

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/10/16/security-implications-of-the-export-of-chinese-surveillance-systems/>

VINCENT BOUCHER, OCT 16 2019

Looking upon China, an important first distinction needs to be made for a proper political conversation. To an intense degree, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has, since the end of its civil war with the Kuomintang, strongly aligned itself symbiotically with the nation and with cultural and ethnic Chinese heritage (Hamilton, 2018, pp. 8-21). The CCP has reinforced this idea through long-term campaigns and reforms in the education system, as well as strong foreign and domestic policies; shaping its image in a way where critics of the government and its official representatives are synonymous to insults directly targeted at the Fatherland and Chinese heritage (Hamilton, 2018, pp. 8-21). It has created and reinforced its incredibly strong immutability as an embedded part of Chinese identity.[i]

However, whereas Chairman Mao's influence, methods, and cult of personality used to foster this vision, China saw during the 1980s and 90s, as it was seen through the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, new challenges arise to both its increasingly educated Chinese youth in search of a new voice and the CCP's elites desire of a secure mandate for the Party. These youths were the last of its kind, the last in a nation that would then see massive re-education reforms, astonishing economic growth, the beginning of a long march to end centuries of humiliation and the dawn of a hundred-year marathon to power (Hamilton, 2018, pp. 8-21). The advent of modern technology in China granted the government, particularly under President Xi Jinping's leadership, the opportunity to innovate and apply modern technological marvels to Maoist methods of population control (Mozur, 2019). This new extremely effective amalgam, as well as the leadership's considerable influence, have proven to be incredibly valuable for the Party in tightening security measures, leading the population and assuring its long-term survival; shaping public opinion and repressing dissidence.[ii]

Over the years, the CCP has enacted a multitude of these complex mechanisms. Most notoriously: the "Social Credit System," a score-based system relying on adoption of desired behavior[iii] based on social merit (Radio, 2019). A system that both punishes and rewards key behavior through a range of initiatives such as public shaming, travel bans, limited or extended business opportunities, favorable or devalued credit ratings etc (Shahbaz, 2018). The "Hukou," a population control household registration system dating from ancient China that determines areas where individuals can inhabit and work, based on their origin and means (Ka-Ho Wong, 2019) and most recently, the "Integrated Joint Operations Platform" (IJOP). IJOP is a part of the "Strike Hard Campaign"[iv] against terrorism, that merges and coordinates information gathered by agents on the ground (including agents from the infamous homestay "Becoming Family" campaign), checkpoints,[v] intelligent camera networks[vi] and the use of re-education centers[vii] (Watch, 2019; Ingram, 2018; Niewenhuis, 2018). The Party has—reacting to terrorist attacks conducted by members of the Uighur minority in the mid 2010s, and to the risk represented by revenants; returning Muslim Chinese Citizens (often of Turkish descent) that fought for the Islamic State—used the veil of national security to 'justify' additional security measures to an already extremely controlled and oppressed environment. Furthermore, the CCP has also implemented and constantly upgrades its 'Great Firewall of China.' It uses these technologies to monitor and limit online and offline traffic; by creating its 'own' internet and limiting access to the 'traditional' web, the CCP reduces netizens' range of motion and ensures that mostly Party-approved content is diffused[viii] (Shahbaz, 2018). In theory, these mechanisms are publicly presented and enacted for security purposes. However, practically, they have been applied for population control purposes,[ix] targeting minority groups and dissidents deemed problematic to the leadership (Barbaro, 2019).

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

From a semi-detached utilitarian perspective, the CCP has so far seen a certain degree of success in its endeavor.[x] It has, policy-wise, casted a wide net. In its broad definition of terrorism and systematically rigid approach, it has sacrificed human rights and freedoms to eliminate terror attacks and most importantly, for its long-term survival, political and separatist dissents (Wong, 2018; Watch, 2018). However, there is, and this is the focus of this essay, more to the Chinese surveillance-state apparatus than domestic intentions. Internationally, the CCP has been exporting its surveillance system to willing governments around the globe (CBC, 2018; Shahbaz, 2018; Carvalho, 2018; Mozur, Kessel, & Chan, 2019). Notwithstanding the significant prospective national security risks encountered by states resulting from extensive reliance on and cooperation with Chinese state-owned enterprises or CCP member-owned firms in key infrastructure development and expansion of state security apparatus, the export of an altogether rather effective and well-trained[xi] (through machine learning) all-inclusive 'plug and play' surveillance system backed up by the CCP and its agents threatens basic freedoms of common folks and, as seen above, the lives of political opponents or 'undesirable'[xii] activists across the world (Porter, 2019). The CCP first used the 2008 Beijing Olympics to market its mechanisms and 'solution' (Barbaro, 2019; Carvalho, 2018). Prior to the Olympics, the CCP installed a raging new 300,000 cameras in the capital. It then invited, many foreign officials to observe the effectiveness of its authoritarian tools. Since then, the Party has exported its solution to many countries, including but not limited to Equator (camera/state surveillance system), Venezuela (Fatherland card), Ethiopia (eavesdropping technology), Pakistan, Kenya, Iran, and Zimbabwe (Shahbaz, 2018).

