

**The United Front and the CCP's "People's War" against Religion**  
*Testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China*  
*Hearing on The Communist Party's Crackdown on Religion in China*

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**Overall Assessment**

Chairman Rubio, Chairman Smith, distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to discuss this topic of critical importance. I will begin with four observations about the nature of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) crackdown on religion:

- [1] The CCP's crimes against scapegoated religious groups are directed from the highest echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The clearest central-level authority directing these actions is the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee.
- [2] The CCP's actions are linked to a state security strategy that prioritizes the protection and expansion of the CCP's power—not the protection of China with or without the CCP. The crackdown on religion is a visible manifestation of a much larger effort to defend the CCP's version of the truth.
- [3] The CCP's choice to employ language such as "a People's War against religious extremism" to describe its actions suggests the CCP is acting on a broader threat perception. This threat perception has always been present in the CCP's thinking, but the clearest sources of the present-day crackdown are the Falun Gong sit-in demonstration near the Zhongnanhai government compound in 1999, and the Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia during the early 2000s.
- [4] The root cause of CCP's actions are not the victims of its aggression. The victims are scapegoats used to mask the CCP's core weaknesses and justify the expansion of the CCP's unchecked power. The core weaknesses are the unending contestation for power within the Party and the Party's struggle to maintain control over China's narrative. These weaknesses do not make the CCP's failure inevitable. In fact, as the CCP's victims in Xinjiang have learned, this combination of the CCP's strength and weakness can be catastrophic.

## The United Front Work Department and Religion

The United Front Work Department is responsible for carrying out the Chinese Communist Party's United Front strategy. A declassified 1957 Central Intelligence Agency document succinctly and accurately described United Front as a "technique for controlling, mobilizing and utilizing non-Communist masses".<sup>1</sup>

Above all else, the purpose of the United Front strategy is to protect and expand the Chinese Communist Party's power. The CCP argues that United Front work in the present day is "unprecedentedly expansive, not only communicating inside and outside the Party, but also liaising inside and outside the established institutions, and reaching home and overseas."<sup>2</sup>

The United Front Work Department oversees ethnic affairs and by definition this role is ultimately responsible for the concentration, internment and "re-education" of predominately Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. The United Front Work Department oversees religious affairs, and the effort Xi Jinping described at the 2015 Central United Front Work Conference as "persisting in the direction of Sinicization" of religion in China.<sup>3</sup> It is by definition not only responsible for the mass internment of Muslims in Xinjiang, but also the growing persecution of Christians.<sup>4</sup>

It has been argued that United Front Work has experienced a "resurgence" under Xi Jinping. While it is true that the visibility of United Front Work has increased significantly under Xi Jinping, the central importance of the United Front in the CCP's overall strategy for ensuring Party state security has remained consistent throughout the Party's entire history.

Xi Jinping has emphasized the importance of upholding the Party's leadership over the United Front. In order for the United Front to succeed on the Party's terms, it must ensure that the persons and entities responsible for carrying out United Front work remain absolutely loyal to the CCP, or at least the current winning side of its unending internal power struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> "The United Front in Communist China: A technique for controlling, mobilizing, and utilizing non-Communist masses." 1957.

<sup>2</sup> Weimin Yang, "学习习近平关于坚持党对统一战线领导的论述 Studying Xi Jinping's Expositions on Upholding the Party's Leadership over the United Front," 30 March 2016. [http://www.qstheory.cn/laigao/2016-03/30/c\\_1118483581.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/laigao/2016-03/30/c_1118483581.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Chenyan Kong, "【学习】如何解读“我国宗教中国化 ([Study] How to Interpret "The Sinicization of Our Country's Religions)", 14 June 2016. <http://www.zyztzb.gov.cn/tzb2010/wxwb/201606/004b224588914f478cdddb54a538d18b.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Burrows and Bang Xiao, "China Cracks Down on Religion, Crosses Burned at Christian Churches, Xi Jinping Photos Installed," 25 September 2018. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-25/crosses-burned-in-china-religion-crackdown/10301956>.

