

**Double Standards in International Relations: How Realpolitik
Considerations Deter Muslim-Majority States from Defending
Muslims in China**

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Abstract

In recent years, China has become an increasingly influential actor in Muslim-majority countries the world over. This is despite growing international condemnation of Beijing's imprisonment of Muslims living in northwestern Xinjiang province, in so-called "vocational training schools" where their religious identities are forcibly assimilated under the guise of counter-extremism. Nevertheless, Muslim-majority countries have remained silent or even supportive of China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. This seemingly contradictory policy position is frequently explained by citing these countries' dependence on Chinese trade and investment in their economic and infrastructural development, however this argument inadequately assesses other important factors behind these countries' support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. Beyond the theory of economic necessity and the equally realist consideration of security ties, this research further posits that Muslim-majority states support or defend China's treatment of Muslims in order to secure Chinese ideological support to defend themselves from reproach against their own domestic policies towards separatist movements and religious extremists. To evaluate these hypotheses, this thesis examines the engagement of some key Muslim-majority states with China by analyzing *realpolitik* factors like (1) economic relations; and (2) security and military cooperation; as well as more ideological factors, namely whether or not they share a common vulnerability to (3) domestic secessionist movements challenging their authority; or to (4) religious extremism that threatens state security. This research examines the economic and security relations between China and six of the most geopolitically significant Muslim-majority countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey), as well the influence of secessionism and religious extremism in each country. It then assesses the analytical validity of these four hypotheses, and concludes that the ideological considerations consisting of common vulnerability to secessionism and/or religious extremism, exhibited the greatest explanatory power for predicting Muslim-majority countries' level of support for China's treatment of Muslims. Although *realpolitik* considerations like economic and security cooperation with China can also clearly be seen to influence the position of Muslim-majority countries on this issue, ideological factors like obtaining Chinese support for their suppression of secessionist movements or religious extremism are clearly paramount. In addition to these four variables, this research also briefly acknowledges the explanatory potential of other ideological factors in influencing the support of Muslim-majority countries for China's policies towards its Muslim minorities. These include factors like regime type, the prevalence of anti-American sentiment, as well as the desire to form an alliance with China against Western democracies and the norms and standards they espouse in multilateral organizations. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that China has already achieved widespread political and ideological support among the developing countries of the Global South, including many Muslim-majority countries. If Western democracies wish to exert pressure on China to change its behaviour, they will first need to win back the support of the Global South by offering a suitable alternative source of political, economic and security support, while foregoing neocolonial demands to enact changes to their domestic political systems.

Keywords

China; Islam; Governance; Diplomacy; Soft Power; Middle East; North Africa; Muslim; Egypt; Saudi Arabia; Iran; Pakistan; Indonesia; Turkey; Uyghur

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Allāh does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allāh loves those who act justly.

Allāh only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion - [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers.

Qur'ān, Sūrah 60, verses 8-9

When Islam first emerged on the Arabian peninsula and began spreading throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the seventh century of the common era, China was largely unknown to the people who adopted the religion. According to Park (2012), “the Islamic world in the early years of Islam had only a vague notion of China, a country at the eastern end of the Silk Road from which merchants returned with silks and other goods, but whose precise location was not well defined” (Park 2012, 2). However, thanks to a growth in maritime trade in the eighth century, “more concrete information about Chinese society began to circulate within the Islamic world as more Muslim authors wrote about them” (Park 2012, 57-58). With few exceptions (discussed below), interactions between the Muslim and Chinese worlds were purely commercial, which led to very positive relations. Successive Chinese dynasties allowed Muslims and other foreigners to establish trading posts in cities like Quanzhou in the southeastern region of modern-day Fujian province, where they were able to thrive economically and orchestrate a cultural exchange. Surprisingly though, it was under the rule of the Mongol empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that the Islamic and Chinese worlds truly came to understand, and

in many cases adopt, one another's culture. Despite having violently conquered much of Eurasia, the 'Pax Mongolica' (Mongol Peace) which ensued "encouraged cross-cultural interaction across the empire and beyond, including the circulation of commodities and information adopted from the cultures of the societies they subjugated" (Park 2012, 193). The two cultural spheres developed a mutual admiration and respect, and this has persisted into the modern period, with Sino-Islamic relations largely remaining positive. Leaders of the Muslim world have not historically had any reason to criticize Chinese leaders, as the latter have not traditionally interfered in the former's political affairs. However, since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, repressive Chinese policies towards its Muslim minorities have given rise to expectations that the Muslim world would intervene in their defence. Why this has still largely not happened is the subject of this dissertation. However, before we can address this puzzling phenomenon, it is important to set out the background of contemporary Sino-Islamic relations.

Through the development of extensive trade networks and generous foreign direct investment, China has become a major player among the Muslim-majority countries of the MENA region in recent years (Molavi, 2019), as well as Muslim-majority countries the world over. A good indicator of China's growing economic influence in the Islamic world is the strong ties between Beijing and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an organization composed of 57 countries with significant Muslim populations spanning Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. In 2017, Chinese exports to the OIC reached US\$ 276.1 billion, representing 16.5% of OIC imports from outside of the group; meanwhile, its imports from OIC member states totalled US\$ 181.5 billion, or 11.3% of OIC exports outside of the group (COMCEC 2018). The significance of these statistics is that China is both the biggest export market and goods supplier to the OIC bloc among non-OIC countries, far ahead of competitors like India (4.5% of imports; 8.1% of exports), the United States (6.8% of imports; 6.9% of exports), and Japan (4.3% of imports; 6.8% of exports)(COMCEC 2018)(see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). The strengthening trade ties and growing economic dependence of Muslim-majority countries on commercial relations with China is taking place at the same time that we are seeing growing international condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policies of imprisoning Muslims living in the northwestern Xinjiang Uyghur

Autonomous Region (XUAR). According to Western media, democratic governments and human rights organizations, Chinese authorities have forcibly detained more than one million Muslims in so-called "vocational training schools" where their religious identities are forcibly assimilated in the name of counter-extremism (Churchill, 2018; DeHahn 2019). Despite this, Muslim-majority countries remain unwilling to condemn China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, and some have even actively supported and defended China's repressive policies. This phenomenon has frequently been explained by citing these countries' dependence on Chinese investment in their economic and infrastructural development, and the fear of economic retaliation by China if they were ever to criticize its treatment of Muslims (Ma, 2018).

Table 1.1: Major Destinations of Total Extra-OIC Exports

Countries	(Billion Dollars)			Share %		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
China	165.3	145.7	181.5	10.9	10.6	11.3
India	123.0	107.2	129.7	8.1	7.8	8.1
United States	96.7	96.7	110.5	6.3	7.1	6.9
Japan	129.4	101.2	109.0	8.5	7.4	6.8
Korea	83.4	68.6	81.4	5.5	5.0	5.1
Singapore	69.2	63.7	76.1	4.5	4.6	4.8
Italy	48.9	46.4	58.2	3.2	3.4	3.6
France	38.5	35.4	43.1	2.5	2.6	2.7
Netherlands	39.0	31.5	42.8	2.6	2.3	2.7
Germany	36.3	35.9	40.1	2.4	2.6	2.5
Total of Top Ten Countries	829.7	732.2	872.4	54.5	53.4	54.5
Total OIC Export	1,523.0	1,370.6	1,602.2	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics

Table 1.2: Major Countries of Origin of Total Extra-OIC Imports

Countries	(Billion Dollars)			Share %		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
China	243.2	235.0	276.1	15.4	15.9	16.5
United States	114.8	107.3	113.9	7.3	7.3	6.8
Germany	87.5	81.5	80.6	5.5	5.5	4.8
India	65.2	68.5	75.1	4.1	4.6	4.5
Japan	63.8	61.9	71.6	4.0	4.2	4.3
Russian Federation	70.3	65.4	67.9	4.4	4.4	4.1
Korea, Republic of	58.5	47.8	59.2	3.7	3.2	3.5
France	58.4	50.4	56.9	3.7	3.4	3.4
Italy	52.1	48.7	52.9	3.3	3.3	3.2
Singapore	51.6	48.5	52.1	3.3	3.3	3.1
Total of Top Ten Countries	865.3	814.8	906.3	54.7	55.3	54.0
Total OIC Import	1,582.4	1,473.7	1,677.3	100.0	100.0	100.0

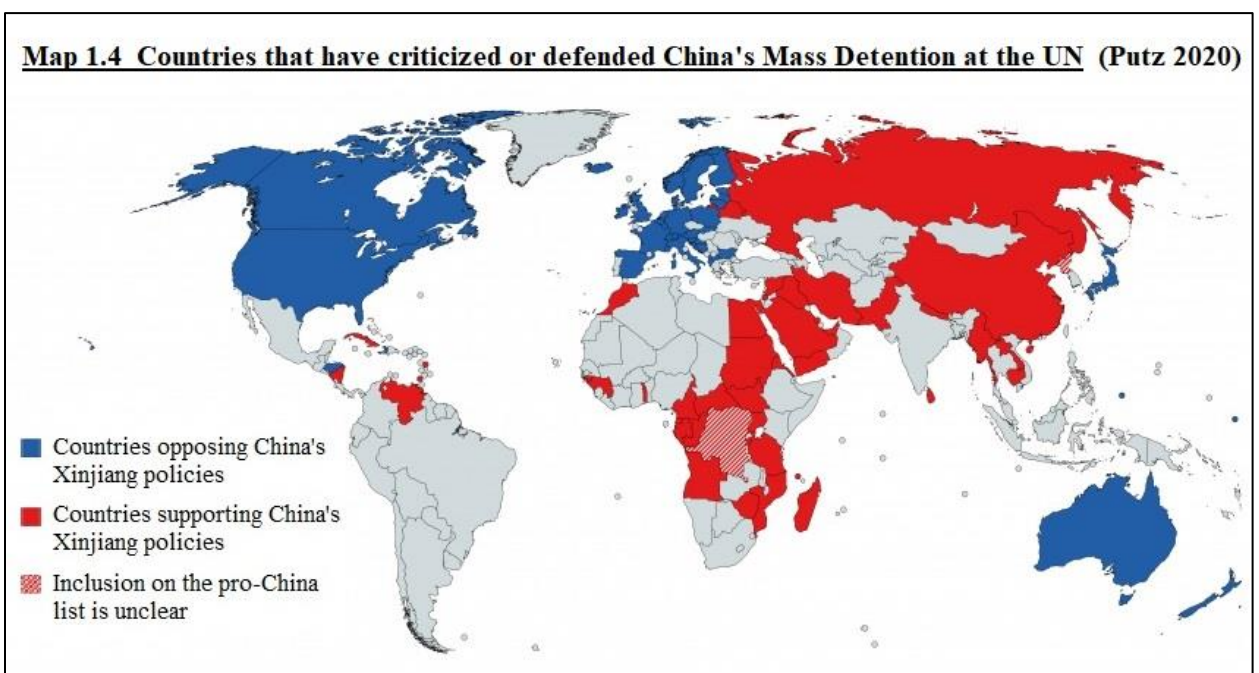
Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics

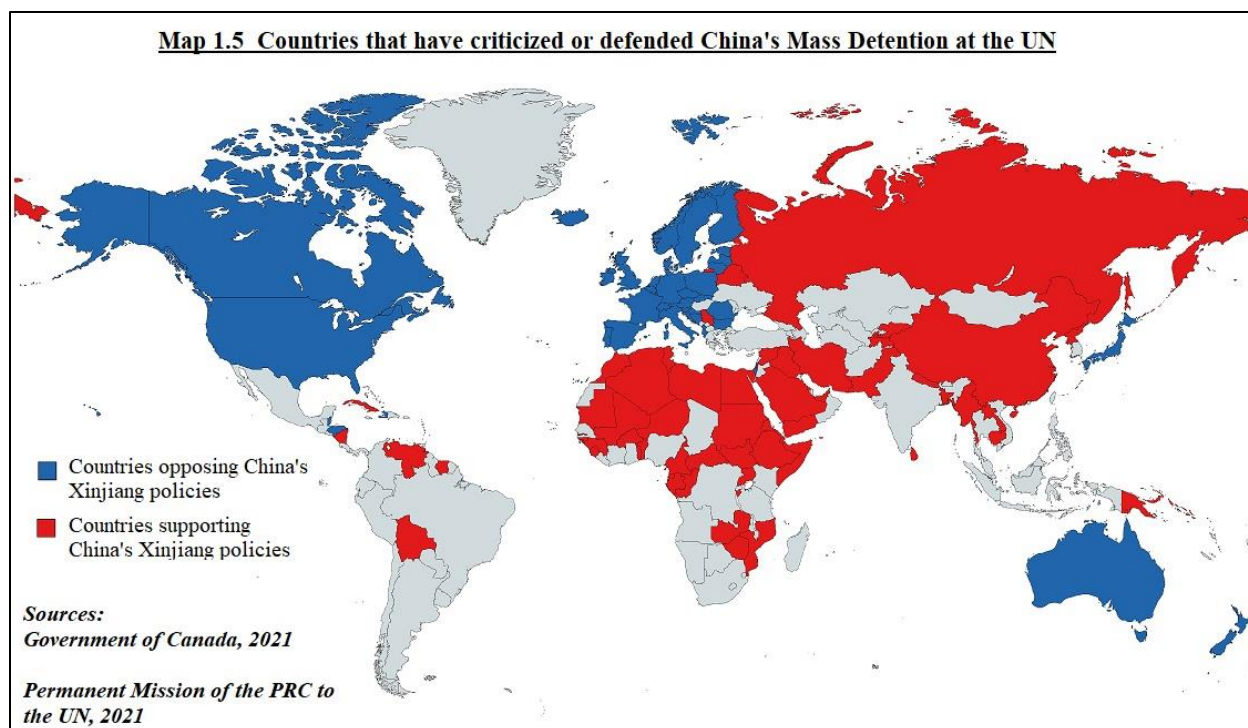
This hypothesis related to economic dependence may, however, be challenged by noting the willingness of many Muslim-majority countries to condemn some of their other major economic partners. For example, the OIC and many of its member states have frequently openly condemned the treatment of

Muslim minorities by countries like India and the United States. Following the decision by United States President Donald Trump to impose a ban on admitting refugees and travellers from seven Muslim-majority countries in 2017, several OIC member states spoke out condemning this move (Brinkhurst-Cuff et al., 2017). Similarly, when the Trump administration announced that they would be moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, this caused uproar throughout the global Muslim community, as the latter city has religious significance for both Jews and Muslims, and has been the scene of frequent violent conflicts between the two groups over which one should have control over it. Following this announcement, the OIC issued a statement condemning the move, and even calling on Muslim-majority countries to boycott the US (TRT World, 2019). Meanwhile, the OIC has also frequently expressed public condemnation of India's treatment of Muslims in the Kashmir region, accusing India in 2019 of 'illegally' undermining the regional stability by revoking Article 370, which granted significant autonomy to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (News18, 2019). Despite the importance of these two major economies to the development of many OIC member states, as well as the significant power they wield on the international stage, the OIC has not held back on condemning their treatment of Muslims.

Conversely, despite China's detention and imprisonment of more than one million Muslims in the XUAR, neither the OIC nor any individual Muslim-majority country has been willing to issue the same kinds of statements against the Chinese government, and they have even actively praised the CCP's policies in the XUAR. For example, on March 1-2, 2019, during the 46th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC, the council published a resolution in which it "commend[ed] the efforts of the People's Republic of China in providing care to its Muslim citizens [...]" (OIC, 2019). This language aligns with the CCP's narrative that its so-called 'vocational training schools' provide useful skills to Uyghurs and other Muslims while ridding them of extremist ideologies and instilling in them a sense of Chinese patriotism. However, this language directly contradicts the accounts of some who have escaped the camps in the XUAR, who allege that the guards in these camps torture Muslims and brainwash them into renouncing their ethnic and religious identities and embracing the Chinese identity being forced on

them by the CCP. As mentioned above, following the issuing of a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet in July 2019 by 22 democratic countries condemning China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, a separate letter defending China's policies in the XUAR was issued by 37 mostly authoritarian regimes, among which were many Muslim-majority countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (see Map 1.3). Another letter was presented in support of China's narrative at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019, co-signed by representatives of 50 countries, including the three noted above as well as Iran (A/HRC/41/G/17 2019). In October 2020, at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Issues, a joint statement on behalf of 39 countries condemned China's XUAR camps, while a joint statement on behalf of 45 countries praised the camps (see Map 1.4, Putz 2020). Most recently, dueling joint statements at the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva were delivered in June 2021 by Canada on behalf of 44 countries condemning China (Government of Canada, 2021), and by Belarus on behalf of 67 countries (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2021), representing the largest number of countries taking an official stance on the issue so far (see Map 1.5). Fundamentally, there are three main positions that have been taken by countries around the world with respect to this issue: (1) active support, (2) active opposition, and (3) ambiguous silence. While many Muslim-majority countries have maintained an ambiguous silence on China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, several have been among the most ardent defenders of Beijing's policies in Xinjiang. Therefore, the underlying question of this research is, faced with what has been called a cultural genocide and the repression of Muslims for their faith in the XUAR, how can Muslim-majority states reconcile their commitment to defending Muslims around the world with their support and active praise for the PRC? Why has the Muslim world taken this inconsistent approach to advocating on behalf of persecuted Muslims? The next section will explore the history of Sino-Islamic relations to contextualize the contemporary relations between China and a Muslim world characterized by a diversity of cultures and political systems.





1.1 The History of Sino-Islamic Relations

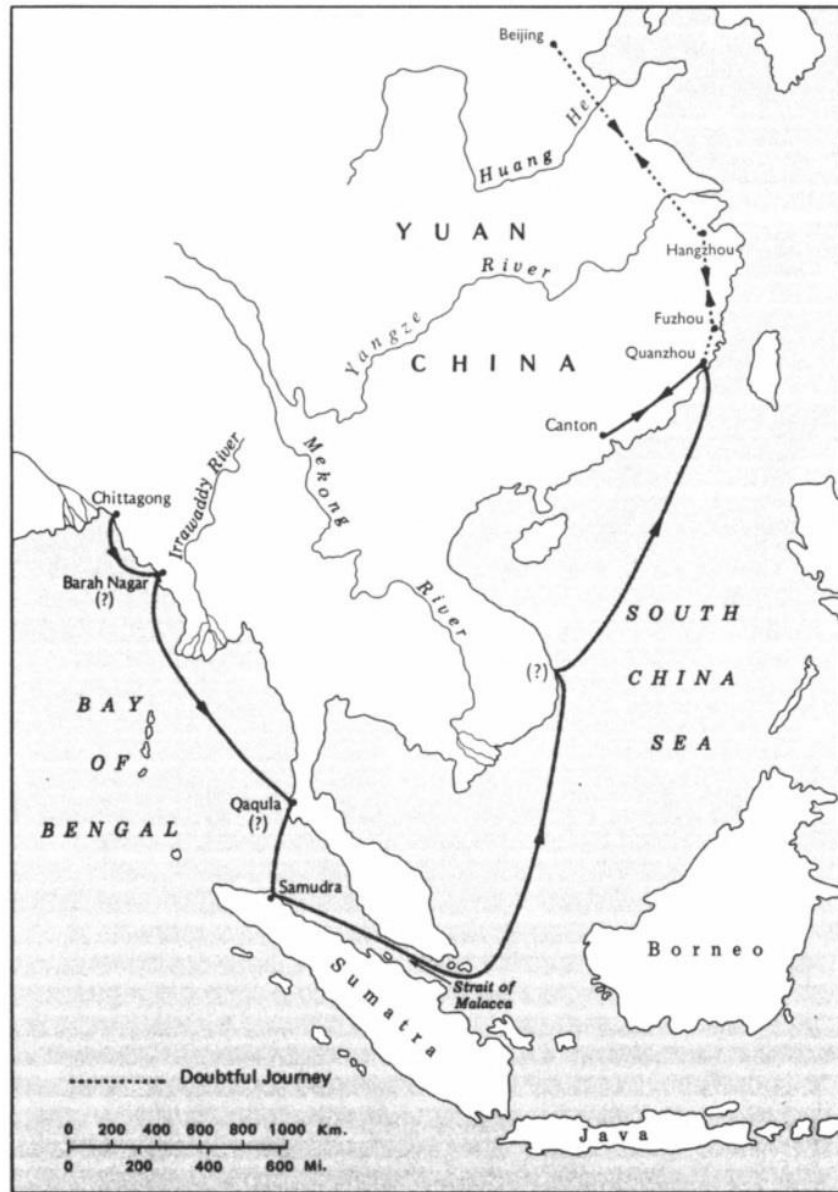
The first Muslims came into contact with China in the seventh century of the Common Era, when Arab and Persian traders brought merchandise from the Middle East across the Silk Road. The rulers of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.) eventually formed relations with the third caliph (descendent of the Prophet Mohammed), Othman Ibn Affan, receiving an envoy from the caliph in 651 C.E. As relations evolved, the Arab Muslims of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 C.E.) and the armies of the Tang fought together as well as against each other, over the course of a century. As both empires were expanding, they eventually confronted each other in the Battle of Artlakh (751 C.E., a.k.a. the Battle of Talas) which was won by the ‘Abbasid army, effectively halting the westward expansion of the Tang Dynasty (Frankel 2016, 574). However, only five years later, when a Tang general named An Lushan started a rebellion against the emperor, “the ‘Abbasid Caliph, al-Mansūr, sent 22,000 Arab mercenary soldiers to aid the Tang loyalist forces, helping the dynasty recapture the capitals of Chang’an and Luoyang” (Frankel 2016, 574). After defeating the An Lushan rebellion, these Arab mercenaries were permitted to stay in China

and even to marry Chinese women, which resulted in the establishment of Muslim communities throughout the Tang territory. For the duration of the Tang dynasty and the entirety of the Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E.), the descendants of these first Chinese Muslims served as the bridge between the Muslim Arabs and the Chinese, promoting both trade and diplomacy between the two civilizations.

In central Asia at this time, a Turko-Islamic empire called the Qarakhanids (840-1212) established close ties with Muslim empires to its west (Ghaznavids and Seljuks) and “sent diplomatic envoys to the Liao (916–1125) and the Northern Song (960–1127) dynasties and reestablished trade with China which flourished between Tang China and Sogdiana in Central Asia in the seventh to eighth centuries” (Duturaeva 2018, 179). Similarly, the Fatimid Caliphate (909-1171) which ruled much of modern-day Egypt and along the coast of northern Africa, established diplomatic relations with the Song dynasty. Evidently, various segments of the Muslim world were fascinated with ancient Chinese empires, and made efforts to engage with them economically and diplomatically. These strong relations continued even after China and many Muslim empires were toppled by the Mongols, who established the Yuan Dynasty stretching from Eastern Europe through the Middle East all the way to East Asia, which lasted from 1279 until 1368 C.E. (Frankel 2016, 574). Although the Mongol empire was responsible for conquering Baghdad, overthrowing the Abbasid Caliphate and massacring thousands of Muslims, they nevertheless granted religious freedom to all believers, as long as their practices did not threaten the stability of Genghis Khan’s empire (Baumer 2016, 1). It was during this period that trade between the Muslim world and the Chinese grew exponentially, with the establishment of “Muslim mercantile communities” in southern Chinese port cities like Quanzhou, Guangzhou and even as far north as Hangzhou (Dunn 2005, 249). According to historical accounts, a famous Moroccan scholar and traveler named Ibn Battuta (1304-1369) spent years sailing beyond the limits of the Muslim world, reaching some of the southern Chinese trading ports in 1346 (see Map 1.6). Some accounts claim that Ibn Battuta was even invited to travel to Beijing to meet the emperor, but many scholars dispute this based on lack of evidence and the chronological impossibilities of the supposed timelines (Dunn 2005, 256-261).

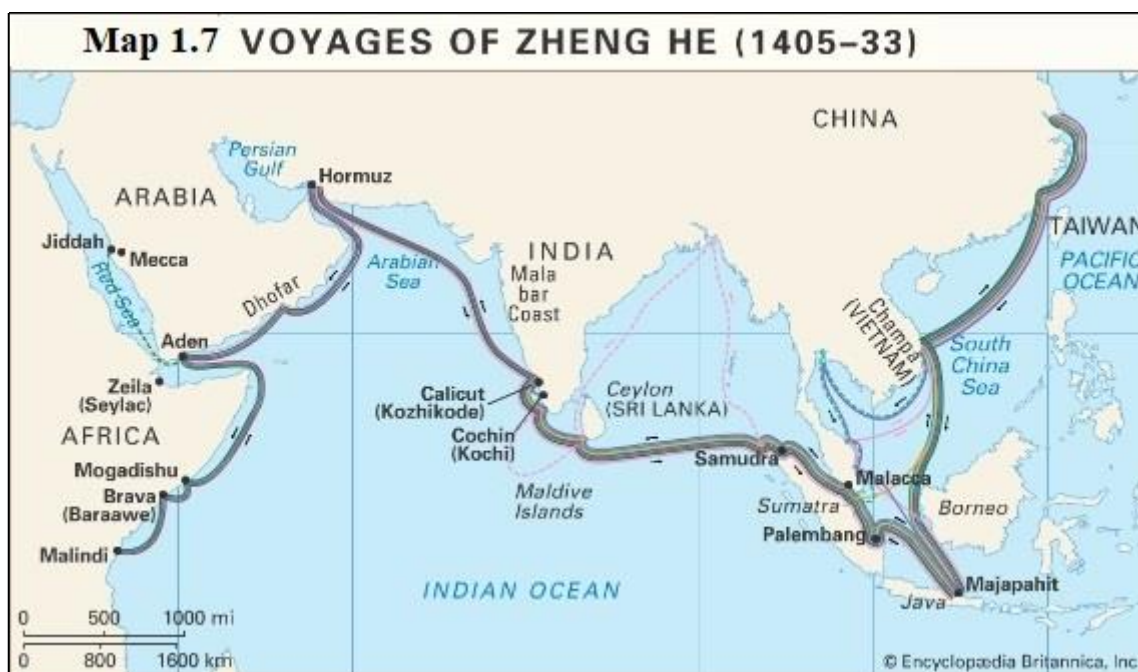
Nevertheless, it is clear that, even during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the Muslim world continued to develop closer ties with China, as well as with East and Southeast Asia more broadly.

Map 1.6 Ibn Battuta's Itinerary in Southeast Asia and China, 1345-46



When the Han Chinese finally succeeded at pushing out the Mongols and establishing the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), they reinstated policies of assimilation towards Chinese Muslims, sometimes referred to as 'Sinicization'. As a result of having been conquered by Mongol 'outsiders' for more than a century, "Ming policy was inward-looking, isolationist, even xenophobic, with a single exception: The

second Ming emperor, Yongle (r. 1402-1424), who sought during his reign to engage the outside world and increase China's international prestige and political-economic influence" (Frankel 2016, 575). It was during the reign of the Yongle Emperor that a Muslim eunuch named Zheng He (1371-1433) was appointed to the position of admiral and sent on various naval expeditions with a large Chinese fleet of armed ships. Some historians have argued that "these voyages were designed to establish a Chinese presence, impose imperial control over trade," using vessels "equipped with incendiary weapons such as the catapult-thrown gunpowder grenades" (Dewan 2015, 8). Others argue that instead of attempting to conquer the foreign lands of the Middle East, the Asian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, Zheng He was a goodwill ambassador who established friendly relations with the many kingdoms he visited (see Map 1.7). After his death, he was revered as a bridge-builder who formed an unprecedented tributary system, famously bringing hundreds of foreign diplomats back to China on his ships to pay tribute to the Ming rulers (Lynn 2007, 31-38). Compared to the European explorers who arrived on the Eastern coast of Africa later that same century, "the Chinese were neither conquerors nor immigrants; they were navigators and merchants," and historians have remarked that "the Chinese treated the Africans with courtesy and restraint" (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 20-21). Following this period of close ties between China and the Muslim world, subsequent Ming emperors cut ties with the outside world, which led to the "gradual blending of Confucian and Islamic ideas that would gain its fullest expression in works collectively referred to as the Han Kitab," which would be used for spreading Islamic teachings to Chinese Muslims across the Ming territory (Frankel 2012, 252).



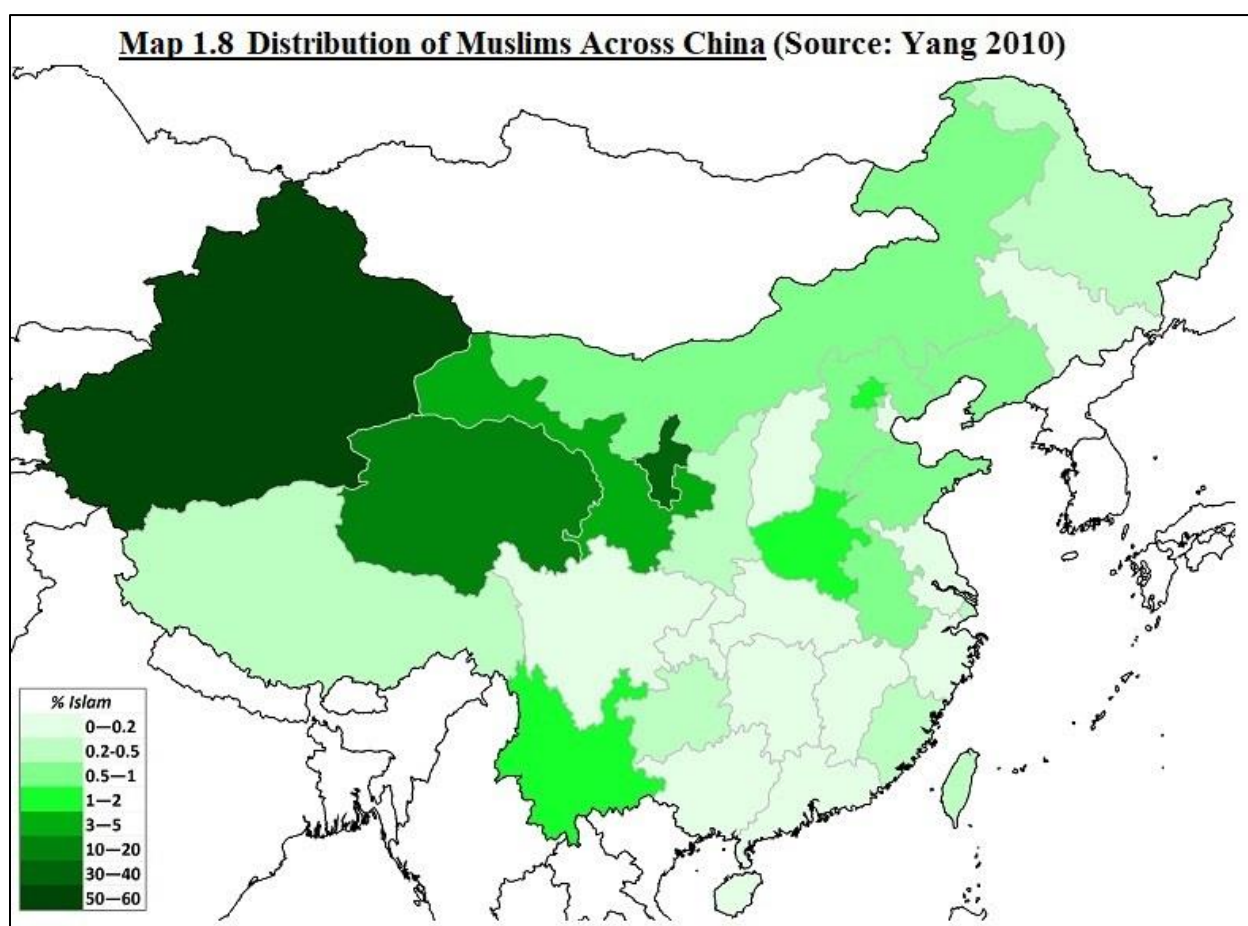
Although this golden age of Islamic literary Sinicization continued into the subsequent Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the Qing's foreign Manchu rulers' westward expansion into Muslim regions of modern-day Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang caused friction between the Han Chinese and the Hui and other Muslims, prompting rebellions and demands for autonomy (Frankel 2016, 575-6). The Qing would continue conquering lands to the west just as the Muslim Mughal empire in modern-day India was in political turmoil, following the death of its last strong emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 (Mosca 2013, 75). Nevertheless, the Qing court heard accounts of Mughal power, and considered sending a diplomatic envoy to Hindustan (the name of the Mughal territory), but no such emissary was ever sent. However, there are accounts of a Mughal envoy bringing tribute to the Qing Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) on his eightieth birthday in 1790 (Mosca 2013, 80). One of the neighbouring Muslim powers that threatened the Mughal empire was Badakhshan (a sultanate in modern-day Afghanistan), ruled by Ahmad Shah, who had long sought help from the Qing empire to conquer parts of Hindustan. Following several refusals to send Qing troops, Ahmad Shah "sent a letter to the Qing court in 1762 demanding it withdraw from Muslim territories, and, when this ultimatum was rejected, began to assemble a huge invasion force," although no invasion ever occurred (Mosca 2013, 80-81). The only other significant Muslim empire at

this time was the Ottoman empire based in modern-day Turkey, but due to geographical distance from the Qing empire, their relations were primarily economic (Hathaway & Barbir 2013, 308). Although the Qing had angered the Hui, Uyghur and other Muslims they conquered, the most powerful Muslim empires of that era maintained mostly positive relations with the Qing empire. There is even evidence that in the final years of the Qing Dynasty, a Hui cleric named Wang Haoren traveled to the Middle East and to Istanbul to implore the Ottoman ruler, Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) to help the Qing (Chen 2015).

Following the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, the Qing Dynasty collapsed and was replaced with a coalition government and National Assembly, and thus the Republic of China (ROC) was founded. At around the same time, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was gaining influence in the Ottoman Empire as its power was crumbling, so Kemalist Turkey served as a prototype for Chinese revolutionaries demanding political reform (Tao 2013). Turkey established official diplomatic relations with the ROC in 1923 (see Chapter 9), and maintained these relations long after the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During the brief period that the ROC remained on mainland China (1911-1949), the Nationalist *Guomindang* Party (KMT) sought to propagate a sense of national unity in which ethnic minorities (i.e. non-Han peoples) were brought under the umbrella of the '*zhonghua minzu*' (中华民族), or the 'Chinese nation' (Mao 2011, 374). In this context and as the Japanese began to invade and occupy parts of China, Muslim minority ethnic groups were encouraged by the KMT to undertake the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, where they advocated against Japanese occupation of China and in favour of KMT rule (Mao 2011, 375). Following these delegations' successes at fostering support among Middle Eastern Muslims and their governments for the ROC's fight against Japanese imperialism, the KMT was encouraged by delegates to strengthen Chinese diplomatic relations with the Muslim world (Mao 2011, 389). This rapprochement with the Muslim world would never get fully underway, as the Communist victory over the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) would usher in a new approach to governing Islam and Muslims, as well as religion and ethnic minorities more broadly.

1.2 Governing Islam in Contemporary China

The population of Muslims in the modern-day territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has reached a total population of approximately 23 million today (Mun 2013, 27). The two largest Muslim ethnic groups in modern-day China are the Hui (10.6 million) and the Uyghur (11.3 million), largely concentrated in their respective autonomous regions of Ningxia and Xinjiang, although the Hui are also found in every major city across the country (see Map 1.8), with a diversity of dialects, cultures, customs and even beliefs. However, despite their common religion, Beijing has taken very different approaches in its relations with the two ethnic groups, pursuing a conciliatory approach with the Hui which have assimilated more closely to the majority ethnic Han culture including through intermarriage with the Han, while restricting the freedoms of the Uyghurs and other Muslims with Turkic ethnic background (e.g. Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, etc.) who have made every effort to remain very distinct from



the Han (Gladney 2008; Israeli 2002). Since the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) reconquered the Uyghur's territory from the Zunghar confederation in the 1750s, renaming it 'Xinjiang' (new frontier), Chinese military rule over the region has increased in coerciveness and control (Millward 2007, 88-97; 107-115).

Uyghurs have resisted any attempt by the Chinese to rule over their land, often employing violence in the form of organized military struggle or of sporadic terrorist attacks. Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the resulting power vacuum led to violent conflict between the Nationalist Party and the newly formed Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as many other warlords vying for power throughout the country. Although Chinese control over the outer regions was never formally relinquished, "for several decades, border regions such as Manchuria, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Outer and Inner Mongolia were either under strong foreign domination, or formally declared their political independence from the Chinese domain" (Lin, 2011, 159). In particular, the Northwestern region of Xinjiang, where the Uyghur Muslims mainly reside, was left to govern itself autonomously, after centuries of being ruled under the Manchu Qing Dynasty. It was in this context that the Uyghurs attempted to form an independent state called the 'East Turkestan Republic', first in Kashgar in 1933, and then again in Yining from 1944-1949 (Gladney 2008). During these brief periods, many Muslim-majority countries refused to give recognition or send aid to the Uyghurs, fearing Chinese and Soviet retaliation. Among the countries that did not offer support were Atatürk's Turkey, Reza Shah's Iran and Afghanistan (Frankel 2016, 577).

The CCP, which defeated the Nationalist KMT army and has subsequently governed the PRC since its foundation in 1949, has often granted significant freedoms to the Hui, while imposing tight restrictions on the Uyghurs, whose demands for an independent East Turkestan have been perceived as a serious threat to Chinese territorial integrity and the CCP's regime stability. Not only were the Hui more assimilated to Han Chinese culture and spoke the Han language, they also posed no such secessionist threat, as they were proud to be part of successive strong Chinese empires (Berlie, 2004). Meanwhile, the Uyghurs have been treated more like the Tibetans and the Mongolians, both of which have had their own secessionist movements, and whose populations are concentrated on the peripheries of China. As Gladney

(2004) explains, “although [China’s ethnic minorities] are only 9 percent of the total population, minorities are concentrated in areas rich in minerals and natural resources, and spanning nearly 60 percent of the country’s land mass” (Gladney 2004, 19). Secessionism among these peripheral ethnic minorities not only threatens China’s economic gains from exploiting these resources, but also threatens China’s territorial integrity, the defense of which has long been viewed by the CCP as a central element in its own legitimacy to rule (Hao 2015, 74). Pokalova (2013) argues that, since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the reluctance of the CCP regime to grant genuine autonomy to the Uyghur people explains the increasingly violent resistance from Uyghur separatists:

“While on paper China propagated autonomy, in reality, it imposed the policies of central control over religion, education and language in Xinjiang. Practising a combination of forced assimilation and migration policies, China relied on the military and the police to carry out its policies. As a result, China has created conditions ripe for the emergence of terrorism” (Pokalova 2013, 287).

Beyond the threat of secessionism, the CCP also fears the Uyghur’s Islamic faith, given its capacity to mobilize the masses in an already unstable region, and the fact that its spiritual authority lies outside the sphere of Beijing’s control. It is important to note that the CCP’s policies towards religion writ large are rooted in the party’s ideological foundation in Marxism, which sees religion as the “opium of the people,” a tool for the ruling classes to subjugate the working classes, ultimately needing to be eliminated from society (Marx & Engels 1964). It is therefore not surprising that the CCP has taken a suppressive approach to governing religion within the PRC, however it is important to note that this policy on religion has evolved over time. Yang (2011) describes four distinct periods since the foundation of the PRC, each with their own distinct approach to governing religion. The first period, labeled the ‘co-optation and control’ period (1949-1957), was characterized by an institutional attempt at eliminating foreign influence over five officially recognized religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Catholicism and Islam) by establishing ‘patriotic’ religious associations to administer each religion separately, all of

which were under the control of the CCP (Yang 2011, 67-69).¹ During the second period (1957-1966), religion underwent a ‘socialist transformation’ during which religions were further brought under the control of the Religious Affairs Bureau (later renamed the State Administration of Religious Affairs, or SARA)(Yang 2011, 69-72). The next period (1966-1979), which Yang calls the ‘eradication’ period, saw the initiation of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ by the CCP, which sought to destroy all symbols of the old, feudal society which the party believed was impeding the progress of the working classes. During this period, religious artifacts, buildings and scriptures were destroyed and those who openly professed their religiosity could be subjected to persecution, as the CCP encouraged so-called ‘militant atheism’ (Yang 2011, 72-74). Finally, the fourth period began in 1979 after the death of Chairman Mao and the start of the ‘Reform and Opening’ period under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. This period saw the CCP seek to strengthen its regulation of religion while accepting its utility in society, shifting from the ‘militant atheism’ of the Cultural Revolution to what Yang calls ‘enlightenment atheism’ (Yang 2011, 74-78). Of course, Yang was writing before the accession to power of President Xi Jinping, who has implemented increasingly restrictive measures to control every aspect of religious practice in China since taking over leadership in 2012. Perhaps this could be classed as a new period, characterized by increased monitoring, control and even assimilation of the so-called ‘foreign’ religions.

1.3 Human Rights Violations in Chinese Policies towards Muslims

Since the Islamist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 (9/11), many governments around the world have taken extreme measures to prevent violent ideologies from radicalizing their Muslim populations. Beijing quickly leapt on this opportunity to justify increased restrictions against the Uyghur Muslims in the XUAR. The prominence of Uyghur terrorist organizations like the *East Turkestan Islamic Movement* (ETIM) and the *Turkestan Islamic Party* (TIP), have enabled

¹ The associations formed to monitor each of the five officially recognized religions and their practices are as follows: The Buddhist Association of China (founded in 1953), the Islamic Association of China (founded in 1953), the Christian Three-Selfs Patriotic Movement Committee of China (founded in 1954), the Daoist Association of China (founded in 1957), and the Catholic Laity Patriotic Association of China (founded in 1957).

the CCP to justify harsh crackdowns in the region. The groups' links to Islamist terrorist groups like *Al Qaeda* in neighbouring countries like Pakistan (Xu et al. 2014), have also further legitimized Beijing's narrative that Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang have been radicalized. However, Beijing has treated the Uyghur separatists as a security threat to the Chinese state since long before 9/11, and this quasi-securitization has stoked fear among the ethnic Han majority, to the point where they not only accept the depiction of Uyghurs as a threat, but they even enjoin the Chinese government to enforce restrictions against Uyghurs in the name of security (Trénadiel & Lee 2018, 190-191). With the events of 9/11 sparking state-driven securitization of Islam across the non-Muslim world, the CCP was quick to use its control over the information accessible to Chinese citizens to "reframe the threat from that of an ethnic separatist issue to a terrorist problem connected to international Islamist networks" (Pokalova 2013, 280). This helped Beijing to justify increasingly repressive policies in Xinjiang to the international community, initiating a new 'Strike Hard' campaign and detaining thousands of Uyghurs under an Amended Criminal Law following the 9/11 attacks (Pokalova 2013, 280-290). In more recent years, the CCP's narrative on the Uyghur threat has evolved into an ideological battle against Islamism, and its policy response has also evolved to become more suppressive, initiating bans on anything that could be seen as evidence of the infiltration of foreign extremism into the Chinese Muslim population.

While historically, the Hui Muslims have enjoyed greater freedoms than the Uyghurs due to their greater assimilation, in recent years, even they have experienced an increase in restrictions on their religious activities. This has included broadening controls on religious education, preventing the public presence of Muslim symbols and halal signs, and ensuring that all Hui imams undergo political education and commit to preventing "illegal foreign religious infiltration activities" (Cook 2017, 66-85). In 2019, there were a number of new policies introduced by Beijing towards Muslims throughout China, including the removal of Arabic script from stores, mosques and other public places (Myers 2019), and the removal of domes from mosques (The Economist 2019). These traditional, religiously significant items have been replaced with Chinese-style architecture and patriotic slogans like "Love the Motherland and Be Grateful to the Party; Listen to the Party and Follow the Party" (Human Rights Watch 2018). As fears of Islamist

ideologies continue to proliferate, and Beijing seeks to ensure that these ideologies cannot penetrate and influence Chinese society and radicalize Chinese Muslims, the CCP has strengthened its controls over all Muslim activities taking place within its borders. Although the XUAR has frequently been the target of the CCP's 'Strike Hard Campaigns' since the first one was launched in 1996 to detain alleged criminals and defend regional security (Human Rights Watch, 2005), the detention of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the XUAR has escalated since the arrival of Chen Quanguo as regional Party Secretary in August 2016. Secretary Chen further escalated the most recent 'Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism' (launched in May 2014), imposing new restrictions on Muslims in the region, including the collection of biometric data, and the imposition of new Orwellian mass surveillance technologies (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The government has also arbitrarily detained more than a million Muslims in what the CCP has called 'vocational training schools', but which many countries have likened to concentration camps (Mai, Zheng & Chen, 2019). Upon 'graduation' from these indoctrination camps, there is evidence that Uyghurs have been sent to factories where they are used as forced labour to assemble products that are then sold around the world (BBC 2021; Business & Human Rights Centre 2021; Xu et. al. 2020). Reports have even suggested that Chinese authorities have sought to reduce the birth rate among Uyghurs and other minority ethnic groups by forcing "intrauterine devices, sterilization and even abortion on hundreds of thousands" (The Associated Press 2020).

In recent years, China has witnessed protests, self-immolations and violent attacks in Tibet and Xinjiang, which Beijing has claimed are motivated by the so-called 'three evils' of 'terrorism, separatism and extremism'. The CCP blames attacks in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China on extremist Uyghur separatists (e.g. the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, or ETIM), and blames protests and self-immolations in Tibet on the influence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile (Hillman, 2016, 3-4). According to the Tibetans and Uyghurs themselves, they argue that they "are being marginalized culturally and economically in their homelands and that their rights are being systematically violated" (Hillman 2016, 4). Beijing fears these two ethnic and religious minorities most of all, because of their "potential to generate domestic instability, complicate Beijing's relations with its neighbours and

even in extreme circumstances threaten the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China (PRC) given the concentrations of non-ethnic groups along its frontiers" (Clarke, 2017, 2). In particular, Clarke (2017) identifies the international visibility and support for the struggle of these two minorities, to which Beijing has responded by emphasizing the importance of 'non-interference' in other countries' domestic affairs, particularly in exchanges with its neighbouring countries (Clarke 2017, 7). In the particular case of the Uyghur Muslims, many central Asian countries are home to diaspora communities who have formed advocacy organizations to bring global attention to the plight of Uyghurs in the XUAR. Clarke notes that "China's growing power and influence in Central Asia by the mid-1990s and increasing relations with Turkey, however, resulted in increasing pressure on these states from Beijing to limit the operation of Uyghur nationalist groups within their borders" (Clarke 2017, 12). China's relations with other significant Muslim-majority countries and their stance on the Uyghur issue has yet to be adequately studied, which this research will seek to redress.

Part of what makes the continued support of the governments of Muslim-majority countries vis-à-vis China's treatment of Muslim minorities in the XUAR so fascinating is the growing pressure against Beijing from Western democracies and their like-minded partners. For more than a year, China has faced calls from foreign governments and from UN experts for an investigation into the arbitrary mass detentions of Muslims in the XUAR (Nebhay 2019). Based on evidence that has come from survivors of the detention camps, some governments have accused Beijing of committing genocide in the XUAR, including Canadian parliament in February 2021 (Scherer 2021), the United Kingdom in April 2021 (Wintour 2021), and the United States in April 2021 (Shesgreen 2021). The same three countries, along with the European Union, imposed sanctions against individuals and entities in Xinjiang for their involvement in human rights violations against the Uyghurs and other Muslims in March 2021 (BBC News 2021). So in the face of mounting evidence and accusations that a genocide is taking place against Muslims in northwestern China, it is all the more shocking that Muslim-majority countries' governments remain silent, and in some cases, have been supportive of Beijing's policies in the XUAR. Understanding what factors influence the stance of these governments on this topical issue will enable the governments

of Western democracies and their allies to develop a response that could hold Beijing accountable by convincing Muslim-majority countries to speak out against their atrocities in Xinjiang. But before we can delve into the hypotheses that will be put forward and tested throughout this dissertation, it is important to briefly outline the geopolitics of the *Umma*, or global Muslim community, which will help to contextualize their response to the Uyghur issue.