Furthermore, the CCP has been pushing its agenda through its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) (Hillman & Glaser, 2019; Ng, 2017; Rolley, 2019). It not only furthers Beijing's economic and strategic agendas, but also propagates the use of Chinese fiber optic, and enhances China's local and China-based intelligence agents' ability to further the CCP's foreign mandates. There is in some regions an increasing dependence on Chinese services (internet) and a wider acceptance of such methods (Hillman & Glaser, 2019).

The CCP's methods of surveillance and population control's success grants its headship a certain legitimacy to its means. As China takes its place as a major power in the world, and attempts to adopt a more significant leadership position, the legitimacy of its behavior and methods relies not only on domestic efficiency, but also foreign support (and perhaps the absence of criticism) which can be guaranteed by the adoption of similar (better yet identical) methods by foreign states. In a time where democracies are struggling, the CCP ultimately strives to provide the world a new 'successful' potential alternative. Its gamble rests in using refined methods of control, supported by modern technology (of sectors in which it is competitive, even excels) to legitimize its autocratically-inclined approach and ideology as a stable alternative to democracies and traditional failing or other struggling[xiii] autocratic models.[xiv]

Preserving Mandates: Realist Use of Surveillance

The following section will adopt a neorealist perspective to describe the use and export of the surveillance model, from the Party's point of view. In this regard, the most important factors to keep in mind are the anarchical nature of the international system (noted by the absence of a central or overarching authority), the assumption that important actors are states (focusing on great powers), the comparative distribution of capabilities among these great powers as means of survival and self-help (military capability, economic capability, and technological capability), and the polarity of power in the international system (for which this essay will assume an ascension toward a bipolar structure). This section will pose two additional assumptions, first, it will accept an offensive realism perspective, accepting states aim for maximized relative power, in comparison to their regional or international rivals. Second, it will deviate slightly from a traditional realist approach and assume that between great powers, in the modern nuclear era, military capabilities are somewhat less important. Implying that return on additional military capability is not directly as beneficial, comparatively, to returns on additional economic or technological capabilities. The military security dilemma is still real and concrete, however, because of nuclear deterrence and mutually assured destruction direct military confrontation, aka direct threat to destruction from military confrontation, is reduced between nuclear powers. Military capabilities are therefore used to pursue, from my perspective, other agendas than direct confrontation between great powers, leaving a higher relative importance to economic and technological capabilities, two sectors that directly influence a nation's well-being, future, prestige, and measures its influence in the world. On this note, it is important to agree, and this will be repeated below, on a definition of 'power.' For this essay, power is

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

defined as the capacity of a state or actor to influence other actors, to 'make them do what it wants them to do.' It also has a comparative aspect to it, which should be translated in comparison with main rivals.

As highlighted above, CCP leadership has been developing, deploying, and distributing highly advanced population control and state surveillance mechanisms. This section will cover the whys and how, from a realist perspective, of this strategy, from the CCP's point of view, which should likewise bring forward the main reasons why democracy-friendly nations, especially the Party's primary rival, the United States, should care about the proliferation of Chinese-made autocratic means of control, of CCP influence creep. More precisely, the section will cover Party goals, their underlying components, and draw from the previous situational section the methods and mechanisms it employs.

The CCP's initiative to export its surveillance state solution (including technology, notably 5G, infrastructure, fiber optic, telecom equipment, and expertise) is highly realist, and pertains to directly and indirectly increase its power on the international scene. Ultimately, Chinese leadership strives to (i) improve its legitimacy^[xv] and influence on the international scene, securing its position as a great power; (ii) widen its sphere of influence to include more nations and regions, particularly in South-East Asia and Africa, with the help of the Belt and road initiative (BRI); (iii) maintain and further China's position as a tech pioneer (including artificial intelligence), and; (iv) promote its economic agenda through ties and dependencies; providing an alternative to the United States and its allies. In other word, exporting the CCP model is a means for the leadership to foster its power and secure its survival through independence and self-help. From the proliferation of the CCP's surveillance and population control mechanisms a similar propagation of authoritarianism follows, increasing the country's legitimacy on the international scene. Furthermore, the Party opens an information pipeline, gaining strategic advantage over its enemies, protects itself from isolation on the international scene, and potentially includes additional countries to its sphere of influence, or at least removes them from the United States, if we are to assume that the US would not openly or overwhelmingly support increasingly authoritarian regimes abroad. If the US, seeing the extent of the Chinese threat, chooses to nevertheless support or include into its sphere of influence increasingly authoritarian regimes, regimes so far from its own ideological sets of values, it could be advanced that its inward peace and stability, would be further challenged; which is, by definition, a positive outcome for the Party.

I support that, to some extent, China's military, economic, and technological capabilities are expected by the Party to be comparatively improved from this strategy. Militarily, the country avoids isolation and gains to widen its sphere of influence, and at least, if successful, creates instability to its rival's model; economically, the Party uses and furthers through this model President Xi's belt and road initiative, and, through cooperation with additional ideologically aligned states, could gain to protect itself from international economic sanctions, creating new opportunities and alternatives to dealing with the United States for both itself and other nations; technologically, the country aims to position itself and be recognized as a pioneer in modern key technologies, an increased reliance on Chinese technology furthers this ambition and increases the CCP and the means of its affiliated firms. Technology is not necessarily a measure of direct confrontation, but a key to the future, where the Party first (and still) used its laboratory in Xinjiang, Tibet, and elsewhere in China, direct big data collected from its partner-states could work in its favor, helping to improve its model and machine learning capability.

