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PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Welcome and Opening Remarks:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good afternoon. My name is John Allen and I'm the president of the Brookings Institution. On behalf of all of us here, I'm honored to welcome you to this important conversation about the past and the present and the future of the Chinese province of Xinjiang.

Brookings is a place that is grounded in reasoned and civil debate, no matter how difficult the individual topic might be. As an independent, nonpartisan institution, we speak in facts, and we let those facts guide our conclusions and our policy recommendations.

In the case of Xinjiang, this distinction is exceedingly important, and our purpose here is to seek truth from facts. And what those facts show, based on media reporting with ever-increasing detail, is that there has been a systematic Chinese government series of directives to suppress the ethnic Uighur population in Xinjiang.

What began as an effort to surveil and to secure Xinjiang several years ago has escalated over the most recent past into the use of mass detention and ideological reeducation of this population. As a result, we've seen a growing division in the world between countries that have condemned this behavior and those who have sided with China.

Last summer, for example, 22 countries sent a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council urging China to stop its arbitrary mass detention, surveillance, and restrictions on freedom of movement. In response, 37 countries came out in support of China's counterterrorism, deradicalization, and vocational training policies.

Then this past November, *The New York Times* published an extensive article citing 400 Chinese language documents outlining the Chinese government's policy and motivations for sending as many as a million Uighurs to internment camps and prisons over the last three years. This article was followed by a second piece by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which analyzed the leak of six cables outlining how

government officials should target people and regulate life inside the camps.

Now, the Chinese government has defended its policy, saying that its actions are necessary to ensure social stability and to protect against the threat of infiltration from Uighur connections with transnational Islamic militant groups in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and Central Asia too, I might add. This is a complex and, of course, it's a deeply concerning and emotional issue.

Despite this, I think all of us will concurrently agree on several fronts, but in particular, first, as we examine this issue that certainly the U.S. and the China relationship is the most consequential bilateral relationship in the world at this point in history. But second, even in spite of the apparent recent progress on trade relations, this relationship is currently at the lowest points we have seen in several decades.

This sets the backdrop for the importance of this conversation today and a continuing conversation on these and related matters. Regrettably, China's actions in Xinjiang and its narrative justifying those actions serve only to reinforce negative perceptions by many Americans and many American policymakers. And it has created an increasingly wide rift between the U.S. and China in its important and consequential relationship as a whole.

In fact, international terrorism is an area that is ripe for cooperation between the United States and China. However, because the Chinese government has chosen to link international terrorism with domestic repression and the detention of Chinese Muslims, it will undoubtedly become ever more difficult, if not impossible, for the United States and other countries to collaborate with China on matters associated with terrorist threats.

As you see from the agenda of today's conference, the panel will explore the historical antecedents of China's actions in Xinjiang, the evolution of these actions, China's use of technology for internal security, and what the ramification of these actions will be. I'll now turn the program over to our moderator, Ryan Hass, and our very distinguished group of panelists, some of whom have traveled from great distances to be with us, and who

will help us to examine all aspects of China's approach to Xinjiang and the Uighur population and offer perspectives on how the United States and the rest of the world should respond.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. HASS: Well, thank you all for being with us this afternoon. My name is Ryan Hass. I'm a fellow here at the Foreign Policy Program at the Brookings Institution. And it's really an honor for me to moderate today's event.

Our goal is to try to shed new light on a difficult subject by looking at it from a historical angle, from an internal security perspective, from a technology perspective, and from a human rights angle. And I think that we have an all-star panel to help us do that today.

But before I introduce them and introduce the event, I would like to briefly recognize an individual in the audience. He is someone who matters a lot to me. We were previously colleagues at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. He taught me a lot about Xinjiang. He took Ambassador Huntsman and others to Xinjiang. He is a friend that lives with us now in the United States. His name is Akram Karim. Thank you, Akram. (Applause)

We're going to break our panel into four parts today. In the first section, we will talk about each individual's area of expertise. In the second, we will ask our panelists to engage with each other's arguments and identify some of the gaps or variances in viewpoints between them. In the third, we will try to look forward to where Xinjiang may be heading and what the United States and others might be able to do to help move the situation there in a more positive direction. And then the fourth section's yours. It's a chance for you all to engage this group of experts with your views.

The first individual that I will call on is Dr. James Millward. He is a professor at Georgetown University, one of the leading voices in the world on the history of Xinjiang and also of ethnic policies in China.

The second panelist is Dr. Sheena Greitens. She is a nonresident senior fellow here at Brookings, a professor at the University of Missouri, and one of the leading

experts on China's internal security policies.

Dr. Chris Meserole is our third panelist. He is a fellow here at Brookings and an expert on the intersection of technology, emerging technology, and domestic international security.

Our fourth panelist is Dr. Sophie Richardson, a human force of nature, and expert on human rights issues and the China director at the Human Rights Watch.

So with that by way of introduction, let's jump into this. If I could start with you, Dr. Millward, can you sort of help us understand, situate? You've written, looking back to the Qing Dynasty, how China has thought about and approached its management of Xinjiang and of ethnic issues more broadly. Can you walk us through that a bit?

MR. MILLWARD: Yeah. So I guess the region we call Xinjiang now, it's sometimes called East Turkestan or Chinese Turkestan, it's a geographical and ethnographical part of Central Asia. And it was brought under the control of Beijing, which was then the capital the Qing empire in the middle of the 18th century. And like many other empires, the Qing ruled with a system, with an approach we could call imperial pluralism. So this is not a democratic pluralism, it's not a liberal system, but it means that you allow local elite, local peoples more or less to govern themselves, local cultures to pertain in local places for the simple reason that otherwise it's very, very difficult to rule a vast area and lots of different people. So that was the Qing approach, similar to the Mongol empire, in many ways not so different from that of the British empire or the Russian empire in Central Asia and so on. So we can call that imperial pluralism.

And then the PRC, when it took over the region, it followed a disrupted period of a few decades, during which Mongolia declared independence with the fall of the Qing empire; Tibet declared independence, and there were various parties, in what is now Xinjiang, that also set up independent regimes. The Russians and the Soviets were in there, as well.

And so coming out of all of that, there was a situation where the southern

part of Xinjiang was under control of the Kuomintang, the Nationalists, who had reestablished some control in the South, and the northern part was under a state known as the Eastern Turkestan Republic, which was strongly supported by the Soviet Union, which was initially trying to do with it as it had done with Outer Mongolia and create a kind of client state, a satellite state.

Because it was the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party that won in the civil war in China, it was difficult to carve off northern Xinjiang as a satellite, and so basically a deal was made between the Soviets and the Chinese. And there was actually -- it's a complicated history, I'm sorry I'm going on too long here.

MR. HASS: No, please.

MR. MILLWARD: But, I mean, negotiations between the U.S. and the Nationalists at Yalta in 1945 had been part of this overall kind of constellation that allowed for whatever new Chinese nation state that took power after the war there to reassume control over former Qing Central Asia. So out of all that, the People's Republic of China took control of the region.

And they faced the same kind of problem that the Soviet Union faced in taking control over the former tsarist empire. How can you be a socialist state, which in many ways has risen to power on the strength of being anti-imperialist, and rule over an empire? Right? You need to kind of square that circle in a certain way.

And so the Chinese system, which we call the *minzu* (民族) -- "minzu" is a term that means ethnicity or nationality -- is similar in many ways to that of the Soviet system. It's a kind of top-down diversity regime which recognizes a fixed number of different peoples, channels resources towards them, gives them their own -- recognizes them and actually valorizes their existence as a way of -- as a bulwark against assimilation, against, in the Russian case Russian chauvinism, in the Chinese case against Han chauvinism or Chinese chauvinism. And so if we talk about the Qing as imperial pluralism, I think we can call what the PRC, their *minzu* system, a kind of neo-imperial pluralism or something like

that.

That was the system from the '50s. That's the system that gives us the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and others on the maps like that. Of course, that autonomy is more on paper than it was in reality. But as a diversity regime, it did function in many ways over the long spread of decades. It ended up being supported by the non-Han peoples of China, even though in the Cultural Revolution, of course, it was not; yeah, it was much abused. So that was the system by which the PRC has governed Xinjiang and other places with minority populations.

