



China Retaliates Against Uyghur Exiles Abroad and Their Relatives at Home

Chinese Uyghurs — members of an ethnic population from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China who have been implicated by the Chinese government in several train station bombings and knife attacks — who have gone abroad to escape persecution at home are subject to being tracked down and harassed by Chinese intelligence agents while overseas. Furthermore, relatives of Uyghurs who are in exile in the United States and Canada have been jailed back in Xinjiang.



A Reuters report published on December 30 noted that while China's suppression of political dissidents and rebellious minorities at home is well known, the communist Chinese government's actions taken to suppress these same people who have gone abroad has not been publicized nearly as well. The report used the case of an Uyghur named Erkin Kurban to demonstrate the plight of members of this ethnic group who leave China, in this case for Canada. Upon his arrival back in China to visit family members after living abroad for 13 years, Kurban was summoned to the local police station and subjected to 10 hours of interrogation. After enduring this ordeal, authorities gave Kurban an ultimatum: When he went back to Canada, he was to spy on his fellow Uyghur exiles and send reports back to Chinese intelligence. If he did not comply, he would be barred from ever coming back to China to visit his family.

The Reuters writer concludes from this and similar cases:

With the power to treat family members back home as hostages, Chinese security services have strong leverage over Uyghurs living overseas, thousands of whom have fled what they say is persecution by the authorities in Xinjiang.

Chinese authorities can exercise control over Uyghurs in exile in several ways. One way is to imprison relatives of exiled Uyghur leaders back in Xinjiang. The long arm of the Chinese intelligence network also extends overseas, however. The report cited the statement of a man described as a "prominent Uyghur leader" who said he had been detained in or denied entry to some Western countries because Chinese authorities had accused him of terrorism. Some Western authorities may consider these false charges more plausible because the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs are Muslim, even though they are far removed both geographically and ethnically from the Arabic-speaking Islamic terrorists in the Middle East. Those familiar with the nature of communist governments, however, recognize that communists may regard all dissidents as potential "terrorists."

Reuters also cited the case of Dolkun Isa, executive chairman of the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC), identified as the leading Uyghur exile-led human rights group. China placed Isa, who was a student activist back in Xinjiang, on a list of Uyghur terrorists in 2003. Despite this designation, Germany accepted his claim of refugee status and granted him a passport in 2006. Even so,



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Switzerland, the United States, and South Korea have at times denied him entry, though the United States finally granted him a 10-year multiple entry visa in 2012.

Though some Western nations have given visiting Uyghur exiles a difficult time, others, most notably Germany, have gone after Chinese agents spying on them. Munich, where Isa's WUC is based, is home to about 650 Uyghurs, making it a likely hunting ground for Chinese intelligence agents.

Back in 2011, noted the Reuters report, Bavarian prosecutors charged three Chinese men with engaging in illegal "secret service activity" by conducting covert surveillance operations targeting the Uyghur exiles in Munich. One of the suspects was accused of "spying on the Uighur community in Germany and sending the information he gathered to the Chinese intelligence service." The transcript of the case notes that the man "regularly reported to his intelligence service contact person — by telephone or in personal meetings — on planned Uighur demonstrations and events. He also passed on information about Uighur exiles and the WUC."

The three defendants (operating under the cover of diplomats working at the Chinese consulate general in Munich) were given suspended sentences and subsequently left Germany.

Chinese officials who are eager to maintain a lucrative trading relationship with the West have toned down the overtly brutal purges that resulted in the killing of tens of millions of Chinese under Mao Tse-Tung. Purges continued even under Mao's successor, President Yang Shangkun in 1989, when Chinese government troops killed from 250 to 7,000 people during the Tiananmen Square Massacre. However, these days, though the communist rulers use more subtle means to maintain control over dissidents, China remains unmistakably under the control of the Communist Party.

In an [article posted](#) on December 28, *The New American* described a new technique being implemented by communist Chinese officials that the author described as "Orwellian" — an allusion to the tyrannical police state described by George Orwell in his novel *1984*. The Chinese system termed "Sesame Credit," while appearing to be similar to the credit scores issued by credit reporting agencies, is nothing of the sort. Rather, it is a system that rewards or penalizes Chinese citizens for their compliance (or lack of compliance) with the prevailing communist party line.

Chinese citizens can build a high Sesame Credit score by purchasing items deemed valuable by the state (such as work shoes or agricultural tools), sharing online links with state-approved websites, or posting messages agreeing with state policy. Conversely, posting links to news reports unfavorable to the communist regime or purchasing videos promoting Western ideas would result in a lower score. The most insidious aspect of the system, however, is that a person's score would be raised or lowered based on the scores of those with whom he chooses to associate, either in person or online. This would result in Chinese citizens basically "unfriending" those with low Sesame Credit scores to preserve their own status. And that status is no mere popularity contest. Since Sesame Credit scores would be used to determine who gets hired or promoted, who is granted visa permission to travel abroad, and who can qualify for loans, those with low scores would not merely be outcasts from society — their ability to earn a living would itself be threatened.

As in Orwell's *1984*, the government's thought police would monitor the citizenry to determine who likes or dislikes "Big Brother" the most.

China's treatment of the Uyghurs is not just about the plight of a single ethnic group, therefore. It is one more indication of what it means to live under communism, where anyone who does not toe the party line becomes an enemy of the state.



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Photo of six Uyghur men living in exile in Palau: AP Images

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