From a realist^[xvi] perspective, China's ruling elites' ambitions is directly represented through its use of this strategy. Ideological proliferation, and the export of the surveillance state are direct means to shift the balance of power in its favor, away from its rival, the United States.^[xvii] In this analysis, it is accepted that the CCP does not highly consider trade imbalances or minor apparent concessions done to 'minor' states in its strategic calculus as real costs, as they are deemed irrelevant in the balance sheet of its endeavours; minor states do not represent a threat to the nation. The Party's moves are therefore motivated solely by desired positive outcomes vis-à-vis its great rival, the United-States.^[xviii]

Ideological Legitimacy – De-isolation

The relatively moderate surveillance mechanisms implemented through greater China, and the Orwellian-style Tibet and Xinjiang laboratories have enabled the CCP to significantly improve an effective application and model of a state-based extensive surveillance apparatus, over the last decade. These controlled environments have granted ruling

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

authorities and potential partner-states (clients) proof of concept and of technology. Chinese leadership has to some extent presented a legitimate alternative outside of the (struggling) democratic model, championed by its primary rival, to achieve stability and long-term prosperity (Rolley, 2019; Barbaro, 2019). The CCP is attempting to proliferate on the international scene the use, even the preponderance, of autocratic mechanisms and tools, justifying their use to skeptics through security narratives of necessity or utilitarianism; often targeting terrorism or violent dissidence (Ingram, 2018; Byler, 2019; Cheeseman & Smith, 2019). However, once applied, these tools can be and are used to repress minorities, political opponents, activists, or even simple civil unrest (Barbaro, 2019; Lewis & Glaser, 2019; Watch, 2018; Kotkin, 2018).

The CCP has been exporting this model to other states and governments, often autocratically-inclined regimes, to indirectly legitimize its practice. This approach aspires to provide a proven solution that can be proliferated to other states; whose acceptance and use of similar (if not identical) population control and surveillance mechanisms ultimately renders its use common practice (Shahbaz, 2018; Rolley, 2019). This way, the CCP legitimizes its use of such mechanisms. First, it cannot be accused or singled out by states relying on similar means of bad practice and abuse, reducing international outrage or opposition. Furthermore, it becomes somehow indirectly protected to attacks from Western nations closely collaborating with states with similar practices. And thirdly, it gains legitimacy as a model & great power, as its ideology becomes successfully replicated and put to the test abroad.

In other words, the Party wants to proliferate its model to foreign actors because the wider the model reaches, the more it shields the CCP from criticism, international multilateral diplomatic attacks, and perhaps even sanctions, which would affect its economic performances, and inward and outward legitimacy.[xix] Although those sectors do not translate a priori as direct tangible material resources, removing potential narratives for rivals to gather around ultimately limits threats in the international anarchical system and reduces opportunities for belligerents to foster support and isolate China. In the current state of affairs, a highly globalized international environment, China's economy is dependent on trade and to some degree, international relations. The country's isolation, economically and diplomatically, would deeply affect its prosperity. The opposite is also true, any similarly ideologically aligned country strengthens the Party's approach's legitimacy, reduces criticisms, and weakens opportunities for collaboration on its rival's side. Similarly, the CCP, if it successfully establishes a new alternate 'good' or 'best' practice by normalizing autocratic methods, furthers the nation's position as a great power; increasing its prestige and influence worldwide. In an anarchical system, one with mutually assured destruction traditional warfare methods, economic means and capability have become as important as weaponry itself.

Widening the Sphere – Made in China

Without reiterating the direct diplomatic and economic advantages leading to enhanced means of self-preservation of exporting a sometimes-criticized autocratic model overseas, there are other direct important advantages the Party leadership aims to gather from exporting its model abroad. First, through the BRI, the Party is installing Chinese-made (and monitored) infrastructure which includes optic fiber and 5G (Hawkins, 2018; Lewis & Glaser, 2019). Reliance on Chinese infrastructure and technology assures not only future business opportunities for support, maintenance, and purchases, increasing economic ventures with locals, it also tentatively provides an opportunity to acquire intelligence regarding important actors and events in the penetrated countries, a direct information lifeline (Hamilton, 2018; Hillman & Glaser, 2019; Lewis & Glaser, 2019). On the same regards that local governments using surveillance technology might pry upon their denizens' lives, the CCP's intelligence apparatus is also potentially granted a direct window in the country's internal affairs. From a realist perspective, these investments increase economic and political influence in countries/regions of operations. The degree to which this new influence might be extended remains to be seen, but it is non-negligible to open a direct window inside nation-partners' infrastructure and security administration.

From another perspective, a significant part of Chinese projects done overseas are directly completed by Chinese firms with Chinese manpower, not local resources. In this regard, it presents the Party with a great opportunity to reassert its influence on overseas diasporas, or to create and develop new ones. Particularly since the Tiananmen Square incident, the Party has reportedly been actively using its resources abroad, including the diaspora and civil society (firms, Confucius institutes, etc.) as arms to further its foreign interests (Hamilton, 2018). Having significant

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

boots on the ground in new countries and regions represents an opportunity to establish new hubs and to promote Chinese culture and interest to increase soft and hard power.