MR. HASS: And so this minzu system or ethnic system, when did it begin to fray?

MR. MILLWARD: So one can kind of tick off a timeline. Obviously, 1991, the breakup of the Soviet Union was a shocking event to the Chinese Communist leadership. They thought perhaps that this kind of neo-imperial pluralism of the Soviet system had been responsible for some of that. Obviously, there are many more reasons for that, economic reasons and so on. But that was something of concern.

The unrest in Tibet in 2008 and in Ürümqi and Xinjiang in 2009, you know, very serious, very sort of bloody incidents of civil unrest, those two were very concerning events. And so around that time there began to be a conversation in ideological circles, among anthropologists, among party thinkers that perhaps there needed to be a second generation, a new approach to *minzu* in China, to ethnicity in China.

And, of course, through those decades, as well, under the influence of the global war on terror, there was a lot of Islamophobia, waves of Islamophobia running around the world, which fueled some of these concerns in China while, at the same time, providing a cover for a lot of crackdowns and other events aimed at the Uighurs.

And so the next stage, I guess would be the emergence around 2013, 2014, in China generally of a handful of horrific events which fit the Salafi terrorist model. There had been other incidents of unrest before. I think most outside observers would not say

they're necessarily terrorists and, therefore, they would not -- or Islamic terrorists and, therefore, would not call for similar types of policies in response. Of course, in China, all unrest gets called separatism, terrorism, extremism, which leads to a one-size-fits-all kind of diagnosis of the problem.

So those events clearly upset Xi Jinping very, very much. I think what happened was in particular a bombing at the Ürümqi train station which two or three people died while Xi Jinping was actually in Xinjiang. That alarmed him very, very much. And one of the senses that you get from the documents which we just mentioned is that he was angry at local authorities in Xinjiang. What are you doing? Your policies don't seem to be solving this problem. We're really going to take care of it now. And much closer control from party central in Beijing began to be implemented in the region.

So that's I think where we see -- and then there's a series of speeches by Xi Jinping -- a shift in the ideology. No longer -- well, it had been the public stance of the party that economic development in the region would eliminate unrest. And Xi Jinping himself in his speeches started saying, you know, that's probably not going to do it. We need, in addition to development, we need qing shen shang de(精神上的), we need spiritual or psychological methods, as well, to address this issue. And that really marks the shift around 2014 or so.

MR. HASS: As you look back in Chinese history, can you identify any precedents or any analogous experiences in Chinese history to what we are witnessing in Xinjiang right now? And if so, how did those play out?

MR. MILLWARD: I can't really.

MR. HASS: Yeah.

MR. MILLWARD: You fed me this question in advance and maybe you're thinking of something I don't know.

MR. HASS: No, I'm not. (Laughter) I think it's illustrative of --

MR. MILLWARD: It is kind of de novo.

MR. HASS: How unique this moment is.

MR. MILLWARD: I mean, obviously, there have been moments of what we would call ethnic oppression, moments of, you know, more assimilationist approaches. I mentioned the Cultural Revolution a few minutes ago and, you know, that was certainly a time like this.

The combination of technology, the use of mass internment, so-called reeducation, that has been -- that has appeared in the People's Republic of China before, but never on this kind of scale. And I think significantly never targeting ethnicity per se. There were political crimes, so-called snakes and I forget all the Cultural Revolution terminology, but, you know, thought crimes and so on were, of course, targeted that way. But never was ethnicity mapped directly upon so-called anti-Chinese or subversive or separatist thinking in this way.

MR. HASS: One final question before we turn to Sheena. You have written about diversity and how the Chinese may be altering their views of diversity and their tolerance of diversity, and Xinjiang is a case study of that. Can you sort of walk us through your argument there?

MR. MILLWARD: Yeah. So I'm a historian of the Qing empire and that kind of imperial pluralism that I was just talking about is not only seen in the frontier regions, but in a really quite creative and flexible repertoire of dealing with frontiers. For example, trade enclaves on the frontiers, such as Hong Kong was in the 19th century. Even the treaty ports, which we, of course, see as an external imposition upon China, actually served in a way -- they helped deal with certain problems, right, by allowing a kind of differential allocation of sovereignty, different kind of legal systems to function. It dealt with issues that were -- in a way that was helpful for the Qing empire.

And if we look in the 20th century, of course, the special status of Hong Kong, the whole idea of One Country, Two Systems arguably is really a continuation of this flexible approach to law, a flexible approach to sovereignty. That is in the Qing tradition. It's

really in the Chinese tradition, as well.

And what I see in recent years is the leadership turning their back on this in order to chase after this idea of the homogeneous population, which is a really a 19th century European kind of idea. Right? This idea that a nation state has to have a monochrome homogeneous people occupying it.

And then, not surprisingly, in addition to the problems in Xinjiang, we see problems in Hong Kong. We see the elections in Taiwan. There are similar issues, you know, in Tibet and so on. So it hasn't been a successful strategy turning their back on the existing diversity regimes they've had before. And, in fact, it seems to be causing a lot of problems.

So in an effort to be, you know, not only critical, but to try and provide a sense that, you know, China can be better than this, I offer this example of China's own historical case of diversity system that has worked with Chinese characteristics in the famous phrase. And I sort of brought that forward in the op-ed you mentioned.

MR. HASS: Yeah. No, I think you raise a very important point. If you look at four of China's peripheral regions -- Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan -- they're all, from Beijing's perspective --

MR. MILLWARD: Two of China's peripheral regions and -- three of peripheral regions and Taiwan.

MR. HASS: Okay, sure. (Laughter) We won't argue that here. (Laughter)
If I could turn to you, Sheena.

MS. GREITENS: Sure.

MR. HASS: You wrote a piece last week in *International Security* that has attracted a lot of attention. You talked about the idea of China's approach being a form of preventive repression in Xinjiang.

MS. GREITENS: Yeah.

MR. HASS: Can you help us understand what that means?

MS. GREITENS: Yeah, sure. I think -- so first, I want to thank you for having us and it's a pleasure to be with this group of panelists who I have a tremendous amount of respect for. My remarks are based on the study that came out last week in International Security. And I also just want to give a shout-out to my two co-authors, Emir and Myunghee, who are here with us today. So the article would not have come together without their input and I'm glad they could join us for the conversation.

I think that it's important -- so I look really at this from the perspective of what is China's strategy for maintaining political control? And that means the rule of the CCP, stability within a reasonable sort of margin under CCP control. And I think it's really important to understand that Xi Jinping, in my view, has fundamentally transformed how China approaches internal security policy and strategy.

And so Xi Jinping, in about 2014, he introduced this concept which he called "comprehensive security." And China has a long history of regarding external security and internal security as much more closely connected than, say, the United States does for legal and other reasons.

And so the sort of first hallmark of this was a reenergizing of this idea that external security and internal vulnerability were closely related. And, you know, we saw this in Xinjiang and in some of these peripheral regions after the fall of the Soviet Union. The idea that external developments could promote internal instability in China occurred in a particular way at the end of the Cold War. And Xi Jinping brought it back up and really made it into a set of guidelines that have become internal security doctrine in China.

So, what I see is a real doctrinal shift under Xi Jinping to a model that I would call preventive repression or prevention and control. The Chinese term loosely translates as prevention and control. And, in fact, you know, previously if you look at the way that policing and public security were done in China, the sort of '70s, '80s, you had this "strike hard" approach or a campaign-based approach to policing. Then the lexicon became very much one of stability maintenance. That was the sort of Hu, Wen, Jiang Zemin era

[that] was about stability maintenance. The term “stability maintenance” is virtually never used in Chinese political discourse anymore, at least in the politics and law apparatus. It’s been replaced by this term “prevention and control.”