Structural changes have clearly placed the UFWD clearly in charge of religious and ethnic affairs. On 21 March 2018, in accordance with the “Plan for Deepening Institutional Reform of the Party and State”, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission was reorganized under the “competent leadership”<sup>5</sup>, of the United Front Work Department, but also remained as a constituent department of the State Council.<sup>6</sup>

The primary responsibility of the Central United Front Work Department in terms of ethnic work is to implement and carry out the Party’s ethnic work guiding principles, study and formulate policy and major measures on ethnic work, coordinating and resolving major issues regarding ethnic work.<sup>7</sup> The State Ethnic Affairs Commission has long been associated with the CCP’s efforts to tighten control over China’s Muslim ethnic groups, particularly the Uyghurs.<sup>8</sup> After November 2012, the Central Xinjiang Work Coordination Leading Small Group Office was moved under the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. The office handles the leading group’s daily affairs.

Also in March 2018, the United Front Work Department absorbed the State Administration for Religious Affairs. The administration previously shared responsibility for religious affairs management with the United Front Work Department.<sup>9</sup>

### **Cultural (In)security**

This definition of United Front work is closely related to China’s version of “national security”, which is better named “(Party-)state security”. Party-state security is not simply about managing foreign and domestic threats. It is also about managing the Party itself – both its relationship with society and its internal power dynamics.

Embedded in the explanation for the “Sinicization” of religion is the closely related CCP concept of “cultural security”. “Cultural security” does not protect *Chinese* civilization. Instead, it aims to eliminate ideological threats that political opponents could use as vehicles to challenge *the Party*.

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<sup>5</sup> "Competent leadership" (归口领导) means the leading agency that supervises the relevant work of its subordinate.

<sup>6</sup> "中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》(The CCP Central Committee Published a Plan on Deepening the Institutional Reform of the Party and State)," 21 March 2018. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/21/c\\_1122570517.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "State Ethnic Affairs Commission Involved in Regulation of Halal Foods," 29 November 2005. <https://www.cecc.gov/publications/commission-analysis/state-ethnic-affairs-commission-involved-in-regulation-of-halal>.

<sup>9</sup> Julie Bowie and David Gitter, "The CCP’s Plan to 'Sinicize' Religions: Bureaucratic Changes are Intended to Aid the CCP in Further Pressuring Religious Groups," 14 June 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/the-ccps-plan-to-sinicize-religions/>.

One article published through the United Front Work Department in 2016 summarized the “Sinization of religion” as having three parts<sup>10</sup>:

*Political Identity: as in love the motherland, endorse the socialist institution, endorse the leadership of Chinese Communist Party, obey the country's laws, regulations and policy directives.*

*Social Adaption: as in adjustments to the conceptual, institutional, and organizational aspects of religion, [religion must] absorb fresh nutrients from the present reality of society, breath and share the same fate with the times. [So that religion can] transmit more positive energy for advancing social harmony, and promoting social progress.*

*Cultural Integration: as in guiding religion with socialist core values, interpreting religious doctrines in a way that is consistent with outstanding Chinese traditional culture and the developmental progress requirements of contemporary China.*

The emergencies China prepares for range from isolated but large-scale unrest events, to massively destabilizing unrest events, like a Color Revolution or Jasmine Revolution. They also include wars, not just over disputed territory like the South and East China Seas, but also an attack on the Chinese mainland by a foreign military, particularly in a scenario like the Kosovo War where a domestic conflict could be a justification. It is part of why multiple defense white papers point to “signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism.”<sup>11</sup> Others have claimed: “[China] faces strategic manoeuvres and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside.”<sup>12</sup>

What is happening in Xinjiang shows the strength of the Party’s unchecked power, but also puts on full display its core weaknesses. Key among these weaknesses is the Party’s unending internal power struggles. Xi Jinping has repeatedly called to: “Resolutely fight against *two-faced cliques* and *two faced-persons*.” One article elaborated that a “large number of cases have shown that some people within the Party have a serious problem in this regard.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, the problem is not a

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<sup>10</sup> Kong, "【学习】如何解读“我国宗教中国化 ([Study] How to Interpret "The Sinization of Our Country's Religions)".

<sup>11</sup> "中国武装力量的多样化运用 (The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces )," (Information Office of the State Council, The People’s Republic of China, 2013); Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. "2000 年中国的国防 (China’s National Defence in 2000)," October 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. "中国的军事战略《2008》 (China’s National Defence in 2008)," January 2009.

<sup>13</sup> "【给“两面人”画个像】之一：台上一套台下一套，当面一套背后一套 ("Illustration of a Two-Faced Person" Part One: One Practice On the Stage and another Off Stage, One Practice in Front of You and Another In Your Back)," 21 November 2018.

new one for the CCP, the contestation for power within the Party is partly to blame for the Cultural Revolution.