1.4 The Geopolitics of the Umma

Islam is now practiced around the world, and although it originated in the Middle East, the majority of the global Muslim population (roughly 62%) lives in the Asia-Pacific region, with the four largest populations found in Indonesia, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (Lipka 2017). According to the World Population Review (2021), there are 46 Muslim-majority countries in the world (47 if you count Palestine), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which claims to be the “collective voice of the Muslim World,” has 57 member states (OIC 2021). These 57 countries span from Indonesia in the far east, to Senegal in Western Africa, and even include Albania in Europe, as well as Guyana and Suriname in South America. With such a diversity of languages and cultures, it is not surprising that the geopolitics of the global Islamic community (the *Umma*) is complex and features an array of issues that cause divisions within the community, as well as between it and the rest of the world. As a first point, despite all of their differences, the members of the OIC often vote as a block at the United Nations, especially when voting on issues of common cause which are similarly salient across all member states (Johansson-Nogués 2020, 110). Acting as a voting block or political coalition at the UN increases the geopolitical significance of the *Umma* in multilateral diplomacy, as countries seeking to reach consensus on an issue of great importance to them must engage the OIC in discussions and sometimes even negotiations. It is therefore not surprising that, as part of its ongoing effort to coopt the *Umma*, Beijing appointed its first representative to the OIC, Ambassador Chen Weiqing, on June 13, 2021 (OIC 2021). An important reason for the close ties between China and the OIC is Beijing’s position on a key geopolitical issue of central importance to the *Umma*: the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Since the United Nations adopted a resolution to partition Israel and Palestine in 1947, the issue of Palestinian self-determination has been a consistent point of common concern for the OIC and its member states, which have worked together to advance Palestine's interests in multilateral forums like the United Nations. According to Johansson-Nogués (2020), the OIC believes that “constancy in their diplomatic pressure on the international community, especially on their Western partners, is vital within the UN framework as the latter's support is perceived as pivotal for achieving Palestinian self-determination” (Johansson-Nogués 2020, 105). Although the State of Palestine is officially recognized by 138 of the 193 UN member states, those countries that have not given their recognition are mainly democratic countries of Europe, North America and Oceania. This undoubtedly impacts the relations between these countries and the Muslim-majority countries that form the membership of the OIC. For example, following the decision by the administration of US President Trump to move its embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2017, the OIC issued statements denouncing the move and accusing Washington of violating international laws and resolutions, as well as provoking the sentiments of Muslims worldwide (OIC 2017). The CCP's position on Palestinian self-determination began as fully supportive under the leadership of Chairman Mao, but this position became more nuanced in the 1980s, “driven by realism and pragmatism associated with its opening-up policy” (Zhu 2013, 60). Now, although Beijing continues to support a Palestinian state, it also advocates for the need to ensure Israeli security, and “China does not want to be perceived as leaning toward either side” (Zhu 2013, 60). Evidently, the CCP has recognized the importance of maintaining its ambivalence towards the issue, as it does not want to risk angering the OIC and its Muslim-majority member states, nor does it want to anger the Western democracies that support Israel's position.

Another fundamental geopolitical issue that influences the level of cooperation and conflict between members of the *Umma* is the sectarian divide between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* Muslims. This dissertation will not elaborate on the theological origins of the sectarian split, but at the risk of oversimplifying a complex issue, the key difference is that the *Sunni* believe in the supremacy of the first caliphs, whereas the *Shi'a* believe that only descendants of the Prophet Mohammed should lead the

Islamic community (CFR 2021). While *Shi'a* minorities exist in numerous countries in Africa and Asia, the sect makes up the majority of the population in only four countries: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq and Iran. As the largest *Shi'a*-majority country, Iran has long been seen as the *de facto* leader of the *Shi'a* community, but this leadership role was further strengthened following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the political empowerment of the *Shi'a* Ayatollah Khomeini. “The transformation of Iran into an overtly Shia power after the Islamic revolution induced Saudi Arabia to accelerate the propagation of Wahhabism, as both countries revived a centuries-old sectarian rivalry over the true interpretation of Islam” (CFR 2021). Meanwhile, as the host country to the OIC and the home of Islam’s two holiest sites, Saudi Arabia wields tremendous influence within the Muslim community, and has depicted itself as the leader of *Sunni* Islam, and an effective counterweight to *Shi'a* Iran. “In its quest to maintain regional supremacy, Saudi Arabia continues to employ all possible strategies and means to roll back Iranian influence in the Middle East [and] the OIC forum is an important part of this strategy” (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed 2018, 300). The two countries have come to symbolize the two broader Islamic sects, and have conflicted over numerous issues. Once again, to avoid alienating any potential diplomatic or economic partners, Beijing has taken the approach of fostering close cooperative relations with both Riyadh and Tehran (Zhu 2013, 65-66).

Evidently, given the size, growth rate and spread of Islam around much of the world, it is not surprising that there would be a variety of geopolitical issues across the diversity of Muslim-majority countries, some of which cause disagreements. There is perhaps no greater internal disagreement within the *Umma* than that which exists between the *Sunni* and the *Shi'a* over who is the ultimate authority in Islam. However, there are also numerous issues which unite the *Umma* towards a common cause, most notably the question of Palestinian self-determination. The objective of this section was not to present a comprehensive overview of the geopolitics of the Muslim world, but rather to provide some geopolitical context that will help situate the rest of this research. The next section will outline several hypotheses that will be explored throughout this dissertation, which could help explain the discrepancy in the approach of

Muslim-majority countries to supporting or opposing different countries for their treatment of Muslim minorities.

1.5 Research Questions & Hypotheses

This dissertation will be looking at the overarching question of why, despite the CCP's increasingly repressive treatment of Muslims in the XUAR, has the Muslim world remained silent, and in some cases, actively supported China's policies towards its Muslim minorities. It will seek to test the validity of four hypotheses, while acknowledging the possibility that different Muslim-majority countries' approaches may result from a combination of several factors. The first and arguably most common hypothesis posited by many scholars to explain this reluctance to openly oppose the CCP is the hypothesis of economic dependence, which suggests that countries with significant economic relations with China refrain from criticizing the Chinese government for fear of economic retaliation (Ma, 2018). China has spent unprecedented amounts of resources, whether financial, human or technological, to cultivate the developing world's economic dependence on China. It has reached the point where many countries are so dependent on Chinese trade and investment that they would never dare to raise any criticism against Beijing at the risk of losing the economic support it provides. This may help to explain the lack of criticism and active praise of the Muslim world towards China, but it could be contradicted by the eagerness with which these same countries condemn similar or less egregious treatment of Muslims by other major economic partners like the United State or India. It is therefore clear from the outset that this explanation is an important piece of the puzzle, but given the counterexamples presented by Egypt (high support; low economic dependence) and Indonesia (low support; high economic dependence), this variable is not sufficient to comprehensively explain the lack of opposition or active support of Muslim-majority countries towards China's treatment of Muslims. Because of this apparent theoretical insufficiency, this thesis will also test the analytical validity of three other hypotheses.

The second hypothesis tested in this research to explain the Muslim world's inconsistent approach to advocating on behalf of persecuted Muslims in the world is the reliance of many Muslim-

majority countries on China for their domestic security. While the obvious source of China's growing international influence and power is its economic importance, it is indisputable that Beijing has also sought to increase its influence in the global security sector by enhancing its military equipment manufacturing and export capacity, and forming bilateral and multilateral security alliances. This hypothesis suggests that, by developing strong security alliances with many Muslim-majority countries and other countries of the so-called "Global South", China may have succeeded in creating a level of security dependence among these countries, who may withhold criticism of Beijing's domestic policies in exchange for Chinese security support. In addition to the importance of Chinese arms sales to the Muslim-majority case countries studied in this research, the joint military drills and high-level strategic exchanges with China are critical for ensuring the domestic security of these countries in the face of external and internal threats. However, in order to assess whether or not security dependence on China has had a significant influence in the decision of Muslim-majority states to support or oppose China's treatment of Muslims in the XUAR, it will be important to consider this hypothesis in relation to the other two hypotheses put forward by this dissertation.

A third hypothesis that will be the subject of this research suggests that the level of support of Muslim-majority countries for China's treatment of Muslims is affected by their own vulnerability to domestic challenges by secessionist movements. Several Muslim-majority countries face the threat of secessionist movements splitting their territory along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines, which is seen as a significant problem for many of these regimes. There could be a fear among certain Muslim-majority countries that condemning China's treatment of Uyghurs could result in Beijing's withdrawal of support for their own efforts to suppress domestic separatism. If a country were to criticize China's policies towards Uyghur separatism despite having their own domestic issues related to a separatist movement, this could also reduce their own credibility internationally and make them a powerful enemy in China. In contrast, speaking out in defense of China's policies in the XUAR could secure China's support for their own treatment of such movements, both in terms of material or technical support, as well as rhetorical support on the international scene, which might provide a much-needed advantage.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis that will be explored in this dissertation suggests that the level of support of Muslim-majority countries for China's treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang is influenced by their own domestic vulnerability to religious extremism. Many countries in the Muslim world face extremist threats either from religious minorities, minority sects or Islamist movements seeking to install more traditional Islamic laws and practices in the country, or in some cases where Islamic laws are already in place, opposition may seek to secularize the country's political system. Faced with such domestic challenges, these countries may be more willing to accept Beijing's narrative that its policies in Xinjiang are an innovative strategy for countering violent extremism from Uyghur Islamists. They may consider that supporting China's efforts to counter religious extremism could garner the support of the CCP for their own oppressive policies aimed at stemming the growth in extremism, which may be criticized by Western democracies for violating the human rights of religious minorities. Similar to the previous two hypotheses, this one suggests a transactional alliance between China and the Muslim world based on mutual support for each other's policies and actions, in the face of Western opposition. Each of these hypotheses will be explored in greater detail in chapter 2, and they are the basis from which this dissertation will develop its central thesis and arguments.

1.6 Alternate Hypotheses

Since clearly there is a need to consider multiple variables in order to fully understand the rationale behind different governments' positions on China's Muslim policies, it is worth considering some additional possibilities that we will not explore in this research. One such theory is that anti-Americanism among Muslim-majority countries may play a role in determining their stance vis-à-vis China on this issue. While anti-Americanism is a phenomenon across the globe, many scholars have argued that it is especially prevalent among Muslim-majority countries. One common explanation for this is the association of the United States with Zionism, or the Jewish nationalist movement for an independent state of Israel, which is ardently opposed by most Muslims and Muslim-majority countries (Johnson 2002, 45). Others have suggested that Muslim leaders have accused the United States for all the

problems in their countries, which has resulted in strong feelings of anti-Americanism (Rubin 2002, 73). In a totally different vein, some scholars even believe that the Islamists in the Muslim world are opposed to the United States because it stands for values that are incompatible with their own political agendas, like “democracy, freedom and human rights” (Wurmser 2001, 27-28). Regardless of what has caused these extreme anti-American sentiments throughout the Muslim world, it is clear that such sentiments exist, and it is plausible that they could inspire leaders of Muslim-majority countries to form alliances with countries like China, despite its historic and present-day persecution of its own Muslim minorities.

Without conducting any extensive research on this variable, it is possible to predict a positive correlation, considering high levels of anti-Americanism in Iran and Pakistan who are highly supportive of China’s treatment of Muslims, and lower levels of anti-Americanism in Indonesia and Turkey (at least until recently, which may explain the recent shift in Ankara’s position on the issue). However, an obvious outlier would be Saudi Arabia, which has a long-standing alliance with the United States, but has also been highly supportive of China as it has experienced condemnation by Western democracies for its re-education camps in Xinjiang. However, strong levels of anti-American sentiment among Saudi clerics might lead them to exert their influence over government officials to reject the United States in favour of China. Another issue that would have arisen with evaluating the explanatory power of this variable would have been the collection of data for valid indicators. Although public opinion surveys have been conducted in some of the Muslim-majority case countries we have studied in the dissertation, this data may not be available for all countries, and often the results of such surveys are impacted by the level of freedom that citizens enjoy in different countries. Nevertheless, anti-Americanism could be an interesting variable to study in future research, as a possible factor influencing the level of support among Muslim-majority countries for China’s treatment of Muslims.

Another interesting hypothesis which could help explain the support of Muslim-majority countries for Beijing’s treatment of Muslim minorities in the XUAR is their reliance on Chinese support in multilateral settings. Clearly, the past two decades has seen China become more active on the international scene, and its influence has been steadily expanding in multilateral organizations like the

United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Within these forums, China has been able to challenge the norms and values being defended by Western democracies, and advance its long-term objectives of unhindered economic growth, territorial integrity and construction of a positive narrative of China's peaceful rise (Li 2011). As part of these efforts, Beijing has been forming *de facto* diplomatic alliances with countries of the 'Global South', who withhold their criticism of Beijing's domestic policies that violate international norms or laws in exchange for Chinese political support on issues that are significant for them. For example, by supporting African regimes and their objectives in the UN, China has secured the support of African countries "for Chinese-led initiatives or against Western-led initiatives with which China disagrees", and "African votes in the UN also function to shield Beijing from criticism of its human rights policies" (Hanauer & Morris 2014, 7). Essentially, China's veto powers in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), as well as its leadership within several UN agencies and other multilateral institutions, have empowered Beijing to form *quid pro quo* multilateral alliances with Muslim-majority countries, along with much of the developing world (Piccone 2018; Chen Weiss 2019).

Countries that are the subject of such international scrutiny logically seek political support from one another, and ideally from like-minded superpowers. It is clear that the world is undergoing a geopolitical shift in which the reigning hegemonic power (the United States) is having its dominance challenged by a rising superpower (China), and this dynamic is playing out most obviously in multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations (UN). As Linn (2018) argues, "China, India, and Russia have increasingly resisted the traditional role of the USA as a leader in global multilateral affairs and also pursue principally transactional approaches, even as they profess adherence to open trade and multilateral solutions" (Linn 2018, 88). In resisting the traditional leaders and the rules they have created to bind the international system, China and others have formed alliances of like-minded states within these multilateral organizations in an effort to protect themselves and each other from scrutiny and interference in their domestic affairs. According to Muldoon et al. (2018), "states such as China, Egypt, and Pakistan (the "spoilers") have made a concerted effort to weaken the UN human rights system and [...] to forge

alliances to forward their aims and gain support for their proposals” (Muldoon et al. 2018, 181). Although objectives may vary, many of these countries seek to craft a positive image, which requires the support of allies, either by praising or by defending their actions and policies.

As a country that is frequently the subject of condemnation by Western democracies in multilateral human rights and free trade institutions, China has consistently advocated for non-interference in its domestic affairs, and has taken this approach towards other countries in the international system. Given this sovereignty protectionist attitude, it is not surprising that many Muslim-majority states with poor human rights records of their own would welcome international political support from China, one of five veto-wielding permanent members of the UNSC, a body that is responsible for calling for investigations into human rights abuses perpetrated by UN member states. In fact, “China has regularly used its veto in the UN Security Council to shield other authoritarian countries from international demands to protect human rights and to block interventions that would force governments to end abuses” (Chen Weiss 2019). If China’s support can be bought simply by withholding criticism of its mass internment of Muslims in the XUAR, many Muslim-majority countries may be more than happy to look the other way. This is in direct contrast to the argument made by Keohane, Macedo and Moravcsik (2009) that multilateral institutions strengthen democratic values like individual human rights by “restricting the power of special interest factions”. Instead, it aligns more closely with Herman and Gallagher (2018), who have argued that alliances of human rights offenders within multilateral institutions like the UN Human Rights Council “undermines its credibility and effectiveness, in part by making it far harder to pass meaningful resolutions in response to egregious human rights abuses, particularly those committed by politically influential countries” (Herman & Gallagher 2018). Unfortunately, given the difficulties in obtaining interviews with diplomatic representatives from China and our case countries, any determination of the motivations driving multilateral behavior and voting patterns would be speculation, so we have left this variable out of this dissertation.

1.7 Academic Contribution

Although China is often viewed as a difficult entity from which to draw theories that apply broadly because of its unique political, economic, social and cultural conditions, it can nevertheless serve to test the validity of existing theories, or to adapt relevant theories to apply to a Chinese context. This dissertation aims to do both of these things. In the first instance, it will test the validity of the theories presented above. It will challenge the theory of economic dependence by demonstrating that, despite the reliance of Muslim-majority countries on commercial relations with the United States and India, they are nevertheless willing to openly criticize the policies of these countries' governments towards Muslim minorities. This clearly indicates that economic dependence on a commercial partner is an important factor in explaining a country's decision of whether or not to criticize that commercial partner. This research will also underscore the power of security dependence to influence the willingness of some countries to condemn the behaviour of others, suggesting that China's strategic approach to arms transfers has attracted the support of many Muslim-majority countries, resulting in their refusal to call out Beijing's policies towards Muslims in the XUAR. Finally, it will assess whether or not a country's vulnerability to domestic secessionist movements or religious extremism has an impact on its willingness to condemn another country for its treatment of secessionists or religious extremists. By studying countries that are threatened by such movements and countries that are not, we will be able to determine whether or not these two independent variables have a significant influence on the dependent variable, and thereby either strengthen their corresponding theories or disprove them.

The current context of Sino-Islamic relations has been the subject of extensive criticism, with many human rights groups and state officials from Western democracies condemning Muslim-majority countries for remaining silent in the face of egregious persecution of Muslims by the Chinese state. Many journalists have tried to explain away the Islamic world's moral lapse by citing economic reasons, arguing that many Muslim-majority countries are dependent on China for their development and economic growth. However, as we have already discussed at length, this argument is insufficient to explain the silence of the Muslim world given their willingness to criticize the policies of other major economic

partners. It is for this reason that this dissertation will look at other theoretical explanations for the unwillingness of Muslim-majority countries to condemn China's treatment of Muslims, in order to better understand all of the factors that influence Sino-Islamic relations. Understanding what influences the geopolitical position of these six Muslim-majority countries will also inform policy-makers in Western democracies seeking to engage more constructively with the *Umma*, and the broader 'Global South'. Evidently, Beijing has succeeded at winning over the political support of many developing countries of the 'Global South'. Understanding what factors have enabled China to do so can ultimately enable the Western democracies to reinforce the so-called "rules-based international order" (a.k.a. the "Liberal International Order," or LIO) by bringing the countries of the 'Global South' into its orbit.

Before moving on, it is important to note that there is always the possibility that the phenomenon being studied could change before the completion of this dissertation. If the Islamic world decides to stand up for Uyghurs and other Muslims facing persecution in the PRC, this change will not render this dissertation moot. Instead, it will provide an avenue to studying the reasons why these countries shifted their policy towards China, and enable us to understand which factors were indeed the most influential in determining the policies of Muslim-majority countries towards China. If, by the time of completion, the Islamic world remains silent on Chinese persecution of Muslims, further research may be necessary in the future, if and when this position shifts, in order to understand the reason for this evolution in policy. Finally, and most important of all, this research will contribute to better understanding how the international community, and more specifically the Muslim world, is responding to growing Chinese influence in an era during which China's rise is challenging the fundamental rules and norms that have governed international society for nearly a century. In so doing, it is my hope that this dissertation will be able to offer a starting point for future research on how the world is responding to China's emergence, broadly speaking, but more particularly as it relates to China's influence in the developing world and the Muslim world.

1.8 Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation will proceed so as to present the necessary information and arguments in a logical order. Having now outlined the current context of the puzzle this research aims to understand, as well as the various hypotheses it aims to test, chapter 2 will explore the existing literature on secessionism in China and similar parallel cases in the six Muslim-majority case countries, and examine the main academic theories that are relevant for the purpose of this research, including those set out above. Following this review of literature, chapter 3 will lay out the methodologies being used for this research, including the reasons for selecting the six Muslim-majority case countries, and the sources from which data will be collected for each indicator. These theories and methods will then inform the analysis of each Muslim-majority case country's relations with China in terms of economic engagement, security partnership and support against secessionism and religious extremism, which will be taken up in chapters 4 to 9. Each of these six chapters will analyze their respective findings in an effort to identify the variables that influence a state's decision as to whether or not they should criticize another state's poor treatment of a minority with which the first state has an affinity (ethnic or religious ties). Finally, chapter 10 will draw some conclusions from this research, and will present possible next steps for future academic research.

Chapter 2 - Existing Literature, Theories and Hypotheses: Situating Muslim-Majority States' Policies within the Academic Context

2.1 Introduction

Before we can begin to analyze the responses of each of the selected Muslim-majority case countries mentioned in the previous chapter to China's policies of repression in Xinjiang, it is necessary to examine the important elements of previous academic research and theoretical contributions to the field of international relations. This chapter will begin by providing an overview of some of the foundational theoretical approaches which have dominated the international relations discipline, which will be of interest for this research, namely realism, liberalism and constructivism. We will then present a brief summary of some key international legal frameworks that are relevant for a discussion about the Xinjiang case. This will be followed by an overview of the theory of securitization of identities, which will be relevant for the analysis of relations between the six Muslim-majority countries studied here and China, because it has been used as a justification for the policies implemented in several of the countries discussed in this thesis towards their own domestic secessionist movements and religious extremist movements. This literature review will also explore the theories and research that support my hypotheses, including the hypothesis of economic dependence, the hypothesis of security dependence, as well as two hypotheses that can be defined as variants of vulnerability theory, namely the vulnerability to secessionist movement, and the vulnerability to religious extremism. The next chapter will then outline the methodological approaches taken to collecting data, as well as the various sources that will be used to collect data for this research.

2.2 Review of Theories and Existing Literature

As identified in the first chapter, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand what factors have influenced Muslim-majority countries' varying levels of support for China's treatment of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). To do so, we cannot ignore the most commonly raised theory for explaining this phenomenon: the Muslim world's dependence on strong commercial relations with China, including their dependence on Chinese imports, exports and investment. However, as we identified in the first chapter, this theory of economic dependence, while important for explaining the reluctance of the Muslim world to condemn the CCP's policies in the XUAR, nevertheless fails to explain their willingness to condemn other important economic partners. To develop a nuanced understanding of the complexity in relations between China and a variety of Muslim-majority countries, this dissertation will examine the explanatory power of three other hypotheses. These are (1) the influence of security dependence on China, and the value of having a security alliance with an influential actor like China; (2) the vulnerability of Muslim-majority countries to secessionist movements within their own national territories; and (3) the vulnerability of Muslim-majority countries to religious extremism domestically. All four of these hypotheses will be discussed in greater detail below. However, before delving into the specific theories behind the hypotheses that we have posited to explain the phenomenon at issue in this dissertation, it is important to contextualize this research in three key theoretical traditions of the international relations field. The next section will briefly outline the theories of Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, and particularly their views on how states interact and what considerations influence their decision-making.

2.3 Foundational Approaches of International Relations

The academic discipline of international relations has many theories and approaches, but perhaps none are more fundamentally important to the understanding of the interactions between states than realism and liberalism. These two positivist traditions are some of the earliest approaches to studying the relations between countries, seeking to predict their behaviour by developing rules that could apply in a

variety of circumstances, essentially applying the scientific method to this field. However, these two camps make very different assumptions about the motivations that guide the actions of states in the international arena, despite their agreement on the state of anarchy which characterizes this arena, with no overarching authority to enforce the rules. In the case of realism, it is the pursuit of power and the need to ensure state security, rather than ideological or normative considerations, which drive decision-making at the highest levels of the state (Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979). In essence, this approach views countries as rational actors which pursue their interests by weighing the costs and benefits of their potential actions in an effort to maximize their power and security relative to other countries (Donnelly 2008, 150).

A closely related theory within the International Relations school of neorealism is the Rational Choice Theory, which posits that states, prioritizing their security above all else, will consider a number of factors in making policies to avoid a ‘security dilemma,’ in which their pursuit of greater security stokes fear in their neighbours who respond by enhancing their own security resources (military equipment, alliances, etc.), ultimately reducing the first state’s relative security. These considerations include the signalling of intentions by other states, the general threat environment of their region, as well as an overall cost-benefit analysis of various options, which may reveal that it is more rational to form alliances than to invest in military infrastructure and resources (Glaser 2010, 13). In the context of international relations with China, realists and rational choice theorists would likely argue that Muslim-majority countries should not advocate for the protection of Chinese Muslims from Beijing’s repression, as such ideological pursuits are not in their self-interest, as they lack the relative power to oppose China, so the cost of confrontation would vastly outweigh the benefits accrued. As such, the rational choice for Muslim-majority countries is to form alliances with Beijing, rather than condemning its treatment of Muslims. This is why we cite ‘Realpolitik considerations’ in the title of dissertation, in reference to the deference given to pragmatic necessities like maintaining economic, security and diplomatic relations, to the neglect of ideological or normative preferences like defending Muslim co-religionists facing persecution in another country.

Building on this theoretical foundation, Mohammed Ayoob (2002) acknowledged that traditional realism, as well as neorealism, failed to adequately consider two important factors that have arisen since realism was first articulated as a theory: (1) decolonization in the mid-20th century created dozens of new post-colonial states; and (2) many of these states were vulnerable to internal conflict and external influence (Ayoob 2002, 33). Ayoob felt that, in order to truly understand the behaviour of states internationally, academics needed to study their domestic politics. What he referred to as ‘subaltern’ states, those that are too weak to survive on their own in the international system, were important to study because they make up the majority of states (Ayoob 2002, 40-41). Ayoob disagreed with neoliberal belief that states could create interdependence by cooperating within the anarchic international system to produce absolute gains (for all parties involved). Instead, he argued that, for subaltern states, “dependence, not interdependence, defined the pattern of their economic relationship with the established, affluent, and powerful members of the international system, thus rendering absurd the concept of absolute gains” (Ayoob 2002, 35-36). This theoretical perspective, dubbed ‘subaltern realism,’ suggests that subaltern states that are economically dependent on a particular hegemon (e.g. United States, China) would be supportive of the foreign policy objectives and positions of their hegemon (Fernández-Molina et al. 360). This was demonstrated in a large-N study of voting practices in the UN General Assembly by states that were economically dependent on the United States, which found a clear correlation between economic dependence of subaltern states and their compliance with hegemonic goals (Richardson & Kegley 1980).

While realism (including subaltern realism) only tends to study states as the central actors in international relations, liberalism sees individuals, non-governmental organizations, and multilateral organizations as equally important for understanding major global issues. This is important for our research on the actions of the Muslim world, which cannot be studied merely from a state-centric perspective. The liberal approach sees humans as inherently good and believes that states are more willing to cooperate with one another to achieve common benefits (i.e. absolute gains) than to fight each other and leave only one winner and one loser. Liberals have even used the realist concept of ‘national interest’

to “support liberal policies such as free trade, arms reduction, adherence to international law and support for liberal movements elsewhere” (Devatek et al. 2012, 53). At the core of these policies are the values that drive liberalism, which include “individualism, freedom, political equality, popular sovereignty, constitutional government, private property, unrestricted commerce, and peace” (Puchala 2003, 189). In large part, these are the values on which multilateral institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and others have been founded.

For decades, some liberal scholars have held that, as China’s economy continues to open up to Western trade and investment, it will inevitably be forced to democratize and protect the civil, political and human rights of its citizens (He 1996; Zhang 2008; Liu & Chen 2011). This was part of the rationale that drove Western democracies to shift their official diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, beginning with Canada (1970), the United Nations (1971) and the United States (1979). Meanwhile, realists and others have argued that, as China’s role and influence in the international community continue to expand, China will continue to challenge the promotion of these liberal values which has been at the core of Western democracies’ leadership in international institutions (Dams & Van der Putten 2015), while also accepting and adopting others, like international free trade, the international financial and monetary system, environmental protection and concepts like sovereignty and territoriality (Johnston 2019). By imposing severe restrictions on these values domestically (as exemplified by Beijing’s policies in Xinjiang), China has demonstrated an alternative model to the one upheld by Western democracies, and this has a certain appeal to non-democratic countries of the ‘Global South’. One of the theories we will explore in this dissertation posits that Muslim-majority countries are attracted to Beijing’s rejection of liberal values, and view China as a legitimate alternative hegemon on which to hitch their wagons moving forward.

Although not a foundational theory in international relations, Constructivism also provides a useful lens through which to study state interests in the context of this research, because of the socially constructed nature of many of the issues in question. Not only are the Muslim-majority case countries facing challenges presented by socially constructed religious, ethnic and national identities, they must

also determine their actions based on (Western-)constructed norms and values of the international system. Constructivism sees norms as fundamental in determining the meaning behind actions and power, and identities as essential to understanding an actor's "particular set of interests or preferences with respect to choices of action in particular domains, and with respect to particular actors" (Hopf 1998, 173-175). According to constructivists, "states are expected to have (1) a far wider array of potential choices of action before them than is assumed by neorealism, and (2) these choices will be constrained by social structures that are mutually created by states and structures via social practices" (Hopf 1998, 177). Furthermore, while realism and liberalism agree on the central importance of material power in the international system (i.e. military and economic power), constructivists view discursive power (i.e. "the power of knowledge, ideas, culture, ideology, and language") as equally important in creating norms and structures that can then constrain the behaviour of international actors (Hopf 1998, 177-178). Throughout this dissertation, we will examine the ways in which China has utilized discursive power to construct an international sphere of influence to act as a counterweight to American hegemony, complete with its own unique norms and values. We will also see how China and our Muslim-majority case countries have constructed a narrative of vulnerability to secessionist movements and religious extremism, even if such vulnerability is overstated or non-existent (see discussion on Securitization theory below).

As we will be applying the lenses of realism, liberalism and constructivism where they are relevant throughout this research, it is important to justify this seemingly inconsistent approach. International Relations theorists have traditionally applied only one theoretical framework to their studies, self-identifying as falling squarely in one camp or another, and mobilizing only the arguments and findings made within that specific camp. However, Sil and Katzenstein (2010) advocated for broader application of multiple theoretical schools wherever they apply, benefiting from the strengths of each school while addressing their weaknesses by leveraging the strengths of others. This 'analytic eclecticism' means "exploring substantive relationships and revealing hidden connections among elements of seemingly incommensurable paradigm-bound theories, with an eye to generating novel insights that bear on policy debates and practical dilemmas" (Sil & Katzenstein 2010, 2). This is precisely what we have

tried to achieve in this dissertation, leveraging the strengths of the three above-mentioned theoretical schools, while overcoming their weaknesses. Before proceeding to a discussion of the theories surrounding the main hypotheses of this dissertation, it is important to provide some context on the international norms and legal frameworks that govern issues like genocide, human rights and the like.

2.4 International Legal Frameworks

Although the focus of this dissertation is the geopolitical, strategic calculations that are considered by Muslim-majority countries in their decision about whether or not to openly condemn China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, it is also important to acknowledge the international legal framework that governs how states should behave, and provides the basis for condemnation when states deviate from the normative structures enshrined therein. Perhaps the most obvious is the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (the "Genocide Convention"), which was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948. The Genocide Convention is relevant to the case of China's policies in Xinjiang, given the accusations of genocide by several Western democracies, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands (BBC News, 2021). Article 2 of the Genocide Convention defines "genocide" as follows:

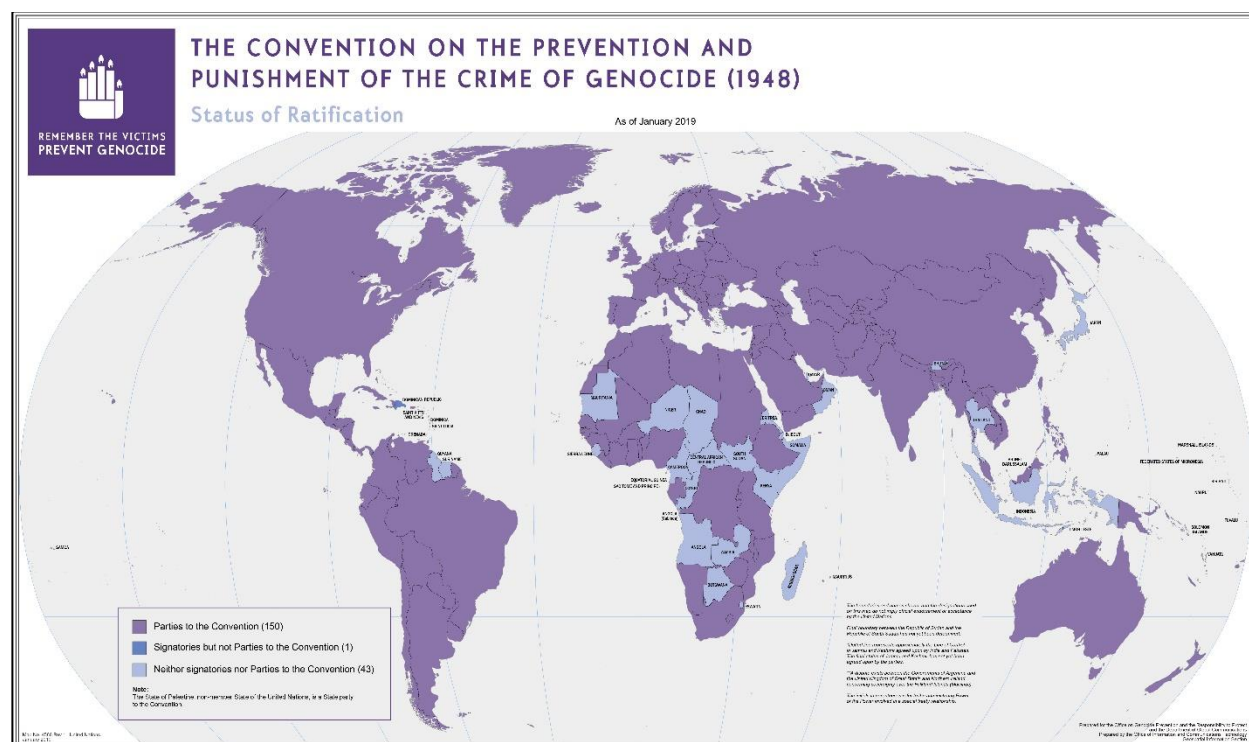
"...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious groups, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
 - (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
 - (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
 - (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
 - (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group"
- (Genocide Convention 1948, Article 2)

As we have discussed in the first chapter, there is ample evidence to suggest that China's policies in Xinjiang have carried out all five of the above-mentioned acts towards Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. While proving an entity's intent to destroy a particular group may be quite difficult in some circumstances, Beijing's intent was revealed to the world in late 2019, when global media obtained and

published over 400 pages of government documents, known as the ‘Xinjiang Papers’, outlining how Chinese officials were to show ‘absolutely no mercy’ to the people in detention camps and elsewhere in the XUAR (Ramzy & Buckley 2019). Image 2.3 below shows that China was among the first to sign and ratify the Genocide Convention, although it is important to note that, along with a dozen other countries, China made its ratification conditional on a reservation that granted it immunity from prosecution without consent of the national government (Prevent Genocide International 2021), which the CCP would undoubtedly never give. It is also worthwhile noting that all other case countries have either signed and ratified or acceded to the Genocide Convention, with the interesting exception of Indonesia. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyze and draw inferences about each case country’s official position on the Genocide Convention, as there would be no obvious implications for the case of Xinjiang, given Beijing’s reservation against prosecution. However, this international legal framework has been discussed at length in multilateral settings, mostly by Western democracies, with a view to holding Beijing to account for its genocidal treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslims in the XUAR.

Image 2.1 Status of Ratification of the Genocide Convention



Another important international law that serves as the normative framework for states' domestic policies and international relations is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the "UDHR"). Also adopted at the United Nations General Assembly meeting in December 1948, the UDHR outlined the rights and freedoms that must be enjoyed by all people around the world. Although not legally binding, the UDHR nevertheless sets the normative framework according to which states' actions and policies are measured. According to Sohn (1977), "even states which originally expressed doubts about the legal force of the Declaration have not hesitated to invoke it and to accuse other states of having violated their obligations under the Declaration" (Sohn 1977, 133). Given the significance of this document, it would be indisputable to condemn Beijing's policies in the XUAR, citing several articles that are being actively violated in the region.

To begin with, Article 3, which protects the "right to life, liberty and security of person," and Article 5 protecting people from being "subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of punishment," have been repeatedly violated by the policies in indoctrination camps, where individuals have faced torture, rape, and in some cases, death (Hill, Campanale & Gunter 2021; Davidson 2020). The vague reasons justifying the detention of Uyghurs and other Muslims in the XUAR, often citing their religious behavior or that of their relatives (Human Rights Watch 2018), appear to be arbitrary, in violation of Article 9. Article 12, which protects people from being "subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence," appear to be violated by the surveillance system implemented by the CCP in the XUAR (Buckley & Mozur 2019), as well as forcing Uyghur and other Muslim families to accept Han Chinese officials into their homes for long-term 'home stays', where they watch the families and report any religious behavior to the authorities (Human Rights Watch 2018). Article 13, which protects freedom of movement, and Article 14 protecting the right to "seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" have been violated by Beijing's confiscation of its Muslim citizens' passports (BBC 2016), and the deportation of Uyghurs from at least 28 countries (Gerin 2021). Perhaps most obviously, the UDHR's Article 18, which protects the "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" forms the foundation of the CCP's repression against its Muslim minorities in the XUAR, and

similarly, Article 19 protecting the “freedom of opinion and expression,” have been violated by security forces in the region that detain individuals that express their religious identities. While many of the other rights outlined in the UDHR have been violated in the XUAR, the last one we will discuss is Article 26, which protects the right to education, including the right to choose one’s education, which has been taken away from Uyghurs and other Muslims who have been forcibly placed in re-education camps to be indoctrinated with the CCP’s ideology, and prohibited from receiving an Islamic education (BBC 2019).

There are several other important international legal or normative frameworks that could apply to Beijing’s policies in the XUAR. For example, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1976) protects several rights currently being denied to Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, including self-determination (Article 1), life (Article 6), freedom from torture (Article 7), security of person (Article 9), freedom of movement (Article 12), freedom from unlawful interference with one’s family, home or correspondence (Article 17), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18), freedom of expression (Article 19), freedom of association (Article 22), and many other freedoms (ICCPR 1976). Similarly, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1976) protects many of the same rights, as well as the right to work that is freely chosen (Article 6), the right to “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 12), the right to education (Article 13), the right to take part in cultural life (Article 15), and other fundamental human rights (ICESCR 1976). Clearly, there are many international legal and normative frameworks that could serve as the basis on which to criticize Beijing’s policies in the XUAR. But despite the broad recognition of these frameworks by governments of Muslim-majority countries, they have largely maintained their silence with regard to the human rights violations taking place against Muslims in China, and in some cases have even praised Beijing’s efforts to eradicate religious extremism. The remainder of this chapter will expand on the theories that are the basis of this research, beginning with the theory that economic dependence has kept many Muslim-majority countries from condemning Beijing’s treatment of Muslims.

2.5 Economic Dependence

The most common argument used to explain why states tolerate the persecution of minorities in another country that share a common ethnic or religious identity with their own citizens focuses on the dependence of these states on trade with and investment from the foreign regime carrying out the persecution. This hypothesis, also referred to as ‘asymmetrical economic interdependence’, suggests that when Country A depends on strong trade relations with and investment from Country B, the former is quite unlikely to openly criticize the latter in the international arena (Richardson 1978; Richardson & Kegley 1980). The classic idiom “do not bite the hand that feeds you” undoubtedly guides the decisions of less developed states in their relations with more developed states, as Country A refrains from criticizing Country B for fear of losing the economic support that it needs. Essentially, “decision-makers in dependent countries value foreign-supplied economic goods and services that they almost exclusively receive at the discretion of a single, dominant partner, and that knowledge of this liability affects their behavior” (Richardson 1978, 14). More precisely, the dependent country’s government, understanding its vulnerability to economic disaster were the more dominant country to threaten their close commercial ties, has very little choice but to comply with the policy objectives of the dominant country (Armstrong 1981). These economic relations are very transactional in nature, and even when there is a clear power dynamic between the two states (i.e. one state has significantly more economic power than the other), “each party has some power resources or capabilities they can draw on. At the minimum, the least powerful can, by refusing to comply, force the stronger to convert some of its capabilities into effective power to obtain compliance by coercion...” (Tesi 2017, 195). In a study of 25 countries that were dependent on economic relations with the United States between 1950 and 1973, Richardson and Kegley (1980) concluded that “the asymmetrical trade vulnerability of the dependent countries leads to their compliance, albeit selective, with U.S. foreign policy preferences” (Richard & Kegley 1980, 191). It follows logically that the dominant country’s foreign policy preferences would include its economic dependents refraining from openly criticizing or condemning its policies and actions.

This hypothesis aligns with the realist approach, but more specifically with the ‘Subaltern’ Realism, which would argue that subaltern (or economically dependent) states would decide to support broader policies of the state on which they depend, also known as bandwagoning (Mearsheimer 2001, 162-163). For example, many Muslim-majority countries whose economic development and growth depends on strong relations with China have refused to criticize the Chinese government’s policies against Muslims in Xinjiang for fear of economic retaliation (Ma, 2018). It also reflects the underlying assumptions of Rational Choice Theory, another theory within the Realist approach, which see actors (in this case states) as acting rationally, based on cost-benefit analyses. According to this theory, Muslim-majority countries would weigh the potential economic cost of criticizing Beijing’s treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang against the potential benefits of doing so. As China has proven to respond quite aggressively to states that condemn its domestic policies, whether through economic sanctions, boycotts or halting of investments, this dissertation hypothesizes that this cost-benefit analysis would lead Muslim-majority states acting rationally in their own self-interest, to refrain from criticizing Beijing in this context.

Ma (2018) and Marukawa (2017) have each suggested that China made itself economically essential to many developing countries, buying their natural resources and commodities, selling them cheap manufactured goods and investing in their infrastructural development, enabling these countries to grow their economies while simultaneously increasing China’s capacity to exploit their natural resource extraction industries (Ma 2018; Marukawa, 2017). However, while this could logically explain the Muslim world’s lack of condemnation towards China, it can be refuted or challenged when we consider their frequent condemnation of other major economic partners, such as the United States and India (see trade statistics in Chapter 1). How could the OIC, whose central mission is to defend the rights of Muslims worldwide, and each of its Muslim-majority member states, justify their refusal to condemn China’s persecution of Muslims based solely on their economic dependence on positive relations with the PRC, while simultaneously criticizing other important economic partners for their poor treatment of Muslims? While this hypothesis may help to explain the cases in which dependent states have refrained

from criticizing the states on which they are economically dependent, it does not account for the cases in which the former have openly criticized the latter despite clearly being economically dependent on them. Evidently, this hypothesis of economic dependence is important to acknowledge, but fails to comprehensively explain the phenomenon of interest in this research, so it will only be considered in tandem with other relevant hypotheses and the theories that have generated them, which are explored in greater detail below.

2.6 Security Dependence

Bilateral exchanges on matters relating to national security can take many different forms in the pursuit of a variety of domestic and foreign policy objectives. The most obvious form of security cooperation is the sale of arms from one country's defence industry to another country's military for the purpose of strengthening that country's capacity to ensure its own security. Arms transfers between countries also has a number of policy justifications, not least of which is the profitability for the defence manufacturers in the supplying country (Stohl 2017, 1). However, while these economic considerations could potentially be driving sales from countries with less significant global influence, the more influential countries undoubtedly leverage their arms transfers to achieve broader geopolitical or ideological gains. For example, in the case of Russia, Blank and Kim (2015) document Moscow's effort in Latin America to utilize "economic contacts in areas of comparative advantage (energy arms sales, space launches, sales of nuclear reactors, possibly power engineering) to leverage political support for Russian positions in world politics and against American interests" (Blank & Kim 2015, 161). There is a degree of competition among arms manufacturing countries to increase their share of the global market, and the world's major economies tend to be the same countries competing in the defence sector. In a separate study of Russia's arms transfers in Asia, Blank and Kim (2014) argued that "trends in arms sales and defense industry are deemed crucial to achieving a great power position in Asia, if not globally" (Blank & Kim 2014, 269). For the purpose of this research, we will focus on these geopolitical objectives

that powerful countries like China seek to achieve by creating a dependence on their arms sales among less powerful countries in the Muslim world.

This hypothesis suggests that when Country A depends on strong security ties with Country B, the former is unlikely to openly criticize the latter on the global stage, and is likely to take the official position of supporting the latter's policies or positions (Sullivan et. al. 2011, 275-294). This theory aligns closely with the transactional "arms for influence" model of security dependence, in which the arms manufacturing country sells military equipment and weapons to other countries only in exchange for political support (Sullivan et. al. 2011, 279-280; see also Keohane & Nye 1977). However, it is important to recognize alternative models of understanding how bilateral relations might be impacted by increasing the security dependence of Country A on the arms transfers from Country B. Walt (2005) suggested that dependence of a less powerful state on a superior power (whether for humanitarian aid, investment or military equipment) could actually have the opposite effect, causing the dependent state to resent its supplier's dominance and push back against its positions just to demonstrate its autonomy (Walt 2005). This thesis dismisses this so-called "lonely superpower" model (Sullivan et. al. 2011, 280), because it was developed in the context of American global hegemony, which Walt acknowledged was the source of significant animosity, particularly in the developing world. Walt argued that this animosity stems from concerns that American dominance could threaten their own interests, and focused on the example of the citizens of Middle Eastern countries opposing Washington's "War on Terror" initiated under President Bush (Walt 2005). While Chinese influence in the developing world has been shown to foster animosity among citizens whose jobs are threatened by an influx of Chinese entrepreneurs and workers (Yang 2018, 2), it does not carry the same ideological motivations as American involvement in the region, seen by many as Islamophobic (Rubin 2002). Finally, a third model, referred to as the "reverse leverage" model, suggests that competition among arms suppliers might lead purchasing countries to "exploit the fact that a much stronger donor relies on them to provide some vital good—and the threat of defection to an alternative supplier—to exert influence over the donor" (Sullivan et. al. 2011, 281). This model could potentially apply for certain case countries, such as Saudi Arabia, but would not be applicable to Turkey,

Iran or Pakistan, which receive minimal arms transfers from the United States, particularly in recent years. However, while these theories may explain how Muslim-majority countries respond to China's arms transfers, it is also important to understand how Beijing's policy objectives are driving its efforts to become a dominant force in this sector.

Perhaps the most obvious reason that explains China's increased investment in the technological development and manufacturing of advanced weapons is Beijing's desire to become a global leader in the security and defence sector. To achieve this goal, the CCP recognizes the need to "catch up with the global military-technological state-of-the-art base by fostering 'indigenous innovation,' thus mitigating foreign dependencies on technological transfers and arms imports while leveraging civil-military integration (CMI) to overcome entrenched barriers to innovation" (Raska & Bitzinger 2020, 94). Another factor galvanizing the domestic defence sector to develop cutting edge technologies and equipment is Beijing's ambition to supply the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the most advanced weapons systems, which would ensure that the CCP can respond to domestic security threats, as well as international conflicts (Raska & Bitzinger 2020, 94-95). These two factors (the desire for technological self-sufficiency and equipping the PLA) are undoubtedly key drivers of Beijing's increased investment in the sector, but this does not explain the recent growth in Chinese arms transfers to other countries' militaries (SIPRI 2021). Chinese arms exports were once motivated by financial gains, as evidenced by the fact that "China offered large quantities of affordable conventional weapons to both Iran and Iraq" during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), demonstrating their lack of ideological positioning in the conflict (Raska & Bitzinger 2020, 100). While commercial considerations remain a fundamental calculation behind China's arms transfers into the 21st century, two new factors have begun to appear increasingly important for policy-makers in Beijing. The fact that a significant majority of Chinese arms exports go to developing countries, often sold at discounted prices or on credit, suggests that these exports are aimed at achieving political goals, such as (1) "cementing alliances or promoting cordial relations," or (2) ensuring continued access to resources like oil or natural gas (Raska & Bitzinger 2020, 102).

This increasing politicization of China's arms transfers, particularly in exports to developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, closely resembles the *quid pro quo* logic of the economic dependence variable discussed in the previous section. This hypothesis, which is grounded in the theoretical framework of 'Subaltern' Realism, posits that the subaltern state that depends on China for arms transfers for its own domestic defence and security needs, would be reluctant to criticize Beijing's policies or behaviours, as this could risk retaliation in the form of canceling future contracts. According to this theory, Muslim-majority countries would weigh the potential security cost of criticizing Beijing's treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang against the potential benefits of doing so. In the same way that the CCP may decide to impose retaliatory sanctions or trade embargoes on countries that do not support its international positions (Patey 2021), it could also impose arms embargoes on those who criticize its domestic policies. This dissertation hypothesizes that it is this threat which influences the Muslim-majority states with significant security dependencies on arms transfers from China, resulting in their decision to refrain from openly criticizing Beijing's policies in Xinjiang.