Now, maybe this is just a sort of shift in buzzwords, but except for the fact that what we’ve seen is a massive overhaul of the legal structures around internal security; five, six, seven, eight different new laws or significant revisions of existing laws. The Ministry of Public Security, state security, and the legal apparatus have replaced almost all of their leadership, partly through anti-corruption campaign purges, partly through other personnel replacement, retirement, et cetera. So Xi Jinping has personnel-wise put his own stamp on the people who are implementing these policies. And we’ve seen a total reorganization moves in the People’s Armed Police, other significant reorganizations in the internal security apparatus under the Politics and Law Commission of the party.

So I think it’s really important to view Xinjiang in that context, which is that Xi Jinping, it’s not only that he decided that policy in Xinjiang was not satisfactory, but that China’s entire approach to domestic security was not sufficient. And that rather than doing stability maintenance, which was more reactive, there was a shift to prevention and control.

And what that’s meant in Xinjiang is an approach that is characterized by a much more collective and preventive approach to repression. And I can go into some detail on that if you want, but I think, again, it’s important to understand that China in some ways shifted the benchmark for what success and stability looked like to this idea that it had to be preventive.

And that’s included a lot of the tech stuff, which I’m going to try not to talk about. It’s fascinating, but I’m going to try to defer to Chris’ expertise on that.

But then I think, you know, what we see in this overall context is that a couple years in, after this visit to Xinjiang and after Xi Jinping had had some time to sort of think about and figure out how to apply this new internal security framework, that in about 2017 internal security policy in Xinjiang I think -- and we find in the paper -- took a pretty

hard right turn. So I'll stop there because I know you may have more questions.

MR. HASS: What do you think happened in 2017? Why was 2017 sort of a hinge moment?

MS. GREITENS: Yeah. That's a great question. And obviously, let me start by saying there is some elements of Chinese policy that have a lot of continuity and deep historical continuity, as well as more recent antecedents. So I'm not saying that everything was new as of spring of 2015. But we do see in the spring of 2017, Chen Quanguo goes for this Central National Security Commission Symposium in Beijing in February, comes back, and in March of 2017, these orders go out to start building large-scale detention and internment facilities for the Uighur Muslim residents of Xinjiang predominantly.

And so what you start seeing a real shift from selective reeducation, detention and reeducation. So there was a term it translates to kind of "drip feed" or like very individualized detention and reeducation to a much more broad-scale approach. And you see, again, this heavy emphasis on ideology and patriotic reeducation and pressuring the Uighur diaspora, which has impacted, I'm sure, some of the folks in this room.

And so that's a qualitative change in strategy. And just for comparison, I do want to highlight, you asked if there were any historical precedents. So I wrote my first book on when internal security services produce indiscriminate violence. And in reading about the Maoist period, I encountered a reference to Mao sending directives to Shanghai to arrest 0.1 percent of the population. These were in the counter-revolutionary campaigns of the early 1950s.

So at a moment of mass mobilization and relatively indiscriminate violence in the 1950s early Maoist China, you were looking at 0.1 percent of an urban population whereas now what we're seeing is 20 to 30 percent of Xinjiang's Uighur population. So there's a significant difference even between -- and we don't have a great sense of sort of what percentage of people were targeted in, say, the Cultural Revolution. But as one data

point, that's a pretty significant difference.

So in this article what we talk about, most of the explanations that have been given for what happened in Xinjiang focus on kind of the post-2009 period and they look at the contention and incidents of violence that Jim mentioned, shifts toward a much more assimilationist minority policy, and then the personal role of the party secretary, Chen Quanguo. And we think those are helpful and they're really fundamentally important pieces of the puzzle.

But what we find is that China was also paying attention, again, in this idea of comprehensive security to developments outside China's borders that they believed could create vulnerability inside China. And again, this is vulnerability from the CCP's perspective, right, not necessarily public safety or the way we would think about it.

And that's that China started watching, there were Uighurs who left following the uptick in the repressive environment in Xinjiang after 2009. And I'll say I was in Xinjiang in 2009, and it was impressive to see the force that was -- and the weight that was brought to bear.

But in the 2014 to 2016 period, there were a very, very small number of people from that group who left, who made contact with Islamic militant groups in Southeast Asia and then in Syria. These are very, very small numbers of people, none of whom so far have returned to China to be involved in any sort of anti-party or anti-regime violence. But it appears that China was tracking these developments very closely and that it paid sort of disproportionate or surprising amount of attention to that as a security development. And that appears to have played -- factored pretty heavily in this early 2017 shift.

And I think the documents that came out from *The New York Times* confirm that even for Xi Jinping personally, these developments were concerning. So you start seeing rhetoric about preventing returns. The IJOP, which Human Rights Watch has a fantastic report that looks at this app, one of the things it does is flag anybody who comes back. Chen Quanguo has given a speech about the need to prevent returns from abroad.

So the idea became that these people were sort of vectors of what the party literally talks about as an infection. And it could infect the broader Uighur body politic. And so an entire culture or religion became -- and the numbers were about 20 to 30 percent, were vulnerable to this "infection." That was the party's term.

And so the result was basically to sort of start treating an entire culture and set of religious practices as susceptibility to terrorism and as a security threat, even though the majority of individuals in those groups had no indication that they were actually vulnerable to or involved in any way in extremist behavior. A normal security or cultural practice became securitized in and regarded as a threat.

But from the CCP's way of thinking, to create immunity in the population you had to target everyone, even people who had not been exposed to the issues that they might be concerned about. And that, I think, is how you get to this point where you get a collective repressive strategy that seems so far beyond, you know, the handful of people that the CCP was paying attention to abroad. So to me that process, that pairing of watching these external developments paired with this perception of an actual cultural vulnerability, produced this policy where you see collective repression of people who have no behavior associated otherwise with extremism.

I just want to add, because I think this will probably come up in the discussion, that just because there is a security logic to that is not a moral justification. There's no blank check, oh, it's a terrorism issue, fine. Right? There's no blank check or moral justification for this. In fact, I think it's important to understand how you get to a policy where people are targeted who have nothing to do from the way that we would look at it and think about it with these phenomena. Why -- I think it's important to understand why the CCP would take that step and, therefore, to figure out what do you do at a policy level to try to change it?

MR. HASS: Mm-hmm. Well, thank you, Sheena.

And one of the things that I remember from being in government we were

always puzzled by was what exactly was it that the Chinese authorities knew that made them so afraid of their shadow that we didn't understand about their own vulnerabilities? Can you help us sort of walk through what do you think is animating this heightened sense of anxiety, paranoia, whatever word you want to use, to describe an effort to inoculate an entire culture against a perceived threat?

MS. GREITENS: I think that's a great question and a very, very difficult one to answer because I'm not sure that there's any answer that can be given that would make sense to me or to you in this room.

MR. HASS: Yeah.

MS. GREITENS: I know from the work that I've done on other authoritarian leaders that they have threat perceptions that are often at odds with reality. I wrote part of my first book on Ferdinand Marcos who saw coup plots around every corner. And especially I think, you know, one of the things that was interesting about The New York Times documents was to see how closely Xi Jinping queued on the events that happened when he was in or around the time that he was going to be in Xinjiang.

And so, for example, you see that Park Chung-hee got significantly more worried about internal security and changed a whole bunch of things about how South Korea operated after the assassination that killed his wife, missed him and killed his wife. And so things that personally impact an authoritarian leader often have an outsized effect on an entire country's policies in a way that doesn't make a lot of sense to us.

Again, I think that's only a halfway explanation. I know that, you know, Jim and Sophie and others have written a lot about the cultural way -- the way that culture itself has been stigmatized and targeted, and I think they probably have a slightly different answer. But from a security perspective I think that's probably the closest I can get you.

MR. HASS: Yeah. So one final question before we turn to Chris.

MS. GREITENS: Sure.

MR. HASS: Given what you've just said and described, is there any

scenario whereby you think the Chinese central leadership could become comfortable that they have established security in Xinjiang? What would success look like if the strategy were to play out? How do you think they define --

MS. GREITENS: I think the issue with the way that it's been defined now --because the other issue about policies is that once things are securitized it's very difficult to walk back the creation or framing of something as a security threat, and we see that in countries all over the world. Right? No one wants to be the leader who's lax on security.

