition by the United Nations of these new concerns was an important moment in the history of security theory.

To conclude, it is safe to say that security is a dynamic notion which has evolved from a state-centric dimension, where military measures were seen as the solution, to a broader and deeper sense, in which the reference of security was the individual. But what is really security? And most importantly, how can we know what can be identified as a security issue in international relations? There is not an unequivocal definition of security because, as Barry Buzan (1983) claimed, it is an essentially contested concept. Nevertheless, Buzan did propose a way to describe it, stating that the general idea behind security was the pursuit of freedom from threat (Buzan, 1983).

4.2 Securitization as defined by the Copenhagen School

Once the concept of security has been properly understood, one can get a much more accurate idea of what the process of securitization entails. *Securitization* was first introduced by the Copenhagen School in *Security: A New Framework of Analysis* (1998). The Copenhagen School offers a constructivist approach to the securitization debate, claiming that issues are not inherently security threats, but rather that they become security threats when they are constructed as such. Buzan et al. once referred to this process by claiming that "by saying the words, something is done, like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship" (1998: 26). They explained how security becomes a *speech act*, a self-referential practice, because "it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue" (Buzan et al., 1998: 24). Therefore, when something is classified as a security threat it may not necessarily be because it is real threat, but because it is presented as such. That is why, in *Regions and Powers*, Buzan and Wæver described securitization as:

> *The discursive process through which an (i) intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat (ii) to a valued referent object, and (iii) to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.* (Buzan & Wæver, Regions and Powers, 2003: 491)

This definition perfectly summarizes the three key ideas that one needs to understand in order to fully comprehend the Securitization Theory. That is why each of the three statements will be further elaborated on in the following paragraphs, and it will also serve as the guiding thread through the analytical section of this work.

(i)   Securitization as an essentially intersubjective process

The fact that securitization is an essentially intersubjective process (Buzan et al., 1998) means that, in order for successful securitization to take place, it is not enough for the securitizing actor to define the reference object as a threat, a process which will be from now on referred to as *securitizing move.* In addition to this, the audience, the recipient of this securitizing move, has to accept the fact that the reference object presents an existential threat. If this is transferred to the Uyghur case, it would imply that it is not enough for the Chinese government to construct the Uyghur community as posing an existential threat if this is not accepted by the audience. Only when an audience agrees on the nature of the threat and accepts to take extraordinary measures, we can talk about securitization.

A graphic representation of the whole process is shown below:

Figure 1. **Representation of the securitization process**
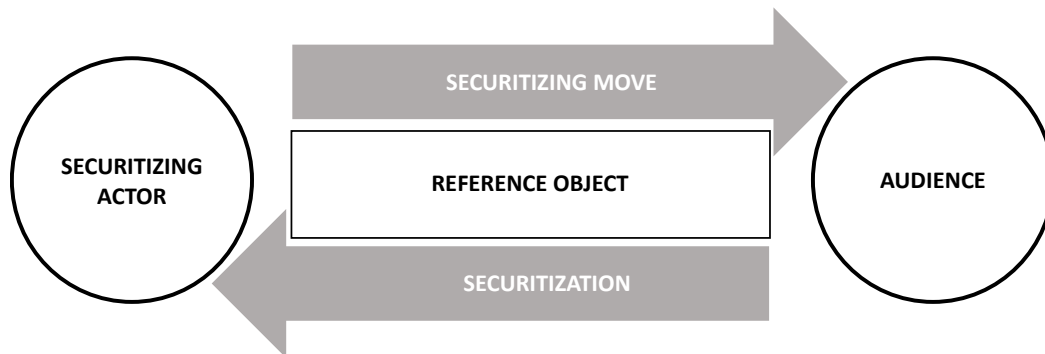
In order to better understand this cycle, it is convenient to look at a brief explanation of the three main actors involved. According to securitization theory, the securitizing actor is that who constitutes issues as extreme security matters that need to be urgently dealt with (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). They do this by labeling the issue in question as 'dangerous' and as a 'threat to security'. Securitizing actors have the "social and institutional power to move the issue 'beyond politics'" (Eroukhmanoff, 2017: 1). Moreover, the reference object is the body that is being threatened by this particular security issue. Lastly, the audience is the actor who perceives the securitizing move and decides whether to accept the construction of the reference object as a security threat or not.

(ii)   Security threats are classified as such by the beholder

Secondly, it should be noted that they explicitly mention that a threat is constructed as such always in relation to a 'valued referent object'. This means that there is not a universal criterion that allows to judge whether something poses a security threat or not, because it depends on the character of the referent object (Laustsen & Wæver, 2000). Laustsen and Wæver (2000) explained this by claiming that survival has different meanings to different nations, groups or individuals and therefore a same threat can trigger different dynamics as a response. Although Wolfers' (1952) work focused on 'national security', he shared the belief that nations can have utterly different perceptions of the same security threat. So, in sum, issues are not inherently security threats because of their nature, but are constructed as such by the beholder.