Innovation – Technology and Operations

The CCP's policies and China's booming technology sectors are starting to prove that non-democracies can compete in an innovation-based sector (Mozur, 2019; Rolley, 2019). From a strategic point of view, the country has been highly investing in the technology sector, including machine learning and artificial intelligence. Its use of emerging technologies is, as mentioned above, a show of strength and capability to the world. It hence represents the country's ability to compete with established powers (notably the US) in important sectors, reducing dependence and promoting self-reliance. Exporting the model is also a strategic move on the CCP's side to further test its model, apply it to different contexts, and gather additional data and intelligence. On the micro level, the Party gains to at least acquire a direct tap into partner-states information stream; advantageous information about markets, business opportunities, important actors, etc. and even possibly sensitive information that could be used to persuade or coerce important actors on local or international matters (Carvalho, 2018).

The mutually destructive capacities of great powers being what they are, I advance that, even from a realist perspective, hard material military capability is reduced in preponderance compared to alternative means to assure one's end. Technology and information, to the contrary, as well as and mixed with economic influence are comparatively more relevant to the balance of power. Under this lens, I further suggest that the Party is interested in information, in nature of big data and targeted intelligence, the proliferation of the 'Chinese internet,' Chinese-supported 5G network infrastructure, and its involvement in security sectors provide.

The widespread use or reliance on Chinese device and infrastructure is on the surface not very different than any other international counterparts. However, Chinese companies quite often lack transparency, and, most importantly, are without a doubt subordinate to the Chinese Communist Party (Hillman & Glaser, 2019), often even owned by senior leadership. Telecommunication companies and providers have concrete access to any data traveling through their infrastructure and can extract and manipulate data as they wish. In the case at hand, China can concretely take advantage of this information to improve its power on the international scene. It can increase repressive capabilities of countries, as well as gather sensitive information on key actors in these countries (targeted approach) and use big data through AI and machine learning to improve population control techniques, manipulate public opinion, and pressure foreign governments to walk along Party line.

Huawei and Chinese technology are not at their core significantly cheaper to produce and acquire than any of their competitors. Huawei phones for instance are highly subsidized products (Hillman & Glaser, 2019; Lewis & Glaser, 2019). Highly subsidized by the Chinese government to what end? Certainly not solely for the propagation of Chinese companies. I would advance the CCP is pushing for Huawei devices and Chinese firms' infrastructure to reach international markets for the aforementioned realist reasons, to compete and gain a hand over its North American rival, especially in a field (telecom-5G) abandoned by American firms years ago.[xx]

Long Reach – Economic Power

Potential economic advantages to exporting the Chinese model and fostering relationships with authoritarian-inclined states has been rehashed plentifully above. On a more specific level, for military and economic capabilities, promoting authoritarian practices could justify a wider array of practice and open commerce avenues previously closed. Furthermore, the Party has been calling upon indebted countries to further its trade and military advantages, as seen in the opening of its first, and only, overseas military base in Djibouti (Cheeseman & Smith, 2019). Party assets have also acquired ports, shipping and trading rights, and advantageous deals overseas, to further China's economic influence.

Resistance

States, especially ideologically divergent states, opposed to the CCP's vision of a more authoritarian international

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

political environment demonstrate, or should demonstrate, opposition to this kind of practice, based on their own realist calculus. With a simple opposing balance sheet, any 'plus value' for the CCP to further the State's influence comparatively to the United States, immediately represents a loss and threat to the United States survival in the long term. Even if one were to assume the threat as moderate or non-critical, because the endgame of a miscalculation threatens the very survival of the State, there is no realist justification for the US to ignore its rival's influence creep. As demonstrated, the threat is especially significant in the economic and technology sectors; and so is the United States' answer to date.

As an example of the seriousness of the perceived security threat, the US has notably restricted or outright prohibited Chinese infrastructure initiatives on its soil, has notably banned Huawei devices, and encourages its allies and partners to do the same (Australia, Great-Britain, New-Zealand, the US and Canada have all adopted measures to restrict the use of Huawei devices and Chinese infrastructure). To avoid losing too much influence on the international theatre, the US is and will increasingly challenge the proliferation of the autocratic model and mobilize its assets and partners to restrict the CCP's influence creep.

Critical Use of Speeches: How to Justify the Use of Surveillance?

This section will look at CCP speeches justifying the use of extensive surveillance mechanisms by the CCP in Xinjiang province. It intends to observe whether such speeches are efficient. The analysis also anticipates that these discourses represent potential templates for client-states importing surveillance tools and population control mechanisms in their future justification of extensive authoritarian initiatives. In order to do so, it will look upon those speeches through three acts: (i) the words said by the speakers when they speak, (ii) the performativity, what they are trying to achieve, pinpointing what the speaker is actually trying to do, function-wise, and; (iii) the effect on the targeted audience, its reception. Because of often very wide audiences and intended recipients, the effect is much harder to evaluate and will be broadly estimated in this analysis.

First Act: Words Employed by CCP Officials

Mr. Aierken Tuniyazi, member of the standing committee of the CCP in Xinjiang and Vice Governor of Xinjiang's People's government, evokes in his speech at a briefing on March 6, 2019 a relatively embellishing discourse and description of Xinjiang. He enumerates nine reasons why Xinjiang is both important and unique in nature; its long history (as a part of China), its geographical location (as the northwest border of China and core area of the BRI), as a vast land (about a sixth of China's landmass), its cultural diversity (coexisting through history), its beautiful scenery (making it "widely known in China"), its ethnic solidarity and harmony (common home to 56 ethnic groups), its harmonious relation with religions (integrated with each other), its "relatively backward economy" (some of its southern regions are targeted by the CCP's initiatives to alleviate poverty), and its "special social situation" (its affliction by terrorism and extremism, and the region's "arduous task in fighting against terrorism and separatism").