MR. HASS: Yeah.

MS. GREITENS: And so once something's been portrayed as a security issue, especially in, you know, a relatively small group of people in the CCP elite, it's pretty hard for me to see how people are going to be comfortable. And most authoritarian leaders exist in some constant state of insecurity and it might go up or down over time, but it kind of comes with the job of not -- if you rule significantly by force as opposed to consent in the form of regular free and fair elections, then insecurity to some extent is, I think, part of the job. And I'm not sure that China will -- that the CCP, rather, will be truly comfortable.

I don't know, I would defer to Jim on this, but has there ever been a period of history where Xinjiang's been sort of -- the CCP has been comfortable with the stability and integration of Xinjiang?

MR. MILLWARD: I mean, one could argue in the '50s and the '80s it was relatively secure, felt stable.

MS. GREITENS: But I think the other point that we find is that it doesn't just depend on what's happening in Xinjiang. It depends on external developments, as well, that are not always within the CCP's control, so developments in Syria, for example. And I think it's going to be a rare constellation, especially as China gets more and more involved in the world. That means there are more and more places where instability or things not being within their control could make them uncomfortable. And I think that makes it a very tall

task, unfortunately, for policy and advocacy.

MR. HASS: Well, we aren't going to stop with the definition of the problem. We will talk in the coming period about what we do about this. But before we look prospectively, I do want to help frame this issue a little bit, and technology plays a big role in the strategy and tactics that Sheena just described.

Chris, you've written about digital authoritarianism. Could you help us understand what that concept means?

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah. So I think the short version of what digital authoritarianism is it's what happens when you give a dictator an iPhone and iCloud. Right? (Laughter) And the longer version of that is to say that digital authoritarianism is what happens when authoritarian regimes learn to use digital technologies, and in particular the scale of digital technologies, to solve two fundamental problems that authoritarian regimes have always faced and that historically they've been disadvantaged at relative to democracies. And those two problems are these.

The first problem is that, you know, whether you're a democratic regime or an illiberal regime, you pretty much always want to stay in power. Right? Like regimes are generally not a fan of regime change, no matter what kind of regime you are. And the first challenge to staying in power is to understand what your population is thinking. Right? So preference aggregation across your whole population. You need to know what they think of the job you're doing, whether you're liberal or illiberal. Right?

For authoritarian regimes that's always been a really hard challenge because if you're a dictator and you go up to somebody on the street and you ask them what they think of what you're doing, they're not going to tell you. Right? They're only going to tell you one answer, which is that you're doing great and you're amazing.

And it's actually a problem for -- you know, we saw this in like the Arab Spring with regimes, like in Egypt, where they just grew careless over, you know, decades of authoritarian rule. They lost touch with what the population was thinking. They were quickly

overturned.

Every authoritarian regime or almost every authoritarian regime is constantly trying to figure out what the kind of public preferences are in their population, so that they can better gauge the political costs and risks of certain policies.

Digital technologies provide a new way for authoritarian regimes to begin to understand what, you know, aggregate preferences are in their population in a way that they never could before. And that's a huge advantage that kind of erodes what has long been an advantage for democracies, which is that we use elections to figure that out. And so elections are not just just and morally good. They're also really efficient ways of telling those in power what the population wants to happen.

The second problem that authoritarian regimes have really faced is the challenge of what to do about dissidents who are seeking regime change, how to identify them as individuals, at the individual level, and to understand where they are, what they're thinking, and how they're operating. For a democratic regime this is, again, it's fairly straightforward, partly because there's fewer people in a democracy, like a full liberal democracy, who are seeking regime change. But also because when there are people in the democracy that seek regime change, their citizens generally provide the government information about the people who have such extreme violent views that they want to overthrow the government. So it's not a huge challenge for democratic regimes to figure out who is such a dissident that they might try and overthrow us.

For an authoritarian regime, it's an extraordinarily difficult challenge to try and identify who in your population -- you know, Dr. Greitens was talking earlier about I think it was the Marcos regime in the Philippines kind of seeing a plot around every corner. You kind of have to have that paranoia if you're an authoritarian ruler because it's really had to figure out who the dissidents are.

And historically, there's only really been two ways of doing that. One is to go into a population that you think might not appreciate what you've been doing and try and

coerce them to tell you who among them are kind of the problems for you. Right? And so you kind of -- it's the hearts and minds approach or the carrots approach.

The other option historically has been to use just mass brute force. And you basically either kill or detain en masse local populations because you can't identify who the problem -- like from your perspective -- who the dissidents are in that community.

What technology is doing is it's providing a third kind of approach. It's not hearts and minds. It's not brute force. It's kind of this Big Brother approach to the authoritarian problem of how to identify dissidents. And what's interesting about what's happening in Xinjiang and where this kind of digital authoritarianism really intersects with Xinjiang is that we're starting to figure out -- you know, in the past, sci-fi writers had kind of written about the Big Brother approach, but we've never actually seen it because the technology wasn't mature enough yet for it to be available as an option. This is really the first time in history starting a few years ago where it was viable as an option. China's kind of pioneering it in Xinjiang.

And unfortunately, for those of us who have been kind of thinking about this for a while, we thought maybe the Big Brother would be worse than the brute force or maybe brute force would be worse than Big Brother. What seems to be happening is that China's combining both of them. And it's not that Big Brother -- like the Big Brother approach where you don't actually need to use that much force because you kind of contract everybody in real time. They're using all like the kind of mass coercive techniques that a lot of authoritarian regimes have used in the past, but they're combining them with this new digital technology that gives them both kind of mass levers that they can pull and, also, really, really fine-grained specific ones.

And it's going to cause, in my view, in the long run, it's going to cause them some significant problems within that population. I would also say from a human rights perspective and if you're somebody who favors liberal democracies, you know, hopefully, you care about what's happening in Xinjiang because of what's happening to the people

there. But even if you don't, you do have to worry that what's happening there is going to kind of begin to spread out to other regimes around the world.

MR. HASS: Can you to a technologically—not illiterate—but not super sophisticated audience, such as myself, help us understand what types of technologies are China using now that weren't available before that allow them to pursue this Big Brother approach?

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah. So I would say like over the last decade there's really three new technologies that have come into play that are all kind of merging and that China really has more experience at this point merging together than anyone else. And those three technologies are, one, your smartphone, right. And what you mean by the smartphone is that it's not just the computer, it's all the sensors that are on there. It's the camera. It's the microphone. It's the GPS, like geolocation devices on there.

The cost of producing what used to be -- like if you wanted to get a GPS chip 20 or 30 years ago, that was really something only states could afford. That's now like in everybody's phone. So the cost for remote sensing went down dramatically, which meant that you could track things, the location of things very precisely around the world.

The second was the cost of cloud computing and the huge expansion in cloud computing, which meant that the smartphones could now -- they didn't have to do all the calculation on the phone. They could shift a lot of the computation to the cloud. So your phones are kind of constantly pinging servers around the world.

And the combination of those two, the ability to kind of have remote sensing capabilities in real time and couple that with massive computing power, is something that's really new and only been possible in the last few years, especially as, you know, smartphones, the cost of them came down and mass adoption rose.

And then the third piece of this was really earlier in the last decade. There were a lot of breakthroughs in machine learning that allowed for new kinds of capabilities that, you know, machine learning as a field has gone back really to the '40s and '50s, but it

became mature in a way that it really hadn't in the past. And in particular, for surveillance it meant that you could identify people by their voice or by their face much more easily than you could have in the past.

And in particular, we're starting to get on the verge of enabling mass real-time facial recognition technology, so that you can kind of use one live video feed or, you know, 100,000 live video feeds and be able to track everybody in all those videos in real time. And that's a capability that just did not exist in the past. And it's one that I think authoritarian regimes or illiberal regimes have dreamed of having forever. It just was not feasible until very recently.

MR. HASS: You talked earlier about what's happening in Xinjiang potentially spreading outwards, either within China or beyond China's borders.

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah.