(iii)   Extraordinary measures

The third remarkable idea is that by labeling something as a security issue, the actor is claiming a right to implement extraordinary means to face it (Buzan et al., 1998). Therefore, classifying a certain conflict as a security threat has historically been used as a way to legitimize taking exceptional measures, such as the use of force. Throughout this thesis, this idea will repeatedly be manifested in the CCP's arguments for tightening their control over the Uyghur community on the basis of a potential exitential threat. It will be analyzed how, by using the security motive, the government declares an emergency condition, justifying the tightening of their control over the ethnic minority. The Copenhagen School defended that the concept of security "could be expanded as long as referent objects, threats and dangers were constituted with this logic of urgency and extreme measures" (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 12).

4.3   Securitization and suspect community theory

Looking at the Suspect Community Theory from a constructivist approach, it can be seen that the creation of a suspect community is really a process of securitization. Therefore, the construction of a subgroup as suspicious can be explained through the three previously mentioned pillars of securitization:

Firstly, it is coherent to think that for a community to be securitized, there needs to be a securitizing actor that depicts the group in a way that constructs it as a security

threat. Furthermore, for there to be full securitization and not just a securitising move, the audience needs to agree and accept such narrative. Also, it must be considered that a group becomes a suspect community in the eyes of the beholder and therefore, different individuals may not perceive a same object as a threat. Recalling Breen-Smyth's (2013) work presented in the *State of the Art* of this thesis, this can be associated with the theory regarding imagined communities, as she also refered to suspect communities as produced by the securitized imagination (Breen-Smyth, 2013).

Lastly, the justification of extraordinary measures based on the asumption of a security threat is a fundamental aspect to analyze when studying the treatment of suspect communities. In the case of the Uyghur minority, their presumed link to separatist, extremist or terrorist movements is being employed as validation to forceably tranfer innocent civilians to re-education facilities. Some authors have even implied that the possibility of applying stricter measures is one of the major reasons for the CCP to brand certain groups as terrorists. This will all be further examined in the eighth section, which will draw on the theory of the Copenhagen School to explain the different steps that led the Uyghur community in China as a whole to be under suspicion and suffer from extraordinary and repressive measures.

5 Research objectives

Taking into consideration the previous chapters, it can be concluded that the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Uyghur ethnic minority is of particular interest from the point of view of Security Studies. More specifically, the Uyghur example poses a noteworthy case study when looking at both the Copenhagen School's description of the process of securitization, and suspect communities' literature. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to examine the construction of the Uyghur in China as a suspect community. In order to so, this work will also aim to determine whether the East Turkistan forces have been securitized by the Chinese Communist Party and if so, how it has been done. Secondly, it will be argued that there has been an extrapolation of the security threat from these groups to the Uyghur community as a whole which has had severe implications for the minority.

Therefore, the main research question that this work aims to answer is: how have Uyghurs been constructed as a suspect community by the Chinese Communist Party? In order to answer this query, it is necessary to first look at three other questions: Have the East Turkistan forces been securitized by the CCP? If so, how? And how has this been extrapolated to the Uyghur minority, constructing it as a suspect community? As a way to find a solution for these questions, the analytical section of the present thesis will aim to study the veracity of the following hypotheses:

1. There has been a securitizing move through which the Chinese Communist Party has depicted the East Turkistan forces as a security threat and has justified the implementation of extraordinary measures.

2. The securitization of the East Turkistan forces has allowed for the whole Uyghur minority in China to be constructed as a suspect community through a process of generalization or extrapolation of the alleged threat.

6 Methodology

This thesis builds on existing literature on securitization and the construction of suspect communities and analyzes how these processes have taken place in relation to the case of the Uyghur minority in China. Thus, the analytical section of this work looks at the construction of the Uyghur suspect community through a two-step approach: 1) analyzing the securitization of the East Turkistan forces through discourse analysis, and 2) determining how this has been extrapolated to the whole Uyghur community by analyzing the new legislation and security practices implemented by the Chinese Communist Party.

The initial goal of this thesis was to employ the discourse analysis method to look at the securitization of the Uyghurs and how this eventually converted them into a suspect community. Nevertheless, there were clear limitations to this approach. The lack of available official documents dealing with the ethnic minority specifically and the very limited reliable translations that could be found publicly would have led to a poor and inconsistent analysis and would have not allowed to come to firm conclusions on the subject. Therefore, it was preferred to evaluate how the East Turkistan forces were portrayed by Chinese media and CCP's official statements. Both perspectives have been jointly analyzed as due to the strict press censorship in China and the close relationship between the Chinese government and the Chinese news agencies examined, it can be argued that they both share a common perspective on their depiction of the East Turkistan forces as a threat to security.

The information gathering process started by looking for literature written on suspect communities and securitization. Such information was mainly obtained from primary sources, which allowed the author to establish the theoretical foundations of this paper based on the main contributions made in the field. The majority of the information used was obtained from academic papers published in International Relations magazines and found through platforms like *Google Scholar*, as well as on books. Furthermore, secondary sources were also employed as they often provided very comprehensive pictures of the theories explained and provided literature overviews and enriching comparisons of different authors.

As for the analysis, in order to determine which Chinese newspapers should be the main information sources to examine the securitization of the East Turkistan forces,

three were selected following the next criteria: Firstly, I looked at the nine most popular online newspapers in China as ranked by the New York Times (Wong, 2018). Secondly, all the papers that could not be found online in English were discarted and lastly, the focus was set on the three sources which contained the most information on the matter and were known to share and portray the CCP's ideology in their publications (People's Daily, 2020; Reporters Without Borders, 2005). The resulting three sources were *China Daily*, *People's Daily* and *Xinhua*, three of the major newspapers in China. Additionally, in order to find information on how the East Turkistan forces had been securitized, the main search strategy was looking for "East Turkistan" or "East Turkestan" through the searching tool of each newspaper, filtering the results by relevance and finally manually choosing which provided relevant information for the case study.