2.7 Securitization of Identity

The theory of 'securitization' has been popularized over the twenty years since it was first developed by authors of the Copenhagen School in the late 1990s (Buzan et al. 1998). It consists of a 'speech act' made by a socially influential actor (often a head of state) which depicts a 'normal' political issue (e.g. climate change, immigration, etc.) as an existential threat to society, thereby justifying the implementation of 'exceptional' measures in order to secure this threat (Buzan et al. 1998, 26). This phenomenon falls within the international relations sub-discipline of security studies, which as many scholars in this field have noted, has experienced an evolution in recent decades. Burgess (2014) argues that, although security studies began as a state-centric analysis of national security threats like inter-state wars, it has seen its scope broadened to include threats to the security of individuals, groups or even the international community as a whole. This includes an analysis of the security linkages with "domestic terrorism, criminality, identity, culture, religion, etc., and global threats, such as global terrorism, climate

change, cyber threats, pandemic, food, pollution, etc.” (Burgess 2014, 8). Each of these security threats can be ‘securitized’ according to the Copenhagen School’s definition, resulting in ‘exceptional’ measures implemented in order to prevent the manifestation of these threats into a crisis or a tragedy. For example, depicting climate change as an existential threat to humanity has justified the implementation of exceptional policies by governments around the world in an effort to reduce carbon emissions and lessen the damage being done to our environment (Peters & Mayhew 2016, 212-236). While these exceptional policies may be disruptive, they are not inherently discriminatory towards any particular groups or individuals in society (with the exception of big corporations that emit a lot of carbon). In the case of securitizing a religious (e.g. Islamic) or an ethno-nationalist movement, which are fundamental to the identities of entire groups, the depiction of these identities as an existential threat to society can be detrimental to the ontological security of the groups in question.

Since the terrorist attacks that devastated the United States on September 11, 2001 (9/11), a slew of speech acts by world leaders, the media and influential individuals have portrayed Islam as an existential threat to Western liberal societies (see Bramadat & Dawson 2014; Croft 2012; Saeed 2016). This securitization of Islam has resulted in the implementation in many countries of exceptional policies and measures for ensuring that terrorist attacks such as those of 9/11 cannot be repeated. While these measures may seem justified to non-Muslim citizens as a means of ensuring their security, the Muslim citizens of these countries have faced heightened discrimination and been victims of hate crimes as a result of the othering process which has framed Muslims as the foreign enemy. The response by Muslim-majority countries in many cases has been to criticize these countries that are imposing restrictions and violating the rights of their Muslim citizens. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has issued strongly worded statements condemning countries like the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Israel, but no such condemnation has been made by the OIC about China’s treatment of Uyghurs. One potential reason for this is because the Uyghur Muslims of Xinjiang have been depicted by China not only as radicalized Islamist terrorists, but also as violent secessionists who seek to split up the Chinese territory. This narrative is relatable to many of the Muslim-majority countries that make up the OIC,

which face their own threats from secessionist movements and religious extremist organizations, and also applies to varying extents among our six case countries.

As an example, secession by ethnic minorities is a phenomenon that no state wishes to face, because a successful secessionist movement would weaken the ‘host state’ by reducing its territory, its population and its international legitimacy. Not only would the host state now have to be vigilant against this newly independent, potentially hostile state on its border, but it would also have to defend against its traditional enemies who might see its failure to prevent this secession as a sign of weakness (Butt 2017, 17-20). Before such a movement can succeed at establishing an independent state, many host states may adopt a strategy of increased coercion against the minority in question. However, the risk of this approach is that “harsh repression can increase ethnic groups’ later determination to secede” (Butt 2017, 27). Not only that, but such coercive treatment of a minority could incur the condemnation of the international community, which may seek to interfere in the host state’s domestic affairs. For this reason, the coercion strategy must be accompanied with the securitization of the secessionist movement, or in other words, the host state must depict this minority group as an existential threat to its majority group. Only by securitizing the secessionist movement could a government legitimize its ‘extraordinary’ response (read repression) directed at the minority group in question, and justify its actions to the international community as a legitimate measure to ensure the security of its territory and citizens.

Kurniawan (2017) demonstrates how the government in Jakarta employed this strategy against the ethno-religious secessionist movement of Acehnese who sought independence from Indonesia from the 1970s to the early 2000s. This example conveniently combines the religious extremist and secessionist dimensions of securitization, as the Acehnese practice a more conservative version of Islam than the rest of Indonesia, which drove them to seek an independent state. As conflict erupted between the Indonesian military and security forces and the ‘Free Aceh Movement’ (or GAM), “the Council for Security and Law Enforcement [...] constantly urged the government to securitize the worsening situation in Aceh and employ extraordinary measures” (Kurniawan 2017, 113). Like secessionist movements in many other countries, this securitization led to greater repression of the entire minority group, not just the members of

the GAM. As discussed in the previous sub-section, states that are similarly vulnerable to secessionism will be more likely to support another state's coercion of its minorities under the guise of ensuring security. Obtaining data that will enable conclusive determination of the influence of this and other variables on the level of support of Muslim-majority countries for China's treatment of Muslims will be complex. The next chapter will outline some of the methodological approaches taken in this dissertation, as well as the sources that will be used to collect data.

2.8 Vulnerability to Secessionist Movements

The phenomenon of secessionist movements is often studied from a domestic perspective, given their immediate policy importance to the central governments of countries where these movements are actively pursuing independence. It is important to understand the source of such mobilization in order to understand how it can have a significant impact on political outcomes. Secessionism is dependent on the mobilization of nationalist sentiments, and in order for nationalism to develop, individuals must feel united under one national identity, consisting of one 'nation'. Anderson (1983) defined the concept of the 'nation' as consisting of an "imagined political community [...] both inherently limited and sovereign," which seeks to defend its territory against infiltration by outsiders (Anderson, 1983, 6-7). Geertz (1973), a decade earlier, pointed to the power of 'primordial sentiments' like common blood ties, race, language, religion or custom, for fostering loyalty to one's own group and opposition to all others (Geertz, 1973, 255-282). As Jutila (2006) argued, "the basic idea of nationalist movements is that the borders of states and national groups should converge," so that each 'nation' should have its own state with its own borders (Jutila, 2006, 177). Evidently, there is a strong connection between the concept of the 'nation' and the constructivist approach, which would argue that national identities, like all identities, are simply constructions which bring about particular sets of interests which influence the behaviour of different actors (Hopf 1998, 172). While such sentiments can foster animosity, competition and even conflict between different nations (either within the same state or across borders), they can also prompt the development of ethno-nationalist secessionist movements and ultimately, the formation of new states.

However, while separatist movements have an obvious impact on the domestic level, the issue also inherently belongs in the International Relations discipline because of the ultimate goal of such movements: to create a new, independent state which would join the international system. Coggins (2011) recognized that beyond domestic considerations, a nation needs the recognition of the international community (or at least a critical mass of states therein) which it seeks to join before it can become a true, independent nation-state (Coggins, 2011, 448). Whether or not the international community recognizes a secessionist movement as a legitimate ‘nation’ deserving of its own independent state depends on numerous considerations that influence each country differently. Evidently, there is the question of whether or not the secessionist movement has diaspora communities in other parts of the world that can lobby their host governments to support the cause of their co-ethnics seeking independence. There is also the normative question of whether or not states are supportive of the self-determination of all ethnic groups, or feel a moral obligation to support these secessionist movements. The debate between these theories is explored below, however there is another important consideration that is worth outlining in greater detail first. When deciding whether or not to support a secessionist movement and recognize its legitimacy as an independent state, members of the international community need to weigh all of their national interests and the potential impact that this decision could have on these interests. To this end, these states must take a *realpolitik* approach to their policy-making with regard to supporting secessionist movements in other states, particularly when these other states are important to their broader national interests and could retaliate against them for supporting secessionism in their territory.

While no Muslim-majority country has openly supported the Uyghur secessionist movement, an open condemnation of China’s treatment of Uyghurs (e.g. Turkey until 2019) can at least be treated as expressing support for the protection of the rights of Uyghurs, albeit not expressing support for their secessionist cause. Conversely, a refusal to speak out against a regime that is persecuting a secessionist movement can indicate a lack of support for that movement, which ultimately lends support to the regime that is carrying out the persecution. However, silence could also indicate a lack of support for the regime’s treatment of that movement, which could nevertheless damage the reputation of the regime

itself, depending on the level of influence wielded by the state remaining silent. Although there is a dearth of theoretical works on states' condemnation of other states' treatment of secessionist movements, there is a plethora of theories related to why states choose to support or oppose such movements, which are relevant to the research objectives of this dissertation. One such theory that has been articulated by scholars of secessionist movements is the vulnerability argument (Herbst 1989), which suggests that when a state faces domestic threats of secession, it is unlikely to support secessionist movements in other states. This theory is certainly relevant for the case of Muslim-majority countries' silence about Chinese treatment of Uyghurs, however there have been counter-examples which have thrown this theory into question, including in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, and in Africa, where factors like ethnic ties (Saideman 1997) or regime type (Bélanger et al., 2005) are better predictors of a country's stance on secessionist movements in neighbouring countries.

Nevertheless, vulnerability theory is a useful framework through which to analyze the absence of high-level criticism by leaders the Muslim world against China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. It is based on the notion that when a state is being criticized for a particular policy it has enacted, a natural response would be to point its own finger at another state which has enacted the same or a similar policy. For example, when climate change activists have accused the United States of not doing enough to reduce its carbon emissions, American politicians have tried to redirect criticism toward India for its growing carbon emissions. It therefore follows logically that a state that is vulnerable to criticism against a particular policy would cautiously refrain from criticizing other states for having enacted that same or a similar policy. As an example, a state that is vulnerable to secession by a minority 'nation' residing within its territory should refrain from lending its support to a secessionist movement in another state for fear of legitimizing the objectives of the minority group that threatens its own territorial integrity. Looking at secessionist movements in Africa, Jeffrey Herbst (1989) likens the decision of African states to support or oppose secessionist movements elsewhere in the continent to a collective action problem. However, Herbst argues that, since many (if not all) African states face the threat of secessionist movements breaking apart their territory, and because it would only take one successful secession to inspire dozens of

others, they are more willing to act collectively to undermine separatism (Herbst 1989, 690). However, as Saideman (1997) notes, states that are similarly vulnerable to secessionism will not always be mutually supportive and cooperative, given the diversity of domestic and international considerations they face. He suggests that “leaders may opt for external aggression to unify a divided society, or they may opt to acquiesce, depending on the nature of the internal conflict they face and their political interests” (Saideman 1997, 724).

In the case of Muslim-majority countries and their willingness to criticize China’s treatment of Uyghurs, there is clearly an element of this vulnerability that has factored into their decision to remain silent. This dissertation will test this theory as it applies to the six case countries, three of which (Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey) are either currently or have recently faced significant opposition from a secessionist movement seeking to undermine the regime in power. This theory would suggest that those countries which are vulnerable to secessionism themselves would be reluctant to support the Uyghur secessionist cause. Therefore, Pakistan, which faces secessionist threats from various ethno-linguistic movements seeking an independent state, including most prominently in Balochistan, would logically refrain from condemning China’s treatment of Uyghur separatists to legitimize such treatment for its own purposes. Similarly, Turkey, which has long repressed the ethnic Kurdish movement for an independent state of Kurdistan, would be unlikely to condemn Beijing and risk undermining their own efforts to undermine secessionism in their own country. Indonesia, which only recently unified thousands of islands to form one archipelago state and remains threatened by movements seeking independent states of Kalimantan, Papua and Riau, would also logically not be supportive of Uyghur secessionism in China. Meanwhile Egypt, which lacks any substantive secessionist movements of its own (with the exception of an insignificant Coptic Christian independence movement), should theoretically be more willing to support the Uyghur cause, as should Saudi Arabia and Iran, despite the minor challenges they face from comparatively insignificant secessionist movements. The fact that they do not support the Uyghurs will make them interesting cases to study, as this may help us to identify other explanations as to why these three countries have remained unwilling to speak out in defence of the Uyghurs and their rights.

As such, the cases selected for this study will allow us to assess the analytical validity of this variable in explaining states' decision to either support or oppose secessionism in another country, with particular attention to Turkey which changed its approach in early 2019, as has more recently shifted back to open condemnation, albeit behind closed doors. Given that Kurdish secessionism has threatened Turkey's territorial integrity since long before the Turkish government stopped speaking out against Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs, it is clear that this variable is influential in explaining a state's willingness to condemn another state for its treatment of secessionism. Meanwhile Egypt, which does not face a significant threat of secessionism, has nevertheless supported Beijing's policies in Xinjiang. Clearly, this vulnerability theory is relevant to this research, and it will be critical to understand the contradictory examples within our case studies in order to identify which variables, or combination thereof, best explains the decisions of different states to support or oppose the Chinese government. Similar to ethno-nationalist secessionism, another common point of vulnerability which has often been raised by China in the context of its relations with the Muslim world is the threat of religious extremism.

2.9 Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

The modernization of all facets of societies across the globe has led many scholars to believe that a secularization of society would occur to varying degrees in different countries and cultures, as they estimated that religion would no longer be needed by the average citizen (Gill 2001, 119). However, as we have seen in many places where secularization has taken place, those who refused to accept the level of influence of their faith in their societies have responded with increased 'fundamentalism'. Gill (2001) argued that this fundamentalism was caused by a 'crisis of identity' among "those who fear extinction as a people or absorption into an overarching syncretistic culture to such a degree that their distinctiveness is undermined in the rush to homogeneity" (Gill 2001, 124). In some countries, the religious fundamentalists held greater political bargaining power relative to the secularists, which allowed religious institutions to maintain their influence in society (Gill 2001, 132). Conversely, in others, the fundamentalists failed to achieve the form of religious governance and influence to which they aspired,

and the response is to advance their religion's interests using any means available, in what has come to be referred to as 'religious extremism'. In psychological terms, religious extremism is commonly defined as consisting of an ideological drive to alter the current political system to bring it in line with religious values and traditions using violent means (Arena & Arrigo 2015). In practice, religious extremism often manifests in violence conducted by terrorist organizations in the name of a religious pursuit, like the so-called *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (ISIS) which sought to form a caliphate in Iraq and Syria under which *sharia* law would be enforced. Juergensmeyer (2017) found that the term 'terrorism' was often used to label "disenfranchised groups desperately attempting to gain a shred of power or influence," which have sometimes been justified by a form of religious extremism (Juergensmeyer 2017, 4-6). In his view, the terrorism conducted by religious extremists is symbolic and performative, designed to strike fear into those who are seen as being responsible for the disenfranchisement of the terrorists, with the aim of forcing them to accept the demands of the religious extremists (Juergensmeyer 2017, 147-203). The idea is that, "although these groups cannot kill on the scale that governments with all their military power can, their sheer numbers, their intense dedication, and their dangerous unpredictability have given them influence vastly out of proportion with their meager military resources" (Juergensmeyer 2017, 4).

In a different vein, Douglas Pratt (2017) suggests that religious extremism can simply be seen as a deeply entrenched rejection of diversity, "all too often grounded in religious ideology and a presumption of competitive identities" (Pratt, 2017, 3). This rejection of diversity can take the form of subtle prejudice and discrimination, or violent attacks against those of a different faith. Pratt goes on to outline the existence of extremist influences in Judaism and Christianity, contrary to the common misunderstanding that Islamic extremism is the only form of religious extremism. Most people are aware of Islamist extremist groups like ISIS, *Al-Qaeda* and the *Taliban*, but it is important to also discuss the prominent examples of non-Muslim extremism directed against Muslims, such as the Jewish Israelis that have attacked Palestinian Muslims, the Myanmar Buddhists who slaughtered thousands of Rohingya Muslims and the Christian groups throughout Europe that have responded with violence to the influx of Muslim refugees in their countries. Like with national identity, constructivist theory would argue that the very

concept of religious extremism is a construction which is grounded in the biased values and beliefs of an ethnic or cultural majority, as well as its political structures, its social reproduction and its leaders, which ultimately determines their interests and actions. In all cases of religious extremism, governments face the difficult challenge of ensuring the security of the targeted groups, whether they are a religious minority (e.g. Palestinians, Rohingya, European Muslims) or the majority of the population (e.g. secular or progressive Muslims in countries where Islamist terrorist organizations are active).

Governments that are vulnerable to religious extremism often present these movements as existential threats to their countries, which enable them to justify extraordinary responses and unparalleled restrictions in order to provide security to their citizens (see Securitization Theory below). The international community has come to accept the threat of religious extremism as reasonable grounds for imposing repressive policies on a country's citizens, often to the detriment of fundamental human rights in certain countries. Edel and Josua (2017) cite the examples of Egypt and Syria as regimes that have mobilized the discourse of religious extremism to justify violent crackdowns and arrests in the name of 'counter-terrorism' (Edel & Josua 2017, 14-15). Webb (2019) further expands on this idea, demonstrating that in many cases, the threat of religious extremism has served to justify the imposition of limitations on freedom of expression, in an apparent effort to limit the spread of extremist ideologies. In other cases, religious extremists have sought to impose their will on those wielding political power, and demanded the legislation of limits on free expression such as anti-blasphemy laws and anti-apostasy laws. Webb acknowledges that such policies are in fundamental opposition to democratic norms and the universal values of human rights, arguing that "respect for religious freedom must be balanced with the need to protect individuals from having their autonomy dominated by religious or ideological imposition or discrimination" (Webb 2019, 138). In the case of many Muslim-majority countries like the six studied here, their own repressive domestic policies aimed at countering the spread of religious extremism which in some ways resemble those implemented by Chinese authorities in Xinjiang (see case studies). Therefore, we hypothesize that a common vulnerability to religious extremism and similarly coercive approaches to mitigating this threat has led the Muslim-majority case countries to refrain from openly

criticizing Beijing in exchange for Beijing's tacit support for their own policies. Evidently, policies related to countering religious extremism and providing security in the face of threats from violent extremists or secularists can be dangerous, and must be carefully elaborated and implemented. This dissertation will provide several examples of such policies in different regime types, allowing for a valuable assessment of the different approaches to security across the spectrum of regimes.

Chapter 3 - Measuring the Variables: Case Selection and Research Methodology

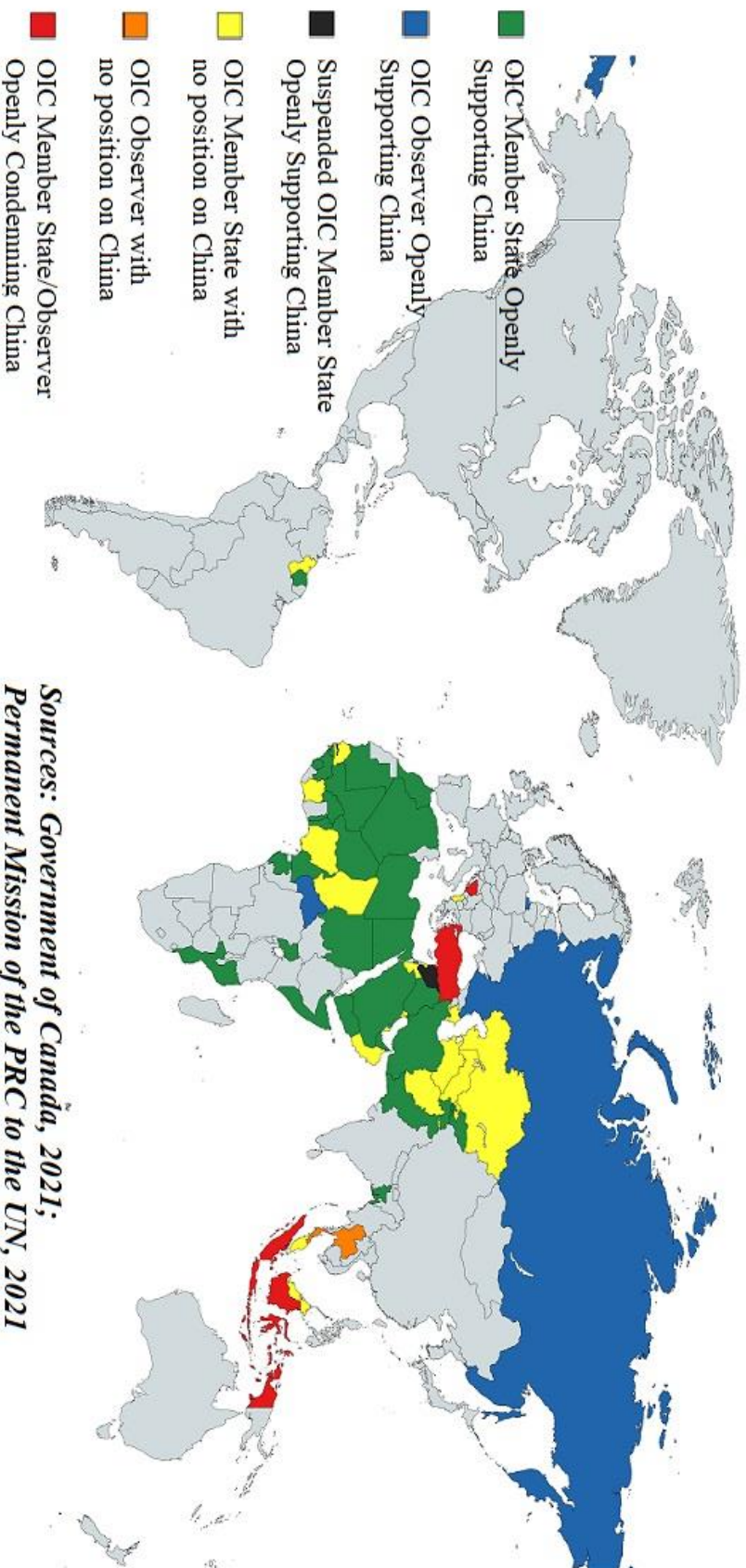
3.1 Introduction

This research is founded on a central puzzle: why would the Muslim world and the OIC, an organization whose guiding mission is to advocate for the rights of all Muslims around the world, which regularly condemns countries openly for what they perceive as inhumane treatment of Muslims, refrain from condemning, and in some cases even actively support the PRC's mass imprisonment of Muslims in the XUAR? It seems like exactly the kind of thing that the Muslim world should ardently condemn, and would in fact parallel other similar cases of condemnation by Muslim-majority countries, including the OIC's recent condemnation of Myanmar for its treatment of the Rohingya (November 2019), of Israel for its demolition of Palestinian homes (July 2019) and of India for its revocation of Kashmir's autonomy (August 2019). This chapter will outline the various indicators that will be used throughout this dissertation to evaluate the research variables to answer this central question. In order to examine the potential strategic considerations behind different Muslim-majority countries' decisions not to condemn China's treatment of Muslims, this research will test the analytical validity of the four hypotheses outlined in chapter 1, each corresponding to one of four independent variables. The first hypothesis suggests that the *level of economic dependence of Muslim-majority countries on China* explains their *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims*. The second advances the idea that the *security dependence on China* influences their *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims*. The third hypothesis posits that the *vulnerability ethno-nationalist secessionist movements in Muslim-majority countries* has a significant effect on their *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims*. And finally, the fourth hypothesis suggests that the *vulnerability to religious extremism in Muslim-majority countries* can have a significant impact on *the level of support for China's treatment of Muslims*. Each variable will be tested in relation to six Muslim-majority case countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkey), which were chosen for reasons described in the next section.

3.2 Case Selection

The reasons for selecting these six Muslim-majority case countries is two-fold: on the one hand, they were chosen because of their significance to the Muslim world. Egypt, with its Al-Azhar University that trains imams from around the world, is a center of Islamic learning. Saudi Arabia, home to the two holiest cities of Islam (Mecca and Medina), is the country that all Muslims must travel to at least once in their lifetimes to honour the fifth pillar of Islam (the *Hajj*), and it invests heavily in the construction of Wahhabi mosques and madrasas throughout the Muslim world. Iran, the world's largest *shi'a* Muslim country, is one of the world's only theocracies in which the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, wields significant influence over the country's citizens and *shi'a* Muslims the world over. Pakistan is the country with the second largest population of Muslims, while Indonesia has the largest, and both countries are located in regions where Islam is not the predominant religion among many of their neighbouring countries. Finally, Turkey, which is also among the largest Muslim populations in the world (8th), has long portrayed itself as a Muslim homeland since its modern inception after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The second reason for the selection of these six Muslim-majority case countries is that their differences in the various aspects of their relations with the PRC will enable us to test the explanatory power of each of the four independent variables. Turkey and Indonesia, in particular, have shown a very limited level of support for China's policies in Xinjiang, while the other four case countries have been comparatively more supportive, in line with the broader position of OIC member states (see Image 3.1). These differences will be discussed further in the following sections, as we outline the variables being tested in this research, as well as the ways in which they will be measured.

Map 3.1 Official Positions of OIC Member States and Observers on China's Xinjiang Policies



*Sources: Government of Canada, 2021;
Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2021*

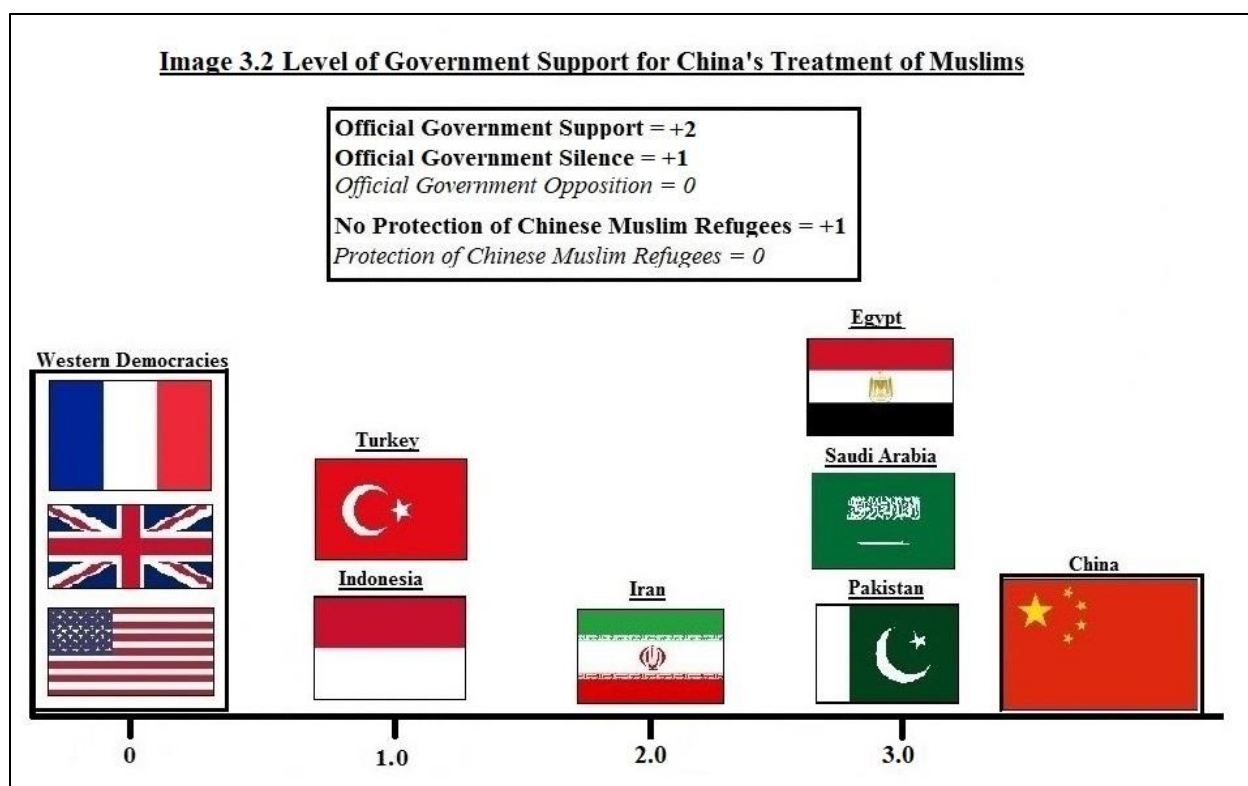
3.3 Dependent Variable: The Level of Support for China's Treatment of Muslims

In order to determine which factors influence different Muslim-majority countries' level of support for China's policies towards Muslims, it is important to study case countries which have taken different stances with regards to this issue. To assess this dependent variable, this thesis will look at the positions of each case country's government, using two primary indicators to determine how these governments position themselves vis-à-vis China's current policies in the XUAR. In the first instance, we will analyze official government statements made by each of the six Muslim-majority case countries being observed in this research, as well as their positions on joint statements made in favour of or in opposition to China's policies. If a case country's government has maintained silence on the issue, this could either mean that they are supportive of Beijing (i.e. refusing to condemn) or that they oppose Beijing but are too afraid to do so openly, so their official silence on the issue will be given a score of 1/2. Meanwhile, countries whose governments have openly condemned China will be assessed a score of 0/2, while those that have actively supported China will receive 2/2. Another indicator that will be used to determine each government's position on China's repression against Muslims is their country's willingness to shelter Uyghur and other Chinese Muslim refugees escaping the PRC. Those who shelter Chinese Muslim refugees will be assessed a score of 0/1, while those that do not will get 1/1, as this demonstrates support for China's policies towards Muslims. If it is not possible to find evidence of the country's approach to Chinese Muslim asylum seekers, we will give these countries a score of 0/1. The reason for this is because international news media has reported extensively on cases of Muslim-majority countries repatriating Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims to China whenever there has been evidence of such actions, so the absence of reporting likely indicates that those countries have not repatriated Chinese Muslims.

In the Muslim world, the only government to have openly condemned China's treatment of Muslims is that of Turkey, however this position has fluctuated since 2019, as Turkey has sought a rapprochement with China in the face of economic sanctions from the US (Huang, 2019). Nevertheless, its off-and-on condemnation of Beijing's policies in the XUAR, coupled with its refusal to co-sign joint

letters to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights supporting China on this matter, earns Ankara a score of 0/2 for the first measure. However, while Turkey has long been very welcoming to Uyghur refugees and other Turkic Muslims escaping the PRC (Shichor, 2009, IX-X), more recent evidence suggests that Ankara has been deporting Uyghurs back to China through third countries in Central Asia (Ullah 2020), earning it a score of 1/1 for the second indicator, and a total score of 1/3. In the case of Indonesia, despite significant protests from influential Muslim authorities, civil society organizations and members of opposition parties, official government condemnation of China's treatment of Muslim minorities has been notably limited. However, Jakarta's refusal to co-sign those same joint letters supporting Beijing, and recent advocacy by Indonesian officials challenging China's policies in the XUAR earn it a score of 0/2 for the first indicator. Meanwhile, on the second indicator, similarly to Turkey, there is evidence in that Indonesia has deported Uyghurs living in Indonesia back to China at the behest of the CCP (Chew 2020), earning it a score of 1/1.

Turning to the other four cases of Egypt, Saudi Arabia Pakistan and Iran, all of their governments have supported Beijing's policies in Xinjiang (2/2), and none have been found to be granting refuge to Uyghurs escaping persecution in China in recent years, with reliable evidence of Uyghurs being deported back to China (1/1), except in the case of Iran (0/1). As a result, the first three receive an overall score of 3/3 for the dependent variable, while Iran receives a score of 2/3. In Image 3.2, we have depicted the varying levels of support for China's treatment of Muslims of each of the six case countries, as well as some Western democracies for comparison. With this divergence in levels of support among our Muslim-majority case countries, the research will proceed to evaluate how each of the four hypotheses (i.e. independent variables) might influence this dependent variable, starting with *economic dependence*.



3.4 Independent Variable 1: Economic Dependence

As mentioned in the previous section, a common argument used to explain the discrepancy in the *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims* among Muslim-majority countries is their *level of economic dependence on China*. As previously mentioned, this variable is often used to explain the developing world's unwillingness to criticize China in the international arena, however this thesis argues that this variable is insufficient, given the frequent criticism by Muslim-majority countries towards other important economic partners like India and the United States. In an effort to analyze the theoretical salience of this variable, we will look at three indicators of the strength of commercial relations between China and our six Muslim-majority case countries. These are: (1) Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) to each of the six Muslim-majority countries as a percentage of the total; (2) imports from China to each of the six Muslim-majority countries as a percentage of total imports; and (3) exports to China by each of the six Muslim-majority countries as a percentage of total exports. Then, in order to give each case

country a standardized score on 3, countries will earn 0/1 if an indicator was between 0 and 5%, they will score 0.5/1 if the indicator was between 5% and 20%, and they will be given a score of 1/1 if the indicator was above 20%, representing a high level of dependence. As the case-specific chapters will demonstrate, all case countries have significant economic relations with China except for Turkey, which until 2019, had limited exports to China or FDI from China. This difference in Turkey's economic relations with China will enable us to test the hypothesis of economic dependence by looking at variations in Istanbul's level of support for China's policies towards Muslims in Xinjiang over time. We will then be able to move on to testing the second hypothesis, the *security dependence of Muslim-majority countries on China*.

3.5 Independent Variable 2: Security Dependence

Similarly to the previous variable, the second independent variable that will be studied in this dissertation suggests that Muslim-majority countries' *security dependence on China* influences their *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims*. However, unlike with economic dependence, which can be demonstrated by looking at several key indicators, it is a bit more complicated to determine one country's security dependence on another. For the purpose of measuring the security dependence on China of our case countries, this dissertation will use only one simple, albeit fundamentally important indicator: Chinese arms transfers to each of our six Muslim-majority case countries as a percentage of their total arms imports. To give each case country a score out of three (as with the other variables), we will give 1/3 to countries which import between 0-5% of their arms from China; a score of 2/3 will go to countries which import between 5-15% of their arms from China; and a score of 3/3 will be given to countries which receive more than 15% of their arms supplies from China. Evidently, there are other indicators of security dependence, such as joint military drills and operations, high-level strategic dialogues or formal bilateral or multilateral alliances. Unfortunately, these other indicators are difficult to measure accurately using quantitative methods, so this dissertation will not factor them into the data for this variable. Instead, each case study chapter will examine anecdotal evidence of security cooperation between the Muslim-

majority case country in question and their Chinese counterparts, to illustrate their dependence (or lack thereof) on their security relationship with Beijing. As we will see in each of these chapters, although each country has developed strong security relationships with China in the form of joint military exercises or participation in strategic dialogues and security alliances, only Pakistan can be considered highly dependent on Chinese arms transfers, while Indonesia is moderately dependent, though many of its arms transfers come from other key players.

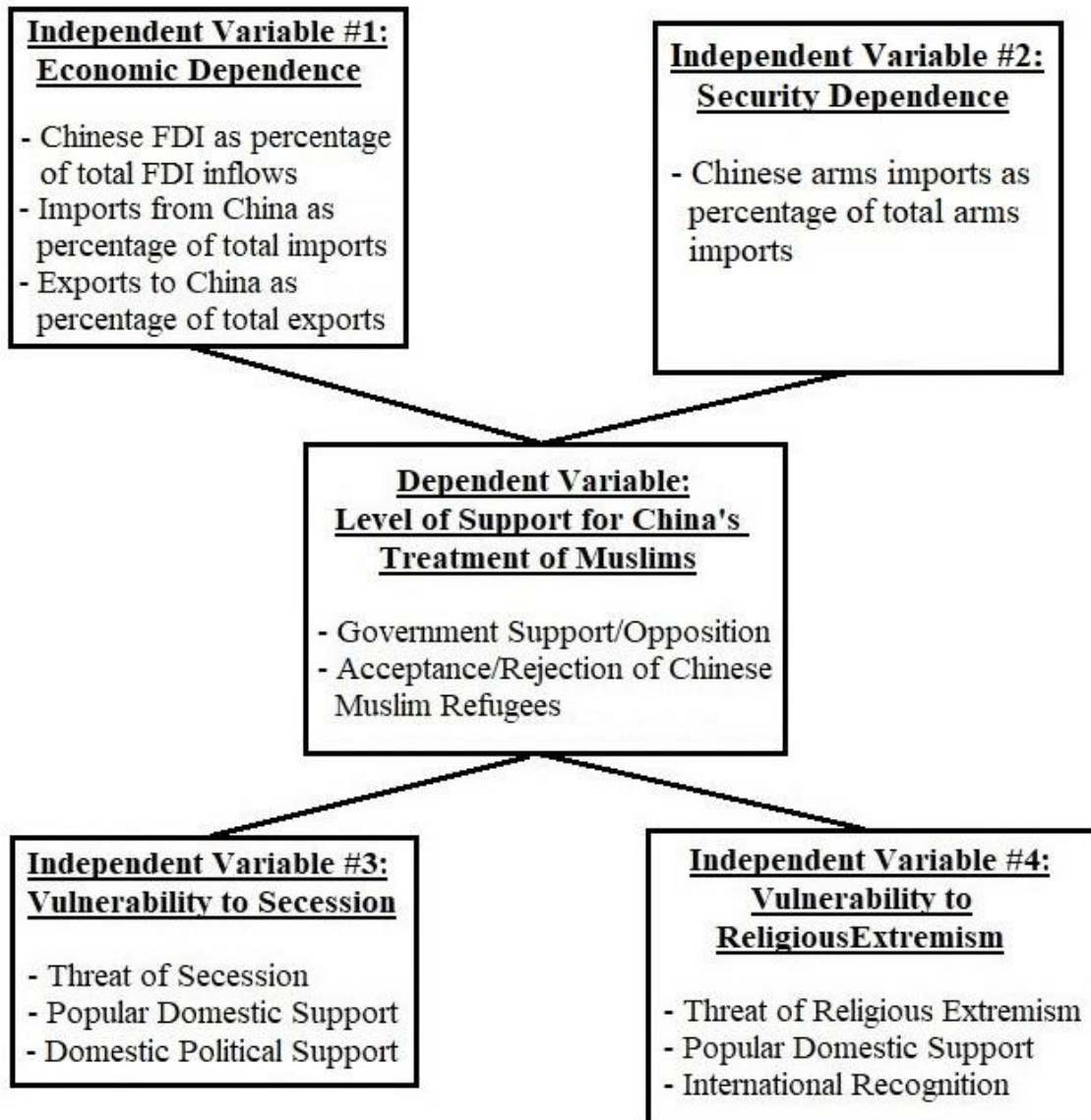
3.6 Independent Variable 3: Vulnerability to Secessionist Movements

The third hypothesis that will be considered in this thesis is the argument that the *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims* among Muslim-majority countries is influenced by their *vulnerability to secessionist movements challenging the state*. Here, I have hypothesized that the reluctance of Muslim-majority countries to condemn China's persecution of Muslims in the XUAR is partially a result of those countries' policies towards their own separatist movements, and the fear of rhetorical and material retaliation by China for any criticism against its policies against Uyghurs and other separatist groups. For the purpose of this research, this third variable will be measured by looking at whether or not such separatist movements exist in each of the six Muslim-majority countries chosen for this project, as well as any engagement they have had with China on such issues. In particular, it will determine whether or not these countries have (1) faced the threat, real or invented, of a domestic separatist movement seeking independence from the state; and if so, if this movement had (2) popular support from regional in-group audiences, and/or (3) political support from domestic parties and/or politicians. For each of these indicators, case countries will be given a score of 1/1 if the answer is yes, or 0/1 if the answer is no, for a final score out of three to measure this variable. While there are significant secessionist movements (i.e. armed, popular movements with international support) in Indonesia (Aceh; Papua), Pakistan (Baluchistan) and Turkey (Kurdistan), the comparative insignificance of such movements in Egypt and Iran will enable us to test the explanatory power of this variable.

3.7 Independent Variable 4: Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

Finally, the fourth hypothesis that will be considered in this research suggests that the *level of support for China's treatment of Muslims* depends on the *Muslim-majority country's vulnerability to religious extremism*. Similarly to the previous variable, this one operates under the assumption that many Muslim-majority countries also face threats of religious extremism at home, which have inspired terrorist incidents and created domestic instability and unrest. I hypothesize that this vulnerability to religious extremism makes these Muslim-majority countries more sympathetic to Beijing's narrative which suggests that restrictive policies and so-called 'vocational training centres' for supposedly radicalized Muslims in Xinjiang are a response to extremism and an effort to eliminate the conditions that lead to its development. For the purpose of this research, we will look at whether or not the six Muslim-majority case countries have (1) faced the threat of terrorism or violent conflict spurred by religious extremism; and if so, if this extremism had (2) popular support from domestic audiences; and/or (3) recognition from the international community. As with the previous variable, case countries will be given a score of 1/1 if the answer to each indicator is yes, or 0/1 if the answer is no, so that each country will have a score out of three for this variable. Evaluating these indicators as they apply to each of our Muslim-majority case countries will allow us to analyze to what extent our four independent variables impact the dependent variable, or the level of support for China's treatment of Muslims. These four hypotheses and the overall summary of variables can be found in Image 3.3 below.

Image 3.3 Summary of Research Variables



3.8 Methodology and Data Collections

As discussed above, this dissertation will seek to determine (1) the level of economic dependence and (2) the level security dependence among the six Muslim-majority case countries, as well as each case country's (3) vulnerability to domestic secessionist movements, and (4) vulnerability to religious extremism, real or invented. The sensitive nature of a country's foreign policy strategies and

considerations makes it highly unlikely that research interviews could be obtained with relevant foreign policy practitioners from China or our Muslim-majority case countries, or that they would yield useful data if such an interview was obtained. This research will therefore focus on analyzing the content of various primary and secondary sources in order to collect the necessary data to test the hypotheses discussed in these first three chapters. Before we begin to examine our six case studies, it is important to outline the different sources from which we have collected data for this research, beginning with our dependent variable and followed by each of the four independent variables.

Level of Support for China's Treatment of Muslims

To begin with, we needed to evaluate each Muslim-majority case country's level of support for China's treatment of Muslims, which consists of the five indicators mentioned above. The data for each country's government stance on the issue was derived from public declarations by government officials, as well as from joint statements made at the United Nations. Focusing mainly on several key statements in the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, this data was easy to obtain. To ascertain whether or not each country repatriates Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims back to China, we consulted the news media and reports by human rights organizations like *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch*. For this measure, some of the case countries' policies had not been publicly recorded in the media or by NGOs. However, given their diligence in reporting any evidence of deportations by Muslim-majority countries of Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims back to China, the absence of any such reporting likely indicates that those countries have not been deporting these Muslims, and as such, we have given a score of 0/1 when no reporting or evidence exists.

Economic Dependence

Concerning the indicators for the first independent variable (level of economic dependence between the six Muslim-majority countries and China), I was able to obtain the majority of this data from trade or investment databases. The data on levels of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the six

case countries was derived from the *American Enterprise Institute's* China Global Investment Tracker (CGIT), which consolidates Chinese FDI by country for the temporal range dating from 2005-2019. This was then calculated as a percentage of the total FDI in the six case countries, using FDI data from *Index Mundi*, which consolidates data from the International Monetary Fund, the Balance of Payment database and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The data on imports from and exports to China, as well as their percentages of the total imports and exports of each case country, was obtained from the *Observatory for Economic Complexity* (OEC), which creates visualizations using economic data from UN COMTRADE. These secondary sources consolidate data from primary sources for ease of reference, and facilitate the data collection and presentation for this dissertation. The only issue that arose from this method of data collection was in the case of Pakistan, for which the CGIT identified Chinese FDI as being higher than its overall FDI inflows identified by *Index Mundi*. In the chapter on Pakistan, we have identified this issue, but have explained that, despite the inconsistent data, it is nevertheless clear that Pakistan is highly dependent on Chinese FDI.

Security Dependence

With regards to the indicators for the second independent variable (the security dependence of the six case countries on China), most of the data was obtained from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), as well as from open source media reporting. Using data taken from SIPRI, we were able to determine the percentage of total arms imports that were purchased from China over the last ten years (2010-2020) of each case country. In certain instances, it was important to shorten the time frame to demonstrate a significant trend in more recent years, which will be explained in greater detail in the relevant case country chapters. This dissertation will also supplement the data obtained from SIPRI by resorting to secondary academic or journalistic analyses of Chinese security cooperation with each of our case countries, to provide anecdotal and qualitative evidence of joint military exercises, strategic discussions or security alliances which demonstrate greater or lesser security dependence on China..

Vulnerability to Secessionist Movements and to Religious Extremism

Looking at the third and fourth independent variables (the vulnerability to domestic secessionist movements and to religious extremism), this research largely resorted to analyzing the content of academic publications on the historical, sociological and political dimensions of secessionism and religious extremism in each of the six Muslim-majority case countries. In addition to academic secondary sources, we also examined local English-language media as well as international media to determine whether these movements have domestic and international support respectively. Studies like the ‘Global Terrorism Index’ by the *Institute for Economics & Peace* also helped to contextualize each of the case countries with respect to their vulnerability to religious extremism. Finally, a brief review of some speeches given by prominent leaders in each of the six case countries in tandem with a review of historical sources and contemporary news media allowed us to assess whether the vulnerability is real or simply portrayed as such by these leaders. These sources gave us a good idea of each country’s true vulnerability to such movements, and this enabled us to draw conclusions on the impact of this vulnerability on each country’s level of support for China’s policies towards Muslims. Although evaluating vulnerability is inherently a subjective practice, the methodology we have used in this dissertation has limited the margin for inaccuracy and enabled the study to be scientifically reproduced in the future, if there is an interest in doing so.

Chapter 4 - Egypt: A Contemporary Alliance of Ancient Civilizations

“China supports Egypt's efforts to maintain stability, develop the economy and improve livelihoods, and supports Egypt to play an even greater role in international and regional affairs.”

Chinese President Xi Jinping, January 2016

“We [Egypt and China] discussed in our consultations the need to redouble our common efforts in various bilateral and international areas to combat the danger of terrorism and extremism.”

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, January 2016

(Noueihed & Abdelaty 2016)

4.1 Introduction

The Arab Republic of Egypt, with a population of over 100 million, is the largest Arab country in the world (CIA World Factbook 2020). It is an important case to study for the purpose of this dissertation because of its cultural significance in the Arab and broader Muslim worlds. Its capital, Cairo, was named the Arab world's Capital of Islamic Culture by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) for the year 2020, along with Bukhara, Uzbekistan for Asia, and Bamako, Mali for Africa (Marie 2019). Along with Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, Egypt is only the third Arab country with two cities that have received this honour (Alexandria was named in 2008), which seeks to promote Islamic culture, and highlight the achievements of important Islamic cities “in the service of culture, literature, arts, science and Islamic knowledge” (Marie 2019). According to a 2018 study carried out by Arab Barometer, Egypt's population is now 90.4% Muslim, with the vast majority of them belonging to the Sunni sect (CIA World Factbook 2020)(see Map 4.1). The famous Library of Alexandria is home to numerous Islamic religious texts, as well as a renowned Center for Islamic Civilization Studies. While Alexandria had long been a center of cultural learning and knowledge transmission from before the birth

of the Prophet Muhammad, “it was Cairo, more than any other city of the later Middle Ages, that developed a reputation as a vital center of traditional Muslim learning” (Berkey 2014, 9). Among the most important Islamic educational institutes in the world, Cairo’s Al-Azhar mosque and university has been teaching Muslim theology since it was first built in the year 970, at the beginning of the Fatimid era (Zeghal 2010, 3). According to Saat (2018), Al-Azhar is still regarded as the foremost institute for education in Islamic theology for the Sunni sect, and is frequented by aspiring scholars and imams from around the Muslim world (Saat 2018, 4). In fact, many Uyghur and other Chinese Muslims have studied at Al-Azhar University, which has been the source of some contention in recent years (discussed below).



While there is no disputing Egypt's importance to the Islamic world nor the importance of Islam in Egyptian politics and society, contemporary Egyptian history has been defined by a succession of secular authoritarian regimes that have limited the growth of political Islam. Throughout this era, Al-Azhar University, long viewed as an authority on all issues of Sunni Islamic law, practice and theology, often weighed in on the side of the military dictatorships to oppose Islamist organizations seeking to instill political Islam in the Egyptian political system, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood (discussed below). However, because of Egypt's historical significance in both the Muslim and Arab worlds, it is nevertheless surprising that Egypt's current leader, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has remained silent on the issue of Beijing's treatment of Muslim minorities. This chapter will analyze Egypt's comparatively supportive position on China's treatment of Muslim minorities, and evaluate several possible reasons for this position by examining various aspects of Egypt's domestic and foreign policies. Before delving into this complex analysis, the next section will first contextualize Egypt's current policies by providing a bit of the historical background of Sino-Egyptian relations.