MR. HASS: Have we seen that yet or where are we?

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah, unfortunately, we've already seen both. I mean, it hasn't galvanized as much attention yet, but, you know, even within China I think one of the common misconceptions is that China's only using these technologies within Xinjiang. That is completely untrue.

And, you know, one of the most pernicious in my view was there was a variant of facial recognition technology where the researchers trained an algorithm to identify Uighur faces, right, and Muslim faces. And then they kind of shipped that software to local police departments elsewhere in China that they could use to monitor CCTV cameras in real time. I would argue that the accuracy, the present accuracy of any facial recognition technology probably isn't good enough to be able to tell you who a Uighur is versus a Han Chinese in China or between different races elsewhere. You know, it's good enough for some things, but it's fairly harmless when Google photos misidentifies your photo. It's not harmless when the state is able to kind of screen people with software that isn't fully baked yet.

So they are using that software elsewhere within China. They're also beginning to export it outside of China.

One of the big questions now is kind of what kind of state capacity you need to be able to build out and duplicate what China's doing in Xinjiang. So I think we're starting to see an answer to that, which is that the Gulf countries in the Middle East who have both the resources and the desire and interest in implementing this model are starting to do so. The UAE in particular, Saudi Arabia, as well, they are kind of working and UAE in particular is working closely with some Chinese companies on this. And unfortunately, it's beginning to spread out. And I think as the cost of it begins to decrease, you'll start to see it in more and more countries around the world, as well.

MR. HASS: China isn't the only country in the world that has the ability to develop advance technology. How are other countries approaching questions around building guardrails around uses of technology for social control? And what is the conversation at the international level on uses of that?

MR. MESEROLE: At an international level I think that there's a really robust conversation that's starting to happen now around things like facial recognition technology and what kind of rights that a democratic society wants to give individuals. Because fundamentally this technology is kind of changing the balance of power between individuals and states. And the relationship between an individual and their government is no longer mediated directly through the ballot box, but through all these technologies that now exist.

And it's producing, at the local level and at the national level and at the global level, a lot of really important policy conversations that are happening. You know, we saw in the United States, for instance, that San Francisco banned facial recognition technology from being used by their police department because they didn't think it was ready yet. I think we'll see more and more initiatives like that. And I think it's incumbent upon us as democratic societies to really figure out what we think about the use of these technologies.

I think one point I would make is that, you know, I have a right over my iPhone. Right? Like you can't just take my iPhone from me. I do not have a right over my face. Right? Like you can use -- anybody here can take a picture of me and use that picture however they want. And I think we're going to have to rethink as facial recognition technology matures, you know, what kind of guardrails we're going to put around them.

MR. HASS: Thank you, Chris. We've talked at a historical level, at a internal security level, and a technological level. We can't lose track of the human level. And, Sophie, can you help us, to the extent possible, understand how life has changed for people living in Xinjiang in recent years?

MS. RICHARDSON: Sure. First, I want to thank Brookings. And, Ryan, thank you. I don't know if Brookings quite understood when it hired you that it wasn't just getting a China expert, but also somebody who's very committed himself to human rights.

I also want very much to acknowledge all of our Uighur friends who are in the room today. I think it's fair to say that we will be working on your behalf until it's as easy for you to call your families as it is for us to call ours. We'll leave it at that for now.

Human Rights Watch has been documenting serious violations against Uighurs for probably 20 years. And some of our earliest work really looked at the establishment and the implementation of one of the most pervasive restrictions on Islam really of any government in the world dating back to the early, I would say, 1990s. I mean, there's certainly been restrictions before that, but if you look at the series of laws and regulations that have been adopted, it's a pretty thorough-going set of restrictions on a very particular faith.

A certain amount of our work was also around issues like particularly enforced disappearances in the wake of the 2009 protests. We actually managed to get into the region and do interviews to document that Uighur men and boys had been taken away from their homes in the wake of those protests and hadn't been heard from since.

One of the other issues we were tracking with increasing frequency, I would

say sort of roughly 2007 to about 2014, and of all the issues, honestly, I wish we had perhaps paid more attention to, and I think we're going to spend some time talking about this, but I think it's important to understand where we are now on some things, about restrictions on movement. And I don't just mean movement within the region, but literally for Uighurs to get from Ürümqi to Kashgar you have to get permission or to get out of Xinjiang you had to get permission. But it was also getting progressively harder literally for people to get out of the country. We're watching the borders get much more difficult to cross.

And one of the distressing pathologies that arose in response was the kind of pressure that Beijing would put on other governments to force refugees and asylum-seekers back to the country. I actually looked this up a couple of months ago. The number of letters and press releases that we wrote to Thailand, to Pakistan, to Cambodia, to you name it, we went through about 25 different countries just in the space of a couple of years urging them not to send people back. Coupled with that, increasing focus on diaspora communities worldwide, harassment, surveillance, tracking people, finding their family members.

You know, increasingly we weren't just writing about these issues in places like Canada or the U.S. or Australia that have, you know, considerable and very visible, at least to us anyway, diaspora communities, but places like Egypt where people had gone to study. You know, and these were places where Uighurs had gone with all legal rights to enroll in schools, but who were clearly becoming increasing targets of attention for local Chinese government officials.

I would say between about 2014, 2016, we were writing a lot about I would say what could loosely be classified as controls on identity. I thought we'd hit rock bottom when we saw the new regulations prohibiting people from giving their children particular Muslim names for fear that they would -- that those names would incite -- Jim will remember the language -- excessive religious fervor. We think who tells people what to name their kids? Come on. That's a matter of state policy?

But, you know, we're also seeing, for example, regionwide inducements at interethnic marriage, providing financial and other kinds of benefits for a Uighur who would marry a Han. Again, you think what on Earth is that about?

Increasingly, we saw less access really at any level of education for people to study in Uighur. You know, access to bilingual education is a key human right. So we were watching sort of this series of restrictions that weren't just about in response to particular events, like the protests, or about particular markers such as Islam. Really these were much more pervasive, widespread restrictions and it was a little bit tough to figure out what exactly this was all about.

But I certainly remember you and I had a conversation in about 2015 in which, you know, I said, look, it's very clear that things are going south. We're not exactly sure what's driving it. We're not exactly sure where it's going. But this needs a lot more attention.

And I think in the coming months what we were starting to hear really from people all over the world was about losing contact with their family members. People started coming to us and saying my mom has deleted me from WhatsApp. I can't get ahold of my aunt. You know, I used to have a regular weekly call with my family members. You know, and we heard this from a couple of people here and we sort of thought, okay, we'll look into that. We heard it from a couple of people in other places.

And within a couple of months, there was an enormous amount of information to suggest that there was something far more systemic going on. At which point we started getting out and doing interviews all over the world and were able to produce a report about the political education camps that we now know had been put in motion in 2017. And I think life for the people who have been in these facilities and who continue to be arbitrarily detained, let's be very clear there is no legal basis, none, even under Chinese law for these facilities. None. If we want to talk about that more, happy to do that.

But what we've detailed happening in those facilities is, first of all, the

primary goal seems to be really political indoctrination. Swearing your loyalty to the party, to Xi Jinping, and effectively relinquishing or being forced to relinquish, you know, any kind of distinct markers of a Uighur-Turkic-Muslim identity. You are not allowed to pray. You are forced to learn Mandarin.

We did document cases of torture and ill treatment in these facilities. And I think it's fair to say that everybody who's in these facilities is being subjected at least to psychological torture because they have no way of knowing when they're going to be released and they have no access to family members or to counsel.

But we also wanted to make the point in that report that life outside the political education camps is not a whole lot better these days; that the pervasive surveillance really means that people can't do much outside the line of sight of the state. You know, it's a region that's awash in surveillance cameras, tools like the integrated joint operations platform, a police app that tracks different kinds of behavior and many of the behaviors that are tracked are legal. They are not criminal in any sense. You know, constantly updates authorities on where you are, what you're doing, who you're related to, where you're going. The pervasive sense of surveillance I think really has very much changed how people live their lives.