As for the second half of the analysis, focused on the construction of the Uyghur minority as a suspect community, most information was obtained from academic papers, as well as official reports and legislation enacted by the Chinese Communist Party, the United Nations and some other institutions within the UN. Moreover, this Bachelor thesis also includes secondary sources, such as the work of other authors who contemplated the Uyghur case in Xinjiang or the critiques made by groups of scholars, as a way to offer a more complete and reliable evaluation.

7 Context

In order to better understand the main events which will be analyzed throughout this work, it is important to consider the historical and political background in which they took place. As it was previously mentioned, modern China's relations with Xinjiang date back to the times of the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century (Roberts, 2020). However, this period is too broad and analyzing the Uyghur case throughout such a long era would be highly complicated. Therefore, for the sake of providing an adequate context, we will start by looking back at the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

7.1 Who are the Uyghurs?

The Uyghurs are a minority that primarily inhabit the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the Northwest of the People's Republic of China (Beller-Hann et al., 2007). Apart from the approximately 12 million Uyghurs living in Xinjiang (Global Times, 2021), about 500,000 Uyghurs reside in other regions around the globe, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey (Roberts, 2020).

Additionally, Uyghurs speak a language derived from the Turkish linguistic family (Roberts, 2020). However, language policy and pressure for Uyghur people and other ethnic minorities to assimilate the Chinese language have been a big part of China's nation building project (Dwyer, 2005). As for religion, most Uyghur people identify as Muslims (Roberts, 2020), which has also raised some red flags for China as it has been perceived as a threat to the country's desired religious homogeneity and stability.

7.2 What are the "East Turkistan forces"?

The term "East Turkistan forces" has often been used by the Chinese Communist Party when talking about radicalized groups within the XUAR with separatist intentions (The State Council Office of Information, 2002). It refers to a wide variety of Uyghur separatist groups and it includes terrorist organizations such as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement or the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), but it also comprises non-violent separatist groups (Gunaratna et al., 2010). Furthermore, the expression "East Turkistan forces" is linked to two attempts of the Uyghur people to achieve independency: the proclamation of the Turkic-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan and of the East

Turkistan Republic, in 1933 and 1944 respectively. This explains why nowadays there is some controversy regarding how the XUAR region should be called. While the Han majority generally refer to it as Xinjiang, some Uyghurs prefer to use "Eastern Turkistan" instead (Roberts, 2020). The latter is deeply connected to its Turkic population and could be interpreted as having separatist connotations.

Specifically, the ETIM was recognized as a terrorist threat by both the United Nations and the United States of America. In August 2002, Richard L. Armitage, who was then Secretary of the State, declared that the ETIM had committed, or could potentially commit, acts of terrorism that would threaten the security of the United States (Armitage, 2002). Later in 2002, the organization was listed under the United Nations Security Council's 'Consolidated List'. In that same statement it was discussed that ETIM should also be known as "The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party b) The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah c) Islamic Party of Turkestan d) Djamaat Turkistan" (United Nations Security Council , 2021: 148).

7.3   How is China's relationship with its minorities?

As stated by Bovingdon, "nation building has unquestionably succeeded in China's core provinces, often called 'China proper'" (2010: 5). Among the remaining regions resisting incorporation into the Chinese nation, there are some remarkable cases like that of Tibet and Xinjiang, in which Han people are a minority (Bovingdon, 2010). The way in which the Chinese Communist Party has treated groups like the Tibetans and Uyghurs throughout history and has aimed to tighten control over them is worth summarizing in the following paragraphs, as it is key to understand the main ideas behind this thesis.

There has been a significant evolution in the policies implemented by the CCP regarding these subgroups of the population, going from times where regional autonomy was encouraged to years of repression and forced assimilationism. In the beginning of the 1950s, the Chinese government maintained a relatively tolerant attitude towards minorities (Wu, 2014). During those years there was a high involvement of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the governance of the Xinjiang region, and it was an era marked by accommodation policies. However, in the late 1950s, under Mao Zedong's presidency, repressive and assimilationist policies were put in place regarding minorities in the PRC. The following years were marked by policies like the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957),

which targeted local nationalism forcing minorities like the Uyghur community to get rid of their culture and traditions and assimilate the Han way of living (Bovingdon, 2004; Davis, 2008). During this period Han state-directed immigration started to arise, as the government wanted to increment the Han population in the XUAR. After a short period in which those measures were loosened, the arrival of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) led to a stronger grip over ethnic minorities in the PRC, which particularly affected regions like Xinjiang and Tibet (Mukherjee, 2010).

