



暨南大學 传播与国家治理研究院
Academy for Communication and Governance, Jinan University

“Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act”: A Crafted Semantic Game

(Research Report)

Jun.18,2020

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed *the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020* on May 14, and May 27 respectively, and formally submitted it to the White House. The Act accuses China of “human rights violations” in Xinjiang and requires the Trump administration to impose relevant sanctions against China.

As the Bill submitted to the US Congress, the text of which requires clear concepts and explicitly referred facts. However, the so-called *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act* has severe problems in terms of concept, logic, and fact, including the misappropriation of concepts, which leads to confusion in understanding, excessive deduction without factual basis, and attribution fallacy that leads to shady conclusions. This Act has become a semantic game, which is self-directed and self-explained by the US. Under the guise of safeguarding "human rights," the Act deliberately obliterates the economic development, social stability, and national unity in Xinjiang. It ignores Xinjiang's efforts to combat terrorism and protect human rights in accordance with laws and regulations. The provisions of the Act fully reflect the "double standards" and hegemonic logic of the United States in dealing with terrorism.

This research is based on the analysis of three Bills passed by the US Congress. Including the first version, S.178 ES passed in the US Senate on September 11, 2019. On December 3, 2019, in the US House of Representatives, the second version of S.178 EAH was voted through. The Bill was then returned to the Senate for revision and finally sent back to the House of Representatives to form the third version of S.3744. The main problems analyzed are as follows:

1. What does the Act reflect on the human rights situation, ethnic and religious policies in Xinjiang, China?
2. Are the facts stated in the Act accurate? If not, what caused the inaccuracies?
3. Why has Congress repeatedly revised different versions of the Act?
4. How is American hegemony reflected in the Act realized through semantic games?

I. BEGINS WITH PREJUDICE, AND ENDS WITH FALLACY

1. The source of information lacks legitimacy

The data and information listed in *the SEC Finding* of the Act are basically from U.S. government departments or media and foundations that support them; therefore, the sources are unreliable. According to the American website *The Grayzone*, those institutes or organizations controlled by the United States includes: *Radio Free Asia*, *World Uyghur Congress*, *Chinese Human Rights Defenders*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, *National Endowment for Democracy*, etc. For example, the finding in the Act comes from reports of *Radio Free Asia*. In article two of *the SEC Finding* the third version S.3744: since 2014, Chinese authorities have detained more than 1,000,000 Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other ethnic minorities in these camps. It is the data obtained by *Radio Free Asia* in an interview with Adrian Zenz. Zenz is an evangelical religious fanatic and a far-right fundamentalist Christian who claims himself “led by God” on a “mission” against China. Perhaps a million is not enough to satisfy his imagination. In an event organized by the US mission in Geneva in March 2019, Zenz stated, “Although it is speculative, it seems appropriate to estimate that up to 1.5 million ethnic minorities [have been detained by China in Xinjiang].”¹

Radio Free Asia is authorized by the United States Congress and is funded by annual federal grants. According to *the New York Times*, *Radio Free Asia* is an essential part of the CIA's global propaganda network. As for its credibility, Dalpino, who served in the Clinton State Department as a deputy assistant secretary deputy for human rights, regards *Radio Free Asia* as "a waste of money" and says it leans very heavily on reports by and about dissidents in exile.²

As *the Grayzone* has reported, a close examination of the reports released by these

¹ China detaining millions of Uyghurs? Serious problems with claims by US-backed NGO and far-right researcher ‘led by God’ against Beijing, Retrieved June 2, 2020, from <https://thegrayzone.com/2019/12/21/china-detaining-millions-uyghurs-problems-claims-us-ngo-researcher/>

² Dick Kirschten. (1999, May 1). *A new agency with a bold mission is set to boost America's broadcast efforts overseas*. Government Executive. Retrieved June 2, 2020, from <https://www.govexec.com/magazine/1999/05/broadcast-news/6021/>

institutes reveals serious bias and credibility problems, and the Western media has deliberately ignored the unreliable sources when reporting on China. American media critic James Fallows believes that mainstream American journalism has degenerated step by step and describes American public life as a horse race. Moreover, the news media's subordination to the Government of the United States is an apparent deviation from the fundamental beliefs that the news media should hold.