We did ultimately wind up writing also about the integrated joint operations platform, which is consistent with the work we had been doing about surveillance technologies and how they're being abused by the Chinese government in a context where there really are no privacy rights. I think Xinjiang is different and even more difficult because people have even less access to rights in that region than in other parts of the country. But we also wanted to make the point that this kind of technology really can be used effectively to help engineer a dissent-free society. You know, we can come back to that theme.

But I think it is also worth pointing out that we are watching Beijing harass communities across the world. It's not good enough to just either arbitrarily detain people inside the region or radically restrict their conduct outside camps, but inside Xinjiang, Beijing

is also going after communities all over the world. And that's an issue I'd like to talk about a little more.

MR. HASS: Well, can we go there now?

MS. RICHARDSON: Sure.

MR. HASS: Because we talked at -- started out at the human level, but now I want to ask you at the systemic level what is happening in Xinjiang? Because you also think about global human rights norms at a macro level. How do you see what is happening in Xinjiang affecting the efficacy of existing norms on human rights globally?

MS. RICHARDSON: It's not good. I mean, that's the short answer, but I'd like to talk more about impunity and the fact that the Chinese government is getting away with this. These are some of the most serious human rights violations inside China really since the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. And, you know, if we were talking about sort of roughly comparable situations -- or let me put it to you this way. I think if just about any other government in the world was arbitrarily detaining a million Muslims we would be having a very different conversation right now. We would be well on a track towards things like independent fact-finding missions, towards accountability, towards grievance procedures, things like that. But because China is so powerful in the international system now, many of those avenues or those pathways to accountability are blocked. And we have certainly been trying to make the case that this is an extraordinary test for the international human rights system to hold a very powerful member to the same standards of accountability as anybody else.

MR. HASS: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDSON: And it can't fail. And if it does fail, then we should all be much more concerned.

MR. HASS: Yes. Thank you, Sophie. I wanted to give each of the panelists an opportunity to pick up and engage on each other's arguments because beneath this very respectful façade there are philosophical and fundamental differences between

them. (Laughter) And they may not be immediately intuitive, but I think that's important that we as an audience and we as a community spend some time understanding what the different viewpoints are and how they all fit together.

So I don't want to put any of you on the spot, but I want to start with Jim and then work our way down. If there's anything just in a moment or two that you want to pick up and either emphasize or provide a different spin on.

MR. MILLWARD: Yeah. So, I mean, just to draw some distinctions, and I don't think they are a fundamental philosophical difference, but there's some aspects of the story that get left out and I'm going to summarize them with a very Chinese kind of slogan of the four "not just abouts." All right.

So it's not just about, number one, Uighurs. Right? There are Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Hui, Han, Mongol, right, other people who have been brought into this one way or another and who are ending up in this situation. And, of course, we know that.

I mean, one framing that's useful to think about is indigenous peoples of the region. And we tend not to use that terminology when talking about China, but it's useful to think about the situation. If we do use that terminology how does that possibly change? Or the indigenous Central Asians, instead of saying China is interning 3 million Muslims, what if we say they're interning 3 million indigenous peoples? Right? Same story, slight different frame for putting on it.

Not just about the camps, right. So the bulk of people who are being interned are indeed in these so-called educational transformational camps, but there's some 500,000. We have very good public statistics from China of people who were arrested since 2016 and put into the prison systems like this. And we don't know a lot about how they are, but they do seem to include not just criminals, but also intellectual, cultural, political, commercial elites. Indeed, those peoples were among the very first to be wrapped up and wound up like that.

So I guess I would add it's not just about religion, as I was just saying. It's

professional people are very much, you know, in the front lines who were targeted like this in Xinjiang, but also abroad. And it is indeed true there's this fear of contagion from abroad. But ironically, the thrust of much of the policies have been not to keep dissident Uighurs out, but to bring them back, right, through various means: cancelling passports and giving one-way travel documents to come back; putting pressure on governments to refoul all sort of people like this. Right?

So there's a concern to bring folks back and not just those who are studying religion at Al-Azhar or other places, but those who are working on Wall Street or those who are lawyers or those who are academics and others. They're feeling this kind of pressure, too.

And I guess my last -- I've already started talking about it, but my last "not just about" would be it's not just in Xinjiang, and Sophie brought that up, as well. So it's sort of a global thing.

Oh, sorry, one more. And so it's not just about security either, I think, although that is an important piece of it and we can follow the timeline. And indeed, my timeline did suggest that that's where this is beginning from, but when we look at the whole picture of who is targeted and who is interned and even little hints here and there within the released documents. For example, there's one line in one of them saying it's very difficult to talk to college students about this or to deal with college students. Why? Because they don't fit the stereotyped image of the Uighur person who is an ignorant bumpkin, supposedly susceptible to extremist thought virus. And that's the image that's trotted out in propaganda videos.

That's the implicit target of all of these policies in the -- which you can tell from the documents. And you can hear from local officials saying, well, it's kind of hard to bring this story about you don't know it, but you're susceptible to this virus to college-educated people who are probably better educated than the police on the ground.

MR. HASS: Thank you. Would any of you -- Sheena, would you like to --

MS. GREITENS: Sure, yeah. So I think that with apologies to Ryan, I'm not sure I find much to disagree with in terms of what Jim is saying. And I want to be clear that when we talk about the counterterrorism or the security logic of this, that's kind of in addition to the cultural and religious destruction that other people have already written about. It's just that there's already been a lot of very, very smart work on that and we hadn't seen a lot that looked at and critically interrogated this claim about, you know, what terrorism or the perception or fear of it did and didn't get in terms of explanatory leverage.

And I'll say like this is an uncomfortable discussion to have in many cases and for many people and this goes all the way back to studies of the Holocaust. Right? Where you have someone like Primo Levi talking about the concern that if you get too close to explaining something that is a truly horrific moral and human outcome, that you're somehow uncomfortably close to justifying it.

People who work on political violence and security are pretty used to saying like, yeah, we don't study war because we think it's good. Right? We study war because we think it's horrific and we'd like to find out why it happens, so we can get in there and stop it. So I guess that's -- probably it's a difference of emphasis more than a sort of fundamental disagreement about what's going on.

I have a point about tech, but if you want to --

MR. HASS: Yeah, please.

MS. GREITENS: -- let somebody else jump in

MR. HASS: No, please, Sheena, go for it. And we'll just work our way down.

MS. GREITENS: Well, I think that one of the important things to understand about the tech, and I would agree with you that there's a real misconception that this is only happening in Xinjiang, I will also say that I think it's half right to say that these things are being developed in Xinjiang and exported to the rest of China. And I think that's really important for understanding sort of how Chinese citizens, either Han citizens in Xinjiang or

elsewhere in China, or even other ethnic groups, might perceive the use of technology.

And think about what's happening, which is that, you know, if you look at some of these data monitoring, data collection, and really data integration platforms, they were experimented with in Beijing, in Shanghai, kind of the major cities on the East Coast in the last 2000s. And they were developed and these tools were being experimented with there before they were applied in Xinjiang.

Now -- and actually, if you look, Xinjiang, it's per capita security spending prior to 2009 was well below the national average because it's a poor province. And provinces fund 80 percent of the public security budget. And so I think what happened in 2009, again, from like the standpoint of the public security official, is there's large-scale unrest around that time in both of these large western regions that are culturally distinct and have this autonomous status, but they're also underfunded and under-resourced from the perspective per capita police forces and per capita security spending. And so the response is to sort of massively overcorrect.

But I think it's important to understand this because, you know, if you talk to people, the way that these technologies have been developed and deployed in the East is very different. And, therefore, the perception of them is often very different.

So, for example, in a number of places in urban Eastern China these tools are used, for example, to figure out how to allocate service provision or road repair or things like that. And so they do, like -- yes, they're used to sort of demobilize public contention and dissent. I'm not taking anything away from that aspect of them. But they do a broader range of functions, including demobilizing people sometimes who are protesting because they want housing or they want more compensation for a house that was knocked down or there's an official who's corrupt who did something and they want redress from a higher authority. Right?