During times where the CCP's grip over minorities was streghtened, pressures on the Uyghur people to assimiliate linguistically and culturally into the Han-dominated society were palpable. Religious practices that differed from those of Chinese Buddhism were punished, mosques were destroyed and religious leaders were persecuted (Davis, 2008). When defining the assimilationist policies implemented by the Chinese state, Bhattacharya declared that they "not only sought to submerge the local identities into Chinese identity but also in the process threatened the local identities to extinction" (2003: 362-363). The cultural and social differences of the Uyghur people were seen by the government as counter-revolutionary threats, and so under the Mao regime they aimed for a homogenization of society (Kanat, 2016). Cultural diversity was not only seen as not enriching but as a threat to the stability and security of the Chinese nation.

With the arrival of Deng Xiaoping to China's presidency in 1978, the radical assimilationist programs that had been implemented were replaced by softer policies which were no longer so strongly focused on depriving minorities of their customs and beliefs (Bovingdon, 2004; Wu, 2014). This era saw a transition from an assimilationist approach to an attempt at granting higher regional autonomy to minorities (Wu, 2014). Thus, throughout the 1980s the culture, language and religion of the Uyghur community bloomed once again after a long period of repression and censorship.

During the 1990s, the CCP changed the strategy to encourage Uyghur loyalty to the state. Instead of forcing them to integrate into the Han-dominated society, they aimed to undermine Uyghur calls for independence by promoting economic opportunities in the region. However, signs of separatism and disloyalty were still punished at the time (Roberts, 2018) and despite the Chinese government's beliefs that economic progress and a more pluralistic approach would help eradicate Uyghur dissent, these actions clearly did not solve the conflict. This was perfecly reflected by the several riots and attacks that took

place in Xinjiang, such as those in Ghulja in 1997 and the bombing of three buses in Urumqi, three weeks after.

In sum, the idea of the dissent of ethnic minorities leading to a fight for separatism has been one of the biggest concerns of the People's Republic of China since it was constituted in 1949. As it has been previously mentioned in the introduction, the so-called Chinese Century of Humiliation gave way to a new-found nationalist sentiment, a strong desire for the PRC to prosper and achieve the place it deserved to occupy within the international sphere. From then on, any challenge that could potentially hinder the consecution of this goal would be deemed as a threat to the union and stability of China and, ultimately, to the security of the country. All of this explains the state's concern with safeguarding social order and helps understand why separatism has become one of China's major fears. Although regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang are particularly seen as potential security challenges for China, all attempts of separatism constitute a security threat in the eyes of the CCP. This is because separatist beliefs and movements threaten cohesion and social stability, and that is why Uyghur separatism was initially constructed as a threat to Han Chinese nationalism and to the security of the People's Republic of China (Bhattacharya, 2003).

Furthermore, maintaining social order in Xinjiang and being able to hold down separatist aspirations was not only important because of the strategic relevance of the region, but because if separatist movements were to succeed in Xinjiang, it could possibly have a domino effect in places like Tibet or even Hong Kong (Purbrick, 2017). Hence, it is not only Uyghur separatism itself that concerns the CCP, but also the potential repercussions it may cause in other minorities who already manifest dissent. The Chinese government is terrified of such disorder in the country and therefore aims to keep stability above all, implementing whatever measures are necessary.

More recent events shed some light on how separatism was not just a concern of the past powered merely by the humiliation the country had suffered from. As an example, in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was constituted by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. That same year, the SCO ratified the *Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*. In that document, the six parties agreed on joining their efforts to combat the

'Three Evils' of separatism, extremism and terrorism, which were all explicitly defined as threats to international peace and security (Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, 2001).

7.4   What changed after 9/11?

After September 11, 2001, commonly referred to as 9/11, tolerance of minorities in the XUAR was even lower than before (Davis, 2008). In fact, it has been argued that it was not until 9/11 happened that there was such emphasis on describing the incidents mentioned as terrorist activities with potential links to international terrorist groups. The events of 9/11 could be defined as a historical rupture which marked a before and after in terms of how security policy was understood worldwide (Holloway, 2008). Former United States President George Bush's speech was a call for action to the international community. Through the following words, he declared what was from then on known as a Global War on Terror (GWOT):

> *The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st century. A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them.* (Bush, 2001)

As a consequence, since the occurrence of said attacks, states started putting in place an extensive regulative effort not only to fight terrorism, but to prevent it as well (Li, 2019). Labeling separatist movements as terrorism became a way to delegitimate the enemy and justify extraordinary measures of repression against them, because handling terrorists violently was not only tolerated by the international community after 9/11, but also encouraged (Roberts, 2020). And so, from then on, the CCP made an active effort for the Uyghur separatist movement to be associated with global terrorism, as a way to gain international validation and support to tighten their control over the ethnic minority (Clarke, 2013).

8 Analysis

The analysis presented in this section will aim to answer two main questions. Firstly, it will explain how the East Turkistan forces have been securitized through both the CCP's discourse shown in official declarations as well as on press releases published by Chinese news agencies. Secondly, the study will look at how this process of securitization has also led to the construction of the Uyghur minority in China as a suspect community.

8.1 Securitization of the East Turkistan forces

The analysis will build on the three key ideas highlighted in the theoretical portion of this work in order to examine whether it is correct to talk about securitization in the case of the East Turkistan forces and, if so, how exactly it has had been done. Recalling Buzan and Wæver's (2003) findings on *Regions and Powers*, the three core characteristics of securitization are that: (i) it is essentially an intersubjective process, (ii) security threats are portrayed as such by the beholder, and (iii) it is used to justify the implementation of extraordinary measures to block the development of the threat. The following paragraphs will look at each of these three features separately in order to implement a systematic approach to answer the first question at hand.