The idea that the Party has a loyalty problem also extends to Xinjiang. In fact, in November 2018 a local-level official penned an article in the Xinjiang Daily entitled “Mobilize the Masses to Win the Anti-Terrorism and Stability Maintenance People's War”. It warned: “we must soberly be aware that the anti-terrorism and stability maintenance situation remains grim; the “two-faced people” have not been rooted out, the “three forces” still wait for opportunities for a counterattack, and unstable factors still exist.

This type of threat is found in the corruption cases against Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, and Ling Jihua, who Xi Jinping reportedly directly accused of being “engaged in political conspiracy activities.”<sup>14</sup> (It is nearly impossible to know from the outside whether or not the charge was genuine). Often times, too, corruption allegations are coupled with allegations along the lines of the much older concept of the “six evils” (六害), i.e.: prostitution, pornography, the sale of women and children, narcotics, gambling, and *profiteering from superstition*.<sup>15</sup> They have been described as: “the vicious ways in which subversives and saboteurs will corrupt our party, our cadres, and our socialist system.”<sup>16</sup>

The clearest event linked to religious persecution and the perception of threat from within the Party is the crackdown on Falun Gong. On 25 April 1999, around 10,000 members of the Falun Gong spiritual sect organized a one-day peaceful sit-in demonstration near Zhongnanhai, the government leadership residential compound in Beijing. The subsequent crackdown Jiang Zemin initiated against the organization has continued to the present day.

Falun Gong’s followers included up to millions of Party members, and of those up to thousands of members of the security services, including in high-ranking positions.<sup>17</sup> The most threatening aspect of the movement was, as Joseph Fewsmith observed in 2001, its “obvious ability to mobilize the people quickly, and its deep penetration into the military and security ranks, which potentially diluted the Party’s ability to control those important pillars of rule.”<sup>18</sup> They used modern communications technology to organize the event.<sup>19</sup> The issue is not simply that a hierarchical

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<sup>14</sup> Shan Gao. “China's President Xi Jinping Hits Out at 'Political Conspiracies' in Keynote Speech.” *Radio Free Asia*, 3 January 2017. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/speech-01032017123112.html>.

<sup>15</sup> “要重视总结经验 (Must Attach Great Importance to the Summary of Experience),” *The People's Daily*, 24 February 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof. “Notes on China; Beijing Hopes To Stamp Out The ‘6 Evils’.” *The New York Times*, 26 November 1989. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/26/world/notes-on-china-beijing-hopes-to-stamp-out-the-6-evils.html?mcubz=3>.

<sup>17</sup> John Pomfret. “China Sect Penetrated Military and Police.” *The Washington Post*, 7 August 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, *Elite politics in contemporary China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 145.

<sup>19</sup> Nigel Inkster, *China's Cyber Power*, Adelphi (London: Routledge for the Institute of International and Strategic Studies, 2016), 24.

group, could enter and win support from the highest ranks of the Party. It is that they did so with a large support base from the security apparatus designed solely to defend the Party.<sup>20</sup> The same group the Party expects to rapidly mobilize in order to *counter* such a movement, were direct supporters of the same movement.<sup>21</sup>

Making scapegoats of groups like the Uyghurs, the CCP points to examples like the Color Revolutions or Jasmine Revolutions, to justify the tightening and expanding of its power.<sup>22</sup> The CCP warns that internal and external “hostile forces” seek to infiltrate political parties, religious, and ethnic groups, and incite divisions in Chinese society.<sup>23</sup> The anxiety is aimed at shoring up loyalty within the Party and convincing Chinese society of their need for the Party’s paternalism.

When the Party describes religion as a vehicle for western “hostile forces” to infiltrate China, it is targeting religion because of obvious connections to the west. As one 2016 article (also about network/cyber security) described: “Underground religion instills ideological and cultural ideas of Western capitalists into believers through the internet, vilifies our own outstanding national moral and cultural traditions, dilutes the national consciousness of the people, and sways people’s thoughts and beliefs.”<sup>24</sup> Several of the persecuted human rights lawyers under Xi Jinping have defended persecuted Christians, and themselves practice, or practiced before their untimely and questionable death in custody, Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

In reality, the CCP’s claims to hold the truth may be more strongly contested by everyday social demands that, intentionally or not, expose the falsehoods in the CCP’s narrative. It is one likely reason why the Party sees the women’s rights movement in China as a threat.<sup>26</sup> Beyond the mobilization power, it exposes the CCP’s false narrative that Chinese culture and the Chinese people are somehow different in regard to universal human rights.