So there's a much broader range of functions, including service provision and coercion that the same system uses in the East. And I just think that if you think about

the role of this tech in China, China's always applied different governance approaches and had a kind of experimental way of doing things that then get scaled up. And that's some of what we're seeing with this tech stuff, so it doesn't work the same way in all parts of the country.

And so if you ask somebody in China, they might have had like even a positive experience with this kind of data collection. That's part of how you get people not to argue with putting in this. I mean, how many of us like, you know, to have location stuff on in our phone so that we can catch a Lyft or an Uber. Right? I mean, it's -- it makes life easier.

And so just like we find some benefit to technology that locates and tracks us, like so do citizens in China. So I think it's important to recognize that there are elements of it that are more ordinary if you're going to talk about how you talk about and think about this. And that's why this global conversation is so important.

MR. HASS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah, I would agree with everything you had said. I think one question I have coming away from this conversation that I'd grateful for my colleagues' input is on whether, you know, Dr. Richardson, you had mentioned earlier that China was starting to almost kind of shape beliefs or trying to shape beliefs within Xinjiang, which is a little bit different than just using technologies or using government power to monitor. Right? You're actually trying to get ahead of it by shaping beliefs.

And I'd be curious for your sense on given how hard it is for Western countries to understand what's happening on the ground there, whether you think it's working. Like is it an atrocity because it's bad, obviously. But is it also -- like what is the efficacy of it on the ground? To the extent that you can answer that, yeah.

MS. RICHARDSON: Right. Well, the day that we can go do dozens of interviews --

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDSON: -- about fears, repercussions against people for

sharing their views with us. I mean, there are about six different issues in what you just said.

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah. Feel free to choose whichever one.

MS. RICHARDSON: We'll refine or focus some of them a little bit. I mean, one of the pathologies I think that we see across the country, not unique to Xinjiang, is this campaign particularly to synthesize religion, you know, to make it fit in with party dogma and with Xi Jinping thought. And that's certainly not unique to Islam. We're seeing that in Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, you name it.

Do people buy it or buy it enough to be able to still practice or worship in the way they want? You know, they express what they need to publicly, but believe something else deeply. We've certainly had people share that view with us.

The point I was actually trying to make about a dissent-free society, if you look sort of comprehensively at all of the different surveillance technologies that are now in use, ranging from the still not fully functional social credit system through these inducements to behavior. Right? It's not necessarily about punishment, it's about inducements or the other ways in which your conduct or things like your speech online is now visible to authorities. I really think what the state is trying to say to people is we can see everything you do and you need to think twice before you say or do anything because you will know that we can see it. And we will offer up, you know, periodic examples of people who will be punished publicly as a way of discouraging you from behaving in certain ways. I think that's sort of the goal, to say to people we can see you.

But just one point that we really haven't talked much about is that sort of what the global response to this nightmare has been. And I think it has in some ways really thrown into very stark relief a discussion about how different governments perceive and interact with the Chinese government, with a government that is now demonstrably shown to be trying to erase a distinct identity. And some governments, thank god, take that idea very seriously or take that problem very seriously and I think are much more focused on seeing with whom they can find partners or allies.

But it's also been very interesting to see both who's trying very hard to not have to choose one side or the other, as opposed to those who really, I think, join with the Chinese government in cheering on these appalling abusive policies either because they agree with them or because, for a variety of reasons, they feel they have no choice, that they must align with China in order to keep systems flowing or trade deals going. But I think it has been one of the ways in which different governments' discussions about China policy has changed significantly in the last two to three years.

MR. HASS: I think that's a very important point. We have about 13 minutes left and I want to make sure that the audience has a chance to weigh in with you all. So with your permission, I'm going to start with Nury Turkel.

We'll take two or three questions at a time, so if you have a question, please just raise your hand. I will collect the questions and then we'll give the panel a chance to respond.

MR. TURKEL: Thank you, Ryan. Thank you for organizing this event.

When we talk about the reasons for the atrocities taking place oftentimes we cite security concerns, political reasons, social control, geopolitical interests, but rarely talk about racism. As a Uighur I can say this, as I grow up being Uighur is bad. Being bad is not accepted. Now being bad makes you subject for transformation. So if you could comment on where racism stands in the Chinese officials' thinking in the formulation of the policies we've seen.

And then, Sheena, when you were researching for your paper did you ask to see any evidence, like the evidence that we in our country here could accept for citation? For example, all those incidents that you cited in your report, have you asked, if not, why did they not show you anything that you can rely on?

And then finally, Chris, if you could comment on if the measures put out by the Trump administration, such as export control and entity list, would be an effective measure to counter the expansion of digital authoritarianism?

MR. HASS: Okay. The gentleman with the hat behind.

MR. HURWITZ: Hi. My name's Elliot Hurwitz. I want to thank the panel for an excellent discussion.

Mr. Meserole mentioned exports of facial recognition technologies by the PRC. I would like to ask whether anyone on the panel would like to comment on the use of this technology by other countries, especially the authoritarian countries.

MR. HASS: Okay, thank you. Let's -- this lady here.

MS. PETERSON: Hi, I'm Dahlia Peterson from Georgetown Center for Security and Emerging Technology. I'd like to bring this a little bit closer to home and exploring the role that our own U.S. companies play in contributing to China's surveillance state. Chip companies like Xilinx, Nvidia, Intel, and storage companies like Seagate and Western Digital, how they're continuing to provide what China considers crucial hardware to power their surveillance state, notably that it is not just for their surveillance state, but for many other applications. Nonetheless, what can we do to put more pressure on Western companies to stop continuing to contribute directly to this nightmare, as Sophie said?

MR. HASS: Okay, thank you. I see several hands, but I'm going to take a pause here so that we can capture these questions before our memories fade.

The role of racism, Sheena, there was a question directed to you, as well as the issue of export controls, use of facial recognition in third countries, and the role of U.S. companies in contributing to what's happening. If it's all right, Sophie, why don't we start with you and work our way down? You can pick and choose any issue that you'd like to pick up and between the four of us, hopefully, we'll catch all of them.

MS. RICHARDSON: Okay. Very quickly, Nury, certainly, you know, discrimination underpins lots of policies. Interestingly, you don't often see racism or discrimination written into a law necessarily. You'll see it more in policy documents. You will especially see it in statements by officials.

And I should have mentioned that one of the things we're seeing more sort

of 2013 and 2016, you know, were confluences of Islam with a psychiatric disorder, for example. So certainly, racism problem.

Very quickly on export controls. You know, our experience in this realm had to do with looking at a U.S. medical technology manufacturing, Thermo Fisher Scientific, which we found selling DNA sequencers to the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau at a time when the Xinjiang regional authorities were gathering DNA from everyone across the region. I want to be very clear, we did not find definitive evidence that Thermo Fisher sequencers were being used in this campaign, but it prompted us to write to them and say what's your due diligence strategy to make sure this isn't a problem? We can talk more about how that conversation ultimately went, but, you know, in discussing export controls, most of those are done either by a specific piece of technology or a good or looking at a particular company.

One thing I find particularly interesting about the proposed Uighur Human Rights Act, which has now passed out of the House and is with the Senate, is that the language there on export controls isn't about a specific good or about a specific company. It insists that people examine or essentially that the U.S. Government examine the possible human rights effects of any particular good, service, product with a view towards the idea that dual-use or triple-use technology could be used in perfectly legit ways, but also awful ones. And that you at least have to have a conversation about how something could be used before it is licensed to be sold.

And I can imagine that there's an army of lobbyists out there waiting to object vociferously to this. It would be hard to implement. But I think it really finally addresses the idea, you know, that chips or plenty of other products can be used for great purposes or for awful ones. And there have to be more effective ways of restricting that.

MR. MESEROLE: Yeah, I think I'll just pick up on that point where the core issue here is that a lot of the technologies that are enabling surveillance are dual-use technologies that can also provide kind of forms of convenience and that allow for better service provision.

And so if you want to kind of get into export controls and you're worried about how they're being used in -- you know, for mass scale of human rights violations, you want to be thoughtful about how you're trying to regulate them. I think I would say that there's probably two ways of doing this.