8.1.1 Main actors within the intersubjective process

Securitization is essentially an intersubjective process, meaning that it involves the interaction between different actors that play a key role in it. Thus, the first step towards successfully determining how the East Turkistan forces have been securitized is defining who the main actors are, following Buzan et al.'s (1998) identification of the agents within securitization.

To start with, the *securitizing actor* that has depicted the East Turkistan forces as a security threat is the Chinese Communist Party, the government of the People's Republic of China. Through discourse, the CCP has portrayed the East Turkistan forces as a threat to security and has urged the implementation of several measures to deal with them. It can be said that in this case the securitizing actor complies with having the social and institutional power required to move the East Turkistan issue beyond politics and depict it as a security threat (Eroukhmanoff, 2017). Furthermore, although delimiting the *audience* is a complex undertaking in this case, it could be assumed that due to the

powerful character of the securitizing actor and the little opposition allowed within China due to strict censorship practices (Reporters Without Borders, 2021), the acceptance of the threat requirement is also fulfilled (in spite of strong opposition at an international level). It is worth noting that despite having classified the CCP as the main securitizing actor, this section will also build on the representation of the East Turkistan forces in Chinese press. Nevertheless, the main news agencies studied are state-owned or are known to have a close relationship with the CCP, so they offer a shared perspective on the matters which will be discussed. Lastly, the *reference object*, whose union and stability the CCP seeks to protect from the East Turkistan forces, is the People's Republic of China and its population.

Because proving the acceptance of the threat by an audience is particularly complicated in this case, the following sections will focus on analyzing the *securitizing move* through which the East Turkistan forces have been constructed as a threat to security, rather than the process of securitization as a whole, and how this has been used to rationalize strict measures regarding separatism, extremism and terrorism within the PRC.

8.1.2 Construction of East Turkistan forces as a threat

The first precondition in order to talk about a securitizing move is that one must be able to confirm that the issue is being defined as an existential threat. It will be seen how sometimes this is explicitly done by directly portraying the issue as a threat, but this is not always the case. It might also be that the subject of securitization is indirectly presented as dangerous or evil or is dehumanized by the securitizing actor. In order to prove that the East Turkistan forces are being depicted as a security threat, this analysis will look for press releases and declarations made by CCP officials where the issue is explicitly or indirectly portrayed as an emergency, as an urgent matter that poses an existential threat to China and its people.

In general, it has been found that the wording employed to depict East Turkistan forces is quite similar across the main sources analyzed. Throughout the several articles and reports examined, the securitized object has been portrayed as an existential threat to the security of the country, as an evil being and even as animals or infected individuals that need to be contained.

In 2001, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang Jiaxuan claimed that China was being threatened by terrorism and that the East Turkistan terrorist forces were "trained, equipped and financed by international terrorist organizations" (Jiaxuan, 2001). Through this direct depiction of the East Turkistan forces as a terrorist threat, Jiaxuan (2001) was describing the fight against these groups as an important part of the global fight against terrorism, asking for inclusion of the East Turkistan threat within the Global War on Terror. Likewise, popular news portals in China have also directly represented the East Turkistan forces as a security threat by branding them as a "grave public hazard" for the PRC and as "posing a serious threat to the security and stability of surrounding countries and regions" (Xie & Wang, 2002). The contribution of these news releases to the construction of the East Turkistan forces as an existential threat is crucial. By describing the issue not only as a national threat, but as having international consequences, the size of the threat is magnified.

This trend of depicting East Turkistan forces as a global threat is also reflected in another crucial declaration that took place in 2001, when the Chinese government published a document titled *Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by "Eastern Turkistan" Organizations and Their Links with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban*. This offered a list of incidents of terrorist violence committed by East Turkistan groups, including the East Turkistan Islamic Movement among others, both in and outside of China and stated that Osama bin Laden had offered financial assistance to Hasan Mahsum, the leader of ETIM (Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by "Eastern Turkistan", 2001). Once again, these statements reflect how the CCP has explicitly defined the East Turkistan forces as a threat to the security of China and its people. Additionally, linking China's enemy directly to Al Qaeda, responsible for the 9/11 attacks, was a clear way of asking for acceptance of ETIM as a global danger, once again amplifying the size of the threat.

Another example can be found when evaluating the speech of a Chinese spokesperson at the East Turkistan National Conference, when he referred to the forces of East Turkistan as "a terrorist force with the objective of splitting China" which "closely colluded with the international terrorist organizations to undertake numerous horrible violent terrorist acts in China and its neighboring countries" (Spokesperson on East Turkistan, 2001). Both labelling East Turkistan forces as terrorist organizations and describing their actions as 'horrible' have great implications for the construction of East

Turkistan groups as a threat. Likewise, in 2002 the PRC published the paper *East Turkistan Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity*, in which they shared a comprehensive list of all the alleged terrorist activities carried out by the East Turkistan forces from 1990 to 2001 in the XUAR. This document explicitly recalls multiple "explosions, assassinations, arsons, poisonings, and assaults", offering a detailed explanation of the different events that define the group as a threat to security (The State Council Office of Information, 2002).