The Vice Governor tends to focus and employ vocabulary bringing forward themes of "ethnic unity" and talks of the important contributions from the Communist Party in the region. He brings forth a six points brief on the province, covering new development as high-quality economic development, a people-oriented approach for their well-being, ethnic solidarity and equality for harmonious development, freedom of religious beliefs in a socialist society, long-term efforts versus terrorism, bolstering security, and he summarizes the "remarkable achievements (that) have been made in eradicating extremism by addressing the root causes." Regarding these six aspects, the general wording employed strongly points out to development, integration, unity, stability, harmony, alleviation of poverty, solidarity (ethnic and religious) and the fight against and threat represented by terrorism and extremism.

The general lexicon used regarding freedom of religion appears inclusive. It highlights the Party's efforts to develop infrastructure and improve the conditions of places of worship, as well as emphasizes religious groups and workers as relatives and friends. On terrorism, the Vice Governor singles out terrorists hiding under the disguise of ethnicity and religion, "exploit(ing) people's ethnic and religious sentiments to incite religious fanaticism and disseminate extremist thought, which deceived and influenced large groups of innocent people." Therefore, he refers to a legitimate ban on illegal religious activity as a means to reduce breeding ground for extremists. The speech further

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

covers the reasoning behind deradicalization, and the enforcement of anti-terrorism law, as powerful legal weapons for combating terrorism and extremism. Some additional methods employed are introduced, such as the use of vocational education and training centers, starting with language education, “since some trainees influenced by religious extremism are relatively under-educated, have a poor command of the country’s common language, and are less capable of accepting modern knowledge and communicating with others (...)” The later part of the discourse goes into detail as to the methods and justification behind vocational centers, putting an emphasis on their legitimacy, their use to educate an undereducated vulnerable population in linguistic (mandarin), law, regulations etc. The speaker also makes assurances of a strict prohibition on the guards on any mistreatment of the trainees, in the form of insults, physical abuse, dignity etc.

Finally, Mr. Aierken Tuniyazi goes over the results of the government’s initiatives and that of the camps. He points to results both domestically, and internationally, in the global combat against terrorism. He concludes affirming that accusation comparing Xinjiang’s vocational centers to “prisons” and “concentration camps” are nothing but disgraceful attacks “aimed at confounding right and wrong.” Based on his account, facts speak louder than words, and many international guests invited to review the camps see them as inspirational and as a successful initiative.

Supporting the general use of this discourse, another official, Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of the Bosi Township in Yecheng Country, Maimai Timing, uses a similar lexicon in his piece “If you are patriotic, please speak Mandarin!”^[xxi] He focuses on the essential nature of speaking mandarin, the official government language, for security and integration purposes. To this end, he uses very strong patriotic lingo. He points out to the vulnerability and security risk posed by uneducated minority groups that cannot properly converse in the common language, hence cannot engage in society, nor follow Party directives; affecting the nation’s cohesiveness, and centripetal force. Not unlike his colleague, he also refers to Party’s efficient policy to alleviate villages out of poverty and increase the farmers’ fortune and standard of living. In his discourse he provides a similar approach to unity as his homologue, reassuring the preservation of Uighur culture, as the Party does not aim to eliminate it, but the essential mastery of the common language and representation of its culture. Lastly, he too recognizes the strategic and geographic importance of the region in the BRI.

Second Act: Intended Purpose of the Speeches

CCP officials use these speeches to mainly target foreign audiences. First and foremost, they want to appease the international community in its concern that the treatment of Uighurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in China is nefarious and breaches international human rights. Furthermore, the Chinese government wants to assert its claim and legitimacy on the region, and position itself as an integral instrument to the region’s functioning. Lastly, there is a strong tendency to justify actions, based on past events and necessity. This way, the Party and its leadership justify the use of extreme population control and surveillance measures. In this sense, it is also possible to see the Party present itself as well-intended in its endeavour, as it presents its agenda as harmonious, unity-focused, and combating extremism and radicalization. The Party uses these kind of speeches not only to justify its own actions to the international community, but also to appease it, and provide its partner-states a template on how to present domestically and internationally the use of the surveillance solution.

In his speech, the Vice Governor strongly highlights the region’s strategic importance. Between the word-use there is a continuous connotation that the region is not only unique and important but is an integral, historic part of China, that Uighurs are part of China. He legitimizes China’s claim to the region through a speech of inclusion and harmony, harmony that can be found through unity and the Party’s guidance. He further refers to the state’s participation in alleviating poverty in the region, in helping underdeveloped towns and counties. He therefore legitimizes the presence of the Party and its agents in Xinjiang, under the benefits of the mantle of the State. His ‘nine reasons why Xinjiang is unique and important’ well reflect the CCP’s stance on the region. They somehow highly refer to Chinese membership and interest; Xinjiang as a core area of the BRI, a border of China, a well-known region in China for its natural beauty, its historic harmony and openness, its backward economy alleviated by the Party, and its special situation that represent a threat for the people living there, China, and the world.