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<sup>20</sup> “警惕“法轮功”险恶政治用心 维护国家安全与社会稳定 (Be on Alert Against "Falun Gong's" Vicious Political Intentions in Order to Safeguard State Security and Social Stability)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 15 January 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Cook and Leeshai Lemish, "The 610 Office: Policing the Chinese Spirit," *China Brief* 11, no. 17 (2011).

<sup>22</sup> Liqiang Wang, "甘肃版权“天山工程”形成机制显现效果 (Gansu "Tianshan Project" Copyright Mechanism Taking Shape and Demonstrating Effectiveness)," *Xinhua*, 11 May 2010. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2010-05/11/content\\_13479282.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2010-05/11/content_13479282.htm).

<sup>23</sup> "充分认识统一战线的重要地位和作用 (Fully Understanding the Important Place and Function of the United Front)," 8 January 2009. <http://www.zyztb.gov.cn/tzb2010/s1503/200911/576044.shtml>.

<sup>24</sup> Bing Zhou, "警惕敌对势力对我国“颜色革命”的互联网布局 (Be Wary of Online Deployment by Hostile Forces Arranging Our "Color Revolution")," *Chinese Soul*, 20 March 2016. [http://www.qstheory.cn/llqikan/2016-03/20/c\\_1118383789.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/llqikan/2016-03/20/c_1118383789.htm).

<sup>25</sup> Stoyan Zaimov, "Christian Human Rights Lawyer Disappears After Being Recaptured by Chinese Officials; Friends Beaten," 9 November 2017. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-human-rights-lawyer-disappears-after-being-recaptured-by-chinese-officials-friends-beaten-206031/>; Christian Shepherd, "Death of Chinese Rights Lawyer Raises Suspicions," 26 February 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights/death-of-chinese-rights-lawyer-raises-suspicions-idUSKCN1GA0TP>.

<sup>26</sup> Leta Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening In China* (Verso, 2018).

## Mobilizing the People

*"We must launch an anti-terrorism and stability maintenance People's War, encourage the masses to offer and report evidence of terrorism, and support the people and the masses, in conjunction with the armed forces to subdue and arrest thugs."*<sup>27</sup>

The CCP has called People's War the, "Magic Weapon for our victory over the enemy at home and abroad and the victory of the revolutionary war."<sup>28</sup> Party leaders from Deng to Xi have successively drawn attention to the centrality of the 'scientific' concept. For instance, in April 1998, President Jiang said, "We have relied [on the methods of] the People's War to fight in the past, and we have to fight the People's War in the future. The People's War is where our real power lies."<sup>29</sup> More recently, at the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the PLA's founding, Xi Jinping said: "To promote the cause of a strong military, we must wholeheartedly adhere to the fundamental objective 'Serve the People', and always be the sons and daughters' army that have the people's trust, the people's support, and the people's love...The mighty force of the People's War originates with the great power of the people."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the greatest indicator of Xi's intended message was the inclusion of the Maoist slogan, "Serve the People". At its origin, the slogan's key points were: "destroying self-interest", living and dying for the people, "doing what is right and correcting what is wrong" [i.e. engaging in criticism and self-criticism], and, in Mao's words, "the unification of our country, unity of our people, and the unity of our various nationalities."<sup>31</sup>

Like the concept of state security, national defense is not the defense of the Chinese nation outside of the CCP, it is the defense of the *People's Republic* of China, with the CCP at the helm. The People's War is a theoretical concept guiding the PRC's construction of a mobilization mechanism that ensures the Party can both mitigate and respond to crisis of all types. This is what strategies and concepts ranging from the United Front, Military-Civil Integration (or Military-Civil Fusion), and building a socialist "spiritual civilization" have in common.

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<sup>27</sup> "发动群众打赢反恐维稳人民战争 (Mobilize the Masses to Win the Anti-Terrorism and Stability Maintenance People's War)," 16 November 2018. <http://wap.xjdaily.com/xjrb/20181116/118967.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Zhenjiang Fan, "我国国防活动的指导原则 (Guiding Principles of China's National Defence Activities)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 20 April 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Guoying Lü, "国防后备力量走向强大 (National Defence Reserve Capacity Marches Toward Greatness)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 20 October 2002.

<sup>30</sup> "习近平在庆祝中国人民解放军建军 90 周年大会上的讲话 (Speech given by Xi Jinping at the Chinese People's Liberation Army's 90th Anniversary Assembly)," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 1 August 2017. <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zxbd/tt/xjp/Document/1560172/1560172.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> "Study 'Serve the People'." *Peking Review*, 1967. <http://massline.org/PekingReview/PR1967/PR1967-02e.htm>.