Furthermore, it has been found that one of the most common ways in which both the Chinese Communist Party and news agencies have constructed the East Turkistan forces as a threat is through their dehumanization and demonization. On one hand, the East Turkistan forces have been demonized, as they have been depicted in the media as representing the previously explained three evils of separatism, extremism and terrorism. East Turkistan forces and their members are interchangeably described as radicalized, separatists and terrorists. This is particularly the case for the East Turkistan Islamic Movement or Turkistan Islamic Party, defined in the *People's Daily* as an "extremist, terrorist and separatist organization that challenges China's sovereignty and stability in Xinjiang" (People's Daily, 2021). The use of terms like 'evil' and 'vicious' is therefore common when talking about the East Turkistan forces (Amnesty International, 2004; Xinhua, 2013). Several news articles on Chinese media label the group as a terrorist organization and emphasize its role as a "common evil of mankind" (Hua, 2002).

On the other hand, the East Turkistan forces have also been dehumanized through their portrayal as animals and even through the use of medical terminology, as if they were a disease that needed to be eradicated. For instance, CCP officials have portrayed terrorists within the East Turkistan forces as rats that needed to be chased down by the authorities (Amnesty International, 2004; Klimeš, 2018). As for the use of medical terminology, it is exemplified by their description as having "been infected with the jihad mentality" (Ash, 2002). This dehumanizing approach is widely used when portraying issues as security matters, particularly in the case of terrorism (Martini, 2021). In the following sections, it will be seen how this could be associated to the mass interment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, which can be interpreted as an attempt to eradicate the Uyghur culture as if it was some kind of disease (Roberts, 2020).

In sum, the analysis of the CCP's representation of the East Turkistan forces both through official statements and through Chinese media shows that there are three main ways in which these groups are being constructed as a security threat. Firsly, by clearly stating that the East Turkistan forces pose an existential threat to China and its people; secondly, by demonizing the organizations and highlighting their link to the three evils of separatism, extremism and terrorism; and lastly, by dehumanizing them, whether it is by referring to them as animals or even using medical terminology to depict them. These three paths to constructing the threat show that the first precondition mentioned to talk about a secuirizing move is fulfilled, and leads to the second precondition which will be studied in the next section: Is this being used to justify the implementation of extraordinary means to face it?

8.1.3 Justification of extraordinary measures

The second precondition in order to be able to talk about a securitizing move is the existence of a call for urgent action in order to implement extraordinary measures to fight the threat. By looking at some of the sources analyzed in the previous section, it can be said that this requirement has also been fulfilled.

Chinese news agencies have called out the East Turkistan forces on multiple occasions and defended the CCP's right and need to design measures to prevent and eliminate threats of this nature. It is frequent to find declarations made by CCP figures urging the party to "crack down on these terrorist" (Ash, 2020). Furthermore, Chinese media has conveyed the concerns of the regional government in the XUAR and its perspective on the measures executed as absolutely "necessary and never excessive" (Cui & Mao, 2021), implying that the East Turkistan forces constitute a threat that needs to be fought with whatever means are necessary. Additionally, it has been explicitly argued that Uyghur separatist terrorism "prompted China to initiate tough anti-terror programs" (China Daily, 2021b). Hence, the alleged terrorist attacks carried out by the East Turkistan forces have been established as the main reasoning for the anti-terrorism and anti-extremism measures implemented by the Chinese Communist Party in recent years (Cui, 2020). In particular, a clear example of how CCP officials justify the implementation of extraordinary measures was the statement by Zhang Xiuming, deputy secretary of the XUAR committee of the CCP when he declared:

"We need to take the initiative and go on the offensive, crack down on gangs as soon as they surface and strike the first blow. We must absolutely not permit the three vicious forces to build organizations, have ringleaders, control weapons and develop an atmosphere. We need to destroy them one by one as we discover them and absolutely not allow them to build up momentum". (Amnesty International, 2004: 1)

This declaration clearly communicates the message that urgent measures need to be implemented immediately. The wording employed is highly explicit and demonstrates a determined will to fight the root causes of the threat.

In addition, a frequent approach which has been identified is the depiction of East Turkistan forces as a global security threat followed by a call for international cooperation in order to prevent and fight it. This is perfectly manifested in the following statement by Jiang Yu, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman: "The international community should make concerted efforts to crack down on 'East Turkistan' forces and terrorism in whatever form" (China Daily, 2009). This inducement to strengthen international anti-terror cooperation is a clear sign of the justification of extraordinary measures (China Daily, 2013). Moreover, by looking back at Jiaxuan's statement in 2001, when he established a connection between the East Turkistan forces and international terrorist organizations, it can also be observed that he was claiming that East Turkistan forces were not only a national threat, but an international one. Therefore, he implicitly stated that the dimension of the efforts to fight the group should be international as well. This reflects the will of the PRC back in 2001 for East Turkistan groups to be recognized as a threat to international security, which would ultimately justify the deployment of global extraordinary measures supported by the advocates of the GWOT.