The U.S. government co-opts these foundations, media, and journalists through various forms of institutional setup, political protection, and financial support. These institutes and media respond to the needs of the U.S. government. They weave the “emperor's new clothes” in reports that lack autonomy and professional norms, and the reports seem to be "convincing" and "gorgeous” but are full of flaws. The Xinjiang-related reports released by the foundations and media are a deviation from journalistic professionalism and the principle of journalistic objectivity. It disobeyed the basic principles of news production, and it is the logic of producing outright fake news. The Act is based on reports from these media and will not be justified due to a lack of factual basis.

2. Sources lack multiple verifications

In newsgathering and writing, the principle “Single source does not stand” means that in addition to interviewing core sources, multiple sources should also be cross-verified, and this is also the basic operation specification of a news report. Most of the information in the Act comes from news media and human rights reports, not the core source. A notable example of this is the vocational education and training centers, which have been reported by many media around the world. The Chinese government has also made clear on many occasions and in various ways about the centers. However, statements in the Act about vocational education and training centers are all attributed to the media or foundations that represent the US government interests.

First of all, the Act does not adopt objective reports of vocational education and training centers. Since the end of December 2018, nearly 1,000 people have visited Xinjiang. Among them are foreign diplomatic envoys to China, UN officials, Geneva-based senior diplomats of

various countries, as well as more than 40 groups (or delegations) of people from political parties, civil society organizations, news media, and religious organizations of various countries. A *Lianhe Zaobao* reporter from Singapore visited the vocational education and training centers in Xinjiang in April 2019 and found that there is no human rights violation.³ US magazine *International Focus* published an article entitled “*A Journey to the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, China*,” in May 2019. It mentioned that “[the trainees] were well fed, and they had good sleeping conditions” and “they were allowed to practice their peaceful religious beliefs.”⁴ The reporter, Val Thompson, describes the trainees' lives with the word "happiness." In an interview with VOA, he also said, "I would not lie for anyone. I wrote down as much of the truth as I could see"⁵.

Second, the Act turns a blind eye to the terrorist threat China faces. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy makes it clear that terrorism is one of the most severe threats to international peace and security, and urgent action should be taken to prevent and combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.⁶ For some time, China's Xinjiang is under the combined influence of separatists, religious extremists, and terrorists. Chinese Ambassador to the UK Liu Xiaoming said in an interview with the BBC that the vocational education and training centers were for the prevention of terrorism. Since this measure was introduced in Xinjiang, there has been no single terrorist case in the past three years.⁷ Nevertheless, for a long time, some Western countries have selectively turned a blind eye to

³ Val Thompson.(2019, May 10). A Journey to the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, China. *International Focus*. Retrieved June 2,2020,from <https://ifmagazine.net/a-journey-to-the-autonomous-region-of-xinjiang-china/>

⁴ 游润恬（2019年4月23日）。被西方媒体质疑 新疆教培中心神秘面纱逐渐揭开。联合早报。2020年6月2日，取自：<https://www.zaobao.com/special/report/politic/cnpol/story20190423-950709>

⁵ 萧雨（2019年8月17日）。眼见为实？新疆“白皮书”背后的大外宣之旅。美国之音。2020年6月2日，取自：<https://www.voachinese.com/a/china-releases-white-paper-on-vocational-training-in-xinjiang20190817/5045888.html>

⁶ United Nation. (2006, September)*The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*.(Publication No. 60/288.). Retrieved June 2, 2020, from United Nation Reports Online via <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/60/288>

⁷ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom (2019, October8) *Ambassador Liu Xiaoming Gives Exclusive Live Interview on BBC Newsnight*, Retrieved June 2, 2020, from <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/ambassador/t1705852.htm>

China's core sources of information on Xinjiang-related issues.