The focus of both speeches on economic development and the support of the Party in the region positions Xinjiang

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

as a dependent of China, one of its integral parts, moving away from any separatist discourse. From the speakers' perspective, the region has been 'saved' or bettered by the CCP, and it depends on the central government to be modernized and economically successful. Furthermore, there is a connotation that these regions are 'to be saved.' The speakers refer to the improvement brought to Mosques and villages as they were underdeveloped and couldn't offer proper services to the population, implying that, contrary to religious authority, Chinese socialism can offer these basic necessities. The wording of the speech places religious and ethnic minorities as friends to the Party (and China) but does not necessarily lets the audience believe that they are indeed a part of the nation. The speaker intends to convince the audience that religious beliefs in undereducated parts of the nation are dangerous as they can potentially lead to deviant dangerous thoughts, such as religious extremism, radicalization, terrorism, and separatist ideology.

The speakers intended to project an open, harmonious, image of the CCP that is willing to include minorities and diversity in its mist, but they also made sure to associate religious and ethnic minorities in the region as generally uneducated and underdeveloped, as potential security risks, and dependent to the Party's guidance. With these risks brought forth and using key examples of terror acts of the past decade, the Party's speakers build up their speeches to align with the Party's reactions and legitimacy in adopting measures to counter these security risks. The Vice-Governor wants to demystify and alienate critics to the Party's methods, particularly the vocational centers. He does not particularly talk about the whole extent of methods employed by the Party to monitor the region. As they are not widely criticized by the international community (yet), he avoids bringing forward the many restrictive measures implemented by the Party to the region and focuses on the international linchpin. There is a clear intent in this not to talk about what is not required to talk about. For instance, there is a big focus in justifying the use of camps and trying to appease the international audience's wrath. He uses figures of speech and implies that hard critics of their vocational centers are enemy agents. He further cites the visit of foreign state members to vocational camps, without explicitly mentioning the names of foreign agents and their positive observations to the effectiveness of and good practice in the camps. But never will the speaker talk about the day-to-day measures employed (such as smart cameras, AI, agents in the household, myriad of checkpoints etc.) to keep the population in check. The vocational camps work well in this sense, as they are perceived as the worst practice, absorbing international critic.

Apart from the legality and legitimacy aspects of the speech, there is also a strong emphasis on positioning the targeted population as uneducated and inapt to properly guide itself, unless the CCP guides them. If the Party is not saying the minority's religious affiliation is wrong, it is however reinforcing the idea that minorities in the region are at risk (or even tend to) make wrong decisions and should therefore be educated for their own good. Therefore, Party officials promote the use of the common language, mandarin, over local or regional dialects in an effort to educate the population and allow them to participate productively in Chinese society. The speaker is justifying the preponderant use of surveillance and population control mechanisms through education and security needs as a veil to mask an inaptitude to manage a separatist population, a desire to reduce security risks and separatist movements through the mask of necessity at any cost to the population.

Third Act: Results (?)

Results are always hard to quantify following very widely targeted speeches, and ongoing circumstances. In this case, the audience is the largest, the world, and because of the immediate nature of the issue at hand there is no or little retroactive data available. Furthermore, because of current events between China and the United States, the 'trade war', tensions and criticism regarding Xinjiang province and the treatment of its Uighur population have taken a slight dip. Speeches are hard to measure in their efficiency, but the general Party initiative to reduce criticism is widely spread through the use of the diaspora abroad (pressures such as in Montreal, Canada to cancel a Uighur-led conference), corporations (worldwide interviews) and governmental initiatives. One can also observe the international community's (particularly the UN's) lack of commitment and pressures on the Chinese government to stop its practices.

These speeches do not directly convince critical actors of the international community but might contribute in convincing autocratic governments to adopt the Chinese solution in their own nations, as the international narrative is provided to them, and China is officially taking a stance on the matter, guaranteeing some form of political support

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

should they face criticism for adopting similar behavior.

Concluding Observations

From this author's perspective, the CCP's export of population control and surveillance mechanisms has very strong utilitarian and realist motives. A wide adoption of Chinese telecommunication infrastructure paired with the adoption of Chinese autocratic methods would somehow increase its military capability and greatly increase its economic and technological capabilities. These increases in capability need and should be measured against its main rival's, the United States. The link between Chinese firms and the CCP also grants the Party a direct intelligence lifeline in some of the most important society in the world, economically speaking, and gives them an additional competitive advantage. This link and the support of the Party, although it sometimes hinders Chinese firms, also protects them from international attacks and sanctions, as seen in Australia with the Huawei ban that resulted in a hold to Australian coal imports. If many governments adopt the Party's model, I suggest it also would shield them from international criticism and to some degree economic sanctions, reinforcing a new China-friendly world order as well as a widened sphere of influence. These practices, and the advantages granted to the Party would increase the CCP's power and influence in the world, measured by its growing influence compared to the United States. Influence and power are well noted by a state's ability to make other actors (not limited but often represented by other nations) do its bidding.

Secondly, this essay covered the use of speeches by the CCP to justify the practice of extensive autocratic methods. Xinjiang is one of the laboratories for such methods. The CCP faces international criticism from the export and proliferated use of such mechanisms. It hence aims to justify its actions through speeches. These speeches generally target international audiences in two ways. First, they justify the use of extreme coercive measures, reducing international criticism and secondly, they provide a template or inspiration for client state partners adopting similar methods. The Party's justification often revolves around necessity, security and terror prevention. Although the efficiency of speeches is hard to measure due to the ongoing nature of this case and other confounding variables (such as the US-China trade war), the lack of serious international criticism and concrete punitive actions are proof that the Chinese-led pressures to counter critics are somewhat working.