It is also common to find the same formulations repeatedly when the CCP and Chinese press agencies justify the existence of re-education camps, which are often described as "vocational education training centers" (Lao, 2019). The main reasoning defended by the CCP is that they are part of a broader system of preventive counter-terrorism measures "aimed at educating and saving those who have been influenced or brainwashed by extremist preaching and those who have taken part in terrorist activities under duress" (China Daily, 2021a). These facilities are portrayed as being aimed at helping "those who are eroded by terrorism and extremism to return to the right track and

help them obtain skills to support themselves and reintegrate into society" (Xinhua, 2019a). Therefore, it is presented as a justified measure based on the idea that young generations are more vulnerable to becoming radicalized and joining terrorist organizations, as well as on the basis that members of the East Turkistan forces need help redirecting their lives into the right path.

To conclude, this section has looked at how the CCP has claimed the right and need to justify extraordinary means in its discourse. Having examined the construction of the East Turkistan forces as an existential threat to the PRC and the Chinese population, and the implementation of extraordinary security practices as means to fight this threat, it is now appropriate to study how this is linked to the securitization of the Uyghur minority and how it has ended up constructing them as a suspect community. This will be further elaborated on in the next portion of this work.

8.2 Construction of the Uyghurs as a suspect community

Ideally, this section would also employ the discourse analysis method in order to examine the way in which the Uyghur people have ultimately been constructed as a security threat, and then build on that to explain the creation of a suspect community. However, this alternative has not been deemed feasible because of a lack of information available on the matter. By looking at the depiction of the Uyghur community by the Chinese media and the CCP, it is very complicated to identify any negative connotation or formulation used to describe them, because there is simply no official source in which the whole minority is depicted as dangerous, evil or threatening. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that there has been a transfer of the allocation of the threat from the East Turkistan forces, to all Uyghurs with separatist and extremist ideologies and, ultimately, to the whole Uyghur community. Because it can be difficult to understand the extrapolation of the East Turkistan issue to the whole Uyghur minority, this section will aim to explain how exactly this has taken place in practice.

Furthermore, as it was previously mentioned, one of the main arguments defended by the Chinese Communist Party in its justification of measures such as the re-education camps is the need to take preventive measures, which tackle the symptoms of terrorism, as well as its root causes (Xinhua, 2019b). Such an approach is employed to securitize not only confirmed terrorist organizations, but also all "two-faced people" (CGTN, 2021),

all individuals who may potentially become radicalized and be tempted to join the East Turkistan forces. This is used to justify the application of strict surveillance systems in order to detect and eliminate these individuals, before they become part of the terrorist threat. Therefore, the CCP has constructed all separatist and radical individuals as a potential threat and used this to claim a right to implement means to spot them and train them to go back into the right track, which demonstrates that there has also been a securitizing move in this case.

Nevertheless, in practice the measures are not only affecting radicalized individuals, because the definitions of extremism and terrorism which the CCP has set as reference are too vague, leading to the arbitrary classification of practically any Uyghur as related to the East Turkistan forces (Roberts, 2020) and the mass detention of innocent Uyghurs under the pretext of preventing and eradicating terrorism and religious extremism (Amnesty International, 2018a). By recalling the *State of the Art* of this work and looking particularly as the work of authors like Hillyard (1993), it can be argued that legislation and security practices play a crucial role in the creation of suspect communities. Thus, the succeeding part of this thesis aspires to determine how the Uyghurs have been constructed as a suspect community by analyzing pertinent legislation regarding this issue within China.

8.2.1 Generalization facilitated by the law

Although it is not believed that Uyghurs have become a suspect community as a direct consequence of counter-terrorism practices and laws, regulation has indeed played a major role in their portrayal as potential threats, as it has failed to accurately describe what should be deemed as terrorist threats (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019), leaving some sort of legal vacuum that has allowed government officials to accuse nearly anyone as a sympathizer of the East Turkistan forces.

The Anti-Terrorist Law of 2015 perfectly reflects how widely and vaguely terrorism has been defined by the CCP. In Article 3, it explicitly defines terrorism as:

The use of violence, sabotage, intimidation and other means to create social panic, endanger public safety, infringe upon personal property, or coerce state

agencies and international organizations to achieve their political and ideological
purposes. (Anti-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, 2015: art. 3)

Such a broad formulation poses the risk of placing peaceful human rights activism or religious activities under the same category as international terrorism (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019). Specifically, the addition of 'other means' at the end of the presented definition makes it fail to precisely describe what should and should not be considered as terrorism, and therefore does not compose an adequate legal framework.

Additionally, the law of 2015 further builds on what should be identified as 'acts of terrorist nature'. Within this category, the CCP includes actions such as "propagating terrorism, inciting terrorist activities, or illegally possessing articles that promote terrorism" (Anti-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, 2015: art. 3), which is extremely imprecise. It is not possible to unequivocally determine exactly what activities are included within this classification.

It is also interesting to note that Article 19 demands that telecommunications operators and Internet service providers implement "network security, information content supervision systems, and security technical preventive measures to prevent the spread of information containing terrorism and extremism" (Anti-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, 2015: art. 19). This section already sheds some light on the surveillance system that has been enforced on the Uyghur community ever since, where censorship is not only encouraged but required when 'extremist messages' may be transmitted within the region or even across borders. However, the article does not provide a definition of what should be considered as an extremist message either, once again leaving too much room for interpretation and endangering innocent civilians and their privacy. The main problem is not explicitly shown in theory but suffered by many in practice.