Third, the Act completely ignores how China suffered from terrorism. Incomplete statistics show that from 1990 to the end of 2016, separatist, terrorist and extremist forces launched thousands of terrorist attacks in Xinjiang, killing large numbers of innocent people and hundreds of police officers, and causing immeasurable damage to property. In the "5.22" Urumqi morning market explosion in 2014, terrorists killed 39 people, and wounded 94. *The New York Times* use terms such as 'militants,' 'suicide bombings,' 'crazy knives,' and 'dropping bombs' to describe the horror. This violent terrorism and religious extremism have fully exposed their nature that goes against humanity, civilization, and society. However, the Act completely ignores them.

Most of the sources of findings adopted in this Act are from American foundations, "Dissent" media, and some dissidents. For example, Chinese Human Rights Defenders concluded that 1 million Uyghurs were detained in Xinjiang by interviewing eight people. Australian Strategic Policy Institute accused China of implementing an oppressive program of "forced labor" against the country's Uyghur Muslim ethnic minority; *Radio Free Asia* claimed that Uyghurs suffered from torture, denial of religious, cultural, and linguistic freedoms, and Uyghurs in American are facing threats and harassment from Chinese officials. Uyghur Human Rights Project claimed that the Chinese government is constantly pressuring Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The organization and individuals include an Uyghur exile, Ilshat Hassan, who has long worked at Booz Allen Hamilton. Booz Allen is a notorious private US military and intelligence contractor. In 2013, Edward Snowden was employed at the firm when he decided to blow the whistle on *the National Security Agency's* invasive, all-encompassing system of mass surveillance.

When the facts or opinions reflected by a source are consistent with the US government's prejudice and ideological needs, it will often choose the evidence that supports it and ignore the contradictory evidence. Ideological bias led the Act to build its factual basis on a single source of information.

II. REQUISITION RUMORS, HEGEMONIC PRODUCTION

The Act lacks basic facts, uses conjecture to conceive the facts they want, and uses the method of making something out of nothing to make an imaginary statement.

1. Hearsay, rumors regarded as corroborating information

Article two of Act S.3744 states: “since 2014, Chinese authorities have detained more than 1,000,000 Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other ethnic minorities in these camps.” This one million number is full of flaws. *The Grayzone* revealed the "Metamorphosis" of this figure. Initially, with the support of the US government, *the Chinese Human Rights Defender* (CHRD) designated this number as "millions of detentions." In 2018, CHRD arrived at the figures submitted to the UN claiming that one million ethnic Uyghurs had been detained in “re-education detention camps” and two million more have been “forced to attend day/evening re-education sessions.” After that, the US government said, "at least 800,000, maybe more than 2 million", and the Act passed in the Senate revised to "one million." Bizarrely, their enormous estimate was ultimately based on interviews with exactly 8 Uyghur individuals.⁸ According to various versions of the Act, the unilateral assumption of the United States not only fails to provide primary data, but the way and means of obtaining the data are too frivolous and hasty.

It is worth noting, according to *the Grayzone*, that the rumor spread widely because of a false headline from *Reuters*: “U.N. says it has credible reports that China holds a million Uighurs in secret camps.” The news was picked up by *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, and others. However, the truth is, the United Nations did not issue it. The announcement was made by *the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (CERD), an independent expert advisory body, not a U.N. official.