This international security issue is multifold. For democracies, the rise of alternative efficient government models is a direct threat. Furthermore, the export and adoption of Chinese high technology to foreign markets represent for these markets, if left unchecked, an intelligence and security risk, especially if integrated directly to national security apparatuses (surveillance). This way, the security of local dissidents and activists are put at risk in their respective countries due to the effectiveness of the methods. Another serious danger for states adopting the Chinese model and technology is their reliance upon foreign technology engrained in the very core of their government; henceforth representing also a risk to their very sovereignty. The CCP has not only been proliferating its methods through free or subsidized hardware, AI technology and training, but has also been gaining insight and a direct connection to the information stream of partner-states. This information stream can be realistically used in two ways as targeted micro information to gain leverage on important targets and as a means to gather and employ big data; the use of which are essentially endless: improve its systems, machine learning, AI, gain insight on masses, indirectly or directly improve population control methods, learn consumer behavior etc. These security issues vary from traditional telecommunication provider in the sense that Chinese firms are directly affiliated or dependent upon the government's agenda. In this sense, there is little to no transparency nor accountability and a very high security threat.

References

Barbaro, M. (2019, May 6). *The Chinese Surveillance State, Part 1*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/podcasts/the-daily/china-surveillance-uyghurs.html>

Barbaro, M. (2019, May 7). *The Chinese Surveillance State, Part 2*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://cutt.ly/XiR0er>

Byler, D. (2019, January 2). *The 'Patriotism' Of Not Speaking Uyghur*. Retrieved from supchina Sinica:

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

<https://supchina.com/2019/01/02/the-patriotism-of-not-speaking-uyghur/>

Carvalho, R. (2018, December 21). *In Latin America, Big Brother China is watching you*. Retrieved from South China Morning Post: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2178558/latin-america-big-brother-china-watching-you>

CBC. (2018, December 1). *'It's like Christmas for repressive regimes': China is selling surveillance technology all over the world*. Retrieved from CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-418-when-gm-leaves-town-loud-restaurants-the-hit-series-dogs-mummers-china-surveillance-and-more-1.4927175/it-s-like-christmas-for-repressive-regimes-china-is-selling-surveillance-technology-all-over-the-world-1.49271>

Cheeseman, N., & Smith, J. (2019, January 17). *The Retreat of African Democracy*. Retrieved from Foreign Affairs: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2019-01-17/retreat-african-democracy>

Hamilton, C. (2018). *Silent Invasion China's Influence in Australia*. Victoria: Hardie Grant Books.

Hawkins, A. (2018, August 12). *China is selling its 'Big Brother' surveillance technology to a country with a poor human rights record*. Retrieved from Business Insider: <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-will-sell-big-brother-surveillance-tech-abusive-governments-2018-8>

Hillman, J., & Glaser, B. S. (2019, April 30). *Charting Progress in China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Conversation with Jonathan Hillman*. Retrieved from China Power: <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/charting-progress-in-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>

Ingram, R. (2018, November 12). *Xinjiang: Life During a People's War on Terror*. Retrieved from The Diplomat: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/xinjiang-life-during-a-peoples-war-on-terror/>

Ka-Ho Wong, F. (2019, January 17). *China's Hukou System: What it is and How it Works*. Retrieved from China Briefing: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-hukou-system/>

Kotkin, S. (2018, July). *Realist World: The Players Change, but the Game Remains*. Retrieved from Foreign Affairs: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/realist-world>

Lewis, J., & Glaser, B. S. (2019, May 17). *The Real Costs of Huawei Technology: A Conversation with James Lewis*. Retrieved from China Power: <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/the-real-costs-of-huawei-technology/>

Mozur, P. (2019, April 14). *One Month, 500,000 Face Scans: How China Is Using A.I. to Profile a Minority*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html?module=inline>

Mozur, P., Kessel, J. M., & Chan, M. (2019, April 24). *Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/technology/ecuador-surveillance-cameras-police-government.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Ng, T. (2017, October 18). *7 things you need to know about Xi Jinping's vision of a 'new era' for China*. Retrieved from South China Morning Post: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2115858/key-points-xi-speech-chinas-communist-party-congress>

Niewenhuis, L. (2018, August 22). *Re-Education Camps In China's 'No-Rights Zone' For Muslims: What Everyone Needs To Know*. Retrieved from supchina Sinica: <https://supchina.com/2018/08/22/xinjiang-explainer-chinas-reeducation-camps-for-a-million-muslims/>

Porter, J. (2019, April 29). *The NYT investigates China's surveillance-state exports*. Retrieved from the Verge: <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/29/16484444/china-surveillance-state-exports>

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

[//www.theverge.com/2019/4/29/18522248/china-surveillance-state-exporting-ecuador-senain-ecu-911-privacy-facial-recognition-tracking](http://www.theverge.com/2019/4/29/18522248/china-surveillance-state-exporting-ecuador-senain-ecu-911-privacy-facial-recognition-tracking)

Radio, C. (2019, March 7). *How China's 'social credit' system blocked millions of people from travelling*. Retrieved from CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-7-2019-1.5046443/how-china-s-social-credit-system-blocked-millions-of-people-from-travelling-1.5046445>

Rolley, C. (2019, May 7). *Is Chinese-style surveillance coming to the west?* Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/07/chinese-style-surveillance-exported-west>

Shahbaz, A. (2018). *The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism: Freedom on the Net 2018*. Freedom House.