4.2 Sino-Egyptian Relations

On May 30, 1956, Egypt became just the 27th country, the fifth Muslim majority country, and the first Arab and African country to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only legitimate Chinese state, officially establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing. According to a former Egyptian diplomat, Mohamed Jalal, "Sino-Egyptian relations since 1956 had been based on cooperation and shared interests that emerged from the basic concepts at the Bandung non-aligned nations' conference of April 1955" (Ehteshami & Horesh 2020, 104). Despite significant economic cooperation between the two countries, successive Egyptian leaders were not ideologically aligned with the PRC, particularly with "Mao's radicalism and his vision of peasant-led socialist development" (Ehteshami & Horesh 2020, 103). In fact, there was even a period from 1958-1962 when Egyptian President Abdel Nasser, having chosen to side with the Soviet Union for its "pan-Arab nationalist posture," clashed with Beijing on international issues from the 1958 Iraqi revolution, to the communist insurgency in Syria, to the Sino-Indian border

skirmishes of 1962 (Ehteshami & Horesh 2020, 103). Nasser's successors, Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, both sought to strengthen Egypt's relations with the West, and particularly with the United States who provided them with military assistance and equipment. However, this did not impede their economic and diplomatic exchanges with China, as it followed the break-up of the Sino-Soviet alliance and also coincided with US President Nixon's rapprochement with Beijing in 1972.

Following the American-centric foreign policy of the Sadat years (1970-1981), during which Egypt prioritized the development of positive relations with the United States as the global hegemon and the only country that could control Israel, Mubarak (1981-2011) was keen on opening up relations with other powers. In contrast to Sadat, "Mubarak perceived a multipolar system in which Egypt's success depended on opening its channels with all great powers," and "one of the first objectives [his] regime pursued was the restoration of Egypt's relations with the Arab world" (Dessouki 2008, 179-80). He began rejecting Israeli positions in favour of Palestinian ones, and quickly re-established close relations with the Arab League, with the Organization for African Unity and with the Nonaligned Movement (Dessouki 2008, 180). From 1996 to 2009, Chinese leaders visited Egypt five times, including President Jiang Zemin's first trip as president in 1996, Premier Zhu Rongji in 2002, President Hu Jintao in 2004 and Premier Wen Jiabao in 2006 (Medeiros 2009, 157). Successive Chinese leaders have also not discriminated against the different sides of the Egyptian political spectrum, with President Hu inviting the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi to visit China. President Morsi accepted the invitation from his Chinese counterpart and was lavished with a three day visit in August 2012 (Ehteshami & Horesh 2020, 105). Not long thereafter, President Hu's successor Xi Jinping visited Egypt in early 2016, when he met with the man who deposed Morsi, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and together they consolidated Sino-Egyptian bilateral relations and "signed investment and aid deals worth billions of dollars" (Noueihed & Abdelaty 2016).

The friendship between Egypt and the PRC is undoubtedly multifaceted, and the complexity of this relationship will be analyzed over the course of this chapter. But what makes the Arab Republic such an intriguing case to study for the purpose of this dissertation, beyond its importance in the Muslim and

Arab world, is its apparent disregard for the well-being of hundreds of thousands of co-religionists being detained in re-education camps in Xinjiang by Chinese authorities. When then-President Morsi, a Muslim Brother, visited Beijing in 2012, the CCP had already ordered several ‘Strike Hard’ campaigns against Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, yet this was not raised by the Egyptian leader. Instead, the only political issue that was discussed was Morsi’s distrust of the West, which had long backed the regime of his predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, which was part of the reason why he chose instead to enhance Sino-Egyptian relations (Ehteshami & Horesh 2020, 105). Now, under the leadership of President al-Sisi, Egypt has kept silent about the mass imprisonment of Muslims in China, and has even lent its voice to a chorus of non-Western, non-democratic states that have actively defended China’s treatment of its Muslim citizens (Lawler 2019). But arguably the most shocking action taken by the Egyptian government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is the decision in July 2017 to detain Uyghur students studying at al-Azhar University and repatriate them to China (Barrington 2017). Young Chinese Muslims who were pursuing an education in Arabic and Islamic studies from one of Egypt’s most historic institutions were arrested by Egyptian authorities and sent back to China where they were quite likely to be subjected to re-education. The next section will provide an overview of the data for the various indicators used to determine Egypt’s level of support for China’s policies towards Muslims (dependent variable). Then, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to examining four possible explanations for Egypt’s position, including (1) its level of economic dependence on China; (2) the nature of its multilateral engagement with China; (3) whether it is vulnerable to any domestic secessionist movements; and (4) whether it is vulnerable to religious extremism. We will proceed in this same order, and conclude by analyzing if and how each of the independent variables influences Egypt’s level of support for China’s policies towards Muslims.

4.3 Dependent Variable: Level of Support for China’s Policies towards Muslims

As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, Egypt’s level of support for China’s policies towards Muslims is at roughly the same level as Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is extremely high. This variable is broken down into the (1) government’s position, (2) religious leaders’ position, (3) the media’s

position, and (4) the citizens' position. To assess the government's level of support for Beijing's policies of restricting Muslims' freedoms, we looked at two indicators: their official position on the Uyghur re-education camps, and their position on granting refugee status to Uyghurs that have escaped China. As we noted in the first chapter, Egypt gets a point for each of these indicators. First, Cairo has joined numerous other countries in signing a joint statement to the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019 commending China's re-education camp system as an innovative solution for combatting violent extremism (Human Rights Council, 2019). Egypt also joined in the chorus of countries that proclaimed their support for China's policies at the UN General Assembly in November 2019 and October 2020 during meetings of the Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Issues (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN, 2019; GA/SHC/4287, 2020). For this indicator, Egypt unquestionably receives a score of 2/2. On the question of offering asylum to Chinese Muslim refugees, Egypt has taken a clear position in its decision to repatriate Uyghur students who had been studying at al-Azhar University, sending them back to almost certain detention in re-education camps (Barrington 2017), earning a score of 1/1 for this measure as well. Evidently, the Egyptian government has shown a significant level of support for Beijing's treatment of Chinese Muslims, earning it an overall score of 3/3 for this variable.

4.4 Egyptian Economic Dependence on China

There is no disputing the economic importance of Egypt for the rest of the world. The Suez Canal, which is owned and operated by Egypt, is one of the most critical pieces of infrastructure for commercial shipping in the world, through which around 9% of global trade passes (Shumake 2019). This canal has facilitated Chinese access to European markets for decades, and represents a significant asset for Beijing's expansion into the Western world. The commercial relations between the two countries began in 1953 with Egyptian representatives selling cotton to Chinese buyers even before their diplomatic relations began in 1956. Since then, their economic exchanges have continued to expand, signing a technical cooperation agreement in Beijing in 1964, funding the construction of a brick factory in 1972, and beginning technological and scientific collaborations in Cairo in 1987 (Gadallah 2016, 95). Following

a visit to China by then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1999, which saw the signing of agreements in “politics, the economy, parliament, culture, tourism, and more,” economic relations between the two countries flourished, as they engaged in “joint projects and investments, especially the cooperation in the Economic Zone North-west Gulf of Suez in addition to establishing the Egyptian companies’ affiliates in China” (Gadallah 2016, 96). This Suez Economic Zone has enabled Chinese companies to crack new markets, both throughout Europe and across Africa, as well as exporting goods like marble back to Asia (Gadallah 2016, 97). Relations have only continued to expand in recent years, with Egypt officially joining China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2016, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the country. Egypt has since promoted the BRI to other African and Arab countries, and its Nile River and other transportation infrastructure has facilitated Chinese access to dozens of other countries on the continent, “making Egypt the northern door of Africa” (Soliman & Zhao 2019, 431-432).

Since the launch of the BRI in 2013, Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) into Egypt has hit unprecedented levels, with Beijing pledging US\$40 billion in investments to support Egypt’s Suez Canal Economic Zone and corresponding Chinese industrial city (Tawil 2019). Chinese FDI in Egypt from 2017-2019 is roughly equivalent to the amount of FDI it contributed to Egypt over the ten previous years (see Image 4.2). As a percentage of total FDI inflow into Egypt, China represented roughly 9.6% of FDI from 2006 to 2012 (see Image 4.3), but nearly 53% of FDI from 2013 to 2018 (see Image 4.4), demonstrating a significant level of dependence on Chinese investment, particularly in more recent years. Furthermore, since joining the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in April 2015, three projects have been approved in Egypt at a total value of US\$660 billion (AIIB 2020). In terms of two-way trade, the most recent data shows Egyptian exports to China at nearly US\$1.2 billion in 2017, which represents only 4% of total Egyptian exports, and is just the seventh largest export destination (see Image 4.5). For China, this represents only 1.7% of its total imports from the entire African continent (OEC 2017). However, Egypt imports over US\$8 billion from China, which represents 13% of its total imports, making China its largest source of imports (see Image 4.6). Evidently, Egypt is quite dependent

on Chinese investments but less so on trade, however this will likely continue to increase with the growth that will inevitably follow from its participation in the BRI.

Image 4.2 Chinese FDI in Egypt (2006-2019)

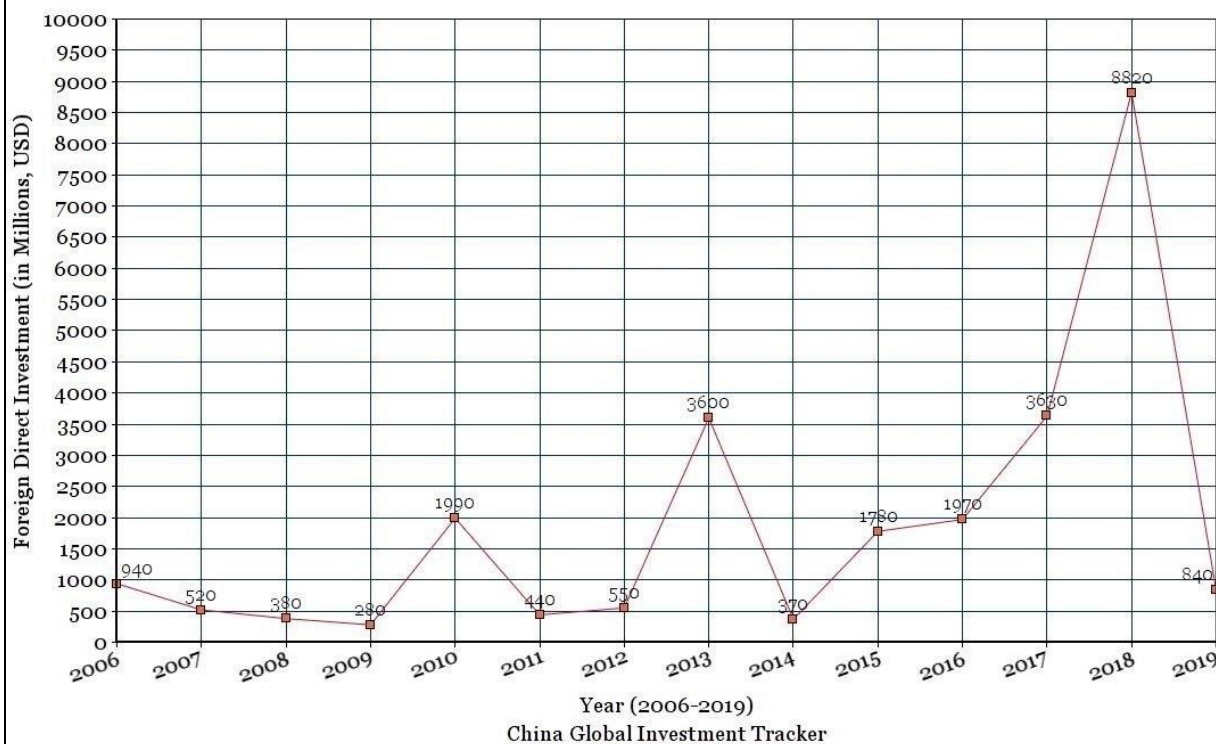


Image 4.3 Chinese FDI as Percentage of Total (2005-2012)

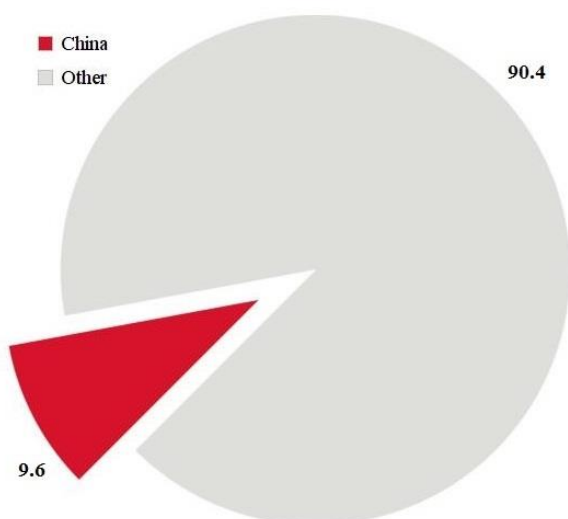


Image 4.4 Chinese FDI as Percentage of Total (2013-2018)

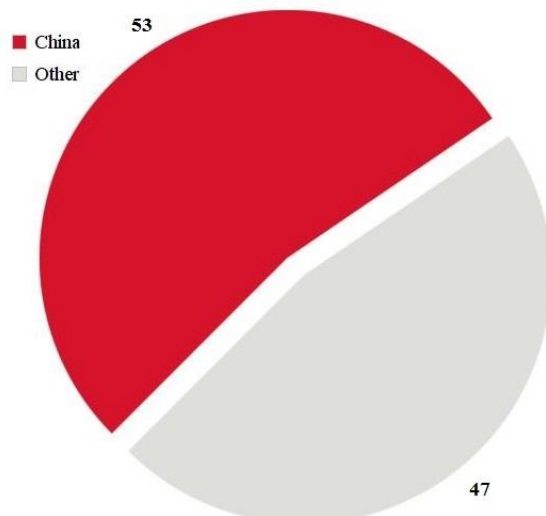


Image 4.5 Importance of Exports to China (2017)

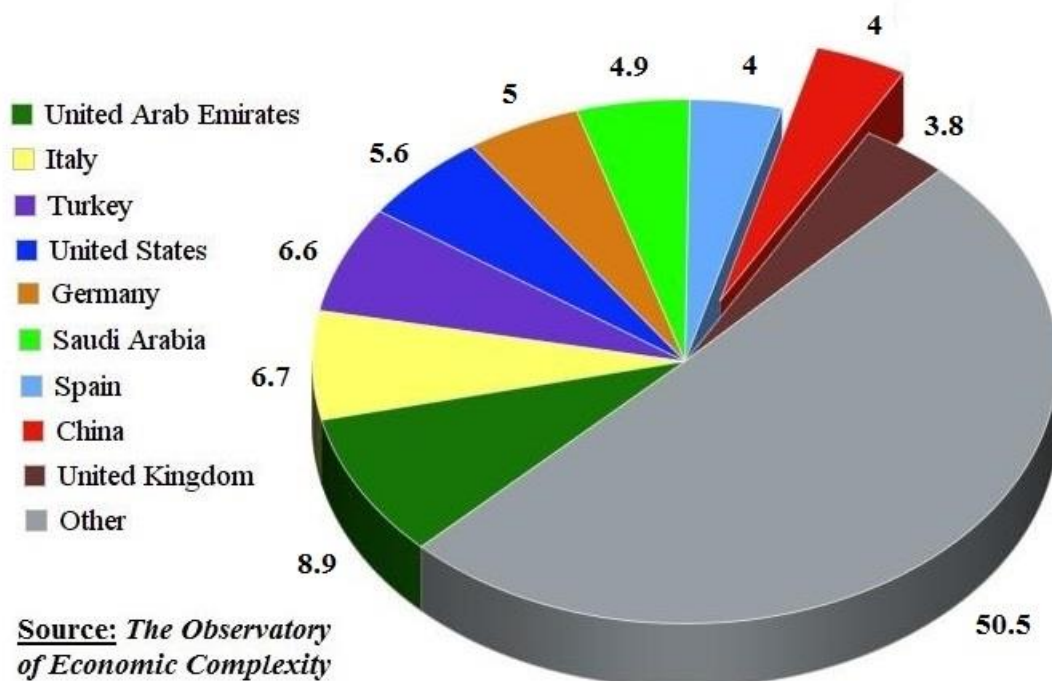
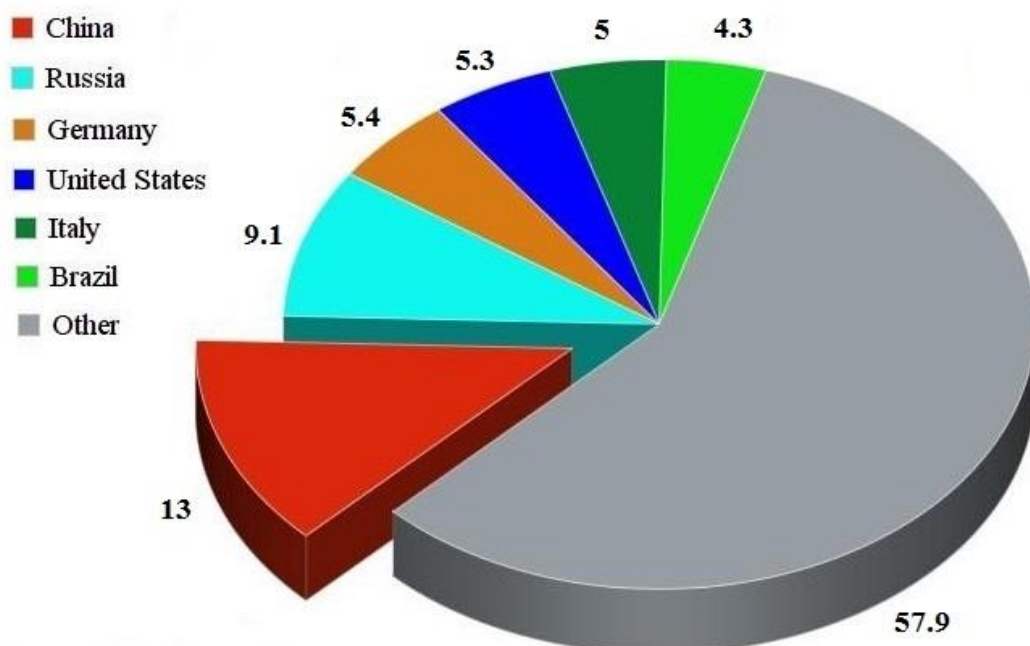


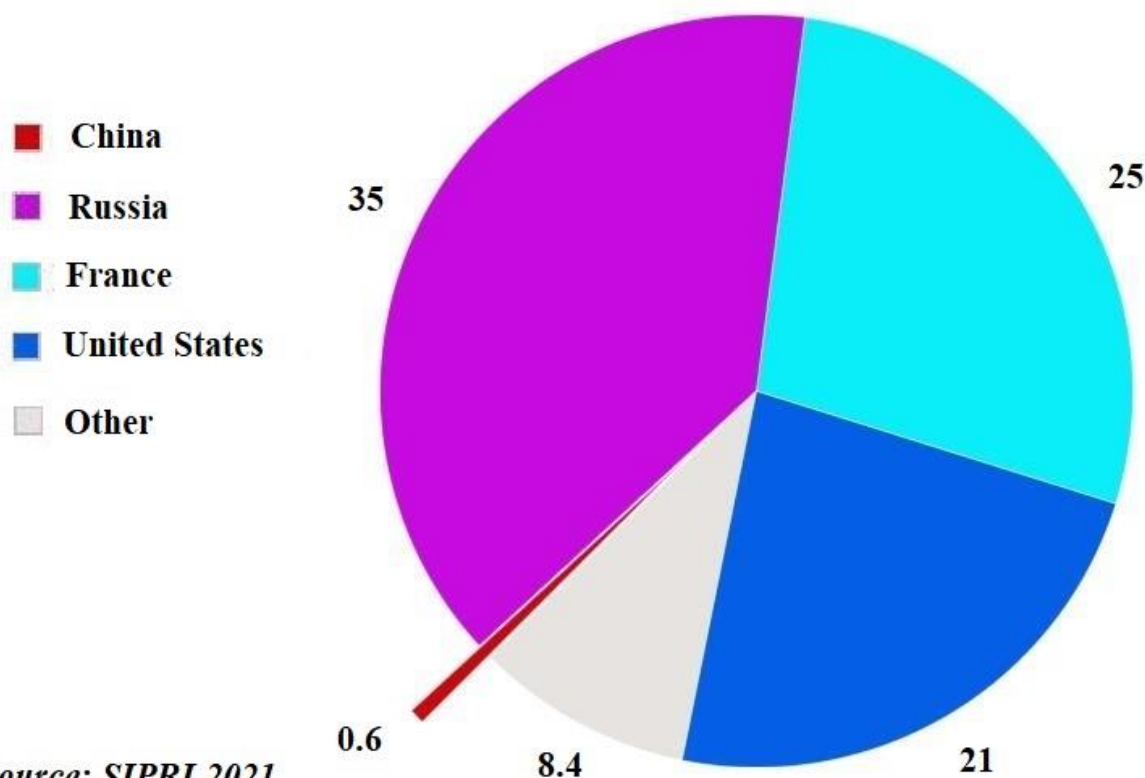
Image 4.6 Importance of Imports from China (2017)



4.5 Egypt's Security Dependence on China

In order to analyze Egypt's level of dependence on close security and defence cooperation with China, we have begun by compiling arms transfers data for the past ten years (2010-2020), to determine the percentage of arms and military equipment that Cairo procured from Beijing during this period. Using data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI 2021), we have been able to determine that Chinese arms transfers to Egypt have been almost negligible over the past decade, making up less than 1% of Egypt's total arms imports. Image 4.7 illustrates Egypt's lack of dependence on arms transfers from Chinese manufacturers and exporters, demonstrating instead a strong reliance on Russia (35%), France (25%) and the United States (21%) for its arms imports. Given China's arms represent between 0 and 5% of Egypt's total arms imports, it is clear that Egypt has very limited security dependence on China, receiving a score of 1/3.

Image 4.7 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2010-2020)

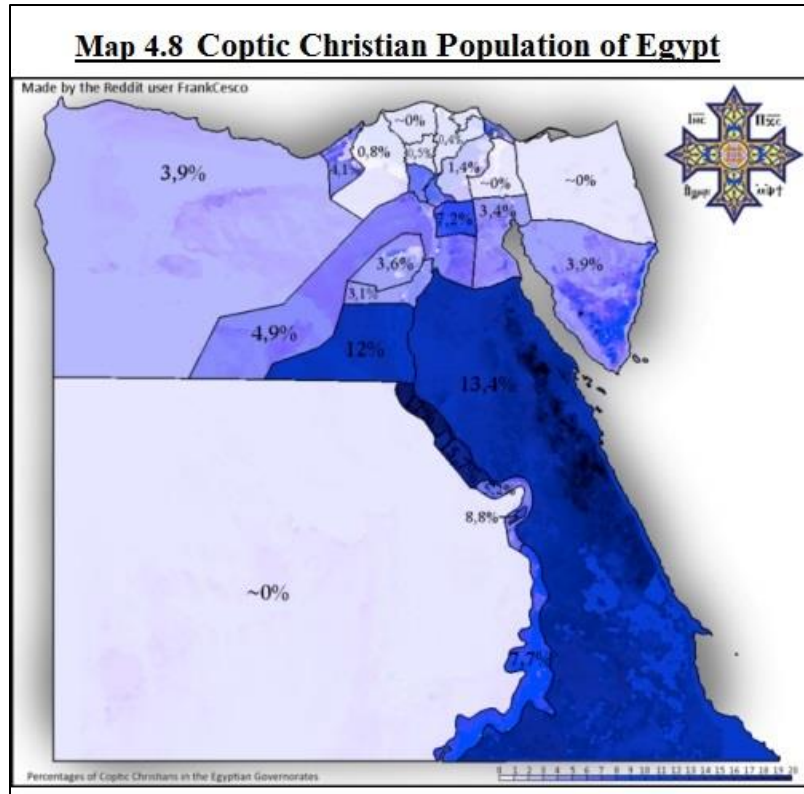


However, as we noted in the methodology chapter, there are other indicators that can be noteworthy in determining the strength of two countries' security cooperation, including whether or not the two countries have engaged in joint military drills. As a coastal nation bordering both the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, with full sovereignty over the Suez Canal which has a notable significance for global commerce (see discussion above), Egypt is a strong naval power. It has carried out joint naval exercises with the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (Ahram Online 2019), but it has held similar naval exercises with many of its regional allies (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Sudan and Bahrain), as well as with other global naval powers like the United Kingdom and Russia (Helou 2020). There have also been numerous high-level strategic meetings between the Egyptian Defense and Military Production Minister Mohamed Zaki and his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe, including recently in March 2019, when the two sides applauded their cooperation in ensuring regional peace and stability (Egypt Today 2019). However, such exchanges happen frequently with the Defence Ministers of other important world powers, so we cannot infer from these exchanges any level of Egyptian dependence on its security relationship with China. Furthermore, Cairo is not represented in any formal security alliances to which Beijing belongs, which only reinforces the conclusion that Egypt is minimally dependent on its security cooperation with China.

4.6 Vulnerability to Secessionist Movements

Although modern-day Egypt does not face any significant threat of secession, the Coptic Christian minority that lives predominantly in the south of the country have occasionally mobilized support for an independent Coptic nation (Kepel 2002, 285). Although estimates vary, the population of Copts in Egypt is somewhere around 10 million, representing around 10% of the national population (Elhenawwy 2019). However, in the southern provinces of Assiut, Minia and Suhaj, Copts make up a larger percentage, with the 1976 census estimating that they represent anywhere between 15% and 20% of the regional populations (Kepel 1985, 157)(see Map 4.8). This Christian minority, which has existed in Egypt since shortly after the foundation of the religion, has often clashed with Muslim communities,

particularly at the start of the 20th century, when Islamic nationalism began growing in the country. As Islamists and other Muslim traditionalists sought to entrench Islam as a fundamental character of Egyptian society and culture, Copts began to feel alienated and in 1911, called a congress of Coptic Christians in Assiut to defend their rights (Makari 2007, 50). At this congress, attendees pushed for greater government support for Coptic schools, access to public service jobs for Copts, and the respecting of Sundays as a holy day of observance (Pennington 1982, 160). Nowhere is the Copts' disenfranchisement by the Egyptian state more evident than in the gradual extinction of the Coptic language through assimilation. This language, which is an amalgam of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and the Greek alphabet, was eventually overtaken by Arabic thanks to policies making the latter the official language of the government and the legal system, the language of education, and eventually, even the language of the Coptic Christian church services (Makari 2007, 45). Over the past century, the clashes between Egyptian Muslims and Coptic Christians may have posed a threat to security and social stability, but there has never been a genuine threat of secession by the Copts (0/1), as most Copts themselves do not want independence from Egypt (0/1), and there is no political representation of a Coptic secessionist movement in Egyptian parliament (0/1). Therefore, with a score on this variable of 0/3, it is highly unlikely that Egypt's level of support for China's mistreatment of Uyghurs stems from their sympathy for their common vulnerability to the threat of secessionism.



4.7 Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

In the introduction of this chapter, we briefly discussed the growth in influence enjoyed by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in recent decades. But Islamism, the ideology that seeks to replace secular laws and politics with *sharia* and Islamic governance, has not only inspired a number of extremist groups in Egypt, but is also largely based on the doctrinal writings and teachings of Egyptians like Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Sheikh Kishk (Kepel 1985, 9-10). Contemporary Egypt, under the nearly uninterrupted rule of secular military dictators, has bred Islamist extremist groups who wished to fight against the country's departure from what they perceive to be Egyptian Islamic values. Successive regimes have labeled Islamists as *Kharijites*, a name revived from the designation of those Muslims who challenged the political rulers of the second and third caliphates following the death of the prophet Mohammed. The Kharijites were responsible for the killing of 'Ali, the fourth caliph after Mohammed, and were known to oppose the rule of the Umayyad (661-750 CE) and 'Abbasid (750-1517 CE)

Caliphates. Although this sect eventually disappeared, “the name ‘Kharijite’ came to denote both the original group that protested against the caliph ‘Ali and *anyone* who rebelled against a leader or his appointed representative” (Kenney 2006, 4). The use of this term in contemporary Egypt has come to be reserved for Islamists, who are evidently seen by the country’s secular rulers as a threat to their authority. In 2018, Egypt was ranked 11th worst out of 160 countries in terms of the impact of terrorism, despite enjoying a significant decline in total number of attacks—from 169 in 2017 to only 45 in 2018— thanks to successful counter-terrorism operations against the Islamic State offshoot *Wilayat Sinai* (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019). Still, there are dozens of Islamist groups currently operating in Egypt, including the militant group *Hasm*, Cairo-based *Ajnad Misr*, and the al-Qaeda affiliated *Muhammed Jamal Network* (Counter Extremism Project, 2020). While each of these organizations poses a threat to the regime of President el-Sisi, for the purposes of this dissertation, we will focus on the biggest, oldest and most influential Islamist group in Egypt: the *Muslim Brotherhood*.

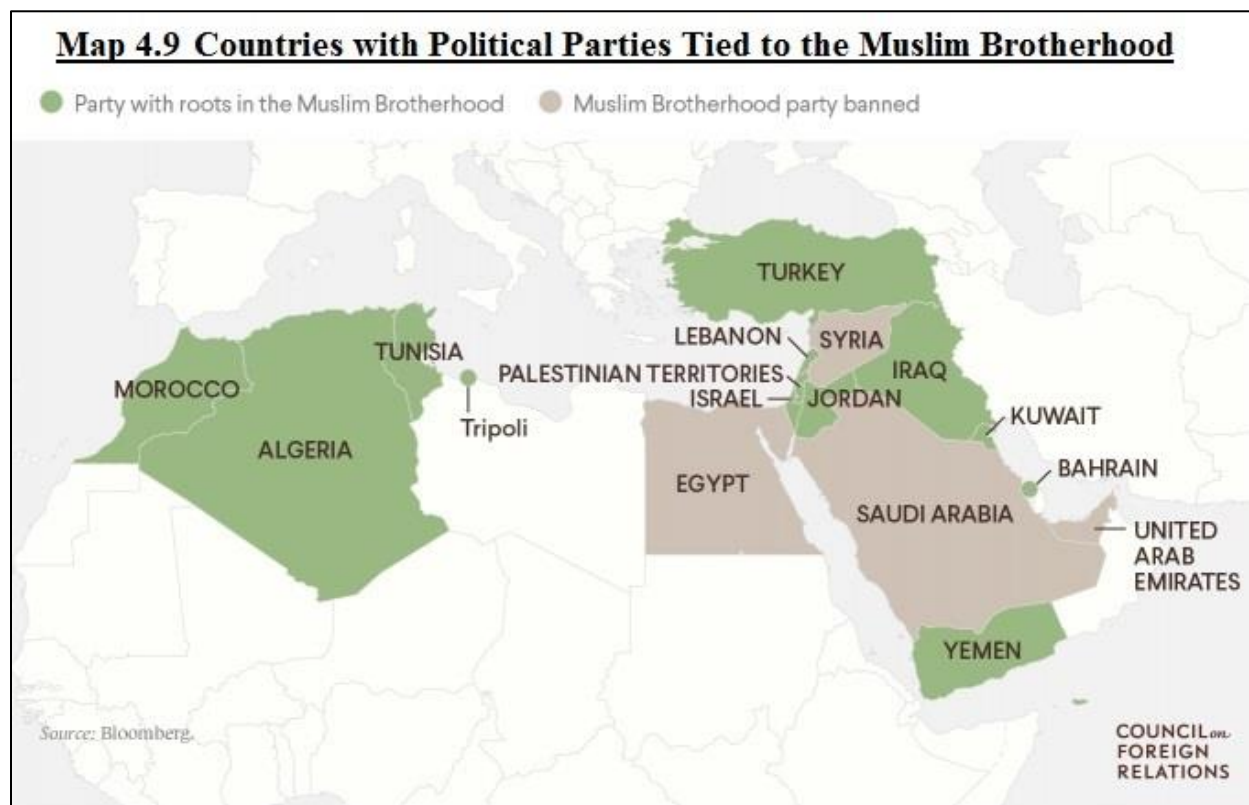
The Muslim Brotherhood was first formed by Hasan al-Banna in the Suez Canal town of Ismailiyya in 1928. Al-Banna, who had been approached by a group of devout Muslims to become their leader, was charismatic in his condemnation of politicians for their partisan infighting, immorality, and unwillingness to redistribute wealth to lift the Egyptian masses out of poverty. He sought to rectify “the secular models of law and education borrowed from Europe [which] were out of touch with the religious beliefs and sentiments of Egyptian society” (Wickham 2015, 22). In the midst of seventy years of British colonial rule (1882-1952) and following centuries of Ottoman rule (1517-1867) before that, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded to bring Islamic values back to Egypt by wresting power away from foreigners and giving it to the Egyptian people (Wickham 2015, 22-23). Al-Banna’s populist rhetoric succeeded at mobilizing support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which grew from a few dozen supporters and four branches in 1929 to over two thousand branches and more than three hundred thousand members by 1949 (Wickham 2015, 21-22).

In 1952, a coup by a group of Egyptian military officers successfully removed the British-backed King Farouk (r. 1936-1952) from power, but they were reluctant to leave Egypt’s fate to democratic

elections. Instead, these so-called ‘Free Officers’ selected General Muhammad Neguib to serve as a figurehead leader, while Gamal Abdel Nasser, a much younger military officer, held the real power behind this military government (Tignor 2011, 259). The Free Officers banned all the old political parties except for the Muslim Brotherhood, but when the Brotherhood challenged the military rulers’ policies, Nasser outlawed them as well (Tignor 2011, 260). Nasser’s Vice President, Anwar al-Sadat, succeeded him after his death in 1970, and began releasing Muslim Brothers from prison in the hopes of gaining political support from this increasingly popular Islamist movement. When he learned that the Brotherhood was plotting to depose him in 1981, President Sadat gave the order to re-arrest its members, but only shortly thereafter, the head of a Brotherhood cell called the ‘Islamic Jihad Group’, Lieutenant Khaled Islambouli, assassinated the president (Tignor 2011, 280). This presented an excellent justification for Sadat’s successor, Vice President Hosni Mubarak, to outlaw the Muslim Brotherhood for the duration of his presidency. Nevertheless, the organization remained the most influential political opposition, with Muslim Brothers even winning 84 of 444 seats (19%) in the 2005 election, despite their affiliation to the group being kept off the ballot (Tignor 2011, 285). The Islamists were clearly gaining ground in Egypt.

In late 2010 and early 2011, the young people in the Middle East and North Africa had grown frustrated with their long-standing dictators and began mobilizing mass pro-democracy protests with the help of social media (Howard & Hussain 2015, 3-4). In Egypt, where President Mubarak had now ruled for 30 years, the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been his main opposition throughout his rule, was quick to capitalize on calls for his resignation. After Mubarak stepped down, the Brotherhood’s candidate Mohamed Morsi won the first election “thanks to its unparalleled organizational infrastructure” and the fact that “none of the Brotherhood’s competitors could count on a similarly committed membership or possessed the Brotherhood’s well-oiled, nationwide chain of command” (Trager 2017, 4). They had earned widespread praise by those devout Muslims in Egypt who support their Islamist objectives (1/1), and widespread condemnation by supporters of Egypt’s secular military leaders (1/1), “routinely vilified as a ‘terrorist’ and ‘extremist’ organization that posed a grave threat to national security” (Wickham 2015, 300). The Muslim Brotherhood is also recognized internationally (1/1), with many authoritarian

governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region ostracizing the group by labeling them terrorists, and banning them from public and political life to contain the threat posed by this Islamist organization to their respective regimes. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood continues to have supporters and political offshoots throughout the MENA region, which have persisted in their efforts to advance their Islamist cause (see Image 4.8).



Ultimately, after winning the presidential election, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi immediately pursued an authoritarian form of government, seeking to impose its Islamic values on a modern, progressive society, silencing dissent and eliminating any restrictions on his power (Trager 2017, 4). Only a little over a year after protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square led to the ouster of President Mubarak, Egyptians gathered once again in the famous square to protest President Morsi's Islamist dictatorship, ultimately leading the Egyptian army to launch a coup d'état in July 2015 and install the Minister of Defence, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, as president. Once again, the Brotherhood was outlawed and a secular authoritarian dictator held power in Egypt. Although Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims do not have

any direct connection to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Chinese Communist Party's claim to be facing the threat of religious extremism has more than likely earned the support of the military leadership in Egypt, which must overcome its own vulnerability to Islamism. In recent years, Beijing has also been seeking to enhance its 'Strategic Partnership' with Cairo, including in the realm of counter-terrorism, in an effort to bring greater "peace and stability" to the region (Xinhua 2019). Evidently, with a score of 3/3, this variable has a strong correlation with the high level of Egyptian support for Chinese treatment of Muslims minorities in Xinjiang.

4.8 Analysis and Conclusion

There is no disputing Egypt's increasing economic dependence on trade with and investment from the People's Republic of China, however Cairo's economic relations with Europe and the United States remain stronger than those with China. Similarly, Egypt has much closer security relations with regional allies, and its dependence on China for ensuring its domestic security, whether through arms transfers, joint military exercises or formal security alliances, is quite limited. Therefore, we can safely conclude that these factors are not the most convincing explanations for Egypt's high level of support for China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. These Muslims, but especially the Uyghurs, have been depicted by Beijing as secessionists and religious extremists, which has served to justify their mass incarceration in 'vocational training centres'. Although Egypt does not face any realistic threat of secessionism, it is remarkably vulnerable to religious extremism, particularly to Islamism, which was first articulated by an Egyptian, Hassan al-Banna. The political success, as well as the domestic and international recognition of the Muslim Brotherhood, has made Egypt's secular military rulers wary of any Islamist groups. As a result, Cairo has unequivocally supported Beijing's approach to combatting what it has called 'religious extremism', even though Western media has been reporting that the majority of Muslims being forcibly brought to the re-education camps in Xinjiang do not subscribe to Islamism or any other form of religious extremism (Maizland 2019). Based on the data presented throughout this chapter, it appears that Egypt's support for China's treatment of its Muslim citizens is likely the result of

Egypt's vulnerability to Islamism. This vulnerability has made Cairo more sympathetic to Beijing's narrative about the threat of extremism in China's Northwestern region, and supportive of the CCP's approach to countering that threat. Furthermore, Beijing's insistence on non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries on the international stage has undoubtedly found favour with El-Sisi's regime, whose own human rights violations against pro-democracy protesters and Islamists has made it susceptible to criticism from the international community. In the case of Egypt, we can safely say that ideological considerations, namely the desire to avoid criticism of its own policies internationally and to maintain strong ties with a major global player have resulted in Cairo's willingness to stay silent about the persecution of Uyghurs and other Muslims.

Chapter 5 - Saudi Arabia: The Silent Holy Land

“China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremization work for its national security,”

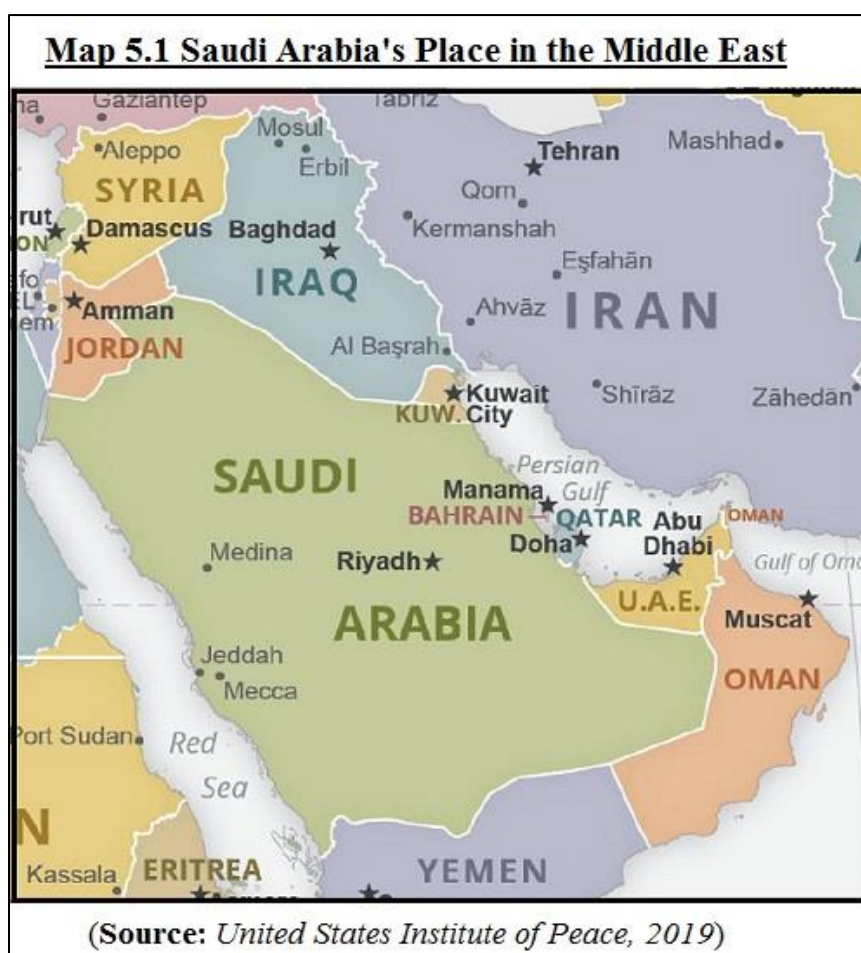
Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, February 2019

5.1 Introduction

With a population of 34 million, 97% of which are Muslims, Saudi Arabia has just the 15th largest population of Muslim citizens (CIA World Factbook 2020; Pew Research Center 2009). However, when devout Muslims around the world pray five times each day, they lay out their pray mats and touch their heads to the floor in the direction of Saudi Arabia — more specifically, in the direction of the holy city of Mecca (see Map 5.1). According to most accounts, the founder of the Islamic faith, Muhammad ibn Abd Allah was born around 570 C.E. in the town of Mecca, and around the year 610 C.E., “he began to have religious experiences in the form of visions and sounds that presented themselves as revelations from God” (Donner 1999, 6). For the next decade, Muhammad continued to spread the messages he proclaimed to have received from God despite facing persecution, while his followers sought to expand the territory under his control, including Mecca, often resorting to violence to achieve this goal. By the time of the Prophet’s death in 632 C.E., he and his followers had taken control of much of the Arabian peninsula, “more by religious persuasion and political alliance than by force,” and Islam’s expansion would only accelerate in the years following his death (Donner 1999, 10).

There is no disputing the importance of the desert kingdom for the Islamic faith, but it is also worth noting its significance for the broader community of Muslims, the global *umma*. The Saudi port city of Jeddah is the location of the headquarters of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a 57-member organization which “endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world” (OIC 2020). As the home of the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (Mecca) and the birthplace of the *umma* (Medina),

Saudi Arabia is the destination of the largest annual religious pilgrimage: the *hajj*. The *hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, and all Muslims are meant to carry out the pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically and financially able (Mosher 2005, 155). There is no disputing the importance of Saudi Arabia for the Muslim world, and the kingdom has frequently led the charge in condemning countries that are perceived as violating the rights of Muslims, including Israel (Staff 2019) and Myanmar (Reuters 2017), among others. It is therefore more surprising that Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam and a foremost advocate for the protection of Muslims around the world, has not condemned China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in the northwestern region of Xinjiang. This chapter will explore several variables to better understand Riyadh's considerations in determining this hypocritical policy. Before doing so, however, we will briefly contextualize the current Saudi Arabian policy by presenting an overview of the history of its bilateral relations with China.



5.2 Sino-Saudi Relations: From Zero to a Hundred

Interestingly, Saudi Arabia was the last of our case studies to establish official diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), which it did on July 21, 1990. Although the Prophet Muhammad himself allegedly told his followers to seek knowledge from as far as China, it seems as though the land of his birth was content to ignore the PRC when it was first founded in 1949. The Kingdom, when it was still attempting to "consolidate international recognition" soon after its own foundation, had established relations with the Republic of China (ROC) in 1939, and refused to shift allegiance when the Chinese Communists defeated the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War and sent the ROC retreating to the island of Taiwan (Fulton 2019, 80). For several years thereafter, as the Cold War intensified between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two sides barely interacted as the Saudis had aligned with the former and the Chinese with the latter. "As neither state had an especially broad international footprint beyond its immediate region, foreign policy orientation and decisions for China and Saudi Arabia largely reflected the international pressures facing their states" (Fulton 2019, 81). China began to increase its engagement with Africa and the Middle East in the 1950s, and then-Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai met with then-Saudi Crown Prince (and future King) Faisal at the Bandung International Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Indonesia in 1955. At this meeting, Premier Zhou raised the issue of gaining access for Chinese Muslims to perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), and Prince Faisal agreed, however this so-called *hajj* diplomacy was the extent of the bilateral relations between the two states during this period (Al-Tamimi 2014, 60-62).

These annual pilgrimages by Chinese Muslims and high level officials from the China Islamic Association were abruptly cut short as the CCP launched its Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which religion and all other supposedly 'feudal' practices and institutions were targeted for destruction. This coincided with "the PRC's attempt to take a more assertive revolutionary role in the international system, as a reaction of PRC leadership to threats from both the USA, as its presence in South East Asia increased, and as its relationship with the USSR worsened" (Fulton 2019, 84). A key part of Beijing's increased international assertiveness involved supporting Communist revolutionary movements in the

Middle East, including Dhofari insurgents in Oman, which opposed the rule of the Saudi monarchy. In July 1969, China also opened an embassy in Yemen, a traditionally hostile neighbour to the southeast of the Kingdom, leading China to be “perceived by Saudi Arabian leadership as a hostile external power trying to destabilize the region” (Fulton 2019, 85). Having come to view the USSR as its main rival, China began to orchestrate a rapprochement with the United States, despite ongoing fears of the increased presence of American troops in Vietnam, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. Then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited Beijing in 1971, as China sought to present itself as an alternative regional power more palatable to the Americans than the Soviets. At the same time, Beijing also stopped supporting Communist insurgencies in the Middle East, as it recognized that instability in this region allowed for Soviet expansion, which it wanted to constrain (Fulton 2019, 86-87). This allowed for a gradual warming of relations between China and Saudi Arabia, although this did not prevent the latter from voting against the former’s admission to the UN (which passed in 1971), imposing a trade ban against the former (1972), and leading an oil embargo that severely impacted the PRC in 1973 (Fulton 2019, 87-88).

The passing of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the accession to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 led to extensive reforms in the PRC, including an effort to modernize its economy and open its trade to the outside world. Not only was increased trade an important factor drawing the Saudis towards the Chinese, but Beijing also “supported Saudi Arabia’s efforts to end the Iraq-Iran war, to mediate a ceasefire in Lebanon, and to build a stronger GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] union”. China also helped warn Riyadh of the Soviet designs in the region by sharing its intelligence, which demonstrated Beijing’s “support for Saudi Arabia’s role as a regional bulwark against Soviet aggression” (Fulton 2019, 90). Despite all these efforts by the Chinese, the Saudis remained steadfast in their diplomatic allegiance to Taiwan, in no small part due to the ideological incompatibilities between Islam and communism. Aware of this, Beijing made efforts to engage with Saudi Arabia on a religious front, sending Muslim delegations to the Holy Land and inviting Saudi delegations to visit China. They even restarted the high-level political delegations to the Saudi kingdom, with then-party chairman for Xinjiang, Ismail Amat,

performing the *hajj* and meeting with the grand mufti, the vice-minister of defence and aviation, as well as the secretary-general of the Muslim World League (Fulton 2019, 90-91). At the same time, Saudi Arabia enhanced its economic relations with the Chinese, lifting their trade ban in 1981 and proceeding to increase bilateral trade from less than US \$150 million in the 1970s to over US \$2 billion by the late 1980s (Fulton 2019, 91). Finally, the decision to switch its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China was made following the purchase of *Dong Feng* missiles from China in 1988, suggesting a direct link between the improving security and political relations between the two countries.