If you're interesting about American tech companies and their role in all of this, one of the most interesting things about the tech sector is that the best way to pressure them to change their behavior is probably, at least in the United States, is probably less regulatory and more norms-based, and in particular the -- where most tech companies are most vulnerable is actually their talent, the engineers that they have in-house. There's a very small pool of researchers that are able to carry out really advanced engineering on the manufacturing side or on the software side and kind of carry forward algorithmic development.

Most major tech companies, whether they're hardware or software, are incredibly sensitive to the policy preferences of that community to the point where even a couple dozen engineers strongly object to a particular policy or who that company is selling their technology to, it can change the company's behavior because they'd rather lose that business than lose those employees.

As far as policy and regulation go with export controls, the software now, there's -- kind of one of the big changes that's happened over the last decade is that software diffusion is really hard to stop now just by the way that the Internet is architected. Hardware diffusion is a little bit easier to stop.

All of the surveillance technologies that we've talked about earlier, many of them are now, especially the ones that are AI-enabled, are reliant on new classes of AI chips. They're called neuromorphic chips or perhaps GPUs, where you're using a different kind of architecture that has fewer dual-purpose uses. And it opens up the possibility of being able to regulate export of those technologies and in particular effectively the machines that make those chips.

That's probably where if you're trying to get at something that the U.S. and Western companies can do that Chinese manufacturing companies are not able to do yet -- and Dahlia's from CSET and they've done some great work on this, as well. They're called lithography machines. It's probably the most vulnerable point or the greatest point of vulnerability on the Chinese hardware side where if we did come down hard on export controls around that, they would really struggle to be able to replicate some of the capabilities that those chips provide.

MS. GREITENS: Yeah, two quick points in response to two of the questions raised. So I have a project tracking the export of Chinese security surveillance technology that has specifically been used in surveillance and public security. We found about -- over 80 countries right now and did some initial statistical tests to look at what factors are associated with the adoption of these platforms by police departments or internal security organizations.

What's interesting about it is it tends to be correlated with crime rates. It tends to be correlated with financial capacity, so this question of state capacity. And strategic importance to the PRC. So the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the People's republic of China quite helpfully gives us this list of their comprehensive strategic partnerships, the cooperative strategic partnerships. It turns out that's a pretty good predictor of places that are going to adopt this technology. Regime type is not significantly associated.

And that's why this is such an important global conversation because the difference isn't who uses the technology. It's what guardrails, to use Ryan's phrase, they put around the use of this technology.

And so one of my concerns is that right now if you look at the U.N. body that is in charge of developing standards for, say, the use of facial recognition, there was just an article about this in I think the *Financial Times*, the only submissions they've received proposing global standards are from Chinese tech companies. Where is the United States? Where is Silicon Valley? If you want to be a force for good, where is the United States'?

foreign policy apparatus?

The United States and other democratic, free countries, I think, should be leading an effort to set these standards in a way that is compatible with civil liberties and democracy. And it's deeply concerning to me because if we don't -- if those countries, including the -- I'm a citizen, so I'll say "we" temporarily. Right, if the U.S. and other democracies don't lead the way, it's very clear that Chinese companies will fill that gap. And if we don't want Facebook and Google writing our tech policy, why exactly would we want Huawei, Megvii, and some of these other companies doing it? That's just -- I just don't understand the absence of engagement on these questions.

Second, this really important question, Nury, that you raised about China and the use of this explanation by the CCP. First of all, you know, it's unclear to me how deep the belief in their own rhetoric goes in China. I think it's probably a mix. I think there are probably some people who use it very instrumentally. I think there's no question that it is used instrumentally by the CCP and the Chinese government. But I also think from my own work on authoritarian threat perceptions that there is some possibility that China has convinced itself these are deeply insecure places, that there may be some belief that this is a threat and that that may -- that they may actually believe this rhetoric in a way that you or I don't find convincing.

The reason I think that matters, right, is that what I've seen, and, again, I sit in the middle of the country, I sit in Columbia, Missouri, so I'm watching a lot of these policy conversations from afar rather than regularly in these kinds of rooms, is that what I see in the press is the tagline has gradually been shortened -- in the U.S. foreign policy apparatus - - to it's not counterterrorism. And that concerns me because -- not because I think that we should be having this debate on China's terms and say, oh, yes, you have a counterterrorism policy. That's fine. Right? That's not what I'm suggesting when I say we need to take this explanation seriously.

I think we should take it seriously and say that you have a -- that you

perceive a threat from a small group of people who themselves are a tiny fraction of a larger group, puts you in common stead with almost every other government in the world and does not in any way relate to the policies or justify the policies that you have implemented. So it's almost like kind of a counterterrorism "so what" response.

And the reason that I say that is that what I tend to see in the policy discussion is that if we say it's not counterterrorism, then China can point to this handful of incidents and play graphic video and position themselves internationally and domestically to their sort of core audience at home as protectors of security and the only people who are capable of holding China together, which is something the CCP has said since 1949. Actually, since before 1949. Right?

And so I don't think we should play into that hand. I don't think we should give them the room, give them that talking point. I think the response in some ways would be more effective to say -- you know, if China says, well, we have a terrorism need. Okay. That's not the point. That doesn't justify what you're doing. So what? Not so what because it's unimportant, but so what because it's not relevant to the behavior that they have pursued in supposed response. Right?

And I think at a -- we need to separate that from the human level. Right? At the human level it's very important, right, for people to know that saying that to the Chinese government doesn't mean that we're saying, yes, we accept that, you know, lots of Uighurs are terrorists. Right? I'm Irish. I don't think that because there were a small group of people involved in the IRA that you can label all Irish people or Irish Americans as pro-terrorism or potential terrorists, in the same way I wouldn't do that with the Uighur population.

Here, globally, in Xinjiang, these just aren't connected. And I would like to see the U.S. engage this point with the CCP by simply not -- let's not have the argument about whether it's counterterrorism. Let's talk about separate it and say it doesn't matter. In some sense it doesn't matter because this doesn't end up being a destination.

MR. MILLWARD: I'd say, if I could just quickly --

MR. HASS: Can I just say we're violating our audience's time. I'm three minutes over. I'm sorry, but I do want to give Jim one minute to provide his (inaudible).

MR. MILLWARD: Very quick. I think the reason the comment about racism matters is because China has overall a problem with unrest. Right? I mean, as any country would have a problem with it, right? And these famous mass incidents happening by the tens of thousands all around. Many of the incidents happening in Xinjiang, which are called terrorism, are, in fact, very, very similar -- they're a response to local corruption, environmental problems, family planning, all of this kind of stuff. Right? And yet in Xinjiang, and to an extent in Tibet, precisely because of this difference, cultural, racial, religious difference, they're treated very, very differently.

And it's also because of the colonial legacy, which they don't want to -- you know, the PRC historical narrative won't admit, but there's an insecurity. The insecurity is on the part of the party leadership about their status in those territories despite the fact that no other country in the world challenges PRC's sovereignty in those places. Nonetheless, they're insecure about that.

And one quick thing. We were talking about export controls, the uses of dual-use of the technology, and there's some useful information there. I can see very quickly this becoming a highly technical argument, again, with the forces arrayed on both sides, the lobbyists, and so on, which is hard to engage with. And particularly when our phones and our own systems will have so many of those same technologies in them, the guardrails are very important. That's a global issue we need to think about.

I think the popular reaction to what's going on in Xinjiang may actually have a stronger effect when people become more aware, for example, of the technology of the T-shirt. And your cotton, something like one-fourth or one-fifth of the cotton crop in the world and of cotton garments in the world come from Xinjiang. And of that amount, a very large proportion are produced by a state-owned organization on steroids called the Xinjiang

Production and Construction Corps, which also runs camps and prisons.

MR. HASS: Thank you. That's a very powerful note to end on. We have a lot more to discuss. I hope this is a conversation that we carry forward. But I do need to honor your time. Thank you for being with us. Thank you, panelists. (Applause)

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