The focus on “unity”, both military-government and military-civilian, is not only about a military-civil integration in terms of technical capacity but one in terms of political capacity. For instance, writing in 2002, Chi Haotian, a CMC vice-chairman from 1995-2002, said:

It is necessary to further strengthen unity of nationalities, and military-government and military-civilian unity, and lay the political foundation for security and stability in the northwest (Xinjiang). We should extensively publicise the Marxist nationalities theory and the Party's nationality policy, increase military-civilian concept of defending national unity, and consciously fight against nationality splittism. We should look at and deal with the problems of military-government and military-civilian relations from the political point of view, and create a strong atmosphere for the armed forces to love the people, and for the people to support the armed forces. Strengthening cooperation between the armed forces and the local government, promoting economic and social development and army building. Party committees and government offices at all levels should, as always, be concerned about supporting the armed forces construction, preparing the stationed military forces for military struggle, and improving capacity for creating the conditions to "win" (wars).<sup>32</sup>

The United Front is also closely connected to the CCP's concept of a “spiritual civilization”. The idea of “spiritual civilization construction” refers to efforts to construct a morality and ethics system that upholds the CCP's power, and builds the CCP's trust in society, not the reverse. It is linked to a propaganda effort that began in the 1980s in response to popular disillusionment with the CCP and attraction to foreign ideas.<sup>33</sup> In fact, United Front work and “spiritual civilization construction” are described as being “in the same realm of the superstructure, both are closely connected, and are also mutually promoted.”<sup>34</sup>

The process of creating a Spiritual Civilization is another area where religion is scapegoated to justify the Party's means. The CCP acts on the idea that preventing crisis requires preventing political opponents from taking over the narrative—in other words, it requires the CCP to strengthen its ‘discourse power’.

For the Party, improving Spiritual Culture involves re-inserting the Party into society, attaching the CCP's political control to China's economic and social development such that they become

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<sup>32</sup> Hui Cai, "深入贯彻“5·31”重要讲话精神积极推进国防和军队建设 (Thoroughly Implement the Spirit of the Important Talk of 5·31 [Jiang Zemin's 31 May 2002 Speech] and Actively Promote National Defence and Army Construction)" *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 25 June 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship : propaganda and thought work in contemporary China, Asia/Pacific/perspectives* (Lanham, Md. ; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 25; Xueliang Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123.

<sup>34</sup> Zhaoguo Wang, "充分发挥统一战线优势,努力为社会主义精神文明建设服务," 23 December 1996. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66703/4495530.html>.

always inseparable, and not completely reliant on the ideological mobilization of the Mao era. Discourse power is directly embedded in the trust and morality that systems like “social credit” are supposed to create.

### **Recommendations for U.S. Policy**

- (1) A strong response to the CCP’s persecution of religious groups must address the problem at its core. Individuals, namely Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Party Secretary Chen Quanguo are directly implementing the CCP’s securitization policies in Xinjiang and should immediately be sanctioned.<sup>35</sup> Sanctions should not, however, end at the local and regional levels of government, because the actual source of the problem is a broader state security strategy that is clearly centrally directed.

The U.S. Government should start by targeting all officials connected to the control of religion. This includes known members of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the Central Xinjiang Work Coordination Leading Small Group Office, and high-level officials at the UFWD. This includes, but should not be limited to, CCP Central Committee member and head of the United Front Work Department You Quan; Director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs and Deputy Director of the United Front Work Department Wang Zuoan; and Central Xinjiang Work Coordination Leading Small Group director and deputy director, the LSG's Office Director Shi Dakang and its deputy directors.

- (2) Sanctions should also extend to both Chinese and international (including American) companies involved in the construction of China’s surveillance state, which support the CCP’s human rights violations. It is not a complete solution, but could stall the CCP’s progress and buy time while policymakers research more effective long-term responses.
- (3) Overseas Chinese communities must be protected. Western governments must take steps to protect overseas Chinese from the kinds of CCP encroachment that have taken place for decades but that are now increasingly augmented.

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<sup>35</sup> Andrian Zenz and James Leibold, "Chen Quanguo: The Strongman Behind Beijing’s Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang," *China Brief* 17, no. 12 (21 September 2017).<https://jamestown.org/program/chen-quanguo-the-strongman-behind-beijings-securitization-strategy-in-tibet-and-xinjiang/>.