In July of 1990, when then-Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited Riyadh, the Saudi government signed a communiqué and officially recognized the PRC as the only China (Fulton 2019, 93). In the three decades since, the bilateral relationship has flourished, with high-level political engagements and official state visits, increased military cooperation (including Chinese weapons sales to and military presence in Saudi Arabia), concerted efforts at broadening people-to-people ties, as well as the obvious enhancing of commercial relations and Chinese funding of Saudi infrastructure (Fulton 2019, 94-103). Since the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, this project has been a key element of Saudi's 'Vision 2030' strategy. Chinese President Xi visited Saudi Arabia in 2016 to elevate the bilateral friendship to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership', and Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman visited China for the G20 summit later that year, reiterating the importance of BRI for achieving Saudi's broader objectives (Fulton 2019, 103-104).

Modern-day Saudi Arabia is not only the source of symbolic religious wealth, but the country also holds roughly 18% of global oil reserves, and is the world's largest petroleum exporting country (OPEC 2019). As a result of its critical importance to many of the world's net importers of oil, Saudi Arabia has managed to escape criticism from major Western democracies, despite its recent history of egregious human rights violations. For example, less than one year after Washington Post reporter Jamal Khashoggi was brutally killed in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, US President Donald Trump was sitting down for breakfast with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman on the margins of the G20 Summit in Japan, praising him for his progressive policies and brushing off questions about his counterpart's

involvement in the murder of the Saudi journalist (Herszenhorn 2019). The explanation for Saudi Arabia's geopolitical position of extreme privilege among Western democracies, beginning of course with the United States, lies in its oil wealth and its geopolitical positioning as an ally against terrorist organizations and other regional enemies of the West (CFR 2018). However, despite its success in developing strong ties with Western countries, it has also pursued close bilateral relations with countries like Russia and China.

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia and China will continue to strengthen their bilateral relationship, which has manifested in Riyadh's silence vis-à-vis Beijing's policies towards Muslims in the Xinjiang region. However, given Saudi Arabia's leadership in the Muslim world, as the birthplace of the Prophet and the home of the two holiest sites of Islam, pointing to its increasingly strong bilateral relations with China as justifying its support for Chinese persecution of Muslim minorities is an oversimplification of the numerous geopolitical factors being considered. In the next section, we will outline the level of support of the Saudi government, media, and citizens for China's treatment of Muslims, which we already know to be quite strong. Next, we will present data for each of the indicators for our four independent variables and demonstrate the complexity of the considerations being taken by the Saudi rulers. This chapter will then draw some conclusions about which variables are most influential in Saudi decision-making with regards to its stance on China's treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang.

5.3 Level of Saudi Support for China's Policies towards Muslims

The overall level of support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in Saudi Arabia, as we saw in the first chapter, is very high. Similarly to Egypt and Iran, Saudi Arabia's government has been very supportive of China's re-education camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (2/2). Saudi's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Ambassador Abdulaziz Alwasil, co-signed a letter to the President of the Human Rights Council in July of 2019, commending China's approach to dealing with "terrorism, separatism and religious extremism" in Xinjiang by "setting up vocational education and training centers," all while praising "China's remarkable achievements in the

field of human rights” (A/HRC/41/G/17, 2019). Saudi Arabia has also been supportive of similar declarations by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), including the one in March of 2019 which commended the Xinjiang re-education camps as an effective counter-terrorism strategy (OIC, 2019). With respect to the indicator of Saudi Arabia’s policy on granting asylum to Muslim refugees escaping persecution in China, *Middle East Eye* has reported that the Saudi government has been deporting Uyghurs back to China (Uighur 2018), earning it a score of 1/1. Furthermore, Uyghurs still living in the desert kingdom are now faced with a major hurdle, as the Chinese embassy has ceased to renew passports, instead offering “one-way travel documents suitable only for passage to China,” where they would likely face detention in the re-education camps (Radio Free Asia, 2020). Although this is not a Saudi policy, there has been no response from Riyadh either condemning this act or offering Uyghurs an alternative solution. Instead, Uyghurs must decide whether to return to China voluntarily and accept whatever fate awaits them, or to remain in Saudi Arabia at the risk of being deported for residing there without proper documentation. Even more recently, there has been evidence that Uyghurs living in Saudi Arabia have been forcible deported back to China on Beijing’s orders (Karadsheh & Tuysez 2021), earning the kingdom a score of 1/1 for this indicator. Overall, Riyadh’s position is clearly very supportive of Beijing’s policies in the XUAR, as the country receives an overall score of 3/3 for this variable.

5.4 Saudi Arabia’s Growing Dependence on Chinese Trade and Investment

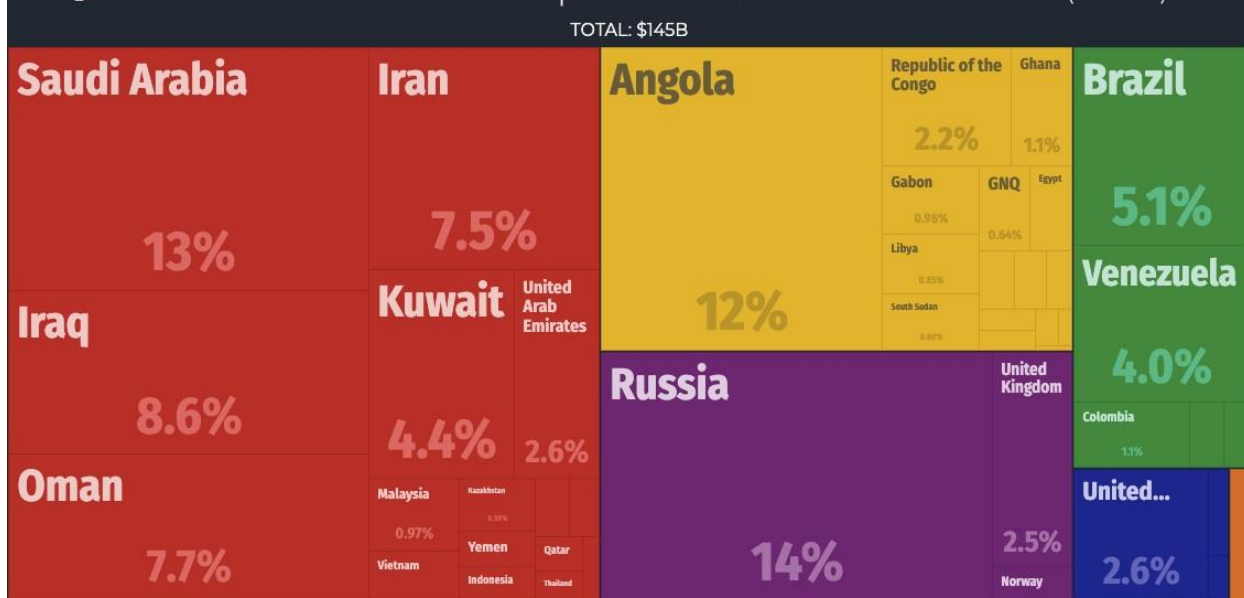
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a founding member and is the *de facto* leader of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which was founded in 1960 to “co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry” (OPEC 2020). According to OPEC, Saudi Arabia has approximately 18% of global petroleum reserves (OPEC 2020), and according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), it was the largest exporter of crude petroleum in 2017, responsible for 14% of global exports (OEC 2017). Of the US\$ 110 billion worth of crude petroleum that Saudi Arabia

exported in 2017, 21% went to Japan, 17% to China, and 15% to the United States (see Image 5.2, OEC 2017). Evidently, the world's three largest economies are quite dependent on Saudi Arabia for their crude petroleum. However, in the case of China, it has diversified its sources of crude petroleum to limit its dependence on Saudi Arabia, importing only 13% of its total crude petroleum imports from Saudis, compared to 14% from Russia and 12% from Angola (see Image 5.3 below, OEC 2017).

Image 5.2 Where does Saudi Arabia export Crude Petroleum to? (2017)



Image 5.3 Where does China import Crude Petroleum from? (2017)



In terms of the overall commercial relationship however, the data tells a very different story. In 2017, Saudi Arabia exported US\$29.1 billion worth of goods to China, representing 17% of Saudi's total exports, making China its largest export destination (see Image 5.4 below). That same year, Saudi Arabia imported US\$18.3 billion worth of goods from China, representing 19% of its total imports, meaning China was also its largest source of imports (see Image 5.5 below). However, while Saudi Arabia is clearly dependent on China for both its imports and exports, Chinese imports from Saudi represented only 1.9% of its total imports in 2017, while exports to Saudi represented only 0.76% of its total exports (OECD 2017). On the question of foreign direct investment (FDI), Chinese nominal investment into Saudi Arabia has not changed significantly since the start of the BRI in 2013, increasing and decreasing depending on the year (see Image 5.6). However, Chinese FDI in Saudi Arabia is growing as a percentage of total FDI, making up just under 11% of the total investment Saudi received from 2005-2012, compared with over 40% from 2013-2018 (see Images 5.7 and 5.8)(China Global Investment Tracker 2019; Index Mundi 2018). Evidently, Saudi Arabia's level of dependence on strong commercial relations with China is high, and it appears to only be increasing in recent years.

Image 5.4 Importance of Exports to China (2017)

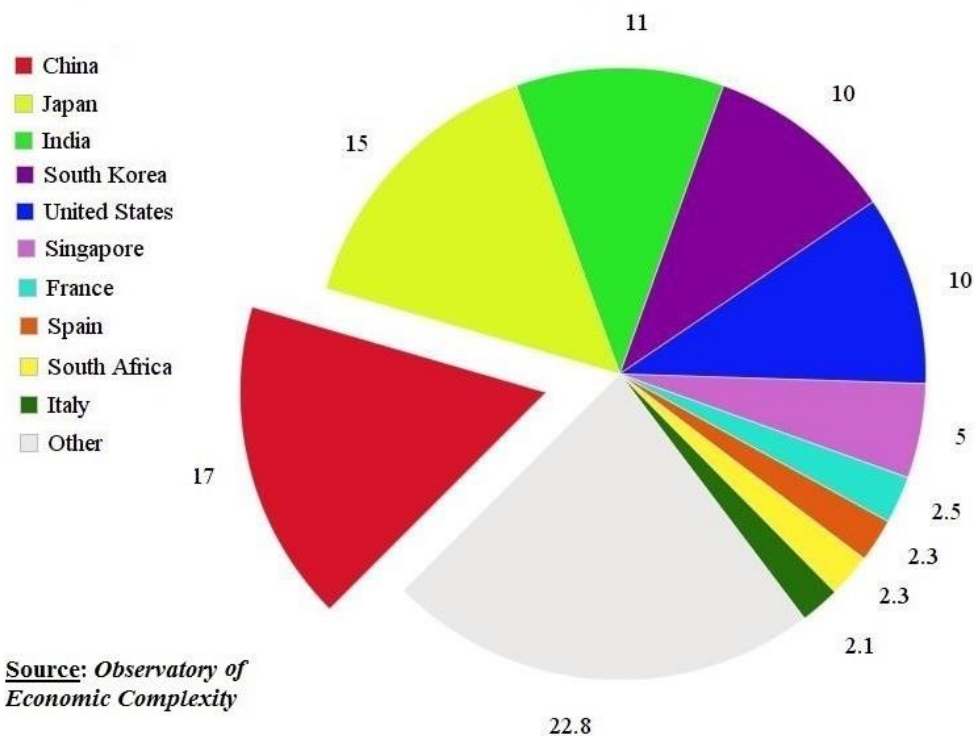


Image 5.5 Importance of Imports from China (2017)

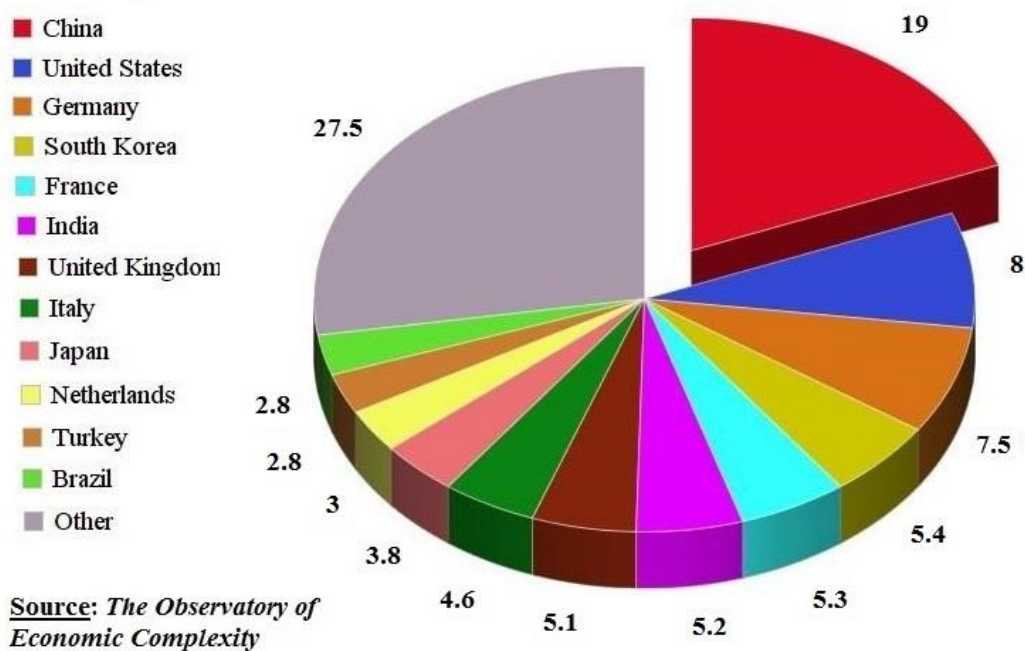


Image 5.6 Chinese FDI in Saudi Arabia (2005-2019)

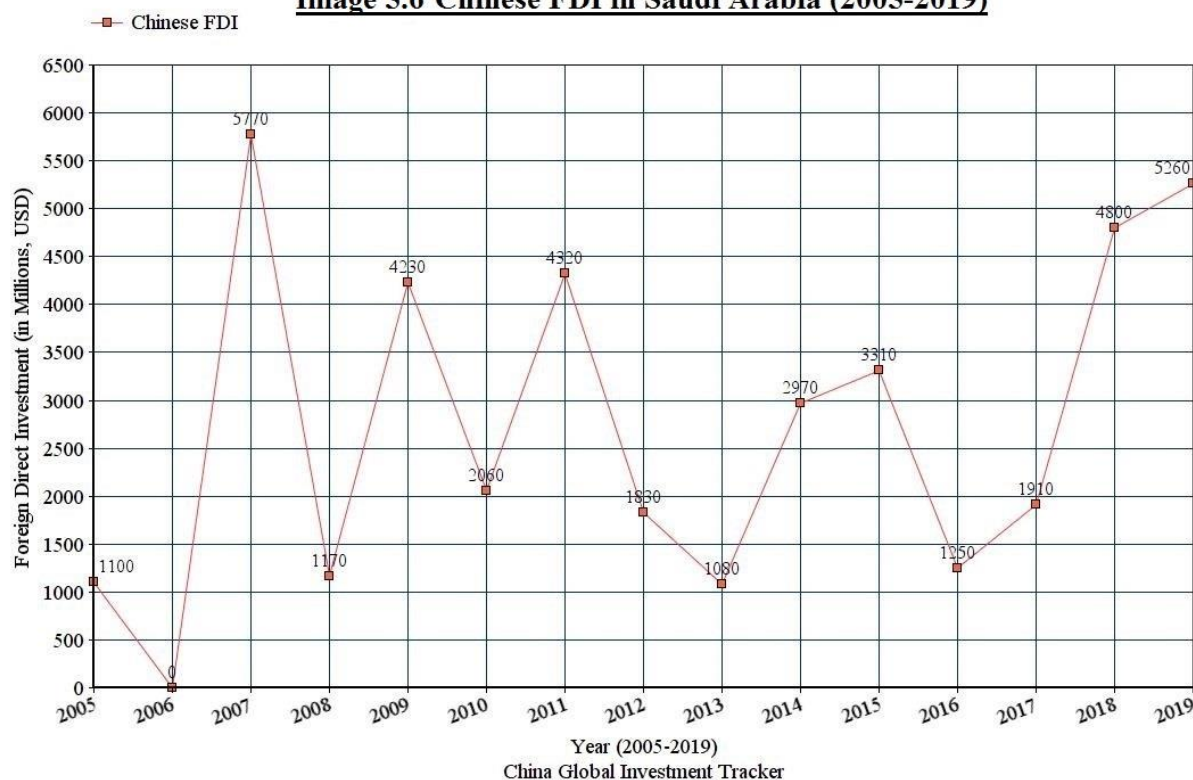


Image 5.7 Chinese FDI as Percentage of Total (2005-2012)

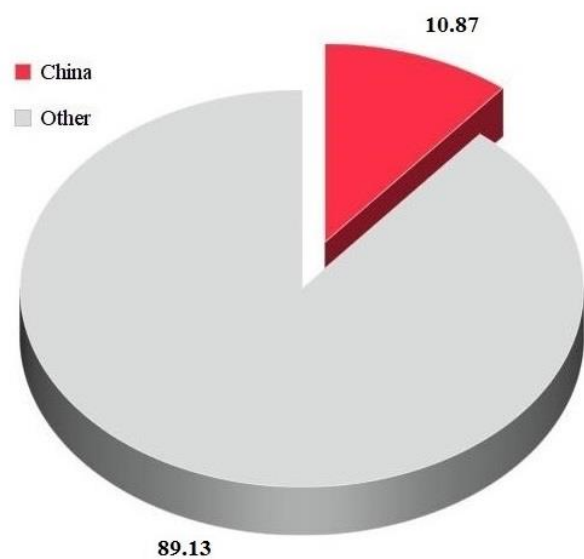
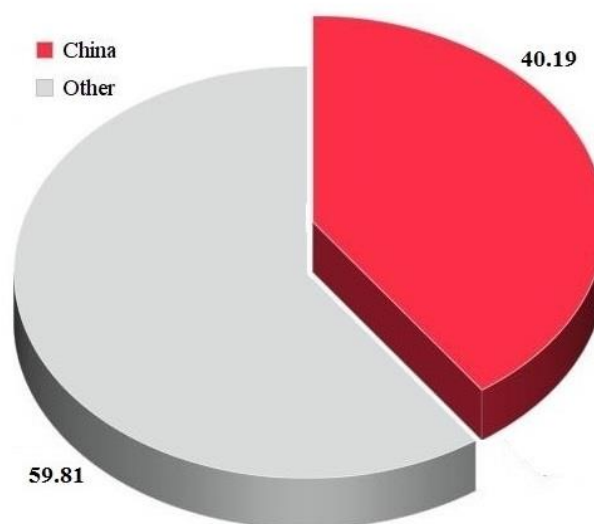
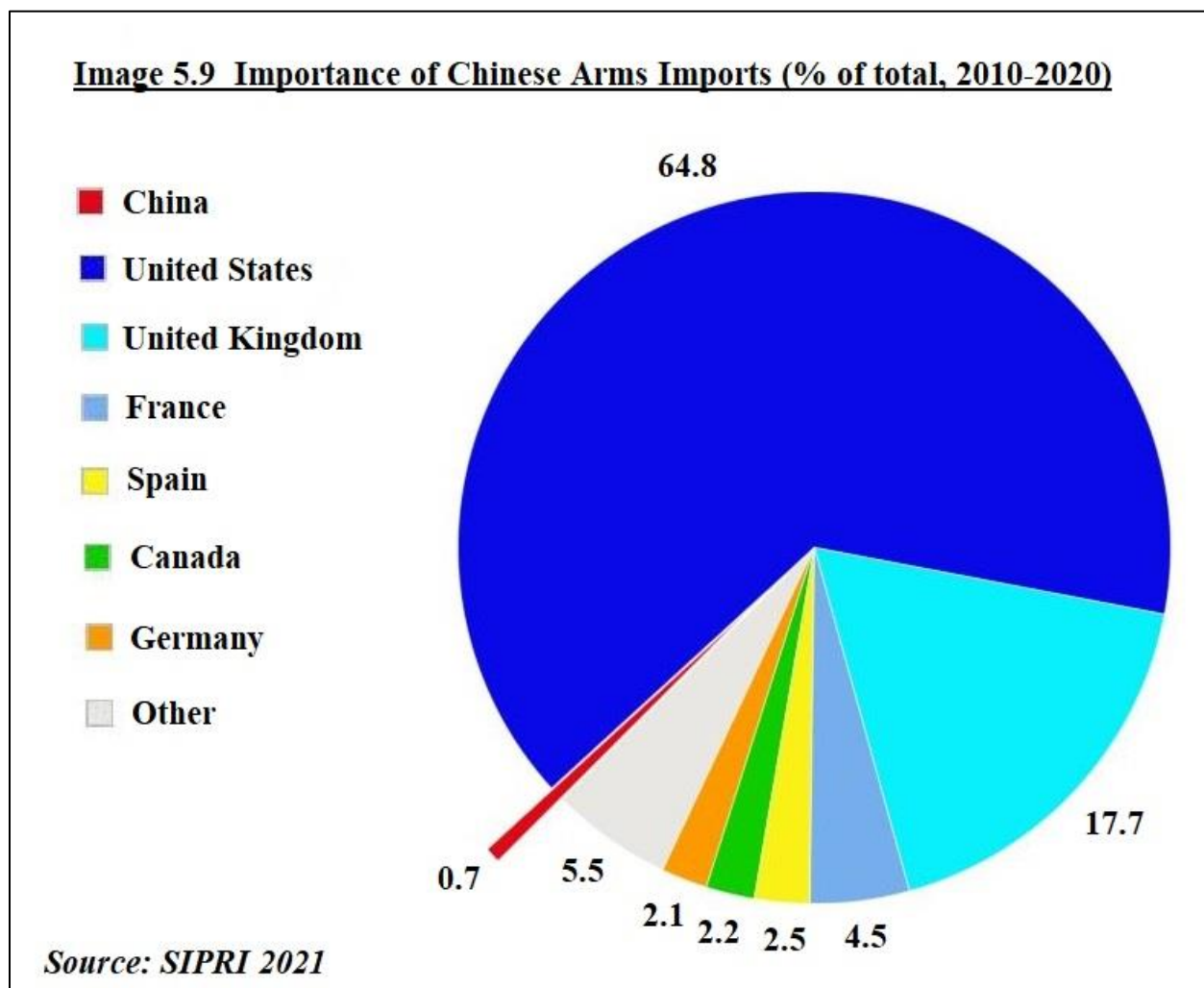


Image 5.8 Chinese FDI as Percentage of Total (2013-2018)



5.5 Saudi Arabia's Security Dependence on China

Unlike with Saudi Arabia's imports and exports, which have fairly diversified suppliers and markets respectively, Saudi Arabian arms and military equipment come primarily from two sources: The United States and the United Kingdom. As in the case of Egypt, less than 1% of Saudi arms imports come from China (see image 5.9), indicating very minimal dependence on Chinese arms transfers for its domestic security, which earns it a score of only 1/3 on this measure.



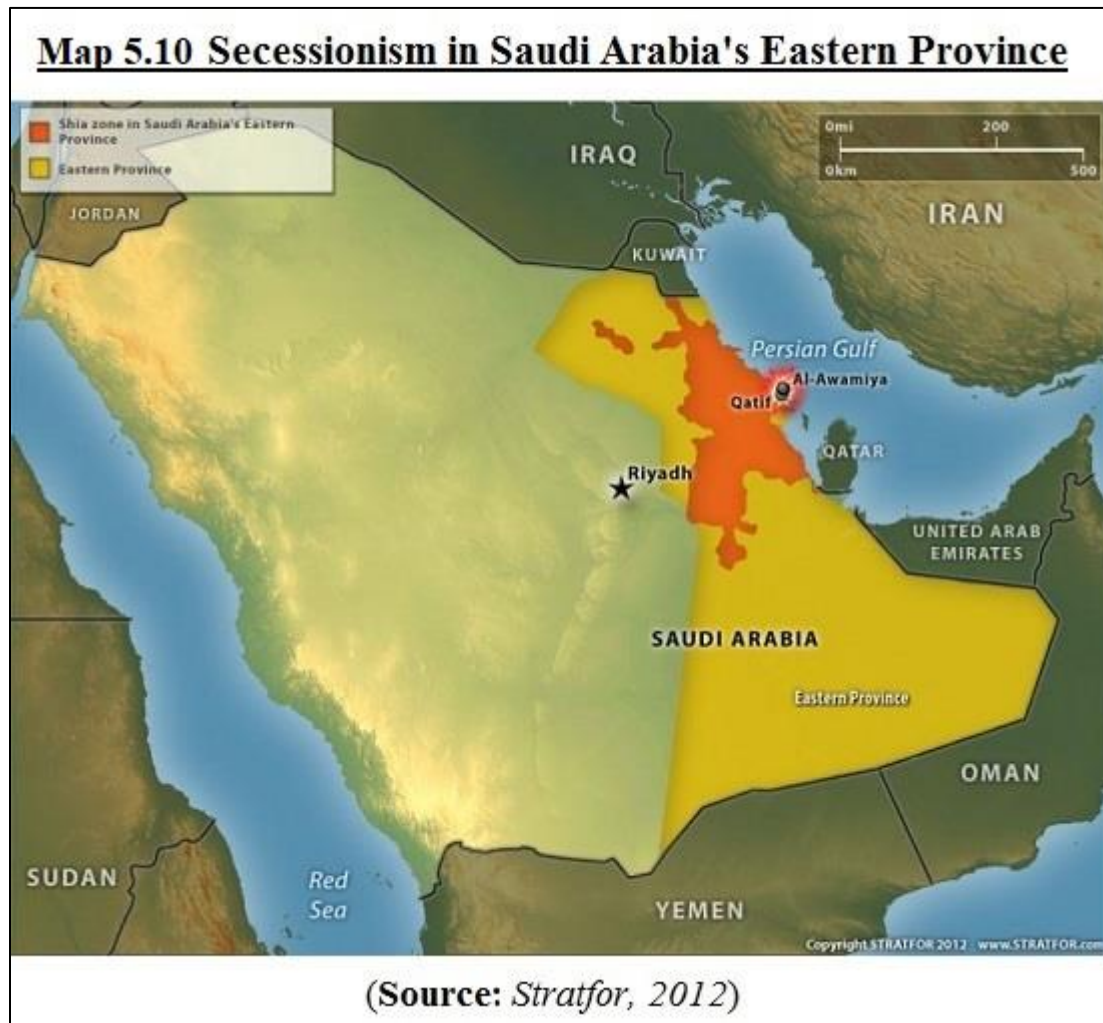
Despite the fact that Saudi arms are largely imported from Western European and North American democracies, this has not precluded Riyadh from developing some kind of security cooperation with Beijing. For example, the two countries' navies notably held three weeks of joint exercises called the 'Blue Sword' in late 2019, during which high level military officials from both countries discussed

regional security (Arab News 2019). However, while such joint exercises certainly demonstrate strong security cooperation between the two countries, it is important to note that Riyadh hosts similar joint exercises with Western democracies at an increased frequency, conducting ground exercises with American forces in June 2021 (The New Arab 2021), naval exercises with France in March 2021 (The National 2021), and amphibious exercises with US Marines in May 2020 (Heisterberg 2020). Evidently, it would be impossible to say that Saudi Arabia is dependent on its security cooperation with China, given it has such strong cooperation with Western military powers. Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister is also its Crown Prince, Mohammed Bin Salman, who has frequently met with high ranking Chinese officials, including China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe, however such meetings tend to be more symbolic than strategic. For example, their last meeting took place in early 2019, but there is little indication of any strategic discussions taking place (Arab News 2019). Furthermore, like with Egypt, Saudi Arabia is not a formal member of any security alliances with China. All of this anecdotal evidence serves to reinforce the conclusion that Saudi Arabia is not dependent on China for its domestic security, making this variable insignificant in the case of Saudi Arabia.

5.6 Saudi Arabia's Vulnerability to Domestic Secessionism

The Desert Kingdom, in its short history since its foundation in 1932, has not suffered from the threat of very many secessionist movements. The recent Saudi military intervention in Yemen in support of Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi against the Houthi rebel movement has brought violence to the southernmost Saudi provinces of Najran and Jizan, which have only been formally governed by Riyadh since 1934 and "retain a strong territorial identity of their own, often in conscious opposition to the forcibly-imposed sterner al-Saud/Wahhabist traditions of central Arabia" (Brandon & Heras 2015). This has allegedly prompted the formation of a secessionist movement called the *Ahrar al-Najran* (the 'Free Ones of Najran') which is closely aligned with the Houthi forces in northern Yemen, as has been reported by pro-Iran Syrian media, but not corroborated by independent media (Brandon & Heras 2015). But in this section, rather than spending time verifying the accuracy of Syrian media reports of a possible

secessionist movement, we will examine the influence of a very real political movement that has challenged Riyadh since the late 1970s: the Shi'a Muslims of Eastern Province (see Map 5.10).



The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (*ash-Sharqiyyah*) is home to the majority of the Kingdom's Shi'a Muslims, which make up roughly 10-15% of the country's total population (Pew Research Center 2009). Like Xinjiang, which is also home to a significant minority group (i.e. the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims), the Eastern Province is critically important to Riyadh as it is home to large petroleum reserves, as well as the largest Saudi oil refinery at the Ras Tanura complex (Nehme 1994, 941-942). The population of the Eastern Province has frequently mobilized protests, and although the Shi'a Muslims living there undoubtedly face sectarian discrimination, this marginalization has only been one element of a much larger political agenda, including "the release of political prisoners, an elected Majlis al-Shura

(consultative council), an independent judiciary, a constitution, and greater power for municipal councils” (Wehrey 2013, 3). Thanks to central government policies, the Eastern Province was also less developed than the Sunni-majority regions where Saudi royalty lived, and the failure of Riyadh to develop the largely Shi’a region caused growing discontent in the late 1970s. In November 1979, after some Shi’a Muslims in the town of al-Qatif held a religious procession in honour of the martyred Imam Hussein —a Shi’a tradition banned in Saudi Arabia since 1913— the Saudi National Guard cracked down violently, killing more than 20 of the attendees. This violence led to the formation of the *Organization for the Islamic Revolution*, which with the help of Iran’s *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps*, sought to bring significant changes to the Eastern Province, to improve the lives of the Shi’a Muslims living there. The leaders of this group would eventually be coopted by the Saudi government’s promises of reform, although these promises would later prove to have been unfulfilled (Wehrey 2013, 7).

In early 2009, a group of Shi’a pilgrims visiting the tombs of Shi’a imams in the holy city of Medina were beaten by Saudi morality police, and this heavy-handedness was defended by a high-ranking member of the royal family who argued that Saudi Arabia is a Sunni country, and those who follow other schools must nevertheless respect Sunni doctrine (Wehrey 2013, 8). This led to mass demonstrations in many cities in the Eastern Province, as well as Shi’a riots in Medina, prompting a violent crackdown by Saudi authorities, once again highlighting the sectoral divide in Saudi Islam. This conflict gave rise to a new movement led by a Shi’a cleric named Nimr al-Nimr, who called for the secession of the Eastern Province from Saudi Arabia. The subsequent arrest of al-Nimr and many of his supporters only added fuel to the fire, causing many Shi’a Saudis to align with this ideological camp (Wehrey 2013, 9-10). During the Arab Spring of 2011, youth across the Arabian Peninsula organized protests calling for political reforms, but the reform agenda differed from region to region, and “the Shia in particular began to focus more on demands and reforms specific to discrimination in the Eastern Province rather than overarching national aims like ending corruption and creating a constitution” (Wehrey 2013, 11). The Saudi regime responded by offering similar economic concessions to many citizens, and launching a media campaign to discredit and ‘sectarianize’ the protests, accusing the Shi’a population of bearing sole responsibility

(Wehrey 2013, 12-14). This did little to calm the Shi'a protesters, who continued to demonstrate throughout the Eastern Province into 2012, frequently clashing with Saudi authorities who sought to violently suppress this movement. At the same time, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr returned to the forefront, gaining popular support from Shi'a Muslims as he called for the removal of the Saudi royal family (Wehrey 2013, 17). His second arrest, during which al-Nimr was injured, triggered further protests.

Throughout the Shi'a protests in the Eastern Province now spanning more than four decades, Riyadh has sought to silence key opposition voices. The importance of the region for the Saudi economy, along with the protestors' clear affiliation to the kingdom's greatest enemy Iran, forced the regime to take any possible measures to prevent this political movement from gaining mass support. Although cooptation of the protesters has been attempted at different points in this conflict, the regime has mostly applied violent suppression to quell the movement. In late 2014, Sheikh al-Nimr was sentenced to death by a Saudi court for "seeking 'foreign meddling' in the kingdom, 'disobeying' its rulers and taking up arms against the security forces" (BBC 2014). This ruling unsurprisingly led to mass protests across the Eastern Province, and even prompted Iranian officials to warn Riyadh not to carry out the execution or they would 'pay dearly' (The Economist 2014). Finally, the Saudi regime executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in early January 2016, silencing one of its most popular critics once and for all (BBC 2016).

Beijing has applied all three of these approaches in Xinjiang, attempting to (1) co-opt the Turkic Muslims with affirmative action policies in universities and public sector jobs (Zang 2010); to (2) crack down violently against protesters (e.g. 1997 Ghulja Incident, 2009 Ürümqi Riots); and to (3) eliminate regime opponents with popular support, including by sentencing influential Uyghur university professor Ilham Tohti to life in prison (Wong 2014), and forcing popular Uyghur businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer into exile in the United States (Nasaw 2009). Evidently, the two countries' common vulnerability to secession by regions that are of critical importance to the regimes' agendas is very likely a key variable in explaining Saudi support for China's treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. It is important to note that the Shi'a secessionist movement in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, despite having never received any significant international support or recognition, nevertheless has strong support from local Shi'a

Muslims (1/1), and has posed a significant enough threat to the Saudi state to warrant the kinds of responses outlined above (1/1). However, given the lack of democratic institutions and norms in Saudi Arabia, there has been no space for political representation of the Eastern Province's Shia Muslims in Riyadh (0/1). As a result, with an overall score of 2/3, we can conclude that Saudi Arabia is vulnerable to secessionism, albeit less vulnerable than some of our other case countries.

5.7 Saudi Arabia's Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

Despite some disagreements between the Saudi rulers and the Wahhabi clerics, the latter have nevertheless exerted significant influence over the Saudi state and legal system, most notably through the strictest implementation of *sharia*. The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice reports directly to the Saudi King, and is charged with ensuring that the Islamic law is obeyed, often patrolling public places to enforce the segregation of men and women, force women to wear a hijab, and ensure that all Saudi citizens attend daily prayers at the mosque (Thielmann, 2017). Often criticized by Western leaders, media and influencers for being repressive and cruel, this Committee (also commonly referred to as the 'Islamic religious police') has been responsible for publicly punishing those caught violating *sharia*, with the most common form of punishment being public flogging (Withnall, 2015). Beyond these punishments, Saudi Arabia has also consistently been the country with the third highest number of executions annually, following China and Iran, with 184 cases in 2019 (Reprieve, 2020). However, despite the negative Western perception of this Wahhabi *sharia* jurisprudence, Saudi Arabia has nevertheless succeeded at exporting this ideology across the Muslim world. The Islamic University of Medina, a primary source of Wahhabi influence, has actively sought to attract foreign Muslims to its campus for Islamic instruction, with more than 80% of its students coming from outside Saudi Arabia (Farquhar 2016, 160-161). The Saudi state has also invested significantly in constructing new mosques and religious schools (*madrasas*), as well as tertiary education facilities like the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, which opened in 1979 (Jaffrelot & Louër 2017, 64). Similar institutions have been constructed thanks to Saudi money all around the Muslim world, and have served to spread the Wahhabi

fundamentalist ideology to traditionally more moderate Islamic nations. The proliferation of Wahhabism worldwide, including to Uyghurs in the XUAR (Ganul & Rogenhofer 2017; Fuller & Starr 2003, 29), further demonstrates the hypocritical approach of Riyadh to religious extremism, at once supporting the growth of Wahhabi Islamism while also supporting Beijing's crackdown in Xinjiang in the name of countering religious extremism.

This may lead some to believe that Saudi Arabia is not itself vulnerable to religious extremism, however, the Global Terrorism Index ranked the country 30th most impacted by terrorism out of 163 countries (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019). Saudi Arabia is often considered a model of political Islam, where *Sharia* Islamic law is enforced by 'religious police' from the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (*Hai'a*), and where religious clerics play an influential role in political decision-making (Mouline 2014). However, some Islamist extremists have nevertheless challenged Saudi authority to be even more Islamist, particularly following the first Gulf War (1990-91), with the increased presence of non-Muslim troops (mostly American) in the Holy Land (Ansary 2008, 113). In particular, the well-known terrorist organization *Al-Qaeda* began to "radicalize and recruit Saudi citizens to wage war against the government," but especially against the Saudi royal family which it perceived as "religiously and politically corrupt and hypocritical in its professed religious beliefs and its claims to be the guardian of Islamic holy places" (Ansary 2008, 113). The group that was formed, called 'Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula' (QAP), orchestrated a "violent campaign targeting Western and in particular U.S. interests" (ICG 2004, ii). The group began carrying out attacks in May 2003, with twelve suicide bombers attacking three compounds home to foreign expats, which killed 30 and injured almost 200 people (ICG 2004, 12-13). The group continued to carry out attacks over the next several months, posing a serious threat to the authority of the Saudi regime.

In response, Riyadh pursued a two-pronged approach to fighting extremism: first, Saudi security forces sought to preempt terrorist attacks; second, officials sought to delegitimize extremist ideologies. This was achieved through a variety of campaigns, including "a counseling program, a tranquility campaign, a religious-authority campaign, a media campaign, a national solidarity campaign against

terrorism, the development of public education, the monitoring of preaching, the review of sponsored publications, national-dialogue conventions, control of charities, Internet filtering, anti-terrorism legislation and increased international cooperation” (Ansary 2008, 118). Many of these initiatives were successful in stemming the growth of the QAP and reducing the number of Saudi youth succumbing to Islamist radicalization. As a result, there has not been a high level of local support for religious extremism (0/1), despite the widespread threat of such movements (1/1), and the international recognition of many of the extremist groups operating in Saudi Arabia (1/1). Although extremism persists in Saudi Arabia, the country is much less vulnerable to this threat compared to 2003 and 2004, with an overall score of 2/3 for this variable. In a high level meeting between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) and Chinese President Xi Jinping in February 2019, MBS reaffirmed Saudi support for China’s ‘de-radicalization’ efforts in Xinjiang, and committed to increasing cooperation in the area of counter-terrorism (Middle East Eye 2019). Clearly, a common vulnerability to religious extremism and terrorism shared by China and Saudi Arabia has likely played a role in the latter’s refusal to condemn the former’s treatment of Muslim minorities.

5.8 Analysis and Conclusion

It comes as no surprise, based on the examination of the four independent variables and their impact on the dependent variable above, that Saudi Arabia is one of the Muslim-majority case countries that has been most supportive of Beijing’s treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang. There is no doubt that, like many of the other case countries, Saudi Arabia is highly dependent on trade with China and investment from China, particularly since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. However, compared to many of the other case countries, Saudi Arabia has a diversified export market, and certainly could survive without Chinese economic support, allowing us to conclude that this variable exerts less influence than others. In a similar vein, much like Egypt, Saudi Arabia’s security cooperation with China is very limited, receiving less than 1% of its total arms transfers from the People’s Republic, and frequently holding joint military exercises with Western democracies. As a result, we can once again dismiss the

second independent variable in this case study, as Saudi's low level of security dependence on China does not align with its high level of support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR. On the question of whether the two countries' common vulnerability to secessionism has influenced Saudi's approach vis-à-vis China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, this explanation certainly holds water. Riyadh has long faced pressure from secessionist and revolutionary Shi'a Muslims in the Eastern Province, which is home to a large petroleum deposit and a key oil refinery and port. Its own crackdown on this opposition could lend itself to Saudi support for China's crackdown against that and other Muslim minorities. Similarly, Saudi's experience in combatting religious extremism, particularly Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, could explain its support for China's de-radicalization measures and heavy security presence in Xinjiang to combat groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which has orchestrated attacks in China in recent years (Byman & Saber 2019). As with Egypt, we can dismiss the first two independent variables as less than significant, given Saudi Arabia's limited economic and security dependence on China. The fact that Riyadh has withheld its criticism of Beijing's policies towards Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, despite its close relations with Western democracies that constantly advocate for human rights, demonstrates that it may be ideologically aligned with Beijing's values of non-interference and sovereignty, and deem it strategically valuable to balance its relations between the United States and China.

Chapter 6 - Iran: Theocracies and One Party Communist States Make Strange Bed Fellows

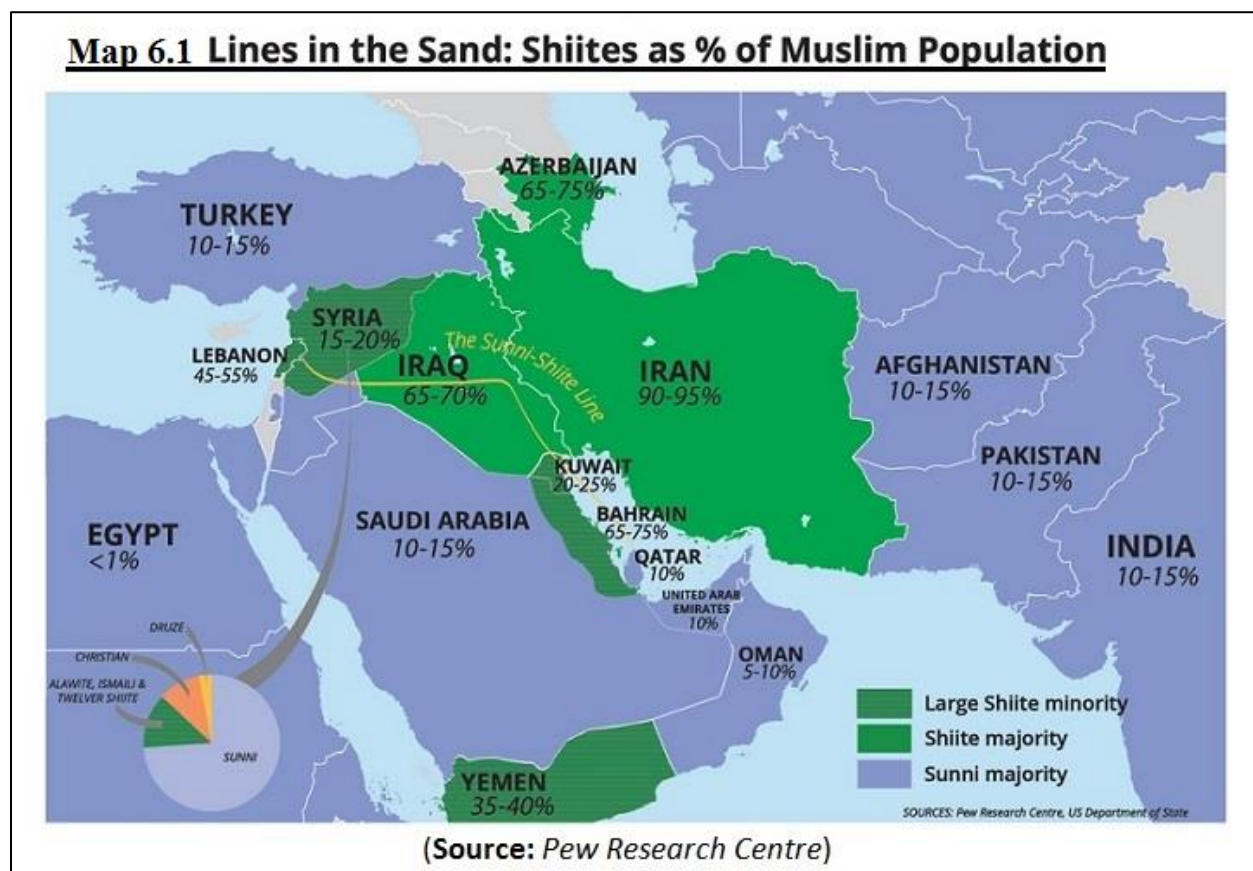
“The Islamic Republic of Iran will never forget China’s cooperation during the time of sanctions.”

Ayatollah Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran, January 2016

6.1 Introduction

With a population of just under 85 million, 99.5% of which are Muslim (CIA World Factbook 2020), the Islamic Republic of Iran has just the seventh largest Muslim population in the world. However, Iran is an important case to study for this research, because it is the largest *Shi’a* majority country in the world, with 90-95% of its Muslim population being classified as practicing a form of *Shi’a* Islam (see Map 6.1)(CIA World Factbook 2020). In the major sectarian divide between *Sunni* and *Shi’a* Muslims, Iran is often considered the leader of the latter group, which makes up only around 15% of the entire Muslim population (CFR 2017). On the opposite side of this divide, Saudi Arabia has unofficially adopted the leadership position of the *Sunni* sect, which makes up around 85% of the global Muslim population of 1.8 billion (CFR 2017; Lipka & Hackett 2017). The history of this ideological split is complex (see Chapter 1), and begins during the Sasanian empire (224-651 CE), with the eastward expansion of Arab Muslim forces, which caused “Zoroastrianism, the original Iranian state religion, [to go] into precipitous decline” (Daniel 2001, 64-75). Across the Abbasid caliphate (750-1517 CE), there were disputes over who should be the authoritative voice over all things Islamic, with the vast majority agreeing on the primacy of the caliphs who had succeeded the Prophet Mohammed as leaders of the Muslim world. These caliphs would be replaced by *imams*, Islamic scholars whose knowledge of the *Qur’an* (the teachings given to the Prophet by God), the *Sunna* (the practice of the Prophet) and the *Hadith* (the records of the Prophet), empowered them to give rulings on questions of theology, practice and *Sharia* law (McHugo 2018, 93-101). Conversely, a smaller minority of Muslims believed that only a

biological descendent of the Prophet himself could have authority over the Muslim community, beginning with the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib (600-661 CE), who had been a devout follower of the Prophet, as well as his cousin and son-in-law. These Muslims gradually formed their own sect, or *shi'ah*, which came to be known as *Shi'ism*, and continued to hold these caliphs, or imams, as the supreme authority until the death of the ambassador of the twelfth imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, in the year 941 (McHugo 2018, 102-109). The majority of *Shi'i* Muslims believe the world is in a waiting period called the 'Great Occultation', which will end with the coming of a new imam (McHugo 2018, 109).



The sectarian divide between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been exacerbated by each country's efforts to expand their influence in the region, which has at times resulted in proxy wars being fought between smaller, less powerful *Sunni* and *Shi'i* countries with their military support. However, despite a long-standing rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, China has nevertheless sought to foster positive

relations with both Muslim powers, conveniently remaining neutral in ongoing conflicts, and positioning itself as an important ally in trade, security, and other geopolitical contexts. Understanding why these two nations, seen as the leaders of both major Muslim sects, would be supportive of a Chinese regime that persecutes Muslim minorities, is the subject of this and the previous chapter. But in addition to being the source of authority for all the world's *Shi'a* Muslims, Iran is also one of the world's only theocracies, whose head of state is also its most powerful religious cleric, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. While it is strange for any Muslim-majority country to be silent or even supportive of China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, it is all the more strange for an Islamic theocracy like Iran. However, as we will discuss in greater detail below, Iran's demonization as a state sponsor of terror has resulted in the imposition of heavy sanctions which have left it desperate for allies, and both Russia and China have been happy to fill that need in exchange for Iranian petroleum. This chapter will examine how each of the independent variables may have influenced Tehran's foreign policies relating to China. Before doing so, however, the next section will briefly outline the history and current status of Sino-Iranian relations.