Article five of Act S.3744 states that detainees are "deprived of their freedom of religion,

⁸ Ajit Singh, Max Blumenthal(2019, December 21). China detaining millions of Uyghurs? Serious problems with claims by US-backed NGO and far-right researcher ‘led by God’ against Beijing. *The Gery Zone*. Retrieved June 2, 2020, from <https://thegrayzone.com/2019/12/21/china-detaining-millions-uyghurs-problems-claims-us-ngo-researcher/>. Chinese Human Right Defenders. (2018, August 3). *China: Massive Numbers of Uyghurs & Other Ethnic Minorities Forced into Re-education Programs*. Retrieved June2,2020, from <https://www.nchr.org/2018/08/china-massive-numbers-of-uyghurs-other-ethnic-minorities-forced-into-re-education-programs/>

culture, and language, and the only way to secure release was to demonstrate sufficient political loyalty.” This article is exaggerated and not in accordance with the facts. The Chinese government is fighting against violent terrorist forces, ethnic separatist forces, and religious extremist forces. According to a white paper titled "*Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang*" released by the Chinese State Council in August 2019, the only criterion for who needs education and training is whether they have committed illegal or criminal acts such as terrorism and religious extremism, regardless of their region, ethnic group or religion.² Chinese law also explicitly prohibits any discriminatory behaviors based on regional, ethnic, religious and other reasons.

The term “denial of the freedom of language” is also absurd. The White paper makes it clear that training in the common national language is aimed at the low level of students' use of the common national language, not to deprive or restrict the right to use and develop the minority language. On the contrary, mastering Mandarin enables students to learn scientific and cultural knowledge, master vocational skills, go out to do business and seek jobs, communicate with other ethnic groups, and make life easier.

The notion of “denial of cultural freedom” is even more ridiculous. In fact, in all three U.S. versions of the Act (S.178 ES, S.178 EAH, and S.3744), there is a lack of understanding and evidence. For example, Article 7C, section 4 of the Act S.178 ES, the first version of the Act, “Uyghurs are forced to celebrate Chinese cultural traditions.” According to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's special Plan for the Development of Cultural Industries (2016-2020), local governments have set up funds to support cultural industries with Xinjiang characteristics to protect cultural heritage. In 2015, the added value of Xinjiang's cultural industry was 11.268 billion yuan. By 2020, the added value of Xinjiang's cultural industry is expected to reach 40 billion yuan, accounting for about 3 percent of its GDP.

Article eight of Act S.3744 states that "in 2019, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China concluded that, based on available evidence, the establishment and actions committed in the internment camps in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region might constitute crimes against humanity.” "Crimes that may constitute crimes against humanity" are inherently speculative, and the report's various data (e.g., a database of political prisoners), case studies,

etc. are mostly from *Radio Free Asia* and other media and lack factual basis. The evidence in this report is insufficient, and the logic is not consistent. Concerning “crimes against humanity,” the Act S.3744 deleted the accusations against the so-called "re-education camps" in S.178 EAH and no longer listed the specific “crimes” of the camps. This back-and-forth shows that Congress does not have a complete grasp of what goes on in the “camps.”

Article six of the first version S.178 ES states that “Chinese security forces have never been held accountable for credible reports of mass shootings in Alaqagha (2014), Hanerik (2013), and Siriqbuya (2013), as well as the extrajudicial killings of Abdulbasit Ablimit (2013) and Rozi Osman (2014).” In the second version of Act S.178 EAH, passed in December, the wording was changed to “the government of the People’s Republic of China’s actions against Turkic Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region are in contravention of international human rights laws, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.”

The first version of the Act S.178 ES accused the Chinese government of failing to investigate several deaths in 2017 and 2018. The second Act (S.178 EAH) also removed each of these "incriminations," indicating that Congress had no information to support them. It is also worth noting that import and export controls were relaxed during the amendment process. The third version, S.3744, deleted import and export regulations and restrictions on technology exports and shifted to restrictions on the entry and exit of Chinese citizens and asset blockade. The revisions show that the U.S. remains dependent on the Chinese market for its foreign trade.

