



Beijing's Terrifying Repression Campaigns

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China is fast transforming into the global epicenter of totalitarian terror. Over the past several years, the world has watched in growing horror as news has trickled out about the massive campaign of repression being waged by the Chinese government in its western province of Xinjiang. That offensive—aimed at the region's Uighur Muslim minority—includes the mass internment and "reeducation" of millions, forced sterilization of Uighur women, large-scale slave labor and other policies intended to fundamentally disrupt social and cultural order in the province, and to subjugate it fully to the will of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

What is overlooked all too often, however, is that the atrocities being visited upon Xinjiang are not unique. Nor are they an isolated incident brought about by extenuating circumstances. They are, rather, part of a larger political strategy—one that is being ruthlessly implemented at home by the CCP and has profound implications for the rest of the world.

In Inner Mongolia, for instance, a different kind of official Chinese repression is proceeding apace. In recent weeks, the CCP has cracked down on schools in the region, mandating Mandarin-language education in politics and history over the vocal objections of the indigenous Mongolian population. Already, these measures have sparked the most significant social unrest in the autonomous region in nearly a decade, and more restrictions are expected. While this campaign is different from the one that prevails in Xinjiang (where authorities are actively trying to erase an ethno-religious identity), its objectives are the same: to forcibly impose a single standard of individual and social expression.

Of late, however, the CCP's campaign has also taken a turn into Tibet. The People's Republic of China has a long history of repression in the southwestern territory, which it forcibly subjugated in 1950 and has maintained tight grip over ever since. As it did in Xinjiang, the CCP initially used the promise of "autonomy" to co-opt Tibetans, but that pretense quickly fell away and the territory became a model of authoritarian control. Today, much like Xinjiang, Tibet is facing extreme conformist pressure from the Chinese government.

Exactly how much is outlined in a new report from the Jamestown Foundation, which documents that—in a parallel strategy to the one now being implemented in Xinjiang—Beijing has begun establishing "vocational training" centers throughout Tibet. As the study lays bare, under the official pretext of "poverty alleviation," the CCP has begun targeting Tibetan nomads and farmers for "vocational skills training," even at the expense of separating family members. The real reason, however, has everything to do with eliminating a potential alternative to fealty to the Chinese state: the Buddhist faith. The report quotes a June 2020 document from the Tibet Commerce Department which clarifies that the entire program's purpose is actually to dilute "the negative influence of religion."

All of these episodes share a common thread. They represent overlapping examples of a model of social control that the CCP is using to promote conformity, maintain political primacy and eliminate allegiance to any alternative identity that could supersede loyalty to the Chinese state. Put another way, the Chinese Communist Party is waging a purification campaign throughout the country to eliminate any tendencies that don't conform to the superiority of its totalitarian state.

For the international community, all this should matter a great deal. It is already abundantly clear that people of faith and minority ethnicities face real dangers in China, and their plight is increasingly emerging as a global humanitarian concern. But China's deepening domestic repression sends another signal as well. How governments treat their own people is perhaps the best indicator of how they will treat the rest of the world. China's conduct in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet makes it abundantly clear that an ascendant Beijing will brook no opposition to its absolutist vision for power.

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