6.2 Sino-Iranian Relations

Persian relations with the Chinese date back to the reign of Mithradates II (r. 124-91 BCE) of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE - 224 CE), who maintained diplomatic relations with the Chinese Emperor Han Wudi (r. 141-87 BCE) in an effort to enrich his own empire through the silk trade (Axworthy 2016). "During the pre-Islamic period Persians played a major role in organizing trade between China and the regions to its west," which included settling Persians in major Chinese centres of trade (Garver 2011, 14). Evidence of trade between the two civilizations persists throughout the Sasanian empire, the period of Mongol rule, as well as in subsequent periods, with Chinese porcelains and silk found in Iran, and evidence of Persian sciences transmitted to China during the Yuan dynasty, when both societies were ruled by the Mongols (Garver 2011, 14). With the exception of the Battle of Talas, which pitted the entire Abbasid Caliphate against the Chinese Tang dynasty, the two civilizations have no history of conflict. This is largely thanks to their geographic distance and the topography that separates them, which made it

impossible to march a large army from one to the other, so instead, the various empires that existed in each region expanded away from each other (Garver 2011, 21-23). The two had few exchanges, with the exception of trade relations and the occasional diplomatic mission, such as that carried out by the Chinese Muslim General Zheng He to the Strait of Hormuz during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), with the purpose of projecting Ming power and establishing relations with new peoples (Lin & Ran 2015). Contemporary relations between the two countries have markedly improved, undoubtedly due to new technologies in communication, transportation, infrastructure, and resource extraction.

With respect to contemporary Sino-Iranian relations, Garver (2011) argues that “the spirit of Sino-Iranian relations arises [...] from the fact that both were among the most accomplished, powerful, and durable kingdoms [...]—and that these rich and proud kingdoms were brought low and stripped of their earlier high status by Western powers during the modern era” (Garver 2011, 4). Official relations were established between the PRC and the Imperial State of Iran (the Pahlavi dynasty) in August 1971, just shortly before the United Nations shifted its recognition from the Republic of China to the PRC in October of that same year. As far as the PRC was concerned, “Iran’s role in challenging Western oil companies in the early 1970s was one factor winning Iran a prominent role in Mao’s Third World united front against superpower hegemony” (Garver 2011, 36). Both countries also supported Pakistan in a bid to contain the growing regional strength of India, and Iran even sent its counterinsurgency forces to assist the Pakistani government with quelling the Baloch separatist movement that had the potential to destabilize and drastically weaken both Pakistan and Iran (Garver 2011, 42). In the period immediately following the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), Ayatollah Khomeini refused to trust the Chinese, as they had backed the regime of the man his revolution had overthrown, Mohammed-Reza Shah. Furthermore, “there was a chasm between the atheistic materialist creed of the CCP and the fervent Islamic faith of the men who founded and led the IRI [Islamic Republic of Iran],” a fundamental incompatibility (Garver 2011, 59). However, as the Iran-Iraq war began in September 1980, the Ayatollah and his advisers quickly put aside their ideological issues and accepted Chinese military assistance.

From the perspective of the PRC, Beijing has consistently balanced its bilateral relations with Iran with several of its broader foreign policy objectives, including:

“protection of Sino-U.S. comity on which China’s remarkably successful post-1978 development drive depends; protection of China’s international reputation as a responsible, sober power; fear of war and other instability in the Middle East arising, in part, from IRI militancy and which might disrupt China’s economic development efforts; and fear of militant Islamic ideology of the IRI influencing China’s Muslim community and Central Asia” (Garver 2011, 28).

While all of these considerations have undoubtedly guided Chinese engagement with Iran since establishing ties in 1971, there is no doubt that the need to protect China’s global reputation and its fear of violent Islamist ideologies among its own Muslim population have been paramount factors. However, despite Beijing’s pursuit of arms-length relations with Tehran, the latter has remained steadfast in its commitment to its bilateral relations with the former. Like most of the other Muslim-majority case countries chosen for this research, Iran’s government has not openly criticized China’s treatment of its Muslim minorities. As we will examine in the rest of this chapter, there are several important elements of the strong relationship between China and Iran that might explain this reluctance to condemn Beijing’s repressive policies towards Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. Before delving into the four independent variables that may help us to understand the motivation behind Tehran’s policy of not denouncing China, it is important to properly outline the level of support for China across different levels of Iranian society.

6.3 Iranian Support for China’s Muslim Policies: From Firm Support to Firm Apprehension

Although Iran’s Foreign Ministry has “periodically expressed concern about China’s treatment of its Muslim minority” since the recent persecution began, Iran has largely remained silent (Ramani 2018). However, in the most public forum, Iran joined numerous other Muslim-majority countries in lauding Beijing’s re-education camps as an effective counterterrorism strategy through a letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/41/G/17 2019), and a

joint statement delivered at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee (United Nations 2020). Therefore, on the indicator of government support for China's Muslim policies, Iran receives a score of 2/2. In terms of Tehran's approach to Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims seeking refugee status in Iran, there has been no evidence to suggest that such status has been granted, although neither has there been evidence that Iran has deported Uyghurs back to China, which likely means that Tehran has not been deporting Uyghurs at the behest of Beijing (0/1). Therefore, with an overall score of 2/3 for this indicator, we can conclude that Iran's government has shown a fairly significant level of support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in the XUAR.

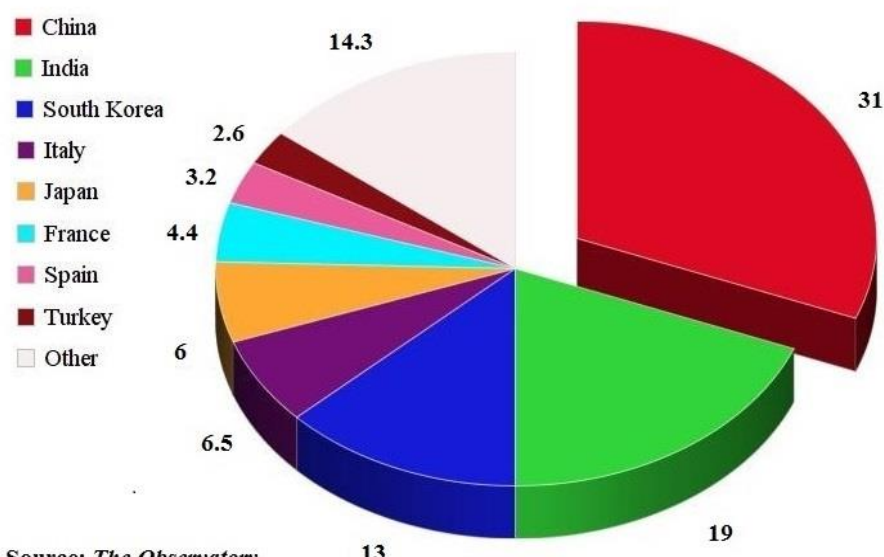
6.4 Iranian Dependence on Chinese Trade and Investment

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been the target of American sanctions since its very foundation in 1979, beginning with a freezing of Iranian government assets in U.S. jurisdictions in retaliation for the hostage crisis. Although this was briefly lifted following a bilateral agreement in 1981, even more sanctions were later imposed on Iran due to its alleged support for international terrorism (Levs 2012). Iran's efforts to enrich uranium in the early 2000s resulted in several rounds of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council beginning in 2006, which required enforcement by all UN member states. These UN sanctions were eventually lifted in 2015 following an agreement negotiated by the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany called the 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action', or JCPOA (Government of Canada 2020). This is important background for this section, because the severity of the sanctions imposed on Iran for decades has forced its leaders in Tehran to find alternative commercial partners outside the sphere of influence of the U.S. and many of its Western European allies. It was during the 2000s that Iran and China really enhanced their trade relations, with Iran supplying Chinese energy needs while China supplied Iran with the goods it could not obtain from Western countries (Calabrese 2020). By 2017, China was by far Iran's most important trading partner, buying 31% of Iranian exports (see Image 6.2) and supplying 37% of Iranian imports (see Image 6.3). These numbers vastly

exceed those of Iran's second largest export destination India, which receives only 19% of Iranian exports, or its second largest import source South Korea, which it receives only 8.1% of its imports.

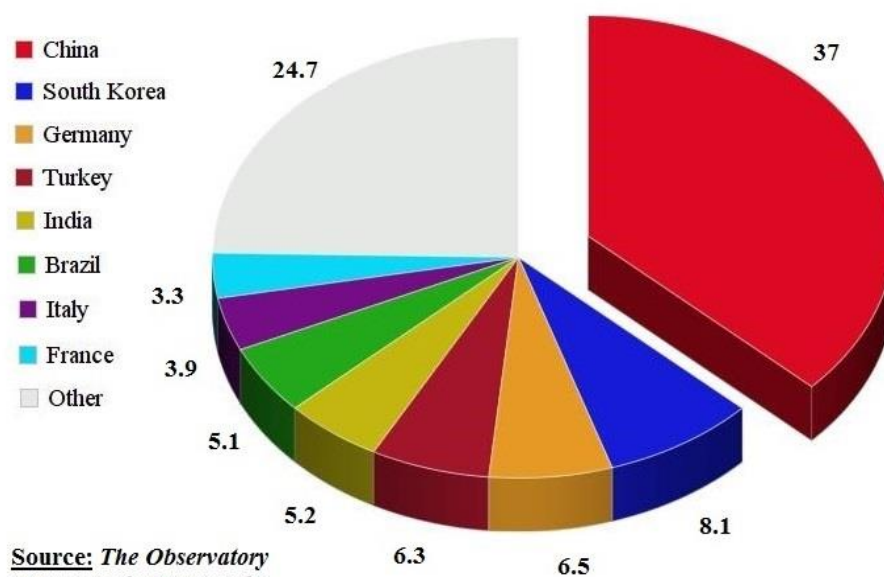
Given these statistics, there is no doubt that Iran is extremely dependent on trade with China.

Image 6.2 Importance of Exports to China (2017)



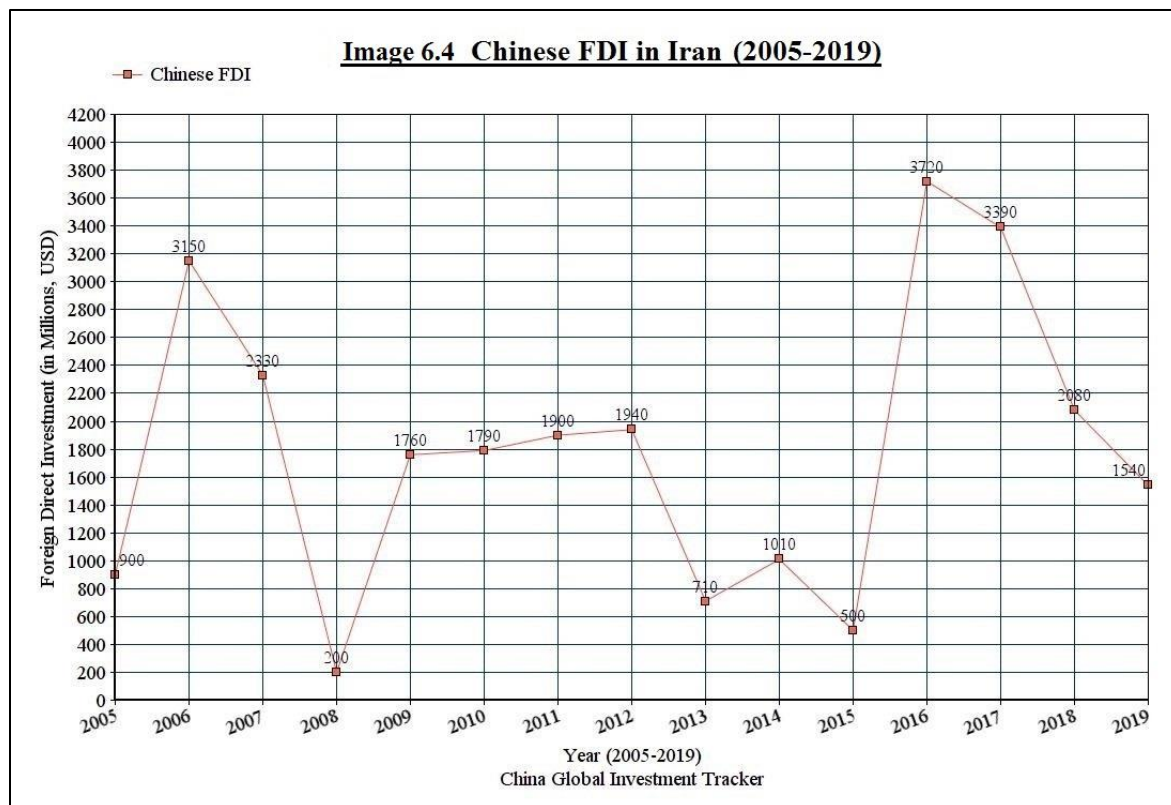
Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

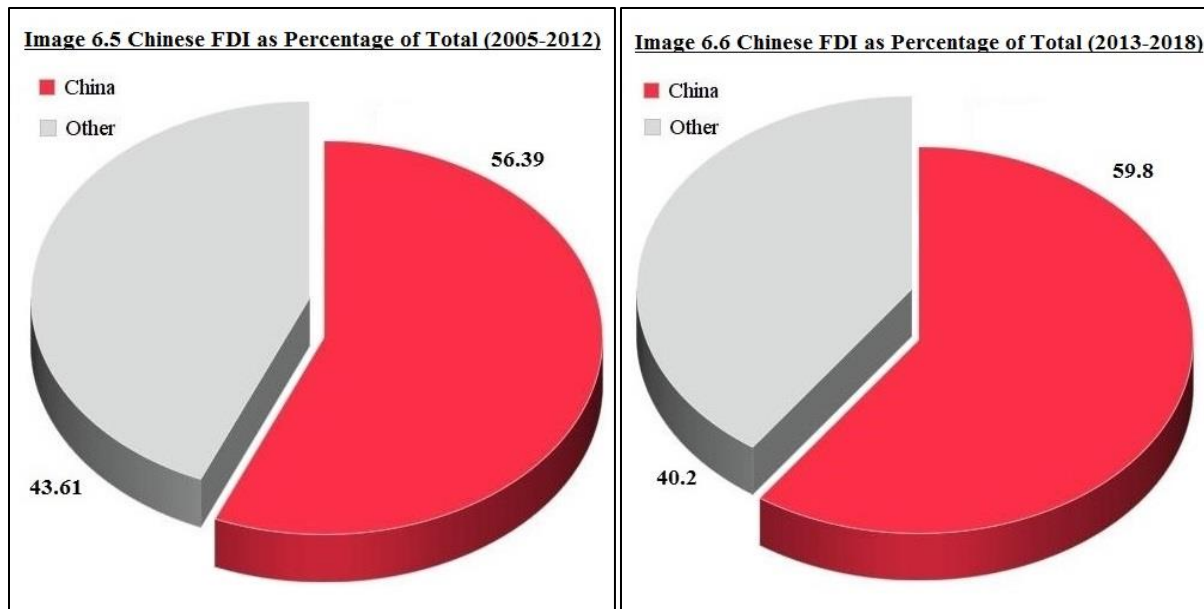
Image 6.3 Importance of Imports from China (2017)



Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

The importance of Chinese investment to Iran's development is equally high, with significant sums of investment funds provided by Beijing for many years (see Image 6.4). Even before the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, Iran had depended on Chinese FDI for more than 56% of incoming investment between 2005 and 2012 (see Image 6.5). Since the launch of the BRI, this percentage has only increased further, with Chinese FDI inflows to Iran from 2013 to 2018 making up nearly 60% (see Image 6.6). Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Iran and China further strengthened their strategic economic and security alliance by signing a partnership agreement in July 2020, which would "vastly expand Chinese presence in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and dozens of other projects" (Fassihi & Myers 2020). Therefore, in the case of Iran, the argument that its economic dependence on strong relations with China could very well explain its unwillingness to condemn China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. Nevertheless, the next sections will explore alternative explanations, beginning with Iran's security dependence on China.





6.5 Iran's Security Dependence on China

As discussed above, Iran is an international pariah which has faced sanctions and arms embargoes imposed by a plethora of actors over the past four decades, since the Islamic revolution in 1979. As a result of these measures intended to restrict the regime's ability to develop a nuclear weapons program or attack regional enemies, Tehran has relied very significantly on two countries for its arms transfers, and China is one of them. Image 6.7 shows that China has been the second largest supplier of arms to Iran over the last decade, however this is a misleading statistic. Since 2016, China has not sold any arms to Iran, which has relied entirely on transfers from Russia, which is better captured in Image 6.8, covering the period from 2015-2020. Given that Beijing's indoctrination camps for Muslims in the XUAR only became widely known in 2017, for the purpose of this variable, it is more relevant to consider the second graph than the first. As such, with less than 5% of its arms coming from China, Iran receives a score of 1/3, making it very minimally dependent on Beijing for its security.

Image 6.7 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2010-2020)

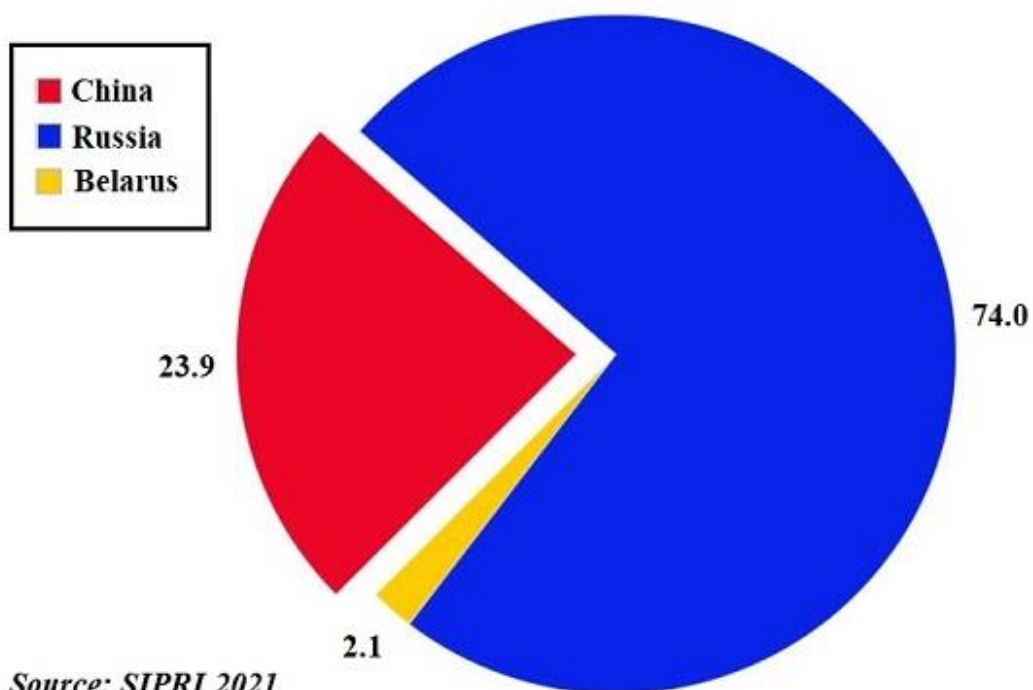
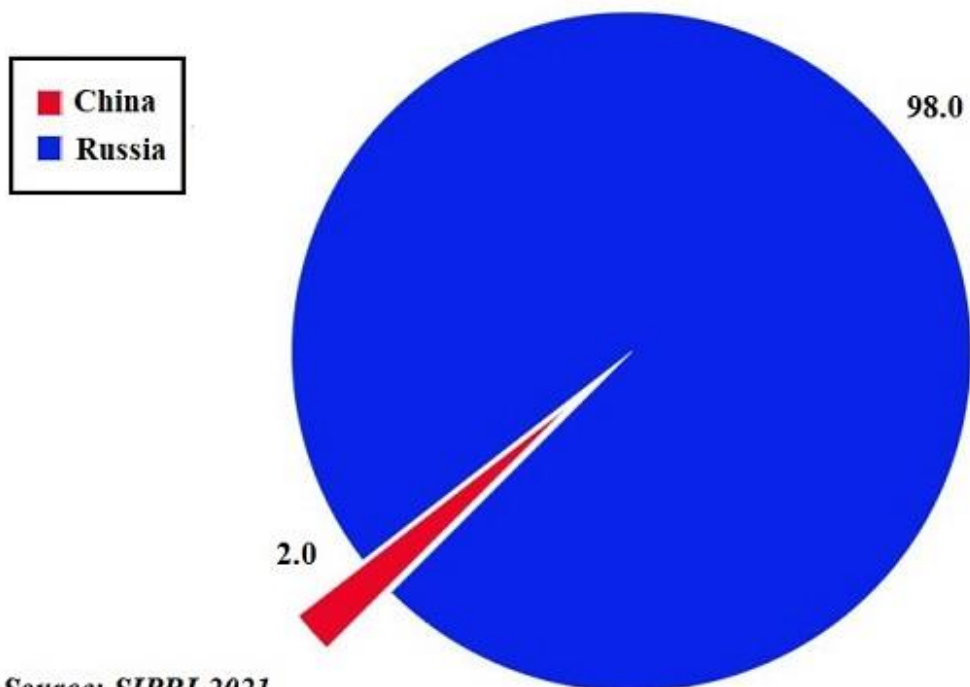


Image 6.8 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2015-2020)



As the arms transfers data above suggests, Russia and China are also Iran's primary security allies in terms of organizing joint military exercises, which they held most recently in the Indian Ocean in February 2021 (Marrow 2021). In November 2016, Iran's then-Defence Minister, Hossein Dehghan, also met with China's then-Defence Minister Chang Wanquan in Tehran (Ahishali 2016), and the two countries' current Defence Ministers met in Beijing in September 2018 (Minister of National Defense of the PRC 2018). Both of these meetings provided an opportunity to deepen their strategic security partnership, and commit to strengthening their cooperation on advancing key interests for their mutual benefit. Iran is also an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is China's foremost security alliance with its regional neighbours, and a forum for advocating cooperation on counter-terrorism (SCO 2021). Therefore, although Iran is not significantly dependent on China for its arms transfers, it nevertheless benefits from a strong security relationship with Beijing.

6.6 Iran's Vulnerability to Domestic Separatism

Iran has faced the threat of secessionism from various groups since long before the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. In the 1920s, Iran's rulers had to quell movements in Gilan (north), in Khorasan (east), in Kurdistan (northwest) and in Khuzestan (southwest), all of which sought an independent state or genuine autonomy (Czulda 2017, 141). These and other separatist movements have periodically challenged successive governments in Tehran, and "have been a major source of threat to Iran's internal stability and national cohesion" (Czulda 2017, 141). Given that two of Iran's most challenging secessionist movements—the Kurds of Kurdistan and the Baloch people of Balochistan—have also challenged Turkey and Pakistan respectively, this section will focus on a movement that belongs uniquely to Iran: the Arab separatists of Khuzestan. The province of Khuzestan is located along the northwest coast of the Persian Gulf in Iran's southwest corner bordering Iraq (see Map 6.9). Although ethnic Ahwazi Arabs make up only 3% of

Iran's population, they make up 70% of the population of Khuzestan province. The province suffers from a poverty rate at around 50% compared to Iran's overall rate of 18%, which is particularly surprising given that this small region with only 6% of the country's population and less than 4% of its territory, contains nearly 90% of its oil reserves (Casertano 2013, 204).



Following the Islamic Revolution, the new regime's drive to reinforce the majority Shi'a-Persian identity —as well as its recognition of the economic importance of Khuzestan— made the region the target of an assimilationist project “with forced displacements of villagers, and with incentives favoring Persians that desired to move in” (Casertano 2013, 205). Furthermore, Tehran has carried out the nationalization of 300,00 hectares of land, displacing local farmers, and subsequent “governmental plans for housing, education and healthcare are considered by locals, completely inadequate” (Casertano 2013, 211).

In the first years of the Islamic Republic, the Arabs of Khuzestan failed to put forward a united front against Iran's rule in their region, making it easy for Tehran to reject their demands for greater autonomy and a share of the royalties from oil production and export. In 1979, the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) violently suppressed a peaceful Arab protest, killing 817 protesters, the worst such atrocity in contemporary Iranian history (Casertano 2013, 212). During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Arab Iranians fought with the Persian Iranians against Arab Iraqis, and they suffered approximately 12,000 casualties. However, this contribution to Iran's war efforts was never rewarded, as Tehran continued with its efforts to impose cultural assimilation on the Arab population of Khuzestan province, who responded by organizing rebellions which were brutally suppressed at the cost of hundreds of Arab lives. Evidently, there was strong local support among Khuzestani Arabs for this secessionist cause (1/1), which enabled them to mount a legitimate threat against Iran's regime and territorial integrity (1/1). Subsequent protests have also been quelled using violence, which has prompted Khuzestani Arabs to take their fight for independence to the international stage, establishing numerous political parties in exile to advocate for support from the international community, including the Ahwaz Liberation Organization (based in the Netherlands), the Democratic Solidarity Party of Al-Ahwaz (based in the US and the UK), and the Al-Ahwaz Peoples Democratic Popular Front (based in the UK). They have also lobbied multilateral organizations like the European Union and the United Nations, in the hopes of mobilizing broad international support for their secessionist movement (Casertano 2013, 213). The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) even submitted a report on Iran's systematic human rights violations against the non-Persian minorities, including the Ahwazi Arabs of Khuzestan (UNPO 2019). However, despite international recognition of their movement, Iran continues to suppress all efforts to advocate domestically, and Tehran has implemented policies similar to Beijing's strategy in Xinjiang, to ensure its continued control over the region. In 2006, Tehran banned Lejnat al Wefaq (Committee of Reconciliation), the only ethnically Arab political party in Iran (0/1), only exacerbating the long held Khuzestani resentment for its lack of political representation in the country's parliament (Nada 2021). It is clear that, with a score of 2/3 for this variable, Iran remains deeply vulnerable to secessionism. Although there is little evidence of

mutual assistance between Iran and China on this matter, it is quite possible that this issue has influenced Tehran's position vis-à-vis Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

6.7 Iran's Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), Iran was the scene of proxy wars between major powers, with the Cold War prompting American support for Mohammed-Reza Shah's demand that Soviet forces leave Iranian territory (Daniel 2001, 144-148). An oil crisis caused by an attempt to nationalize an oil company previously controlled by Britain, resulted in the withering of support for the monarchy, as nationalists and Islamists demanded the Shah's removal, despite his backing from the United States. Mohammed-Reza Shah attempted to stage a "Revolution of the Shah and the People" in 1962-63, which consisted of six reforms that were opposed by many, including a Shi'ite cleric named Rouhollah Khomeini, who was arrested and exiled (Daniel 2001, 158). Although the Shah continued to rule over Iran for the next sixteen years, there was growing anger among the Iranian people with the monarchy, further galvanized by a poorly-handled economic crisis and a poor human rights record receiving increasing public attention (Daniel 2001, 164-167). A Nationalist Movement took shape with Ayatollah Khomeini as its figurehead, and it organized "a massive demonstration [...] in Jaleh Square in Tehran in defiance of the decree of martial law, which turned exceptionally violent after marchers called for the ouster of the Shah and the return of Ayatollah Khomeini" (Daniel 2001, 169). Ultimately, Mohammed-Reza Shah was unable to resist popular sentiment and remain in power, exiling himself to the United States which enabled Ayatollah Khomeini to return to Iran on February 1, 1979 to begin his 'Islamic Revolution'. Despite ongoing conflicts between different political factions competing for influence, Khomeini remained in control of Iran's government until his death in 1989, and his concept of *velayat-e faqih*, or Islamic government by Islamic jurists (*foqaha*), has continued to dominate Iranian politics to this day.

In the early years of the Islamic Republic, Iran's revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini backed revolutionary forces elsewhere in the region, including a coup attempt by the Islamic

Liberation Front of Bahrain in 1981 and the failed assassination attempt against a Kuwaiti emir by a group called the Islamic Holy War in 1985 (Ulrichsen 2016). Since January 19, 1984, Iran has been designated by the U.S. State Department as a ‘State Sponsor of Terrorism,’ a designation which results in “restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance; a ban on defense exports and sales; certain controls over exports of dual use items; and miscellaneous financial and other restrictions” (U.S. Department of State 2020). As mentioned above, the U.S. has imposed several rounds of sanctions against Iran for this reason, among others. More recently, Iran has been accused of supporting “over 20,000 Shia foreign fighters from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Syria, [...] Lebanese Hezbollah, an array of Shia militias in Iraq and [...] Houthis in Yemen” (Byman 2018). Some scholars have even argued that Tehran’s support for terrorist organizations has prompted Saudi Arabia’s large-scale investment in exporting its Wahhabism around the Muslim world (discussed in chapter 5), in an effort to undermine Iranian influence and reinforce sectarian divides among Muslims (Byman 2019). Meanwhile, Tehran continues to back these groups to “weaken governments Iran opposes, undermine the position of regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia, or otherwise expand its influence” (Byman 2020). However, despite the perception that Iran is a supporter of terrorism, it is also one of the countries most impacted by terrorist attacks, ranking 39th out of 163 countries in the Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019).

Although Iran has not experienced any of the world’s deadliest terrorist attacks in recent years, it has nevertheless been victimized by numerous religious extremist organizations on a small scale, and Tehran has sought to securitize the threat of religious extremism. Following attacks in 2017 by terrorists sponsored by the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (ISIS), Iran’s government cracked down on minority communities which were seen as more susceptible to radicalization (Etehad 2017). Another group, *Mojahedin-e Khalq* (People’s Mujahedin of Iran, or MeK), whose ideology consists of a mix of both Islamism and Marxism, has continued to plague the theocratic governments of both successive Ayatollahs, despite originally having helped to put them in power (Katzmann 2001, 99-101). The group famously attacked ten Iranian embassies in different cities

around the world in April 1992, including in Canada, the United States, and eight Western European countries (McFadden 1992). As a result of such attacks, the MeK has been seen as a legitimate threat to the current regime (1/1), and has consistently been targeted by the IRGC, most notably during mass protests movements orchestrated by the organization in 1981 (Katzmann 2001, 101). During this persecution, group members sought refuge in France, where the group briefly had its headquarters in the early 1980s, before relocating to Iraq in 1986 (Katzmann 2001, 101).

The MeK has also mobilized its supporters in exile to campaign for international support (1/1), and has fostered close ties with the U.S. government by offering intelligence on Tehran's strategies, even "reporting on Iran's attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction programs" (Katzmann 2001, 105). The group has even addressed U.S. Congress, which sees it as more like-minded than the current Iranian regime (Katzmann 2001, 109). In addition to these efforts to mobilize international support, the MeK also has a website in English, Arabic and Farsi conveying the organization's efforts to end the corrupt theocratic regime currently ruling Iran and establish an Islamic democracy (PMOI 2020). However, within Iran itself, very little local support exists for the MeK and other religious extremist groups (0/1). In 2016, the group was forced to relocate to Albania with help from the United States and the UN Refugee Agency, following attacks on their temporary camp in Iraq (Reuters 2016). The MeK continues to be a thorn in the side of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who claimed the group was responsible for orchestrating mass demonstrations in Iran in 2018 (The Times of Israel 2018). Clearly, this and other terrorist organizations with religious extremist identities have posed challenges to the regime in Tehran, which has sought to expand its counter-terrorism cooperation with countries like Russia and China. Iran is currently an observer to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a security alliance between China, Russia and central Asian states, and Tehran has even asked to become a full member (Wang & Kong 2019, 78). Based on all of these factors, it is entirely possible that Iran's vulnerability to religious extremism (2/3) and a strong desire for increased counter-terrorism cooperation has led the Iranian government to keep silent on China's treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

6.8 Analysis and Conclusion

Unlike with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Iran's refusal to criticize China's policies towards its Muslim minorities in Xinjiang is likely more to do with necessity than ideological alignment. Evidently, due to the U.S. State Department's classification of Iran as a 'state sponsor of terrorism' and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Tehran by many U.S. allies and even by all UN member states for a time, Iran has grown to be extremely dependent on China for trade and investment. However, Iran has also historically greatly benefited from close security ties with China, including its purchasing of Chinese arms and military equipment, their participation in joint military exercises, and their mutual support through formal security alliances like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In addition to these factors, Iran is also similarly vulnerable to secessionism, particularly by the Arab minority living in its southwestern region of Khuzestan, to which Tehran has taken an approach not unlike that pursued by Beijing towards its Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang. By violently cracking down on protests for independence and attempting to culturally assimilate the region of Khuzestan by encouraging ethnic Persians to relocate there, Tehran is applying the same model that Beijing has long employed in both Xinjiang and Tibet, where separatist minority ethnic groups have threatened its access to these resource-rich regions. Finally, although Iran has not been victimized by religious extremism to the same extent as other countries in the region, it nevertheless faces threats of this nature in a similar way that China has. Although Tehran has not responded to this threat by developing re-education camps for anyone perceived as being at risk to radicalization by religious extremists, it has nevertheless securitized the issue to justify increased restrictions on minorities. In this case, it seems *realpolitik* considerations like economic and security gains, and the similar vulnerability and response to secessionism and religious extremism by Iran and China, have been influential factors in Tehran's position vis-à-vis Beijing. The findings that the data for all four independent variables are relatively high, raises questions as to why Iran's level of support for Beijing's policies towards Chinese Muslims (2/3) is

not higher. However, we might expect that the West's ostracization of Iran will only serve to push Tehran further into the orbit of the Chinese Communist Party in the coming years.

Chapter 7 - Pakistan: CPEC, Countering India, and Cross-Border Marriages

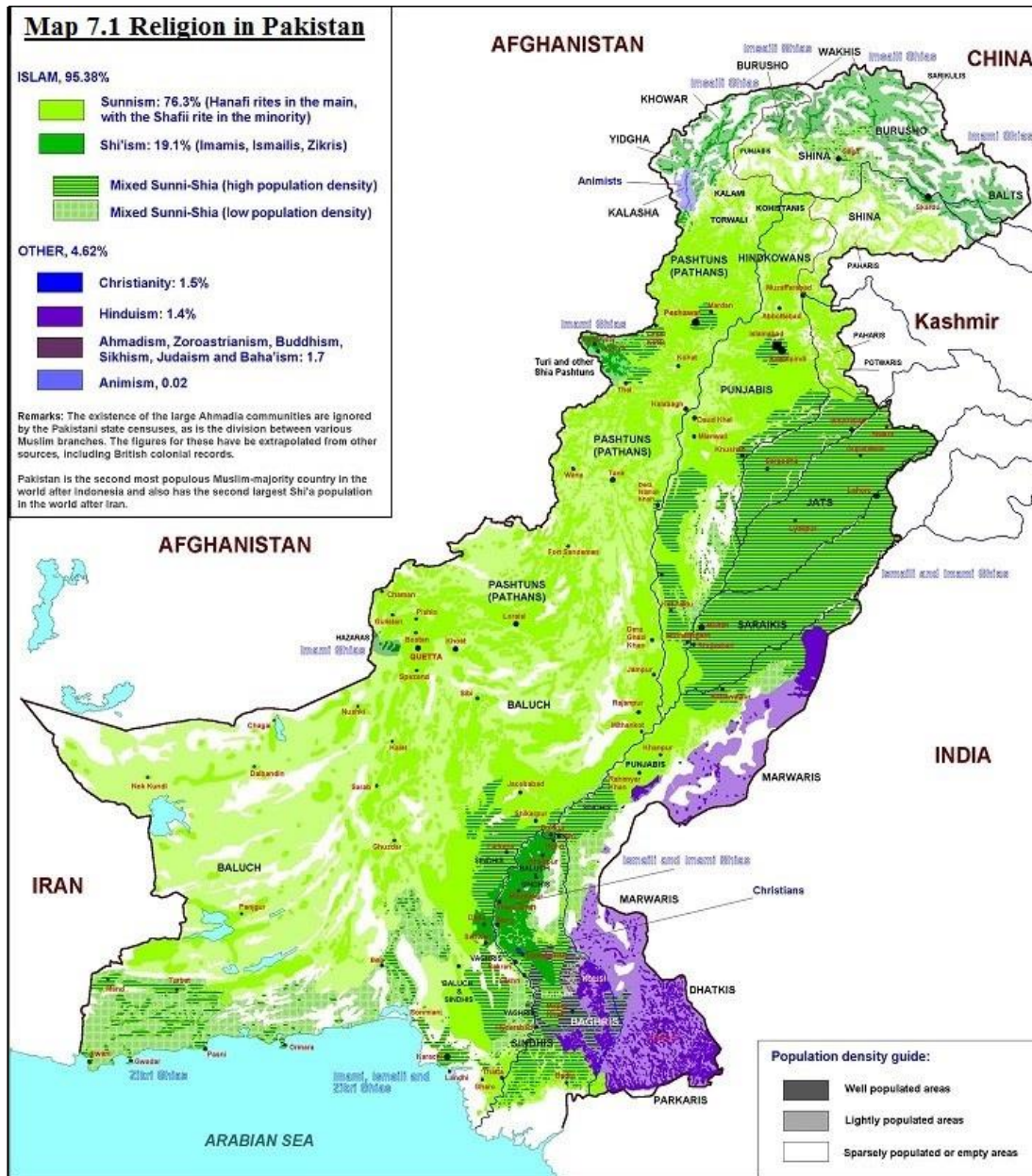
“China has helped us. They came to help us when we were at rock bottom, and so we are really grateful to the Chinese government.”

Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan
(Mahbubani, 2020)

7.1 Introduction

With more than 200 million Muslims, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has the second largest population of Muslims of any country in the world after Indonesia, making up roughly 96.5% of its total population (CIA World Factbook, 2010)(see Map 7.1). During what was called the ‘Golden Age of Islam,’ Pakistan contributed significantly to developments in numerous areas, including medicine, mathematics, and literature (Wynbrandt 2009, 51). Throughout the first three centuries of Islamic expansion into South Asia, Muslim rule was limited to only a few regions administered by representatives of the Abbasid Caliphate, whose various capitals were in faraway Iraq and Syria. However, following invasions by Central Asian Muslims in the early 11th century, “direct Islamic rule would extend over large swaths of the subcontinent” (Wynbrandt 2009, 53). During the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526), Islam spread throughout modern-day Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, leaving only a few Hindu majority regions outside the scope of the Muslim Sultanate’s rule. Following the fall of the Sultanate, Islam’s hold over the sub-continent would be consolidated under the rule of the Mughal Empire (1526-1748), which continued to give Islam a prominent role in both society and government (Lapidus 2002, 374-378).

Modern-day Pakistan has the unique predicament of bordering both India and China, two major regional rivals. Since the very foundation of the state of Pakistan in 1947, conflict with India has been a mainstay, flaring up on occasion and never fully being resolved. It therefore logically follows that Islamabad would seek to develop close ties with Beijing to contain India’s regional ambitions, as the



adage holds that the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend. However, what makes Pakistan such an interesting case to study for this research is the significant opposition to close ties with China from the Pakistani public. As we will see, citizens have mounted protests against increased Chinese presence in the country, and there have even been attacks against Chinese expatriates living and working in Pakistan as part of the new China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Furthermore, longstanding trade links between Pakistani businessmen and the people of Xinjiang — the Chinese province bordering Pakistan —

have resulted in numerous intermarriages, and these men have advocated publicly for Islamabad to defend their wives from persecution by Beijing. Despite the clear public push against the government of Pakistan to limit China's growing influence in its territory, successive leaders have only sought to enhance their relations with their Chinese counterparts. In April 2015, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Mamnoon Hussain conferred Pakistan's highest civilian award on Chinese President Xi Jinping during a visit to Islamabad (Economic Times 2015). This chapter will endeavour to better understand what factors have motivated Pakistani officials to ignore their citizens and proceed with increasing its engagement with and dependence on China. Before delving into an analysis of the variables of this research, it is important to contextualize Pakistan's contemporary geopolitical position by briefly outlining the historical evolution of its bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China.

7.2 Sino-Pakistan Relations: The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend

On January 4, 1950, Pakistan became one of the first countries to establish official diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, recognizing its future significance in geopolitics. However, for the duration of that decade and into the 1960s, Islamabad kept its distance from Beijing at first, as the latter had already established close ties with India (Boni 2020, 31-32). In an effort to guard against the threat posed by India, a regional rival with whom Pakistan had already fought one war (1947-1948) over the Kashmir issue, the Pakistani government formed an alliance with United States President Dwight Eisenhower in the early 1950s. The Americans were hoping that Pakistan would be a key partner against the Soviet Union and the spread of communism in the region, in exchange for American economic and military assistance (Wynbrandt 2009, 176). This alliance with the United States continued into the 1960s, as the American forces made use of air bases in Pakistan in their war against communism, but "relations deteriorated when leaders in Islamabad began to feel a U.S. tilt toward India; to address the military disparity Pakistan began to explore relations with China and the Soviet Union" (Wynbrandt 2009, 191). Meanwhile, China was engaging in a border war with India (1962), which prompted Beijing to shift its support to Pakistan, signing a border agreement on the issue of Kashmir in March 1963 and launching a

new era of Sino-Pakistan relations, characterized by a strong military and economic partnership to counter the Indo-American alliance that had been forming (Boni 2020, 34-35).

As trade between China and Pakistan grew in the 1960s, so too did military support, with China supplying billions of dollars' worth of weapons and jets to their strategic partner (SIPRI 2020), as we discuss in detail below. In addition to material support, Beijing also provided rhetorical support throughout a series of Indo-Pakistani wars, condemning Indian 'aggression' and threatening New Delhi with military retaliation if they did not cease their military provocations (Boni 2020, 36-37). A third Indo-Pakistani War broke out after Pakistan's President Yahya Khan refused to recognize the victory in the 1970 general election of a Bengali political party called the Awami League, instead using Pakistan's military to crack down on dissent in the East Wing. This caused many East Pakistanis to flee to neighbouring India for safety, which prompted an Indian military intervention in the region, ultimately resulting in the formation of an independent state of Bangladesh. Once again, China did not physically intervene, but expressed strong support for the government in Islamabad, and condemned India's interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs. Following this war, Pakistan further strengthened its defence cooperation with China, even obtaining the necessary technology to develop its own nuclear weapons to counter India's nuclear program (Boni 2020, 38-41). After President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ousted through a coup d'état orchestrated by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977, the new military regime pursued a strategy of rapprochement with the United States, providing support to American efforts to "counter Soviet troops fighting in Afghanistan" (Boni 2020, 42-43). Irrespective of this strategy, Beijing continued to provide support to Pakistan, considering this alliance to be an 'all-weather friendship', and has only increased this support in more recent years.

For example, in 2019, China was condemned for vetoing a resolution at the UN Security Council requested by India to blacklist Masood Azhar, the leader of Pakistan-based *Jaish-e-Mohammed* (JEM), following a suicide bombing he orchestrated in Kashmir, in an effort by Beijing to deflect scrutiny against its ally in Islamabad (Aamir 2019). This is in keeping with China's policy of defending Pakistan from accusations of being a terrorist haven, often levelled by the United States and other Western democracies

(Gao 2017). Pakistan has also returned the favour, with its Finance Minister praising China's Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as an innovative mechanism funding infrastructural development where other multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank and Asia Development Bank only focused on poverty reduction (Zhang 2014). But perhaps nowhere is Pakistan's reliance on China's international political support more evident than in its ongoing clashes with India, particularly in the northern region of Kashmir, where the two south Asian rivals have perpetually conflicted over disputed territory. The region is currently split into Indian-administered Kashmir (Jammu and Kashmir; Ladakh), Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Gilgit and Baltistan), and Chinese-administered Kashmir (Aksai Chin), and has been the source of tension for decades (BBC 2019).

Following a decision by the Indian government to revoke the special autonomous status of the section of Kashmir it administers in August 2019, protests have erupted across both Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, leading to violence and mass arrests (Al Jazeera 2019). In addition to this domestic instability, the international community has been trying to help resolve the Kashmir dispute since partition in 1947, including the United Nations as a whole, as well as individual efforts by the US, the UK and the Soviet Union (Schaffer 2009). The question of international pressure against Pakistan on this issue is less evident, as most of the calls made by different states and multilateral organizations have been for both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and deescalate the conflict (UN News 2019). Even the Muslim world, represented by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, has consistently advocated for a peaceful solution, although they have been more openly critical of India, calling on New Delhi to halt its so-called security operations in the region (Aliyev 2020). These security operations were a response to a suicide attack in February 2019 which killed 40 Indian soldiers, which was claimed by JEM, sparking a diplomatic spat between the two neighbours, forcing UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to call on both sides to defuse tensions (UN News 2019). Little more than one week later, the Pakistani air force announced that it had shot down two Indian jets over the Kashmir region, and India retaliated by shooting down a Pakistani jet (Regan et al. 2019), in a dramatic escalation that demonstrates the complex nature of this ongoing border dispute.

In this context, as Western democracies have essentially recused themselves from this issue and called on both sides to address it peacefully, and even as many Muslim-majority countries have not explicitly taken sides, more than ever Pakistan is reliant on political support from its “all-weather friend”, China (LaFranchi 2019). Beijing has long helped Pakistan contain the growing political, economic and military power of its Indian neighbour, and this has been very apparent in the context of the Kashmir dispute. First of all, India’s revocation of Article 370 has given China a legitimate opportunity to criticize India’s human rights record, just as many Western democracies are condemning its treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. In the days that followed New Delhi’s move, Chinese officials held talks with their Indian counterparts to demand a reversal of this decision (Joshi 2020), and made public statements of support for Pakistan’s position (Varma 2020). Following the flare-up of tensions in August 2019, China backed Pakistan’s call for a discussion at the UN Security Council on India’s revocation of Jammu and Kashmir’s autonomous status (Nichols 2019). Evidently, China’s support for Pakistan internationally has played a role in fostering very close relations between Beijing and Islamabad. The rest of this chapter will examine how Islamabad has responded to allegations of genocide by the Chinese government in neighbouring Xinjiang, and assess which factors may have played the biggest role in determining their level of support for Beijing’s policies.