Fearing the consequences this law was already having on ethnic minorities within China, in November 2019, a group of rapporteurs from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights wrote a joint letter directed at the Chinese government in which they laid out a series of comments on the effect and application of the Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China. The intention was mainly

to convince the CCP to reconsider some of the statements contended in the law as they had raised fears in relation to human rights. More specifically, the rapporteurs were seriously worried about the recent arbitrary persecution and detention of civilians and their enforced relocation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019). Likewise, they were very concerned about the limitations of "the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the right to education and the right to freedom of movement" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019: 2). These issues were especially troublesome in the case of certain ethnic minorities, such as Uyghurs and Tibetans (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019).

Although these articles may not imply a problem in an explicit manner, in practice they leave extensive room for innocent civilians to be placed under suspicion in an unjustified way. And this can be applied to the whole problematic around the Uyghur case. It has not been legally accepted nor publicly admitted that Uyghur people in the XUAR are being forcibly taken to mass internment camps. However, there is evidence that it is indeed taking place in practice, it is just being labelled as "free vocational training" by the Chinese government (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019). That is why in their letter it is argued that counter-terrorism law should always comply with the principle of legality so that it could not be used to "target civil society on political, religious or other unjustified grounds" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019: 5).

In 2017, Xinjiang's government introduced the De-Extremism Regulations, which were also criticized for jeopardizing human rights and resulted in the unjustified incarceration of multiple individuals. Some of the expressions of extremism identified within this law included actions such as wearing a beard or choosing certain names for children with extremist connotations. In this case, the problem with these norms is not only that they are too vague, but rather that they label civilians as extremists for insignificant acts. With the enactment of this law, ethnic minorities like the Uyghur were left vulnerable and unprotected by the law, dependent on the interpretations made by local officials who executed the will of the government. Just like in the case of the Anti-Terrorist Law of 2015, there are expressions such as "other speech or acts of extremism"

(Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 2018: 14) which make it possible to target essentially anyone, linking them to extremism and therefore justifying extraordinary measures to prevent radicalism from spreading across the region.

In sum, the main argument defended is that the broad provisions collected in the analyzed laws have not directly converted the Uyghur people into a suspect community, but they have indeed allowed for it. This way, the minority has gone under suspicion and is suffering from the deployment of severe and generally unjustified measures.

9   Conclusions

In the past few decades, several scholars have engaged in the study of suspect communities and have proposed their very own reasoning behind what exactly these communities are, how they are created, and the consequences of being part of one. Suspect community theory has been used in the literature to examine cases like the Muslim community in the United Kingdom, or the Irish people in Britain during the IRA era. However, it had not been explicitly applied to the case of the Uyghur minority in China. Additionally, it has been argued that the construction of a suspect community is essentially a process of securitization as explained by the Copenhagen School. Hence, due to the academic interest of this matter and its geopolitical relevance, this thesis aimed to look at the Xinjiang conflict through the securitization and suspect community theories, in order to explain the whole process that has led this minority to be seen as suspect and how this has been used to justify extremely strict security measures like the forced transfer of millions of Uyghurs to re-education camps.

Because there are no public declarations in which all Uyghurs are explicitly portrayed as an existential threat to security, this analysis followed a two-step approach in order to examine how the Uyghurs have been constructed as a suspect community. Firstly, it has looked at Chinese media and official Chinese Communist Party's declarations in order to see how the East Turkistan forces have been discursively portrayed as a threat and used to justify the implementation of extraordinary measures. The construction of the East Turkistan forces as a threat was mainly done by depicting the group as dangerous, evil, and even dehumanizing the members of the organizations, calling them rats or claiming they had been "infected with the jihad mentality" (Ash, 2002). It has also been proved that the CCP has explicitly claimed a right to implement urgent and extraordinary measures to "crack down" on the groups and has even called for international cooperation in order to fight the East Turkistan forces, claiming that they were not only a national threat, but a global one.

Secondly, although in theory the measures implemented by the Chinese government are supposed to be targeted at terrorists and radicalized individuals who could potentially become terrorists, this is not the case in practice. It has been argued that there has been a transfer of the threat from the East Turkistan forces to the entire Uyghur

minority in China, and this has been facilitated by the establishment of vague legislation regarding extremism and terrorism. Because the actions included under the labels such as "terrorist action" are so imprecisely defined, there is too much room for interpretation, and this allows to justify the arbitrary detention of virtually any Uyghur under the pretext of extremist or terrorist behavior. The main takeaway from this conclusion is that although the Uyghurs have not been constructed as a suspect community *because* of legislation and security practices, these have definitely *allowed* for their construction as a suspicious body and as a threat to security.

Finally, the strict measures that have been unleashed over the Uyghur minority in China have shaped the country's relationships with the international community, as the violations of human rights carried out in the re-education camps and the surveillance systems implemented have raised great concern around the globe. Therefore, the main findings of this thesis are now of particular interest, as they offer a different perspective through which to examine this polemic issue and understand how innocent Uyghurs are being targeted by the CCP's measures in practice. Although a lack of accurate information has been an important limitation throughout this work, securitization and suspect community theory can be enriching tools for analyzing the Uyghur case and it would be very interesting to use a similar approach in the future if there is more public information on the matter that allows for a more detailed analysis of the construction of the East Turkistan forces as a threat and of how this has ultimately affected the totality of the Uyghur community.

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