The Act is proposed for the sanction’s sake. The Act's broad description of the facts may mean that Congress did not engage in rigorous fact-checking in the drafting process. A series of changes show that the US Congress does not have accurate and comprehensive facts, so it will have to change the provisions of the Act.

2. The hegemonic production of the Act

The Act is based on the *Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018* and emphasizes the necessity of sanctions against China. However, this proves that *the Uighur Human Rights Policy Act* is a continuation of a series of China-related acts such as the *Asia Reassurance*

Initiative Act of 2018, aiming to safeguard the hegemony and interests of the US. *Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018* authorizes explicitly \$1.5 billion in each fiscal year from 2019 to 2023 for the U.S. Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Defense. The money is used to achieve various goals, including promoting U.S. foreign policy interests in the region and resisting China's attempts to undermine the world system. The Act also proposes interference in the affairs of other countries and regions, such as Myanmar, Tibet, and Taiwan. It can be seen that *the Uighur Act of 2020* of the US has continued its consistent practice of seeking hegemony in Asia and interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. *Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018* does not better explain the legitimacy and rationality of *the Uighur Act of 2020*.

III. NEGATIVE FRAMES, AND INCITING TO VIOLENCE

This study found that the facts on which the Act is based have severe problems in authenticity. From these problems, we can see the deep-rooted prejudice and hegemony of the US government against China. This prejudice and hegemonic framework determine that the entire writing of the Act is a word game that is difficult to achieve logical self-consistency. The authors of the American cognitive linguistics, Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M, pointed out in the book *Metaphors we live by* Political ideology is also framed by metaphors. These metaphors can lead to prejudice and stigmatization of a country or nation.⁹

1. Connection with negative semantic system

The Act used the vocabulary against Nazi Germany during World War II to construct a discursive framework for China, thereby introducing problems related to Xinjiang into historically painful memories and negative semantic systems. Western media use "concentration camps" to describe "vocational skills education and training centers," and this is a political practice of semantic connection. In the Act, Xinjiang's vocational skills education and training center was regarded as a "human rights violation" and was compared with the semantic system of the German concentration camp. If we accept the metaphor of

⁹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press.

“concentration camp,” the term “concentration camp” will directly link China’s anti-terrorism and depolarization actions with German history. China's achievements in counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization have been deliberately filtered out.

Western media has set a discursive framework (negative, oppressive, human rights, and violates international law), which incorporates everything into this framework for understanding. Data, arguments, and excuses that are not in this framework are denied, ignored, and marginalized. The prejudice is carried through to the end by not allocating discourse resources. For example, Chinese journalists from the BBC went to the Xinjiang Vocational Skills Education and Training Center for interviews. What they saw and heard were all positive. However, the reporters incorrectly used the sound and picture alignment technology, which made the picture presentation positive, but the commentary negative. Use editing techniques to embed prejudice into news reports. In the end, the correct and positive vocabulary was deliberately filtered out by the Western media, leading Xinjiang-related issues deep into the negative semantic system.

2. Discursive division and double standard

The U.S. government uses words such as “ethnic oppression,” “illegal detention,” “Concentration camps,” “human rights violations,” “arbitrary detention,” “abuse” and “harassment,” supplemented by ambiguous data, adopts irregular investigation methods, and filters news information from China and other countries in the world. China's anti-terrorism effort is eliminated from the world's anti-terrorism discourse.

China is the victim of a double standard of Western countries on counter-terrorism issues. In 2011, the United States killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. This assassination in other countries' territory was called a just act by Obama. Head of the Justice Department Eric Holder called it a national self-defense act. The United States’ *Patriot Act* stipulates that as long as it is related to international terrorism or foreign espionage activities, corresponding investigation activities can be carried out. This regulation has not been duly authorized, but it has become a basic means of investigation.¹⁰ In 2005, the UK started a project that aims to maintain