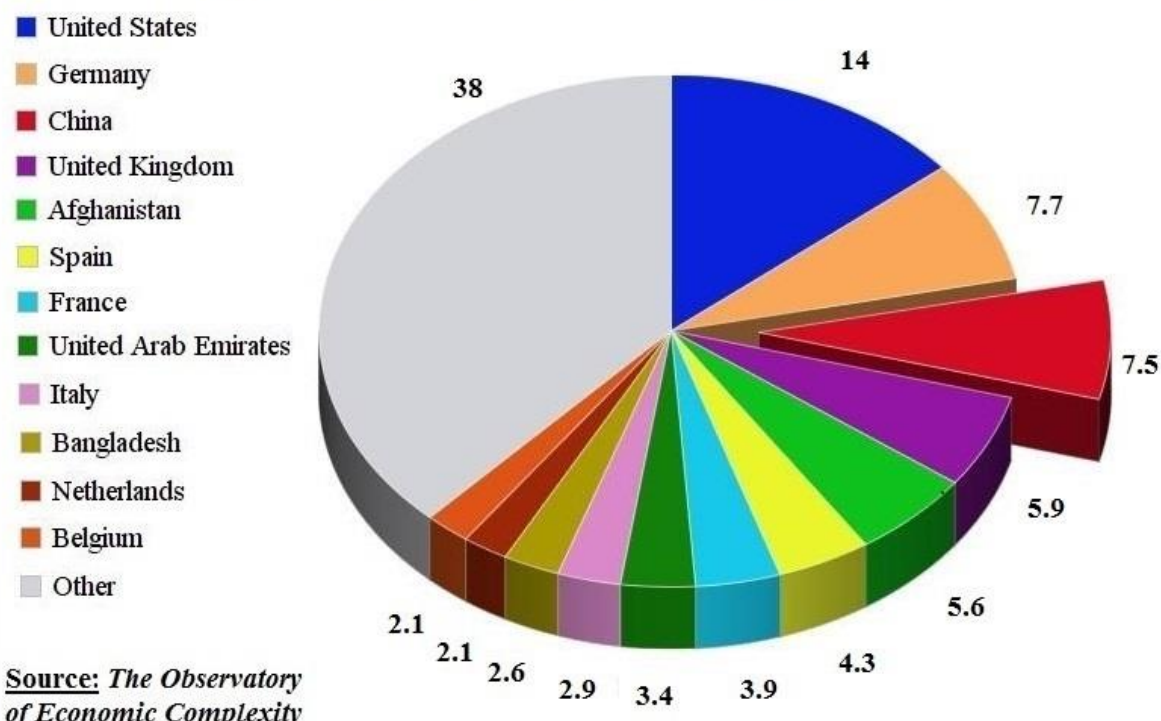
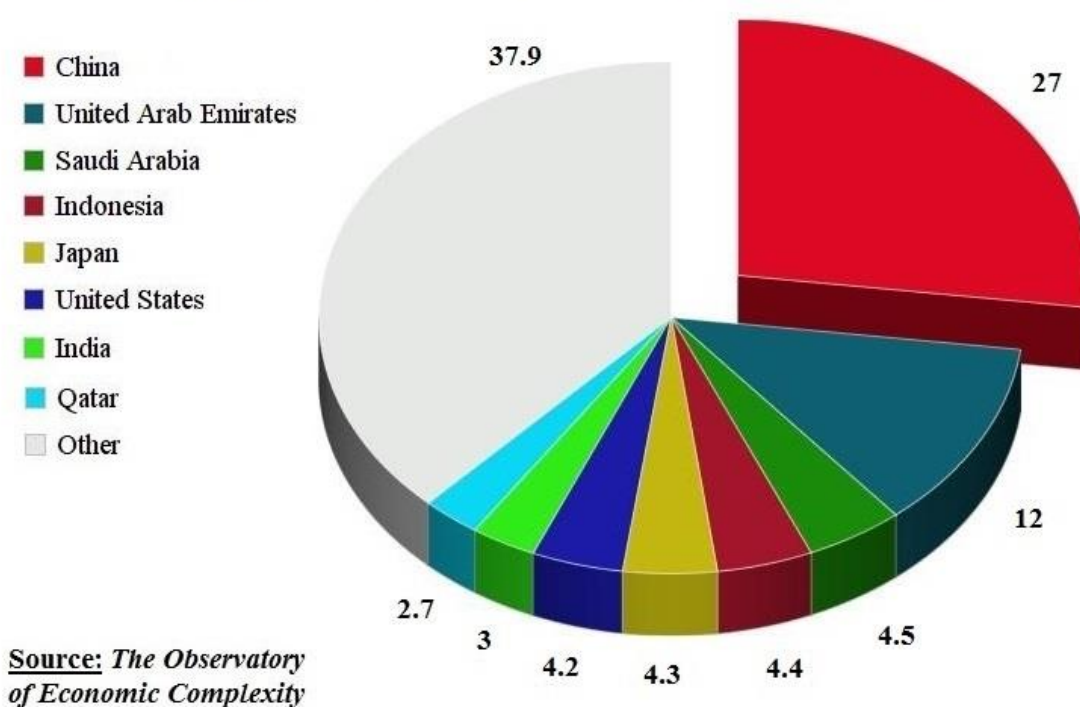
7.3 Pakistan’s Support for China’s Xinjiang Policy

Particularly in recent years, Pakistan has been a strong supporter of China’s ill treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Looking first at the Pakistani government’s level of support, although the Minister for Religious Affairs, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, has previously criticized Beijing for using counterterrorism to justify its re-education camps for Muslims and called for a lessening of restrictions (Kuo, 2018), other officials have defended China’s policies (Mahbubani 2020). Most notably, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan refused to even acknowledge the indoctrination camps in Xinjiang during an interview in June 2021 (Westcott 2021), demonstrating a high degree of support for Beijing. Like many other case countries observed as part of this research, Pakistan’s acting Ambassador to the

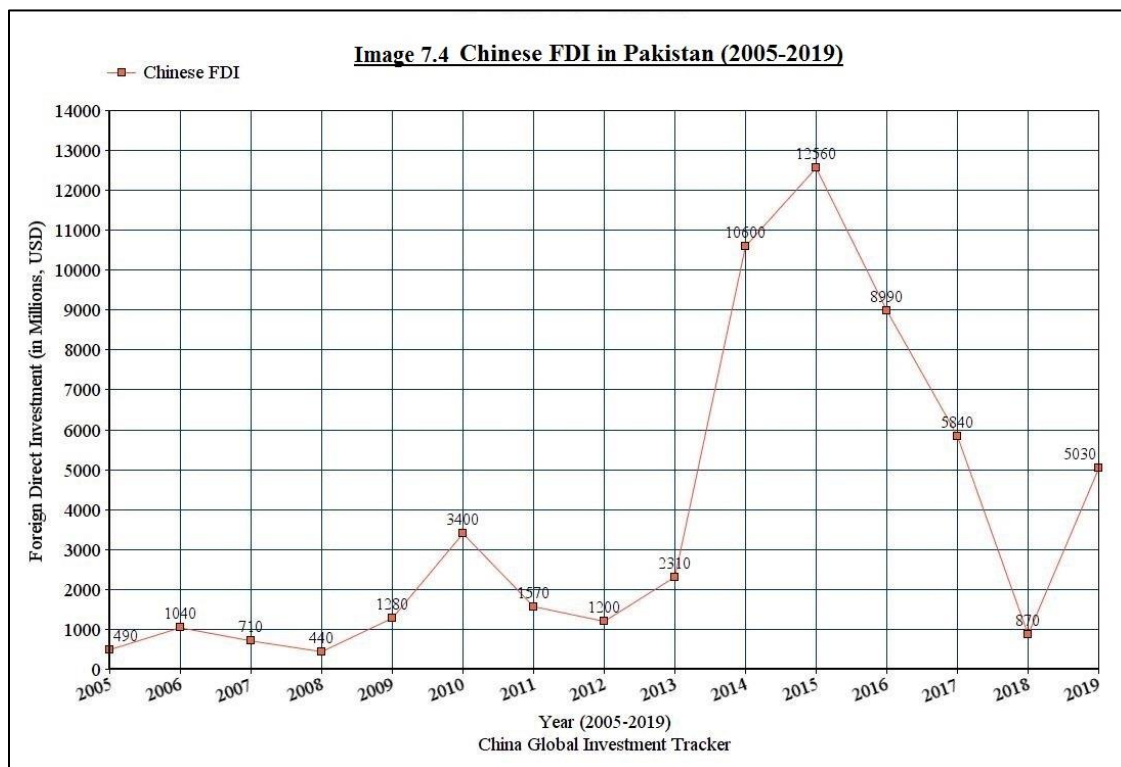
United Nations, Tahir Hussain Andrabi, co-signed the letter to the Human Rights Council in July 2019 lauding China's policies in that region (A/HRC/41/G/17 2019). Pakistan was also one of the countries named as having supported a statement made at UN General Assembly by the Ambassador from Belarus, Valentin Rybakov, defending Chinese policies in Xinjiang as effective in countering terrorism and violent extremism (Westcott & Roth 2019). Because of the clear support offered by the government of Pakistan for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities, it receives a score of 2/2 for this measure. On the question of Islamabad's own treatment of Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims seeking refuge in Pakistan, in the past, it has deported Uyghurs back to China where they were sure to face extrajudicial punishment (Radio Free Asia 2011). Since the indoctrination camps began to be publicized in 2017, Islamabad has completely ignored calls from Pakistani citizens to demand the return of Uyghur wives from China (Feng & Hornby 2018). Even more recently, there have been reports that Pakistan has been detaining Uyghurs living in the country and deporting them back to China (Huffman 2021). Therefore, on this measure, Pakistan receives a score of 1/1. Therefore, with an overall score of 3/3 for this variable, it is clear that Pakistan's government has a strong level of support for Beijing's policies towards its Muslim minorities living in the XUAR.

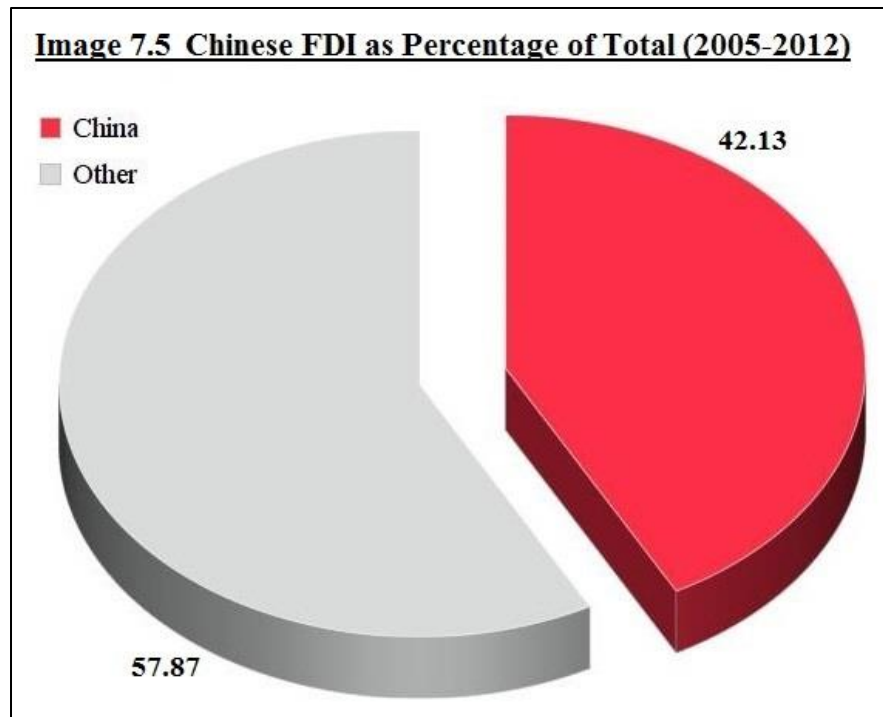
7.4 Pakistani Dependence on Close Economic Ties with China: Before and After CPEC

Unlike some of the other case countries examined so far, China is not Pakistan's largest export destination, with only 7.5% of Pakistani exports going to the PRC, compared with 7.7% to Germany and 14% to the United States (see Image 7.2). However, when it comes to imports, it quickly becomes evident that Pakistan is highly dependent on China, with 27% of its total imports coming from the PRC, compared to only 12% from its second largest source, the United Arab Emirates (see Image 7.3).

Image 7.2 Importance of Exports to China (2017)**Image 7.3 Importance of Imports from China (2017)**

In terms of Chinese investment into Pakistan, since launching the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the connected China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2013, China has invested more than US\$41 billion into Pakistan's infrastructure (see Image 7.4). Before the launch of the BRI and the CPEC, Chinese FDI into Pakistan already made up 42.13% of total FDI inflow into the country (see Image 7.5). However, since the launch, it is impossible to calculate Chinese FDI as a percentage of total FDI inflows, given that the World Bank and other databases have not included the same breadth of transactions that the China Global Investment Tracker (CGIT) has included. As such, while the CGIT calculates Chinese investment into Pakistan from 2013 to 2018 at US\$41.17 billion, the World Bank has calculated Pakistan's total FDI inflows for that same period at only US\$12.9 billion. Also worth noting is that, since joining the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a founding member in 2014, four projects have been approved by the bank in Pakistan, at an overall value of over US\$500 billion (AIIB 2020). Therefore, it is clear that Chinese investment into Pakistan, both before and after the launch of the BRI and the CPEC, is extremely important for Pakistan's development, and there is no doubt that Pakistan is highly dependent on Chinese investment.





7.5 Pakistan's Security Dependence on China

As we have just seen, Pakistan's dependence on a strong economic partnership is significant. It should therefore come as no surprise that its dependence on strong security cooperation with China is also unmistakable. Unlike the first two Muslim-majority case countries, which import the vast majority of their arms and military equipment from Western democracies, Pakistan imports more than half of its arms from China. In this instance, it is worthwhile mentioning that the data presented in Image 7.6 below does not adequately capture the true dependence of Pakistan on arms transfers from China, which have made up an even greater percentage over the five years from 2015-2020, whereas American arms transfers have declined dramatically. To demonstrate this even greater dependence, for this case study, we have created a separate graph to show Pakistan's largest sources of arms transfers from 2015-2020, represented in Image 7.7. Irrespective of this marked increase in dependence in the last five years for which data is available, Pakistan nevertheless receives a score of 3/3 for this measure, as Chinese arms transfers have made up more than 15% of its total for the last ten years, demonstrating a remarkable level of dependence.

Image 7.6 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2010-2020)

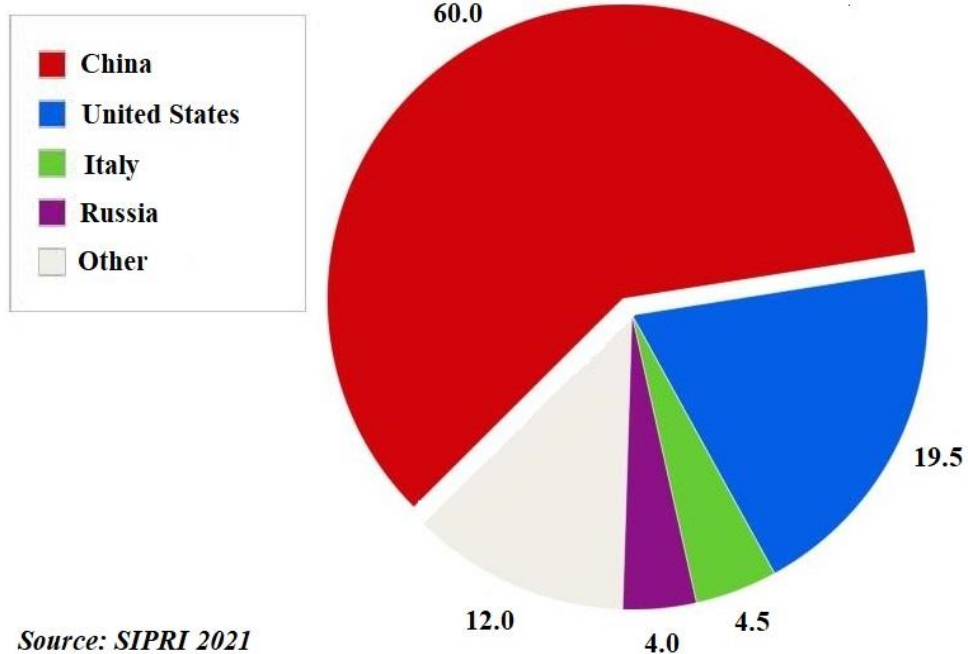
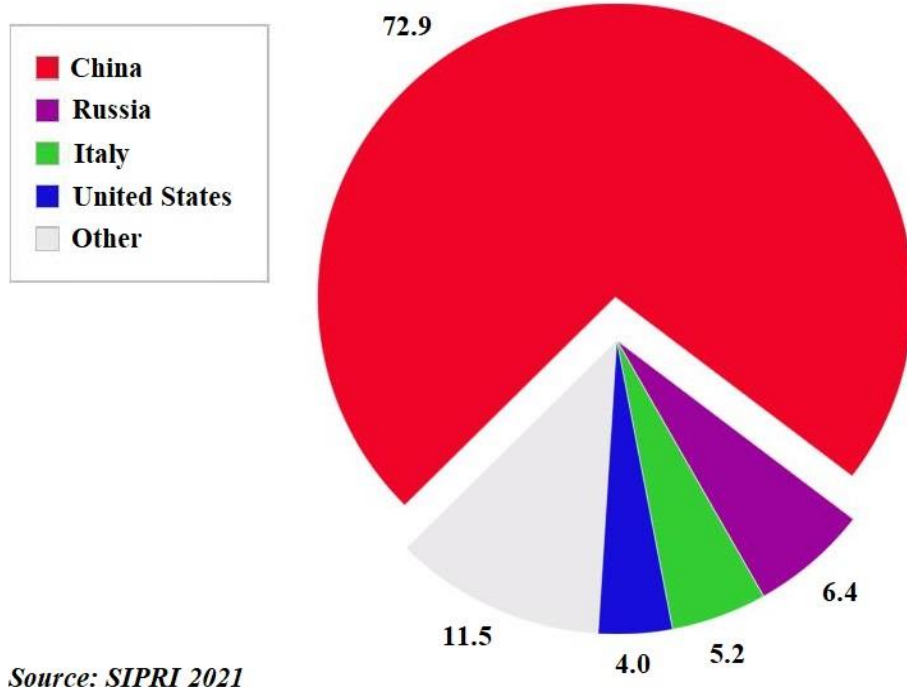


Image 7.7 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2015-2020)

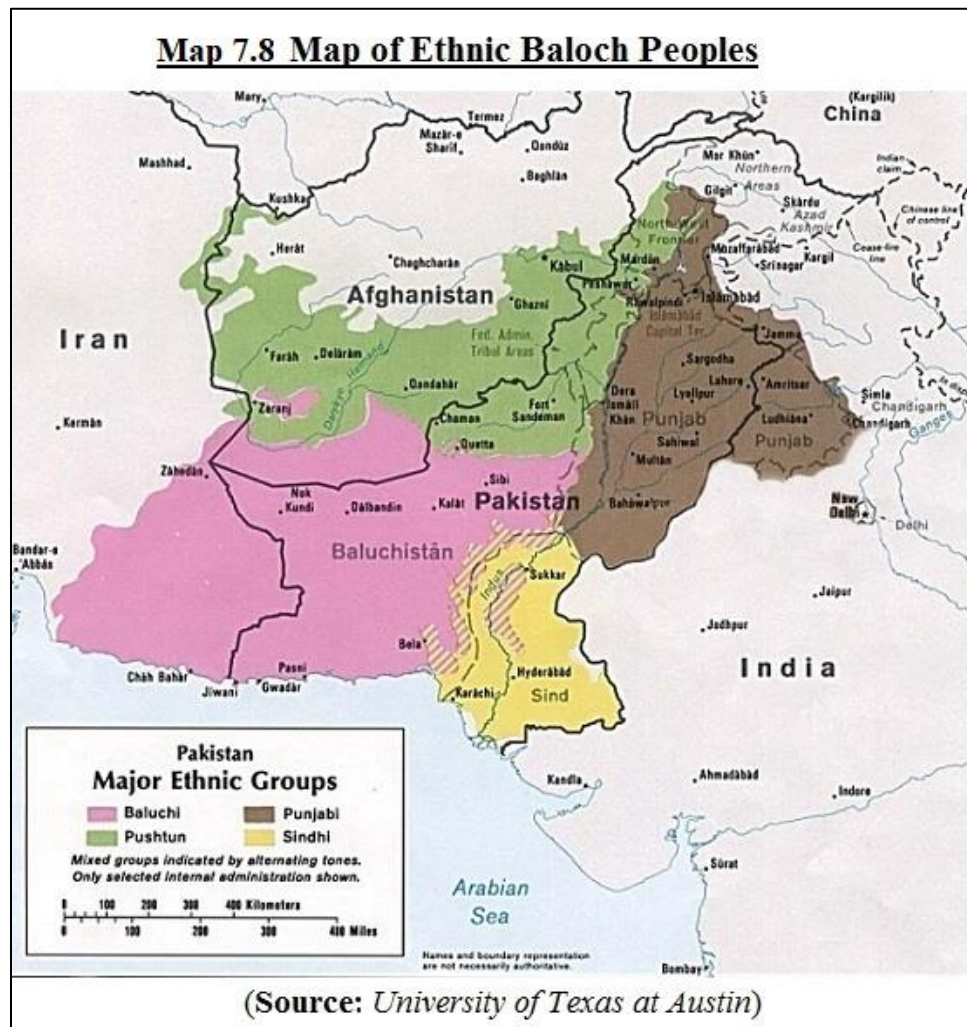


Similarly, if we look at examples of Sino-Pakistani joint military exercises, there is no end to the exercises held between these two strategic military allies, from air force drills near the two countries' borders with India (Khan 2020; Tribune India 2021) to regular naval exercises (Global Times 2020). The two countries' Defence Ministers also meet regularly, and most recently "signed a memorandum of understanding for deepening military cooperation" in December 2020 (Khan 2020). Khan (2013) also provided an overview of Pakistan's military cooperation with China in the context of counter-terrorism, particularly in the border region of these and several Central Asian Republics, where terrorist organizations have been known to have their headquarters (Khan 2012, 72). It follows logically from this counter-terrorism cooperation that in 2017, along with India, Pakistan would ultimately join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a security alliance with China, Russia and the Central Asian Republics. This evidence all simply strengthens the conclusion that Pakistan is deeply dependent on China for its domestic security, and this factor likely played some role in determining Islamabad's decision not to condemn China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in the XUAR, despite Pakistan's close connections to this ethno-religious group with which it shares a border.

7.6 Vulnerability to Secessionism in Pakistan

As to whether a vulnerability to secessionism may play a role in Pakistan's support for China, there is a strong argument to be made that it does. There are numerous secessionist movements that have threatened the government of Pakistan, including Sindhi nationalists calling for an independent state of Sindhudesh, Kashmiri nationalists seeking an independent Balawaristan, and Muhajir nationalists seeking an independent Jinnahpur in Southern Pakistan. But perhaps the most challenging secessionist group has been the Baloch national movement, which has long pursued an independent state of Balochistan in the southwestern region of the country that borders Iran and Afghanistan (Rafi Sheikh 2018)(see Map 7.8). Like Xinjiang, the Pakistani province of Balochistan is a peripheral territory that is rich in natural resources used for energy, like coal, gas and potentially even uranium (Wirsing 2008, 3-4). According to Wirsing (2001), "among the many grievances expressed by the Baloch nationalists, the most persistent

and long-standing has been that these resources, including coal as well as gas, have been exploited by the central government without adequate compensation to the province” (Wirsing 2008, 4). Also, like Xinjiang, the province of Balochistan is Pakistan’s largest, composed of roughly 44% of the country’s territory, but its population is the second smallest of any province, with less than 5% of the national population (Siddiqi 2012, 52). Nevertheless, the region’s crucial importance to Pakistan’s economy means Islamabad will likely never willingly relinquish its control over Balochistan.



Although Balochistan was originally meant to be an independent country following Indian independence from British colonialism, Islamabad convinced the leaders of the region to join Pakistan, officially signing over their sovereignty on March 21, 1948 (Siddiqi 2012, 60). Pakistani authorities wasted no time in reinstating the system of governance that had allowed the British to control the Baloch

region's resources, installing a regional leader subordinate to the central government in Islamabad, and outlawing the most influential Baloch nationalist party, the *Kalat State National Party*, or KSNP. Naturally, these measures provoked opposition from many Baloch citizens, resulting in the formation of the *Baloch National Liberation Committee* which demanded a renegotiation of the accession agreement, and even clashed with the Pakistani army (Siddiqi 2012, 61). The region's occupation by the Pakistani military, as well as the execution of several Baloch leaders on charges of treason and rebellion in July 1960, further strengthened the resolve of Baloch nationalists (Siddiqi 2012, 63), as well as local support for the cause (1/1). After the democratically elected national government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dissolved the regional coalition government of the Baloch-supported National Awami Party (NAP) and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) in February 1973, the Baloch nationalists mounted an insurgency. Taking advantage of a Pakistani military weakened by its war with India over the independence of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Baloch guerrillas began attacking convoys carrying supplies to occupying forces in Balochistan (Siddiqi 2012, 64-69). Although this conflict would last for more than four years, ultimately "the superior firearms of the Pakistan Army coupled with political-military support from Iran dealt a severe blow to the whole organised Balochi fighting unit" (Siddiqi 2012, 70).

For more than twenty years following this insurgency, Baloch nationalists took up their cause through participation in Pakistan's parliament. However, when General Pervez Musharraf came to power in 1999 through a successful coup d'état, he sought to impose developmental projects in Balochistan province without the support of Baloch politicians, including most notably the Chinese-funded construction of a port at Gwadar on the coast of the Arabian Sea (Zeb 2020, 148-149). This led to the rise of the *Balochistan Liberation Army* (BLA), which carried out multiple attacks on infrastructure projects, including murdering three Chinese engineers working on the Gwadar port project in May 2004 (Zeb 2020, 150). Islamabad tried on numerous occasions to negotiate a settlement to the various demands being made by Baloch nationalists, but underhanded tactics by Pakistani officials led to break ups of talks and resumption of violence on numerous occasions throughout the early 2000s (Zeb 2020, 152-56). Then, following a BLA rocket attack which targeted General Musharraf during a visit to Balochistan to extend

an olive branch in December 2005 (Masood 2005), the central government responded by launching a military operation against the BLA and other militant Baloch nationalists (Zeb 2020, 157-58), demonstrating the severity of the threat posed by this movement (1/1). During the violence that ensued, a top political leader of the Baloch nationalist movement, Akbar Bugti, was killed by Pakistani security forces, causing an immediate uproar among Baloch citizens (Zeb 2020, 160). Although further efforts have been made by Islamabad to co-opt the Baloch nationalists through political participation of the Balochistan National Party, which currently holds four seats in Pakistan's National Assembly (1/1), violent insurgency continues in the region to this day. There is clearly no doubt that Pakistan's significant vulnerability to secessionism (3/3) could play a role in further strengthening its support for China's policies in Xinjiang.

7.7 Pakistan's Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

Since 2001, Pakistan has suffered 17,220 deaths from terrorist attacks, and in 2018, the country was ranked the fifth worst impacted by terrorism, with 537 deaths from 366 incidents that year alone (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019). One of Pakistan's deadliest terror cells is *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP), which has been active since 2007 and is responsible for "the deaths of thousands of state officials, police, soldiers, religious minorities, common civilians, and even teachers and students" (Hanif, Ali & Shaheen 2019, 1). Like most Islamist organizations, its objective is the implementation of Islamic government, characterized by a *sharia* legal system and influential religious officials, and it has benefited from the curriculum of Islamic schools (*madrasas*) to gain the support of young Pakistani Muslims, which could even facilitate the recruitment of militants (1/1). Although the group is a listed foreign terrorist organization sanctioned by the United Nations and its member states, it nevertheless has broad support among Pakistani citizens (Hanif, Ali & Shaheen 2019). Although the TTP is perhaps the most notorious terrorist organization operating in Pakistan, the country is also victimized by numerous other groups. In 2018, it was the so-called *Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State* which caused the most casualties, responsible for 251 deaths that year, or 36% of the total (Institute for Economics & Peace

2019). Other major Islamist terrorist organizations operating in Pakistan include *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (Army of Jhangvi), an anti-Shia extremist group with links to *Al Qaeda* (Roggio 2014), and *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (Army of Mohammad), which has mounted numerous attacks in the disputed region of Kashmir with the goal of ending Indian rule over the region (BBC 2002). Clearly, the threat posed by religious extremism in Pakistan is genuine and significant (1/1).

Due to the ever-present threat of religious extremist and terrorist organizations in Pakistan, Islamabad has long sought alliances to help it secure its territory from sporadic attacks, and has brought international attention to the issue (1/1). During the 1990s, it began to really enhance its alliance with Beijing on defence and security matters, signing knowledge transfer and defence procurement agreements in 1990 (Boni 2020, 122). Over the course of that decade, China would supply US\$2.4 billion worth of weapons to Pakistan, and this number would only continue to increase into the 21st century, with US\$8.3 billion worth of Chinese weapons supplied to Pakistan from 2000-2019 (SIPRI 2020). In exchange for Chinese support in defence and security, Beijing sought Islamabad's assistance with combatting religious extremism, but in particular, of preventing the growth of the *East Turkestan Islamic Movement* (ETIM, discussed in Chapter 1), which had established bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to Small (2015), "the Pakistani government sought to manage this, translating its relationships with militants into a channel that could be utilized on Beijing's behalf," facilitating communications between Chinese officials and leaders of militant groups. China has made numerous deals with religious extremists, some involving material resources or even weapons, and in exchange, "Beijing expected that not only would the groups themselves refrain from targeting China, they would also refuse any support to Uyghur organizations that did" (Small 2015, 81). As the Beijing Olympics of 2008 approached, a Uyghur terrorist group called the *Turkestan Islamic Party* (TIP) began threatening to attack the Olympics Games, and Pakistan showed its support by claiming to have blocked all land borders between the two countries to ensure that no terrorists could cross into China. Although terror attacks did ultimately occur in Xinjiang during the Olympics, there is no evidence that these were carried out by the TIP, and the group itself never claimed credit (Small 2015, 84-85).

Pakistan's extreme vulnerability to terrorist attacks by religious extremist groups (3/3) and its apparent inability to comprehensively eliminate the Uyghur Islamist organizations like ETIM and TIP with bases and networks in Pakistani territory, have in some instances led to tensions with Beijing (Small 2015, 90-91). However, in a positive sign of increasing coordination, Islamabad took a further step in proving its commitment to combatting security threats posed by religious extremist organizations by becoming a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at its meeting of the Heads of State Council in June 2017 (SCO 2020). Following an announcement by U.S. President Donald Trump in early 2018 that it was suspending military aid to Pakistan, it was quickly revealed that China had already begun filling that void, and Pakistan would soon reciprocate by helping to build "Chinese military jets, weaponry and other hardware," and granting access to the Chinese Beidou satellite navigation system, "allowing more precise guidance for missiles, ships and aircraft" (Abi-Habib 2018). Perhaps most significantly, in January 2020, the two countries carried out naval exercises in the Arabian Sea called 'Sea Guardians 2020,' consisting of live-fire drills spanning over nine days, complete with "special forces, warships, aerial assets and, for the first time, submarines" (Elmer 2020). Evidently, the common vulnerability to religious extremism shared by China and Pakistan has led to the development of a strong security alliance aimed at combatting this threat, not only along their shared border, but also in the region more broadly (see discussion on security dependence above). It is therefore quite likely that this variable has a significant influence on the dependent variable; in other words, there is a strong possibility that a common vulnerability to Islamist terrorism and the resulting security coalition between China and Pakistan, could explain Islamabad's refusal to criticize Beijing's repressive policies towards Muslim minorities living in northwestern China.

7.8 Analysis & Conclusion

This chapter has examined the various explanations for Pakistan's strong government support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and found that it received nearly the highest possible scores for all variables, making it difficult to determine which variable has the greatest

explanatory relevance in this case. The review of economic data for recent years demonstrated Pakistan's significant dependence on bilateral trade (imports and exports) with China, and also showed a growth in Chinese investment into Pakistan, thanks largely to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative. With respect to Sino-Pakistani security cooperation, Islamabad is indisputably dependent on China for its arms transfers, operates frequent joint military exercises with the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and is a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) security alliance. On the question of each country's vulnerability to secessionism, Pakistan clearly faces a similar threat, with resource-rich Balochistan mobilizing numerous attempts to secede from the Islamic Republic, and Islamabad has responded a similar way as Beijing in Xinjiang, with ethnic assimilation projects hidden underneath affirmative action programs. Finally, as the case country which suffers the worst impact from terrorism, Pakistan is likely to be quite sympathetic towards Beijing's narrative of detaining Muslims in re-education camps to 'combat terrorism and religious extremism'. Furthermore, the two countries' counter-terrorism cooperation in the SCO offers another example of the strong alliance between them, which undoubtedly influences Islamabad's decision to remain silent about China's treatment of Muslim minorities. This case country offers an excellent example of the correlation between each independent variable and a relatively strong level of support for China's Muslim policies.

Unfortunately, the fact that each variable demonstrates some degree of correlation with the dependent variable in the case of Pakistan makes it difficult to draw any significant conclusions. Clearly, *realpolitik* considerations play a role here, but so does ideological alignment in terms of the two countries' strong opposition towards India, their common vulnerability to secessionism and religious extremism, and their mutual support on the international stage in the face of condemnation from Western democracies. The case of Pakistan does not allow us to isolate any of the independent variables, so it is impossible to envision how removing one of them might influence the position of Islamabad vis-à-vis Beijing's policies in the XUAR. Despite close ties between Pakistanis and the Uyghurs and other Muslims living in the region bordering the country's northeast, Islamabad has remained highly supportive of Beijing throughout the recent years, as it has faced widespread criticism from the international

community. It is likely, albeit impossible to verify, that even if Pakistan were less economically dependent on China, it would nevertheless maintain its support for Beijing's policies. The same applies to the three other variables that were tested in this chapter. The only thing that could plausibly change Islamabad's posture towards Beijing is if it experienced a rapprochement with New Delhi, which is highly unlikely, given the long history of animosity between India and Pakistan. For now, all we can conclude is that Pakistan is highly aligned with China on numerous issues, and their all-weather friendship appears to be unbreakable for the moment.

Chapter 8 – Indonesia: Silent Leadership in the World’s Largest Muslim Country

“Of course we reject or [want to] prevent any human rights violations. However, we don’t want to intervene in the domestic affairs of another country,”

Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla, December 2018

8.1 Introduction

On December 27, 2019, hundreds of Indonesian Muslims gathered in front of the Chinese Embassy in Jakarta to protest what they view as Beijing’s human rights violations against their co-religionists in China (Karmini 2019). These protests followed calls by Indonesia’s two most influential Islamic associations, *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*, for China to cease their abuse of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (RFA 2019). Despite the pressure of public opinion, the government of President Joko Widodo continues to remain silent on this issue, not supporting nor condemning China’s treatment of Muslims. This is surprising for several reasons. First, Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims of any country in the world, with just under 230 million Indonesians (or 87.2% of the country’s population) identifying as Muslim (see Map 8.1) (CIA World Factbook 2018). Second, Indonesia is an electoral democracy, and although the Economist Democracy Index ranked it a ‘flawed democracy’ with better electoral processes than protection of civil liberties (Economist 2019), it should nevertheless be expected to defend human rights, both at home and abroad. Third, Indonesia was founded on five key principles (the *Pancasila*), the second of which, the commitment to a “just and civilized humanitarianism”, instilled an obligation to “treat with [sic] others, even foreigners, in a fair manner, free from suspicion, exploitation, and oppression” (Morfit

1981, 840-841). This chapter will seek to understand the considerations that have kept Jakarta silent on Chinese persecution of Muslims, despite all these reasons to speak out.



Historians consider that Muslim traders had begun visiting and doing business in Indonesia as early as the seventh century of the common era (Ricklefs 2008, 4). Later that century, the ruler of Pasai, a region on the island of Sumatra that is located in the modern-day province of Aceh, converted to Islam, prompting other nearby rulers to convert as well. Islam spread rapidly across the various islands over the next few centuries, “first in Sumatra and what is now Malaysia, then in the far eastern Spice Islands, [...] and finally, in the fifteenth century, on Java itself” (Pringle 2010, 23). By the time the first Portuguese explorers arrived in the early 16th century, they noted that, while there remained some non-Islamic states, most of the kingdoms were ruled by Muslims (Ricklefs 2008, 7). As new innovations in maritime travel and communication made it easier for Indonesian Muslims to connect with Muslims from abroad, carry out the pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*), and study Islam in other parts of the world, many adopted a more orthodox understanding of Islam, resulting in increased upheavals and the waging of ‘holy wars’ against the Christian Dutch (Benda 1958, 338). Despite the Dutch imposition of an ‘Islamic Policy’ which sought to suppress the Islamic rebellions and strengthen control over Muslim Indonesians (Jung 2010, 290-292), Islam still managed to thrive. It would eventually drive the opposition movement against Dutch

colonialism (Jung 2010, 293; Benda 1958, 342), and remains a powerful force in Indonesian politics to this day. As such, it is even more surprising that the Indonesian government has remained silent about China's treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang. To contextualize Jakarta's silence, which seems to directly contradict Indonesia's founding principles, the next section will briefly outline the country's relevant history before delving into an analysis of this dissertation's variables.

8.2 Dynamic Relations between China and Indonesia

The Republic of Indonesia was the first country in Southeast Asia to officially establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, which they did on June 9, 1950, only six months after achieving their own independence. In the years that followed Indonesian independence, these relations flourished, with a trade agreement signed in 1953, a dual citizenship treaty signed in 1955, and a series of high-level diplomatic visits (Sinaga 2018, 2). Throughout this period, the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was gaining support, claiming to have 3.5 million members in 1965, and more than 20 million affiliates (Vickers 2013, 158). Although Sukarno and the PNI made efforts to co-opt the PKI with promises of increased power to decide on government policies, the PKI's opposition to Sukarno and the status quo grew, and as many Indonesian organizations protested the corruption of the regime, rumours of an impending coup d'état began to circulate (Vickers 2013, 159-160). Then, on September 30, 1965, several top military generals were kidnapped and killed, and although the connection to the PKI was tenuous, a propaganda campaign succeeded at convincing Indonesians and the international community of a link between the culprits and the communists. The highest ranking military officer not targeted in the attack, Major-General Suharto, quickly took control of the situation, and under his leadership, the PKI was outlawed, the army led "a demonstration in Jakarta in which the PKI headquarters was burned to the ground," and oversaw a massacre of communists that killed hundreds of thousands and imprisoned 1.5 million over the next two years (Vickers 2013, 162-164). In a Letter of Command signed on March 11, 1966, "Sukarno transferred much of his authority over the army and parliament to Suharto," although Suharto's rule would only gain legitimacy after his 1971 electoral victory (Vickers 2013, 165).

The friendship between Jakarta and Beijing soured after the attempted coup, as the former accused the latter of supporting the communist insurgents, and Indonesia froze diplomatic relations with China on October 9, 1967, closing its embassy in Beijing just two weeks later (Sinaga 2018, 2). For more than two decades following this decision, Indonesia under Suharto's 'New Order' regime saw China as a national security threat, not only because they were accused of having supported the PKI, but also because they could exert influence over a large number of overseas Chinese living in Indonesia. During this period, very little changed in the bilateral relationship, with the exception a Memorandum of Understanding on direct trade relations, signed in July 1985. Finally, a series of meetings in 1989 between high level officials from both sides led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in August 1990, and the signing of an economic agreement during an official visit by Suharto to Beijing in November of that year (Sinaga 2018, 3-4). Indonesia nevertheless remained cautious in its exchanges with China, opting to focus its attention on developing trade and investment ties (Sinaga 2018, 9). At this time, Indonesia appeared to be enjoying an economic boom thanks largely to foreign loans, but when it became clear that the country's government suffered from rampant corruption, what had seemed to be a boom turned out to be a bubble which burst suddenly in 1997, with investors pulling their money out and many industries collapsing (Vickers 2013, 209-211). This coincided with the collapse of the baht currency in Thailand, which caused similar currency and stock market devaluations throughout East and Southeast Asia, known as the Asian Financial Crisis (Moskow 1999, 11). Suharto was forced to give up power to his Vice President, B. J. Habibie, who held power temporarily until Abdurrahman Wahid (aka Gus Dur) was elected in October 1999 and began expanding ties with China to foster economic recovery (Sinaga 2018, 9-10).

Over the next two decades, bilateral relations between Indonesia and China have evolved significantly, with Gus Dur and his successors Megawati Sukarnoputri (Sukarno's daughter) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono lifting restrictions on ethnic Chinese in the country, including on religious and cultural practices (Sinaga 2018, 10). During the government of Megawati (2001-2004), the partnership broadened to include the energy sector, with several Chinese state-owned oil and gas companies entering

Indonesia's energy industry (Sinaga 2018, 10). Under Yudhoyono (2004-2014), Indonesia signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement on April 25, 2005, expanding cooperation in many areas, including defence and security (Sinaga 2018, 7). In more recent years, with China joining the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 and signing the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) in 2002, Indonesia has been able to engage with the PRC in multilateral and regional settings. For Indonesia, the "ARF could ensure that China respects norms of international relations and becomes more committed and active in multilateral security efforts in the region" (Sinaga 2018, 12). China's accession to the ACFTA forced it to negotiate with all ten ASEAN member states together, rather than making bilateral deals with each individually (Sinaga 2018, 11). Under Indonesia's current President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), economic relations with China have expanded even further, with significant Chinese infrastructure investments following Indonesia's accession to the China-run Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in June 2015 (discussed below). Many Indonesians have protested against their country's increasing dependence on China under Jokowi's leadership, with anti-Chinese sentiment growing across the country, stoked by fabricated anti-Chinese news propagated through social media (Anwar 2019, 5). This pressure has forced Jokowi to distance himself from Beijing, even summoning the Chinese Ambassador in December 2019 following a clash between the Chinese coastguard and Indonesian fisherman near the Natuna islands in the South China Sea, and visiting Natuna himself in January 2020 to underscore Indonesia's sovereignty over the islands (Reuters 2020). Beyond these minor spats, however, Indonesia remains close to China, as we will break down in the next sections.

8.3 Indonesian Support for China's Treatment of Muslims

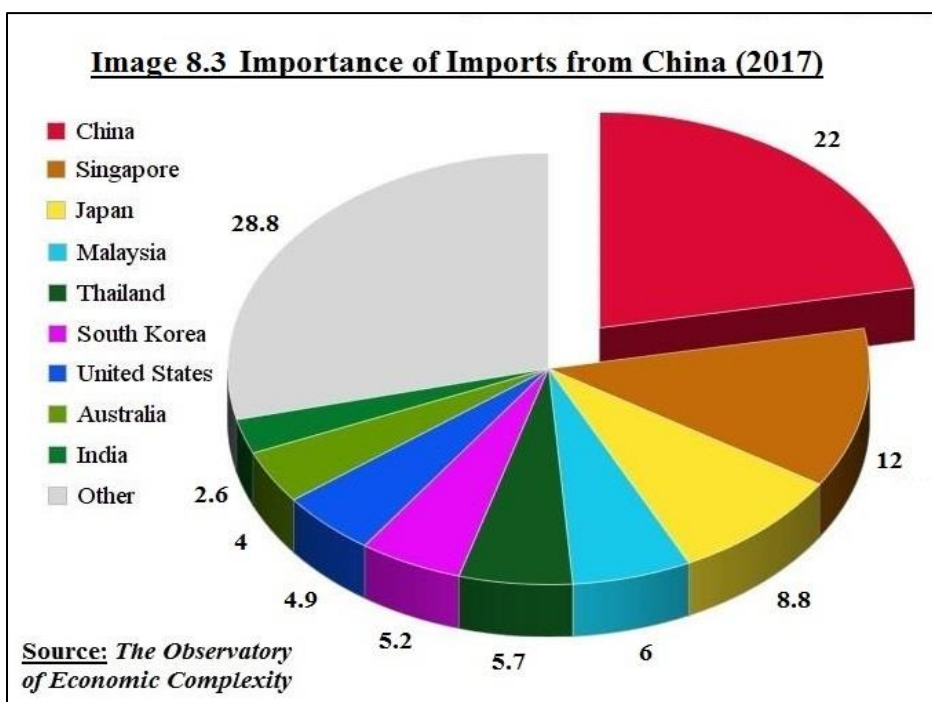
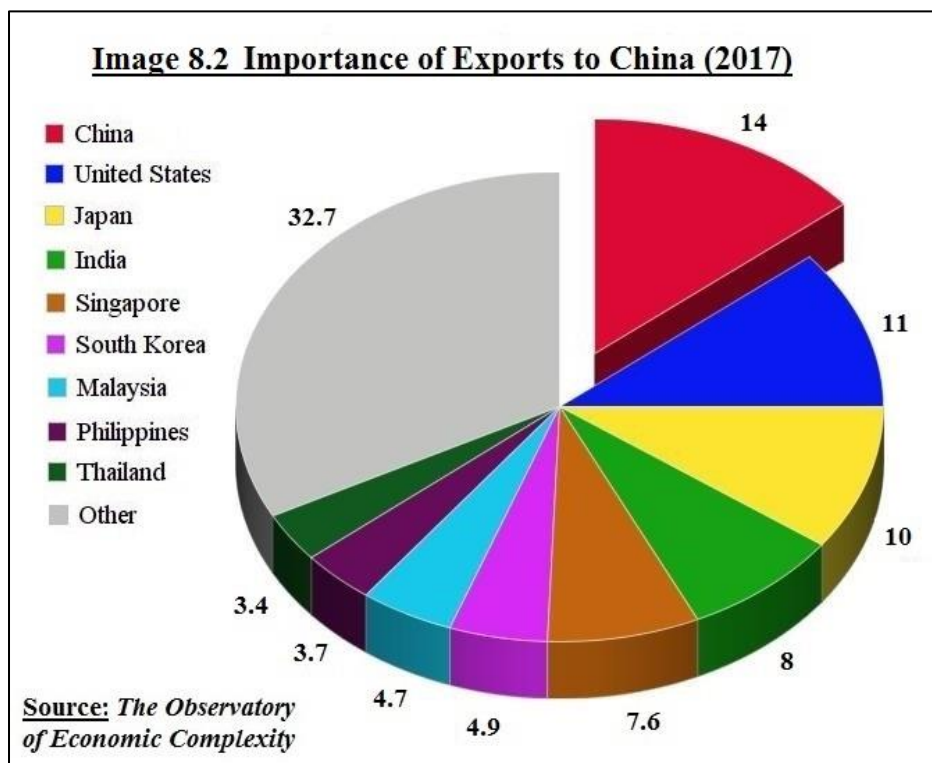
Perhaps because of the current complications in the Sino-Indonesian bilateral relationship outlined above, the current Indonesian government of Jokowi has not been explicitly supportive of Chinese policies in Xinjiang. Unlike the other Muslim-majority case countries (Turkey excluded), Jakarta did not support the various joint statements defending China's policies against Muslim minorities as effective counter-terrorism strategies. However, despite having chosen Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin to be

his Vice President, Jokowi has also never explicitly condemned China's treatment of Muslim minorities. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile pointing out that, since his latest election victory in April 2019, Jokowi's newly appointed Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi has claimed to have raised the issue and advocated for religious freedom with her Chinese counterpart (Permana et. al. 2019). As a result of this open advocacy on behalf of the Uyghurs, as well as Jakarta's refusal to co-sign joint statements supporting Beijing's policies in the XUAR, Indonesia receives a score of 0/2 on the first indicator for this variable. On the issue of demonstrating support for Chinese policies towards Uyghurs by deporting those living in Indonesia back to China, officials in Jakarta have historically been unequivocally opposed. Indonesian officials have previously arrested Uyghurs accused of allegedly conspiring with Indonesian Islamist militants (Reuters 2015), however at that time, they refused to deport them back to China (RFA 2016). Unfortunately, more recently, Jakarta appears to have shifted its stance on this issue, deporting three Uyghurs back to China before a state visit by then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in late 2020 (Chew 2020). Therefore, on the second indicator, because of this recent policy shift, Indonesia receives a score of 1/1. With an overall score of 1/3 for this variable, Indonesia is still one of the least supportive Muslim-majority case countries we have selected for study in this dissertation, and its support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR can be classified as only minimal. The next four sections will each explore one of our independent variables, and how they may correlate with this relatively low level of support for China's Muslim policies.

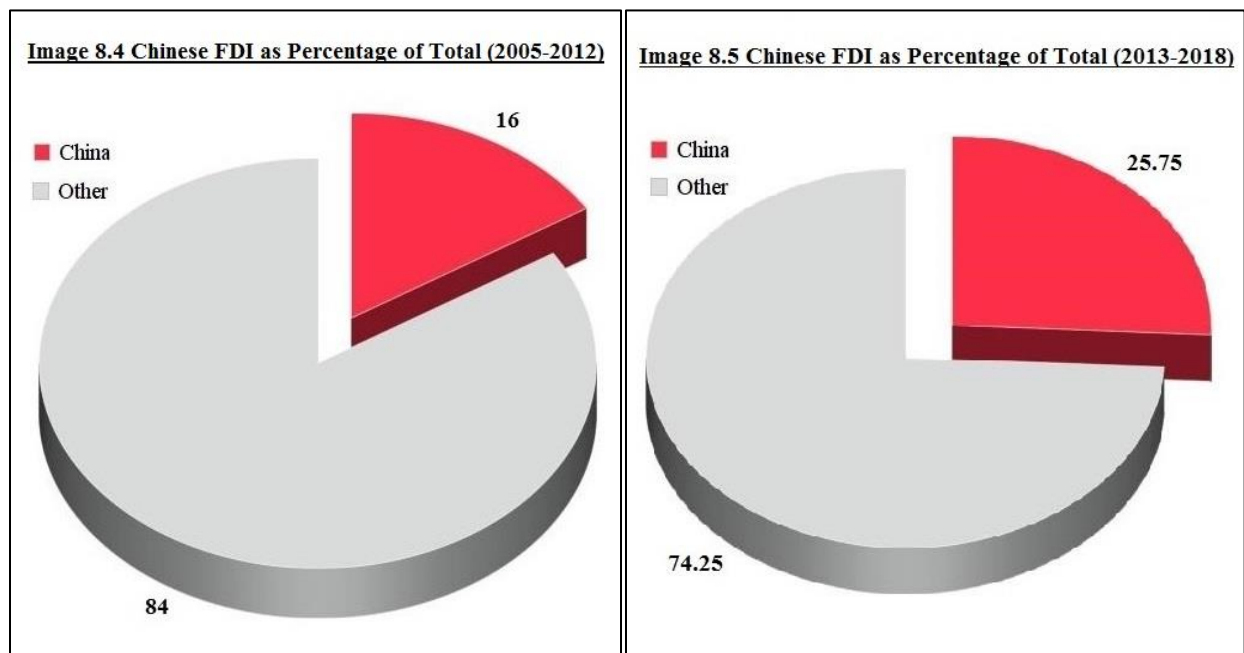
8.4 Jakarta's Reliance on Economic Ties with Beijing

By virtue of geographic proximity, increasing Chinese engagement with the ASEAN community more broadly, not to mention a large overseas Chinese diaspora living throughout the archipelago, Indonesia has very strong economic relations with the PRC. In 2017, China was Indonesia's largest export destination, receiving 14% of Indonesian exports compared with only 11% going to the United States and only 10% going to Japan (see Image 8.2). Similarly, that same year, Indonesia received 22% of

its total imports from the PRC, compared to only 12% from Singapore, its next biggest import source (see Image 8.3). Based on this data, there is no doubt that Indonesia is highly dependent on overall trade (both imports and exports) with China, its largest trading partner by a significant margin.