Watch, H. R. (2018). *"Eradicating Ideological Viruses" China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims*. HRW. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>

Watch, H. R. (2019, May 1). *China's Algorithms of Repression, Reverse Engineering a Xinjiang Police Mass Surveillance App*. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass-surveillance>

Wong, C. H. (2018, December 23). *China Applies Xinjiang's Policing Lessons to Other Muslim Areas; Regions near Xinjiang are deploying community policing, surveillance and restrictions on Islamic practices*. *Wall Street Journal*.

Notes

[i] The distinction is important and, as an academic, I believe important to avoid reinforcing the enshrined idea that the CCP is indeed the nation. Even if some automatically dissociate nation and Party, the embeddedness of the Party as *being* the nation and representing what it is "*to be Chinese*" has been deeply enshrined over the past decades, and can often not be easily dissociated.

[ii] Any interested reader is encouraged to dive in details in some of these methods and technological systems. This essay will not cover them in depth, but will focus on the consequences and applications of Chinese methods of control and surveillance, domestically and internationally, and how they could represent a security risk.

[iii] The desired behavior, sometimes referred to as 'civilized behavior', is set by non-other than the CCP itself.

[iv] Although this campaign is most notoriously referred to in the case of Xinjiang and surrounding areas (especially Muslim or cultural minority regions), it is a country wide campaign. However, the most drastic or obvious initiatives of the campaign are reportedly so far only deployed in Xinjiang and are slowly being rolled out in surrounding regions. It is not historically atypical for the Party to deploy new reforms or initiatives by regions or zones, in controlled environments. For instance, Chairman Deng Xiaoping enacted his economic reforms and free trade zones solely to a few cities in the 1980s, to contain any potential negative drawbacks, and control important parameters to the major policy changes.

[v] Which are omnipresent in Xinjiang.

[vi] Which are progressively replacing the traditional omnipresent regular camera networks in every Chinese city. The CCP is also using machine learning to better its algorithms and pinpoint desired behavior, ethnic backgrounds, etc.

[vii] Also often referred to as vocational centers, training facilities, re-education camps, labour camps, work camps, concentration camps, etc.

[viii] To be noted that the range of exclusion and censorship on Chinese web varies over the years, both under

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher

different regimes and depending on Party objectives. The Party does not per-say approve or direct content, but will, through its directed censorship, regulate public opinion and narratives.

[ix] Again, the scope of this essay is out of the intricacies of how the Party uses what. It aims to reflect that there are political and repressive uses to these mechanisms, and that their export could indeed be a direct security risk for minority or separatist groups around the globe. Likewise, this generally could, depending on the level of implementation and dedication to the system, as well as its evolution, represent a risk to human rights, freedoms, and to democracies as a whole.

[x] Depending on how one qualifies success. A utilitarian realist success in its goals and methods, a humanitarian failure in respecting the lives of many. The CCP sometime quotes the internment of Uighurs in percentages of total population (approximately 0.0714% of the Chinese population), rather than looking at the raw 1 million detainees suffering a wide range of human rights abuse.

[xi] A system that will continue to learn, and that will benefit from exposure to different ethnic traits, backgrounds, demeanours etc.

[xii] Undesirable from a regime's point of view (POV).

[xiii] Prosperity and power, the goal of historical Chinese rulers aiming to preserve the mandate of heaven. The government aims, and needs, to achieve both, especially in such a competitive global environment.

[xiv] Often, Chinese leadership refers to its approach as 'Chinese Capitalism', or 'Chinese Socialism'.

[xv] Including the legitimacy of its method, and of its ideology.

[xvi] Or perhaps neorealist perspective.

[xvii] Here accepting that a shift of power when rivals are directly involved is indeed a net gain.

[xviii] Other great powers, such as the Russian Federation, are ignored for the purpose of this analysis, as Chinese efforts are, from this authors point of view, mostly targeted at eclipsing the world's dominant sitting power. Furthermore, the Kremlin's ambitions and ideology are somewhat aligned to China, reducing their perceived threats. Lastly, from a military, economic, and technology perspective, China is, respectively, at par, eclipsing, and increasingly outpacing their Russian counterparts.

[xix] Again, this is a reference to the importance of prosperity and stability, traditionally & historically, in China.

[xx] Please see <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/the-real-costs-of-huawei-technology/>, podcast by CSIS, Center for Strategic and International Studies, hosted by Bonnie Glaser, with guest expert James Lewis. They mention very clearly the position of the US for telecom technologies, as a provider of essential semi-conductors and chips, but as inapt and absent from telecoms directly. Furthermore, it is a good representation of the risk associated with corporate and intellectual propriety espionage, as Chinese firms ran the last Canadian telecom giant out of business after illicitly acquiring their IP. This issue would, from this essay's perspective worsen in an environment where Chinese firms, backed and reporting to the CCP would control/own significant telecom infrastructure and provide most of the code/devices required for it.

[xxi] This second speech is present as a supporting piece to the coherence and major elements noted in the first.

*Written by: Vincent Boucher
Written at: University of Ottawa
Written for: Mathieu Landriault
Date written: June 2019*

Security Implications of the Export of Chinese Surveillance Systems

Written by Vincent Boucher