¹⁰ Ramraj, V. V., Hor, M., & Roach, K. (Eds.). (2009). *Global anti-terrorism law and policy*. Cambridge

community safety.¹¹ The program carries out training and community safety work in the community, including screening Islamic fundamentalism. The British government began to pay more attention to civic education in primary schools and Islamic schools. These initiatives of European and American countries are regarded as active anti-terrorism actions. However, the national common language education in China and the prevention of terrorism are becoming human rights violations. This is a typical double standard. We can see that in relevant BBC reports¹², China's anti-terrorism measures were labeled as "brainwashing," "Nazis," "punishment," etc., supplemented by a dark tone and weird music. China's efforts to counter terrorism, separatism and religious extremism are described as "anti-human nature" and "evil." This discourse segmentation based on ideology has excluded China's anti-terrorism from the discourses of world peace and anti-terrorism effort. It has emerged as a result of holding a double standard for China's anti-terrorism and anti-secession effort.

3. The humiliation of culture and inciting violence

Studies have shown that extremists have pointed out that they attacked the western world based on a sense of humiliation. Peter L. Bergen, who conducted an exclusive interview with bin Laden said, Bin Laden believes that the attack on the United States is just defensive war against the West since the First World War... As far as bin Laden is concerned, his war is mainly about humiliation and regaining the dignity of Muslims.¹³ It is this culture of humiliation that constitutes the profound reason why many Muslims are attracted to terrorist violence... The reason for the self-destructive impulse came into being due to the combined effects of psychology, culture, society, economy, etc., leading to the transformation from humiliation to violence.¹⁴ The Act uses words such as "arbitrary detention," "ill-treatment," "harassment," "long-term oppression," "aggression," "detention," "torture," "more than 1 million", etc., to

University Press.

¹¹ Allen, C., & Nielsen, J. S. (2002). *Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001: Summary report*. Diane Pub Co.

¹² 新疆“再教育营”：泄密文件披露中国如何洗脑百万维吾尔人， Youtube.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGDr38eU62U>.

¹³ Bergen, P. L. (2006). *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader*. Simon and Schuster.

¹⁴ Moïsi, D. (2010). *The geopolitics of emotion: How cultures of fear, humiliation, and hope are reshaping the world*. Anchor.

describe a situation that humiliates Muslim residents. Especially by using some false rumors, people in Xinjiang feel humiliated and make them feel that their identity is being scorned, which inspires them to take the most fierce resistance. Therefore, the Act is inspiring the humiliation of Muslim residents in Xinjiang. Such instigation will bring more significant challenges to the stability and development of Xinjiang.

IV. Conclusion

For a long time, China's ethnic policies and anti-terrorism practices have been criticized by Western countries. The introduction of *the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act* by the United States can be regarded as the consistent prejudice of Western countries against China and the continuation of hegemonic logic.

The US government has long interfered with China's Xinjiang-related issues. This time, in the form of an Act, the US replaced anti-terrorism and anti-secession issues in Xinjiang with human rights, ethnicity, and religious issues. We criticized human rights in Xinjiang and related policies. It is an escalation of the US effort of discrediting China's counter-terrorism practices and interfering policy.

Taking advantage of information produced by US controlled-foundations and the media, the the US is trying to construct the Western world's narrative for Xinjiang, China. However, the Act relies too heavily on unreliable sources such as foundations and media controlled by the United States and lacks coverage from core sources in China. Moreover, the Act does not adequately screen rumors, which shows that the Act itself is a text that lacks reliable factual support. From this perspective, the law has always been a tool for the United States when seeking world hegemony.

What needs to be warned is that the US government is good at using language strategies to bring China's Xinjiang issues into a state of historical nihilism and violent unconsciousness. For example, by linking China's governance to the negative semantic system; by discourse separation and denying China's anti-terrorism and depolarization achievements; by using many emotional words to stimulate Uighur humiliation and inciting violence. These are particularly evident in this Act. It can be said that the introduction of *the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act*

in the United States is more like a carefully crafted semantic game. (End)