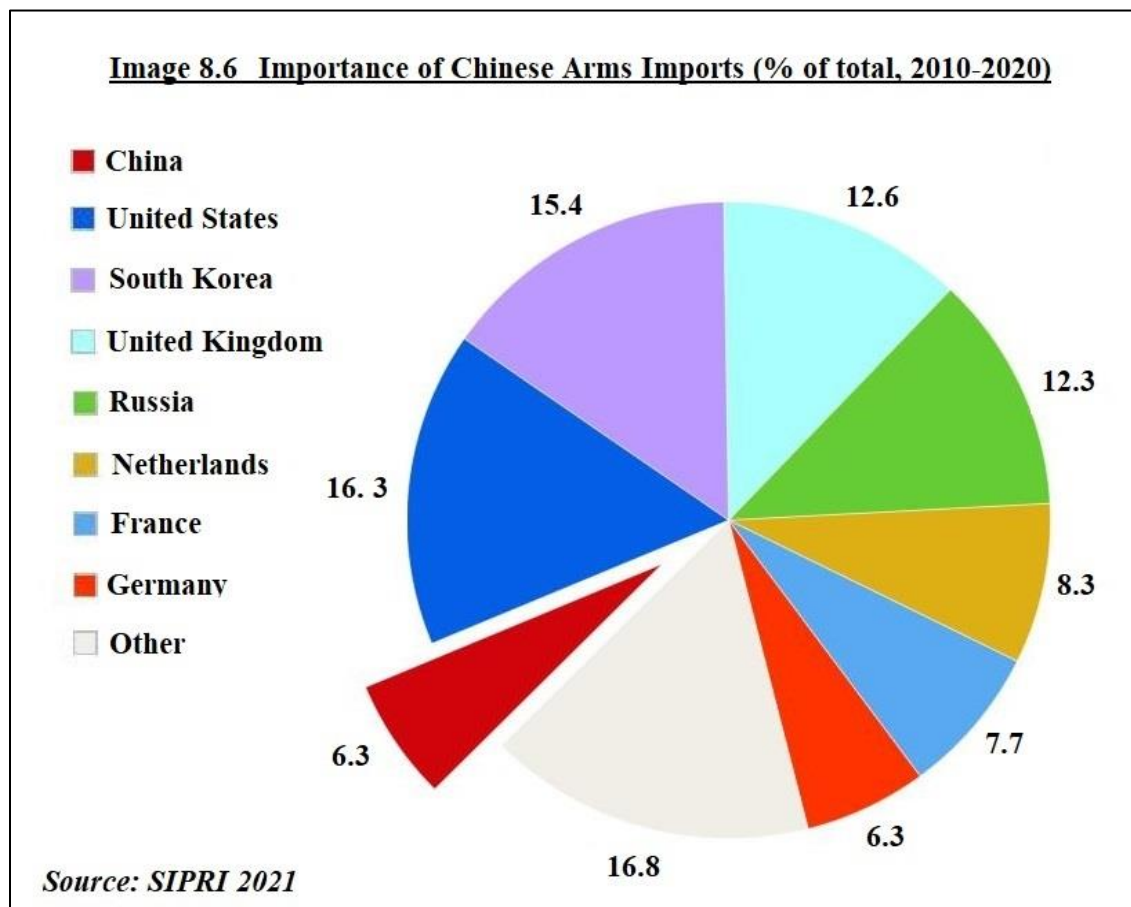


The same is true of Chinese investment, with Indonesia being among the first to get involved in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) when it was first launched in 2013 (Parameswaran 2019). Before the launch of the BRI, Chinese FDI into Indonesia from 2005 to 2012 was approximately US\$14.62 billion, representing 16% of the country's total FDI inflows (see Image 8.4). Over the next six years, Chinese FDI nearly doubled to US\$29.16 billion, representing 25.75% of total Indonesian FDI inflows over that period (see Image 8.5)(China Global Investment Tracker 2019; Index Mundi 2018). It is also worth noting that since Indonesia joined the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2014, the financing of five different projects in Indonesia has been approved by the bank, at a value of nearly US\$940 million (AIIB 2020). Given Indonesia's significant dependence on trade with China, as well as its apparent reliance on China for a quarter of its FDI, it is therefore quite surprising that Jakarta has not been more actively supportive of Chinese policies towards Islam. However, with strong opposition among Indonesian media (Anyu 2019; Antara News 2019), religious leaders (Nastiti & Ratri 2018; Karmini 2019) and citizens (RFA 2019), there are clearly competing considerations that must be taken into account by the Indonesian government.



8.5 Indonesian Security Dependence on China

The first independent variable demonstrated how Indonesia, despite having a lower level of support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in the XUAR than most of our case countries, nevertheless depends rather significantly on close commercial and investment relations with Beijing. By virtue of its geographic proximity to China, and the fact that Chinese goods are priced more accessibly for the average Indonesian citizen to be able to afford, Jakarta has looked past its areas of contention with Beijing to establish close economic ties. Similarly, Indonesia has developed fairly cooperative security relations with China, despite having a significant area of naval contention: The Natuna Islands and the broader South China Sea. Despite periodic clashes of naval forces and fishermen, as well as public criticism on the international stage over China's territorial claims to the entirety of the South China Sea, Jakarta has nevertheless depended on Chinese arms transfers for a reasonably significant percentage of its total arms imports, although it has undoubtedly the most diversified source of arms imports of any of our



case countries. Image 8.6 shows Indonesia's balanced arms imports from several Western democracies, as well as from Russia and China, which accounts for 6.3% of total arms purchased by Jakarta over the last ten years, tying China for 7th most important arms supplier. As China's arms transfers account for between 5-15%, Indonesia receives a score of 2/3 for this variable, as we conclude that it is moderately dependent on China for its arms imports.

Turning to Indonesia's strategic security cooperation with China, again we can see a moderate level of engagement, despite the ongoing issues of contention. For example, in May 2021, the two countries' navies held joint exercises near Jakarta with the aim of improving their coordination and communication, and in April 2021, China sent three ships to assist in the search and rescue operation involving a sunken Indonesian submarine (Zhou 2021). Despite such military cooperation with China, Indonesia frequently hosts joint exercises and patrol missions with other partners like Japan, Australia and the United States (Taylor 2016; Yuniar 2021). While Indonesia's Defence Minister, Prabowo Subianto, has met recently with his Chinese counterpart, Wei Fenghe (XinhuaNet 2020), similar meetings are also held with US (Defense 2018) and Australian (Laskar 2020) counterparts, demonstrating a sort of balancing act being carried out by Jakarta towards the major military powers in its region. In terms of security alliances, while Indonesian representatives have attended high-level Chinese security conferences like the Xiangshan Forum in 2018 (Ekman 2019), however this has also been significant speculation that Jakarta is considering closer collaboration with the Quadrilateral Dialogue (Beng & Erdoğan 2021), a security alliance consisting of the United States, Australia, India and Japan, often seen to be an effort to counter the rise of China. Evidently, while Indonesia is moderately dependent on security cooperation with China, it has also sought to balance this dependence by engaging significantly with Western democracies and other key military players in its region. Therefore, it is possible to rule out the significance of this independent variable in the case of Indonesia, as it does not appear to have influenced Jakarta's level of support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR.

8.6 Indonesian Vulnerability to Domestic Secessionism

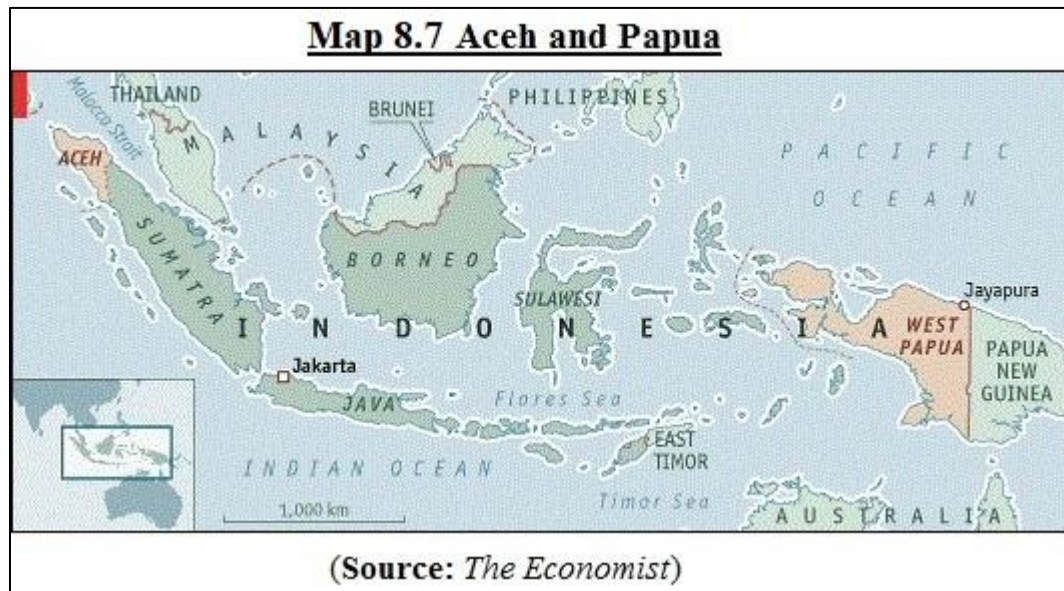
By virtue of being a large archipelago composed of thousands of islands, hundreds of languages, and numerous cultures and religious affiliations (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia 2020), the issue of secessionism has always plagued modern Indonesia. Aspinall & Berger (2019) describe several conflicts that took place simultaneously following the defeat of the Dutch colonialists in 1949, including between those who supported secular government and those supporting Islamic government, between communists and opponents of communism, as well as between supporters of different political leaders. However, “these conflicts, though often bloody, were primarily about reconfiguring the Indonesian nation-state rather than breaking it up” (Aspinall & Berger 2001, 1006). The ouster of President Sukarno and the accession to power of General Suharto led to the implementation of the so-called ‘New Order,’ consisting of centralized efforts to replace the traditional governance models of various islands with the form of government prevalent in Java, as well as social engineering initiatives in which impoverished farmers from over-populated islands were relocated to less populated peripheral islands in an effort to assimilate them (Aspinall & Berger 2019, 1007-08). As in China’s Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions, where similar policies have been put in place, such an approach leads to resentment from the local population which feels disenfranchised and powerless to defend their cultures and traditions. However, as Côté (2014) concluded in her study of relations between locals and migrant populations in China and Indonesia, the political liberalization undertaken in the latter over the past several decades has exacerbated inequalities and subsequently the tensions between locals and migrants, and provided the space for local populations to demand greater political representation or even secession (Côté 2014, iii).

There are a few key secessionist movements that have challenged Jakarta throughout its recent history, including movements advocating for independent states of Aceh, Papua (formerly Irian Jaya), Riau and East Kalimantan. An abundance of natural gas and timber, as well as oil and minerals, has made the Indonesian government very protective of these territories, due to their importance to the national economy (Tadjoeddin 2014, 42). However, a common theme across all three regions is that wealth from the extraction and export of their natural resources consistently failed to adequately enrich the local

populations. As Tadjoeeddin (2014) found, “a general pattern emerged from the secessionist challenges posed by the three resource-rich regions: local grievances originated from the feeling that the perceived or actual wealth of the regions was not commensurate with the expected general welfare of ‘their’ people, given their resource base” (Tadjoeeddin 2014, 44-46). This issue is also relevant to the Chinese cases of Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous regions, both of which are rich in natural resources, and both of which have among the lowest incomes in the country, with residents earning less than the national average by more than ¥15,000 and ¥20,000 respectively (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018). In the three Indonesian regions, this unequal distribution of resource wealth among the local population led to demands for greater autonomy, however ethnic violence only broke out in Aceh and Papua (Tadjoeeddin 2014, 48). In both Aceh and Papua, nationalist rebels did not depend on pilfering natural resources for their funding, instead relying on financial and social support from locals, which enabled them to remain ideologically driven in pursuit of greater autonomy for their respective regions (Tadjoeeddin 2014, 57-58). For this reason, both independence movements deserve to be analyzed in further detail.

The case of Aceh, located at the western-most corner of the Indonesian archipelago (see map 8.7), is home to a unique ethnic group (the Acehnese), and has a long history of independent administration, and for centuries was a “major military and trading power and a centre of Islamic religion and culture.” When Aceh was integrated into Indonesia following its independence, it became a microcosm for the broader conflict between those who supported the secular government and those who wanted Islam to form the “philosophical and legal basis of the Indonesian state” (Aspinall & Berger 2019, 1016). After Aceh was given ‘Special Territory’ status in 1958, this *Darul Islam* rebellion was temporarily resolved, as Aceh was permitted to manage its own legal, educational and religious affairs. The discovery of oil and natural gas in the region’s territory in the 1970s, and its subsequent exploitation by the central government, led to widespread anger among Acehnese who felt that their resources were being stolen without adequate compensation, leading to the formation of an independence movement called the Free Aceh Movement, or GAM, with widespread local support (1/1). Like in East Timor, violent suppression of this movement by the Indonesian military only fuelled the flames of secessionism, and calls for an

independence referendum followed the ouster of Suharto in 1998 (Aspinall & Berger 2019, 1016-17). No referendum was ever held.



Meanwhile, on the eastern-most corner of the archipelago (see map 8.7), Papua is home to numerous indigenous Melanesian tribes, including some which remain uncontacted (Survival International 2020). Papua was not ceded by the Dutch when Indonesia declared independence, but sovereignty over the territory was eventually transferred to Jakarta in 1962 under an agreement supported by the US and the UN in the Cold War context as a way to prevent Soviet influence taking hold in this region (Aspinall & Berger 2019, 1013-14). The Papuans were never given a choice as to whether to join Indonesia, and many rebelled against Indonesian rule, resulting in violent suppression by the military. Under the ‘New Order’ government of President Suharto, Papua experienced economic development through resource extraction, coupled with transmigration from other provinces of Indonesia. Just like in Aceh, the local population began to feel as though their resources were being stolen from them, and the Free Papua Movement (OPM) was formed in 1964. However, unlike in Aceh where the predominance of a single ethnic and linguistic group enabled the formation of a unified independence movement, the ethno-linguistic diversity in Papua made it impossible for the OPM to ever reach the same capacity as the

GAM. This did not prevent them from demanding independence in 1999 from Suharto's successor, President Habibie, but no such independence was ever granted (Aspinall & Berger 2019, 1014-15).

To address the sources of discontent following Suharto's removal, President Habibie implemented two new decentralization laws allowing for regional governance and economic distribution from the center to the provinces (Tadjoeddin 2014, 59-60). The people of Riau and East Kalimantan were content with these political reforms, but this was inadequate for the people of both Aceh and Papua, which were eventually granted greater autonomy by President Wahid in 2001. In Aceh, it was not until the Helsinki Agreement was signed in 2005 that violent separatism ceased, and the GAM began to fully participate in regional politics, transforming itself into the Aceh Party. In Papua, increased shares of resource profits and the formation of a Papuan People's Congress put an end to separatist demands (Tadjoeddin 2014, 60). Although tensions still flare up from time to time, particularly in Papua, where the arrest of 43 Papuan students for allegedly disrespecting the Indonesian flag in 2019 led to violent protests that were suppressed at the cost of at least twenty lives (New York Times 2019), secessionist movements no longer poses a genuine threat to Jakarta (0/1), and the in-group support for these movements has largely subsided (0/1). A likely explanation for this pacification of secessionist movements is the democratic inclusion of the GAM (now the Aceh Party) and other political parties advocating for greater autonomy of regions that had previously been the home of violent secessionists (1/1). Furthermore, the other major secessionist movements of Indonesia have largely been extinguished, so although Indonesia has historically been extremely vulnerable to secessionism, it has largely overcome this challenge through federalist compromises. With a score of 1/3 for this variable, we can conclude that Indonesia does not have a significant vulnerability to secessionism. It is possible that Indonesia's historic vulnerability to secessionism could have made Jakarta more sympathetic to Beijing's narrative that its repression against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the XUAR consists of an effort to contain a secessionist movement. However, conversely, it is equally possible that the Indonesian government's willingness to compromise with the various secessionist movements that have advocated for independence from the

archipelago in the past could logically inspire it to encourage other countries, including China, to do the same.

8.7 Indonesian Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

Of the six Muslim-majority countries we have studied for this research, Indonesia is just the fifth most affected by terrorism (Iran is the least affected), ranked 35th out of 160 countries in 2018. However, this represented a rise of seven ranks from 2017, as the archipelago saw one of the largest increases in deaths (39) from terrorism from one year to the next (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019). Islamist extremism has been the source of a number of these attacks, and there is a plethora of Islamist organizations active in Indonesia, each of which has its own agenda and ideological foundation. Wibisono et al. (2019) examined Indonesian extremist organizations through four dimensions: (1) political; (2) theological; (3) ritual; and (4) social. In the political dimension, moderate Islamic movements tend to accept and participate in politics, seeking “an integration of religious values within the current political systems (e.g. *Muhammadiyah*; *Nahdhatul Ulama*), whereas more extreme groups are characterized by “support for comprehensive *sharia*, support for the resurrection of the Caliphate, and the rejection of democracy” (e.g. *Darul Islam*; *Indonesian Mujahedeen Forum*; *Hizbut Tahrir*)(Wibisono et al. 2019, 4). On theological beliefs, moderates would see *Allah* as loving and peaceful, whereas extremists would emphasize *Allah*’s authoritarian persona, and would believe in “rigid interpretations [of theological tenets] and coercion to suppress different narratives” (Wibisono et al. 2019, 5). In Indonesia, the key difference between moderates and extremists in the ritual and social dimensions is the tolerance of diversity: while moderates are willing to incorporate non-Islamic traditions into their rituals and engage with non-Muslims in their day-to-day lives, extremists insist on ritual purity, and often blame non-Muslims for problems that exist within their communities (Wibisono et al. 2019, 6).

To understand the current context of Islamist extremism in Indonesia, it is important to briefly review the history of political Islam in the archipelago. Following independence in 1945, Sukarno sought to eliminate the influence of Islam in politics by refusing to make *sharia* the official legal system of the

country, and although his *Pancasila* ideology espoused belief in one “God”, it did not call Him *Allah* as the more extremist Muslims had wanted (Abuza 2007, 15-16). Although the Islamic political organizations like *Nahdhatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah* remained operational during this time, Suharto’s ‘New Order’ left no space for them to operate politically. However, this success at limiting Islam’s political influence opened an avenue for Islamist organizations to gain social influence, particularly with the growth of Saudi investment in the proliferation of Wahhabism (the Islamist ideology discussed in chapter 5) via NGOs like the Indonesian Islamic Dawa Council, as well as through cultural and educational exchanges (Abuza 2007, 18; Varagur 2020). Following the removal of Suharto from power in 1998, the people of Indonesia demanded democratic reforms, and for leadership, they turned to the “Muslim leaders [who] were seen as uncorrupted by the New Order regime, and had nation-wide appeal” (Abuza 2007, 20). As new political parties were once again allowed to form, several Islamist parties were created and quickly gained popular support, winning more than 20% of the vote in the 2004 elections (Abuza 2007, 24). In the most recent 2019 election, Islamist political parties won over 30% of the vote and around 30% of the seats, however this does not adequately reflect the growing influence of Islamist extremism in Indonesian politics, and the growing support from the local population (1/1). Leading presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto, a former general from the Suharto era, received broad support for Islamist parties leading up to the election, so “under pressure to increase his Islamic credentials, Jokowi chose Indonesia’s most senior Islamic cleric: Ma’ruf Amin, head of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), who was also NU’s supreme leader,” to be his running mate and ultimately become the Vice President (Arifianto 2019). This followed the infamous jailing of Jakarta’s Christian former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (aka. Ahok) for two years under charges of blasphemy for citing the Qur’an during a campaign speech, which led to massive protests in Jakarta and his eventual electoral defeat in 2017 (Lamb 2017).

Beyond the threat of increasing Islamization of Indonesian politics, the archipelago has also seen the growth of numerous Islamist terror organizations in recent years (1/1). The group *Jemaah Islamiyah*, founded in the early 1990s by two Islamic clerics living in exile in Malaysia and affiliated with *Al Qaeda*,

is driven by its “stated goals [...] to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state and then to ultimately create a pan-Islamic state in Southeast Asia that would also include Malaysia, southern Thailand, Brunei, and the southern Philippines” (Abuza 2007, 38). It became particularly deadly in the early 2000s, claiming responsibility for the Bali bombings (2002), the bombing of the Marriott hotel (2003) and the Australian embassy (2004) in Jakarta, and suicide bombings of Balinese restaurants (2005), which killed more than 240 people altogether (Abuza 2007, 37). Following the Bali bombings, Indonesia passed an Anti-Terror Law in 2003, giving extraordinary powers to investigators, prosecutors and judges, including the right to detain terrorism suspects for up to one week based only on preliminary evidence (which can include intelligence reports), as well as the right to examine suspects’ mail or packages and intercept suspects’ communications (Juwana 2005, 298). Following attacks on churches and police stations in Java and Sumatra in May 2018 carried out by the Islamic State-affiliated *Jemaah Ansharut Daulah*, Indonesia further expanded its Anti-Terror Law to give the Indonesian military a role in counter-terrorism, despite significant opposition (Nabbs-Keller 2018). Furthermore, many of the Islamist terror groups operating in Indonesia have been condemned by the international community and even sanctioned as terrorist organizations (1/1) (UNSC 2020). Evidently, religious extremism and terrorist violence remains a serious threat in Indonesia (3/3), however it is difficult to assess the extent to which the country’s vulnerability to such violence has influenced its support for China’s treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, as counter-terrorism has not been a significant point of cooperation between the two countries.

8.8 Analysis & Conclusion

In comparison with the other Muslim-majority countries we have examined so far, Indonesia has low overall levels of support for China’s policies towards Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. The little bit of support Indonesia has given Beijing has come from the state’s willingness to deport Uyghurs to China, although government officials have nevertheless spoken openly in condemnation of Beijing’s policies. In a way, this chapter has presented arguments for which variables have most influenced Indonesian opposition to Chinese policies, and as an outlier, this case provide an opportunity to truly test the

explanatory ability of the independent variables. Jakarta's low levels of support for Beijing on this and other issues appears to disprove the hypothesis about economic dependence, as Indonesia remains highly dependent on strong trade and investment ties with China. Similarly, the security dependence argument appears invalidated by the fact that Indonesia has opposed China's treatment of its Muslim minorities despite purchasing a significant percentage of its arms from Chinese suppliers, and engaging regularly in joint exercises with the People's Liberation Army. Meanwhile, Jakarta's ability to overcome the threat of secessionism in recent years by granting greater autonomy to the resource-rich provinces of Aceh and Papua may have reduced its level of sympathy towards Beijing in its vulnerability to secessionist movements among the Uyghurs. Similarly, its democratic, transparent approach to combatting violent religious extremism may have reduced any genuine support it would have given to Beijing, despite both countries facing a high degree of vulnerability to this growing threat. Overall, it would appear that *realpolitik* considerations like economic growth and domestic security have been largely disregarded by Indonesia's government, which risked Chinese retaliation by advocating for the rights of Chinese Muslims in the XUAR. Instead, the Indonesian government appears to be acting on a moral agenda to defend fellow Muslims facing persecution in China, perhaps owing to a mixture of pressure from opposition, civil society and religious authorities; respect for the values of human rights, self-determination and democratic representation; allegiances to Western powers like the United States and Australia; and animosity towards Beijing for its position on the South China Sea dispute. However, Jakarta's desire to expand Chinese investment through the Maritime Silk Road, and to continue to grow its exports to the large Chinese market, may be the likeliest explanation for its willingness to deport Uyghurs back to China where they will likely face detention.

Chapter 9 - Turkey: Ethnic Ties, Secessionist Movements and the Belt and Road

“The incidents in [Xinjiang] China are, simply put, a genocide. There’s no point in interpreting this otherwise.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, July 2009

“Turkey is firmly committed to strengthening its cooperation with China in all areas [...] Turkey shares China's vision when it comes to serving world peace, preserving global security and stability, promoting multilateralism, and upholding the principle of free trade.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, July 2019

9.1 Introduction

The Republic of Turkey is located at the crossroads of three continents, with Europe to the West, Asia to the East and Africa to the South (see Map 9.1). As such, it has long been a hub for travellers transiting to one of these three continents, or simply for tourists seeking to learn more about this intersection of ancient civilizations, with an average of 1.8 million monthly tourist arrivals between 1993 and 2020 (Trading Economics 2020). Turkey is home to around 82 million people, approximately 99.8% of whom are Muslim, the vast majority adhering to the Sunni sect of Islam, giving it the eighth largest population of Muslims in the world (CIA World Factbook 2020). There are many reasons for selecting Turkey as a case for this research, including its rich history as a center of trade and later as a protector of the Muslim holy lands (discussed below), however there are two reasons that stand out above the rest. First, until an official diplomatic mission by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to China in July 2019, the Turkish government had been the only government of a Muslim-majority country to speak out against China’s treatment of its Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, with the president even going as far as

calling the situation a ‘genocide’ in 2009 (Reuters 2009). As recently as February 2019, Turkey’s foreign ministry was condemning China’s re-education camps for Muslims as “a cause of great shame for humanity” (Al Jazeera 2019). The Turkish government’s defence of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities facing arbitrary detention and forced assimilation in Xinjiang is not so surprising, given their shared ethno-linguistic ties with the Uyghurs and other central Asian Turkic Muslims (Ercilasun & Ercilasun 2018). What is more surprising is Turkey’s sudden change in official position regarding China’s treatment of its Muslim minorities, the motivation for which this chapter will seek to understand. But before we can elaborate on the various potential explanations for this political decision, we must contextualize contemporary Sino-Turkish relations by outlining some of the key moments in its history.



9.2 The Complex History of Contemporary Sino-Turkish Relations

Due to its geographic location on the doorstep of three continents, it is not surprising that the people living in what is now modern-day Turkey interacted to a notable extent with China even before the Common Era, with each side profiting extensively from commercial relations developed along the Silk Road. Furthermore, genetic studies of Turkish ancestry have proven that modern-day Turks have

ancestral ties to Central Asia (including Uyghurs), North Asia (Mongolians) and East Asia (Han Chinese), so migration between regions has clearly been taking place for centuries (Hodoğlugil & Mahley 2012). During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1912), although westward expansion did take place, neither Chinese empire was “ever interested in expanding further into West Asia, and thus never confronted the Safavid or Ottoman empires” (Horesh 2012, 224-225). Contemporary relations between these two countries began not long after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Turkey signed the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with the Republic of China (ROC) in 1934, and ambassadors were exchanged in the years that followed (Fidan 2013). However, with the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war and the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Turkey’s embassy followed the ROC to Taiwan, and relations with Mainland China were cut off. During the Korean War (1950-1953), Turkey fought with the United Nations Command on the side of South Korea, fighting against Chinese troops who aligned with North Korea (United States Forces Korea, 2020). The two countries also took opposite sides at the start of the Cold War, as Turkey was a United States ally and member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while the PRC supported its Communist ally, the Soviet Union (Söylemez 2017, 2). Then, following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, Turkey joined many other Western countries and shifted its official diplomatic recognition from the ROC to the PRC in 1971 (Fidan 2013). Relations began to expand significantly when President Kenan Evren, who had been installed in power following the 1980 military coup, visited Beijing and Shanghai in 1982 to enhance economic ties with non-Western countries (Fidan 2013). However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, several sovereign Turkic states were formed in Central Asia, “convincing Turkey to use its leadership position in the ‘Turkic world’ to expand its diplomatic influence eastward,” even advocating for an independent Uyghur nation, despite Chinese frustration (Söylemez 2017, 3).

Relations began to improve again in the second half of the decade, with the two countries signing agreements to co-produce missiles in 1996, Turkey purchasing US\$43 million worth of Chinese weapons in 1997, and issuing a decree in 1998 banning government officials from attending pro-Uyghur events (Söylemez 2017, 3-4). In 2000, during a visit to Turkey by then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the two

sides signed a joint communiqué elevating their relations to an ‘enhanced partnership’. Under the government of Prime Minister (now President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in 2002, the relations have continued to evolve, with growing bilateral trade, joint military exercises in 2010 and the further elevation of their alliance to the level of ‘strategic partnership’ that same year (Söylemez 2017, 4). This is even though Erdoğan has spoken out against China’s treatment of Uyghurs, and Turkey has consistently offered protection of and support to members of the movement for an independent ‘East Turkestan’ (Shichor 2009, 24-28). Nevertheless, ties have continued to improve in recent years, with Turkey joining China’s Belt and Road Initiative, and Turkish ships making visits to Chinese ports and vice versa (Söylemez 2017, 7-8). According to Chen (2019), the attempted coup by the Gülen Movement in July 2016 forced Erdoğan to crack down on political opponents, and Turkey’s relations with Western democracies subsequently deteriorated (Chen 2019, 2-5). As a result, Erdoğan sought to improve ties with China, seen as an ally in the fight against terrorist organizations like the Gülen Movement, expanding security and economic cooperation with the Chinese to advance its own domestic and international agenda (Chen 2019, 6-9).

However, while a rapprochement has undoubtedly been taking place, Turkey continues to oppose and conflict with China on many different issues. For one thing, while respecting the so-called ‘One China Policy’ and refusing to establish official relations with Taiwan, Ankara nevertheless pursues close economic relations with Taipei, much to Beijing’s frustration. However, although interested in pursuing a Free Trade Agreement with Taiwan and developing an arrangement through which double taxation can be avoided for Taiwanese and Turkish businesspeople operating in each other’s jurisdictions, Colakoglu (2019) has assessed that such pacts are unlikely to move forward in the current context of a rapprochement with Beijing. Turkey has similarly remained neutral in the controversial issue of Beijing’s imposition of a new National Security Law in Hong Kong in July 2020, co-signing neither the statement in support of the law, nor the statement in opposition to it at the UN Human Rights Council (Albert 2020). In terms of Turkey’s multilateral support for China’s economic ambitions, as discussed in the previous section, its participation in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates growing Turkish

support for Beijing's projects. This is also exemplified by Ankara's rapid accession to the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a founding member in 2015. Turkey has also made significant financial contributions to the AIIB, resulting in Ankara holding the tenth most votes in the bank (AIIB 2015). As will be discussed in the next section, Turkish government officials (including Erdoğan) have even stopped speaking out against China's treatment of Uyghurs since February 2019, and the rest of this chapter will examine the various possible explanations for this sudden change in Turkish policy.

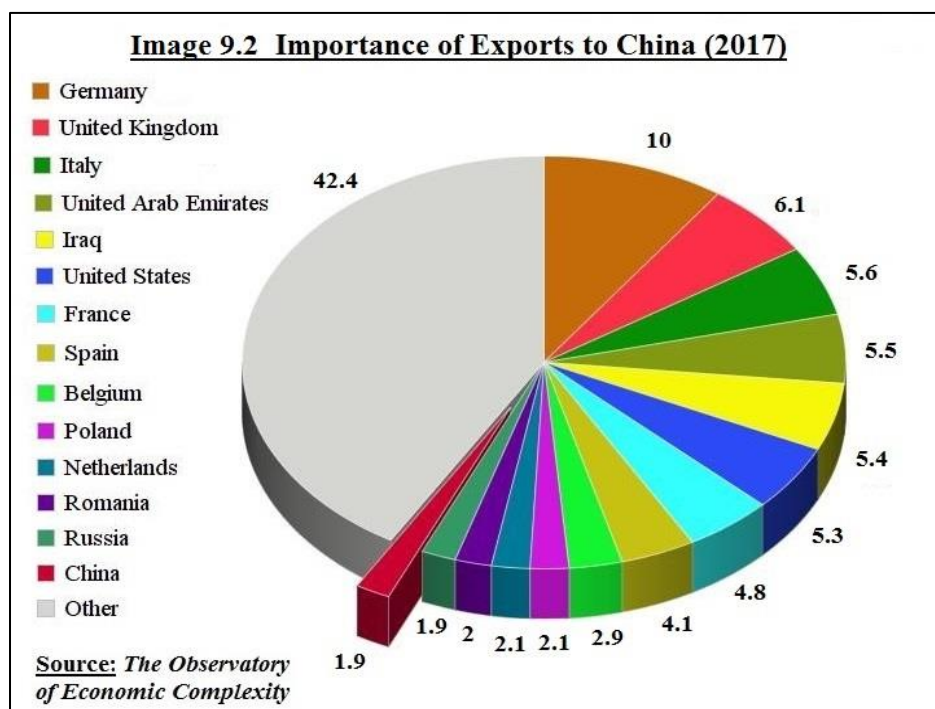
9.3 Limited Turkish Support for China's Treatment of Muslims

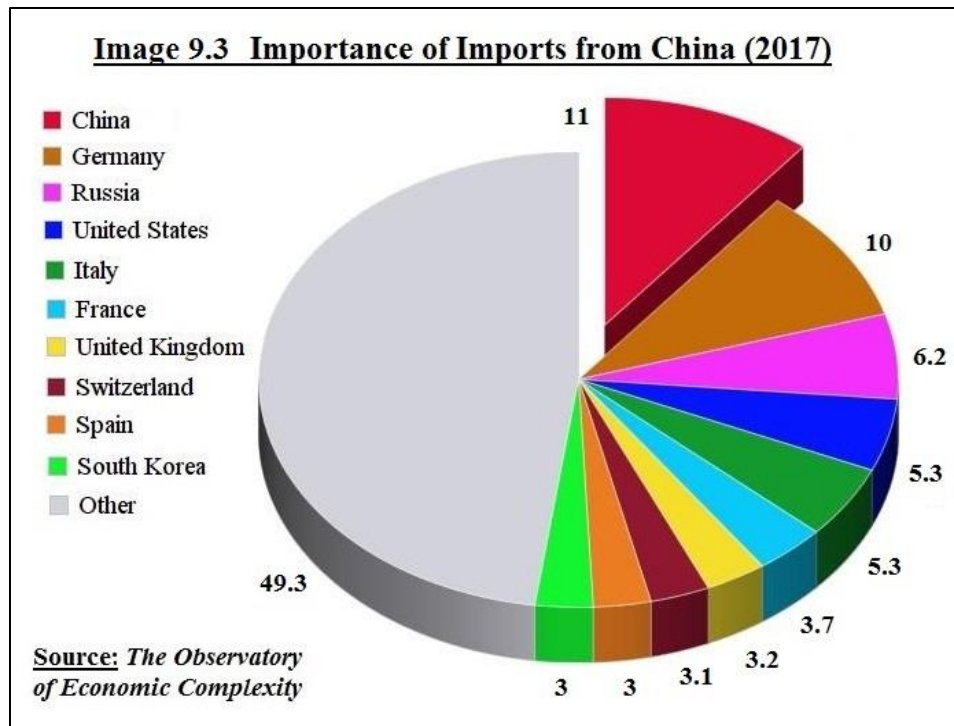
As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, what makes Turkey so fascinating to study for the purposes of this dissertation is its ethno-linguistic ties to many of the Muslim minorities in China, which has historically resulted in Turkish officials condemning China's poor treatment of its Turkic Muslim population. However, this government criticism abruptly paused in early 2019, just as an official visit at the highest level was being prepared (President Erdoğan visited Beijing in July 2019). During that visit, the Turkish president allegedly told Chinese President Xi Jinping that he "hopes the peoples of China's Xinjiang live happily in peace and prosperity," but he did not raise the issue of the Xinjiang re-education camps with his counterpart, apparently striking a politically neutral stance on this sensitive issue (Mai 2019). However, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu publicly claimed to have raised the issue of the Uyghur camps with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during a visit in March 2021 (Al Jazeera 2021). Furthermore, at the UN Human Rights Council in July 2019 (Axios 2019), at the UN General Assembly in October 2019 (A/HRC/41/G/17), as well as at the UN General Assembly in October 2020 (GA/SHC/4287) and the 47th session of the Human Rights Council in June 2021 (Permanent Mission of the PRC to the UN in Geneva 2021), Turkey did not join many other Muslim-majority countries in defending the camps, so for the indicator of government support, we give Turkey a score of 0/2. On the question of whether Turkey has deported Uyghur and other Chinese refugees back to China, there is no disputing that the country has long harboured Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims escaping repression in the PRC. However, despite constant denials from Turkish authorities, evidence has surfaced

to suggest that Ankara has begun to deport Uyghurs back to China, which they have done through third countries in Central Asia, perhaps to reduce the risk of public backlash (Ullah 2020).. Therefore, on this measure, we would give it a score of 1/1. Overall, with a score of 1/3, Turkey remains one of the case countries with the lowest levels of support for Beijing's treatment of Muslim minorities in the XUAR.

9.4 Turkey's Growing Dependence on Economic Ties with China

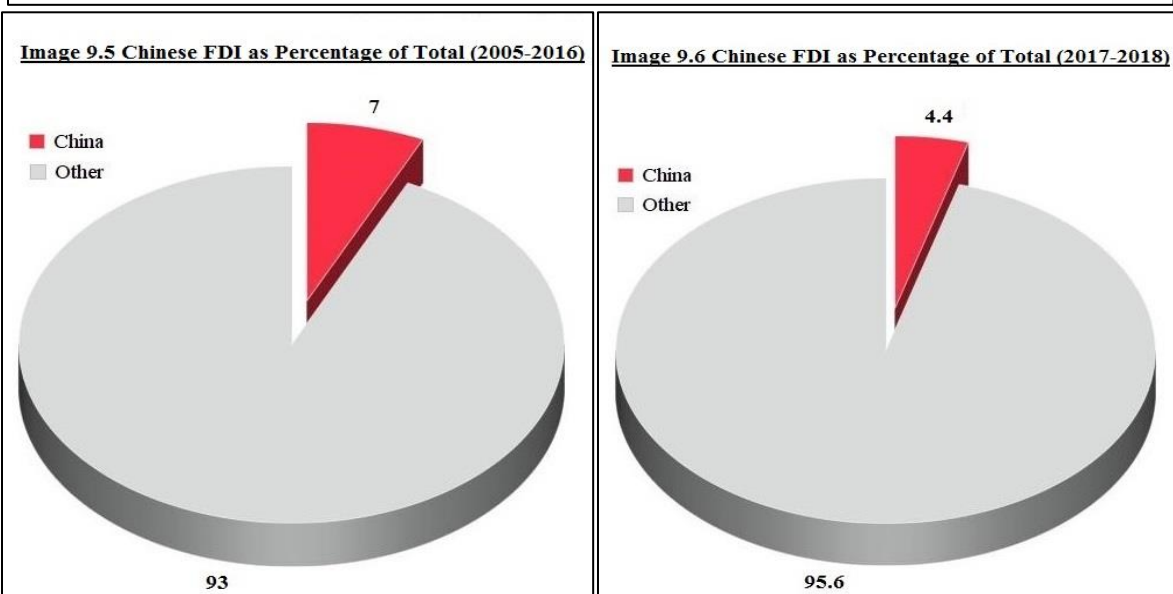
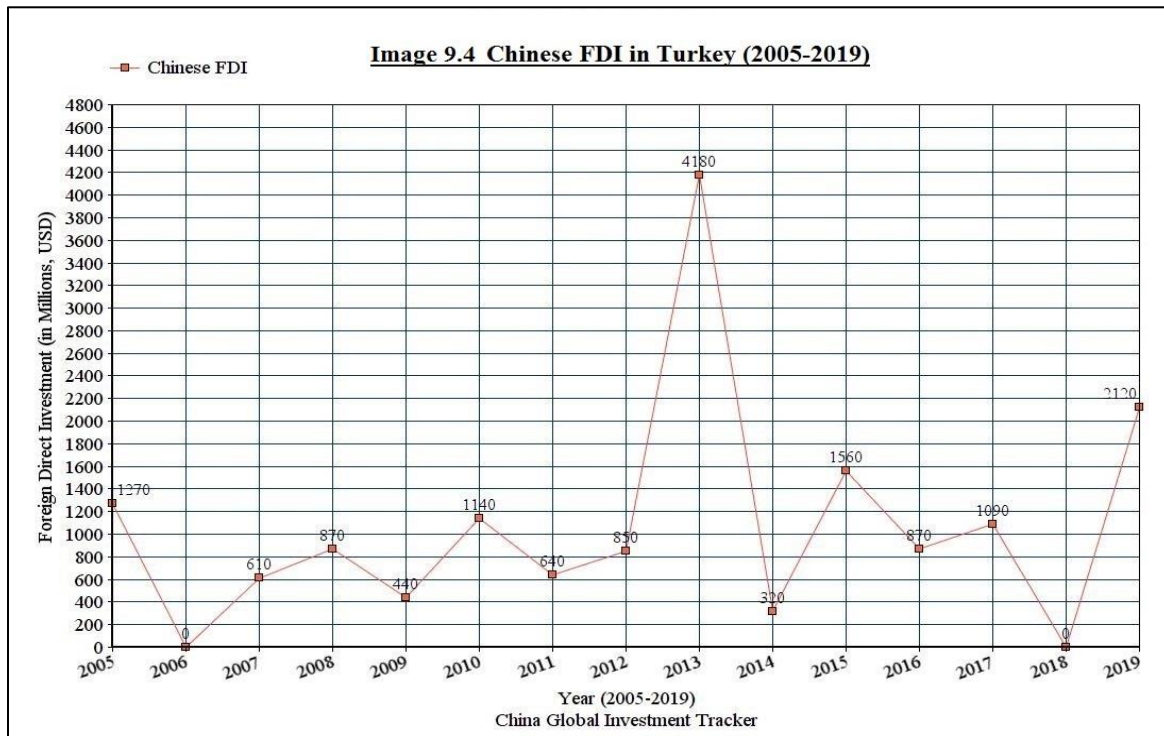
By virtue of its geographical location at the intersection of three continents, Turkey has been able to engage in commercial relations with a broad range of partners, which has limited its dependence on any single country. Naturally, its proximity to Western Europe and its current candidacy to join the European Union have encouraged strong trading relations with European countries. Nevertheless, due to China's dominance in the export of certain high value-added products like broadcasting equipment and computers, it was still Turkey's largest source of imports in 2017, representing 11% of Turkey's total imports (see Image 9.2). On the other hand, China is only Turkey's thirteenth largest export destination, receiving only 1.9% of Turkish exports in 2017 (see Image 9.3). This demonstrates a fundamental lack of dependence on exports to China, and Turkish imports from China could also potentially be imported from another source.





Although the commercial data presented above is from 2017 — before Turkey’s shift in policy stance on China’s Muslim re-education camps — and could have experienced some marked changes since 2019, it nevertheless demonstrates that Turkey has not historically been dependent on trade with China. Similarly, Chinese FDI into Turkey (see Image 9.4) has not played a very significant role in the country’s total FDI. From 2005 to 2016, Chinese FDI accounted for only 7% of Turkey’s total FDI at US\$12.75 billion (see Image 9.5), and in the first two years (2017-2018) of Turkish involvement in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese FDI only made up 4.4% of total FDI inflows at US\$1.09 billion (see Image 9.6)(China Global Investment Tracker 2019; Index Mundi 2018). Nevertheless, Turkey has been ramping up its efforts to engage with the BRI, even launching its own parallel ‘Middle Corridor’ project consisting of railways connecting Central Asia to Europe through the Caucasus. This Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway has the capacity to carry a million passengers and 6.5 million tons of goods each year, and is a central piece of Turkey’s involvement in China’s BRI (Colakoğlu 2019). Furthermore, since joining the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2016, the financing for five major projects has been approved by the bank at an overall value of US\$ 1.4 billion (AIIB 2020). Even more recently,

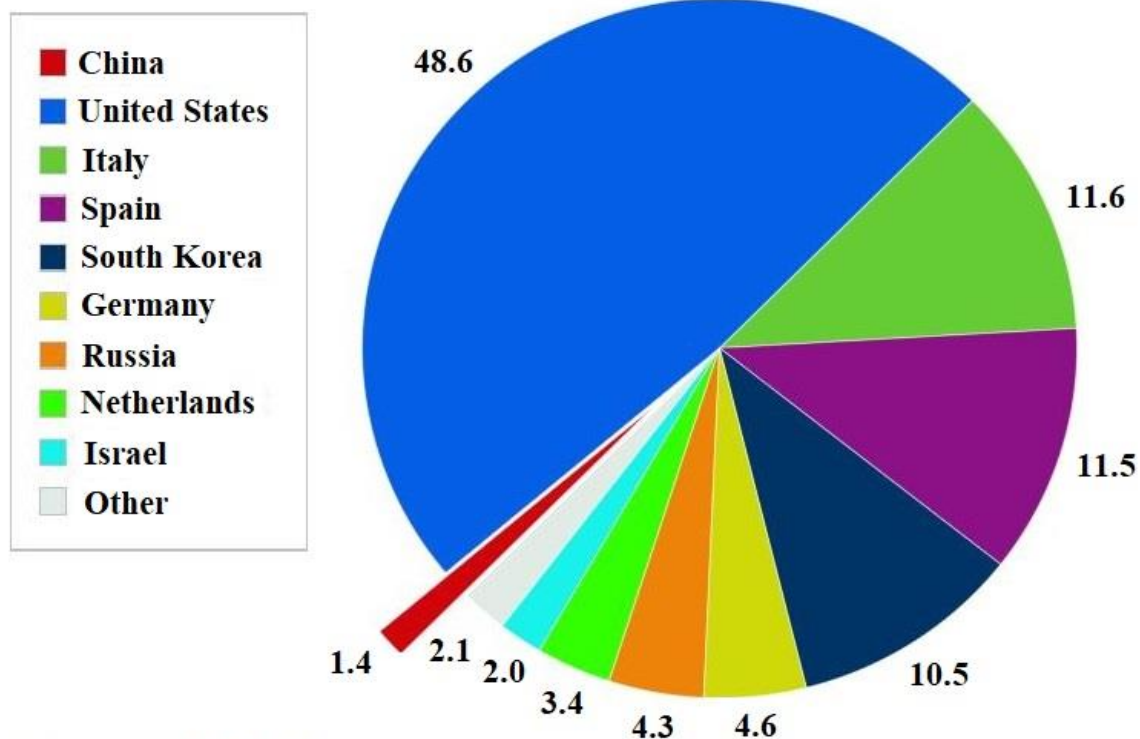
China announced a bailout of US\$ 3.6 billion for Turkey in the form of infrastructural investments through the BRI, which was perceived as an effort to defend Turkey in the face of US threats to “obliterate and destroy” its economy (Spengler 2019). Despite this recent rapprochement, Turkey’s level of economic dependence on China remains low, so it is quite unlikely that this is the only reason for Ankara’s recent shift in policy towards Beijing.



9.5 Turkey's Security Dependence on China

Much like its economic relations with China, Turkey's security relations with China are quite minimal, as Ankara continues to have much closer relations with Western democracies. This is quite likely due to the fact that Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a political and military alliance between 28 European countries, Canada and the United States, which jointly address security issues that affect any of its members (NATO 2021). Image 9.7 clearly demonstrates that the United States is Turkey's largest supplier of arms and military equipment, and most of its other important suppliers are Western democracies. Meanwhile, China's arms transfers to Turkey are negligible, representing only 1.4% of total imports from 2010-2020, and 0% from 2015-2020, earning Turkey a score of 1/3 for this variable.

Image 9.7 Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2010-2020)



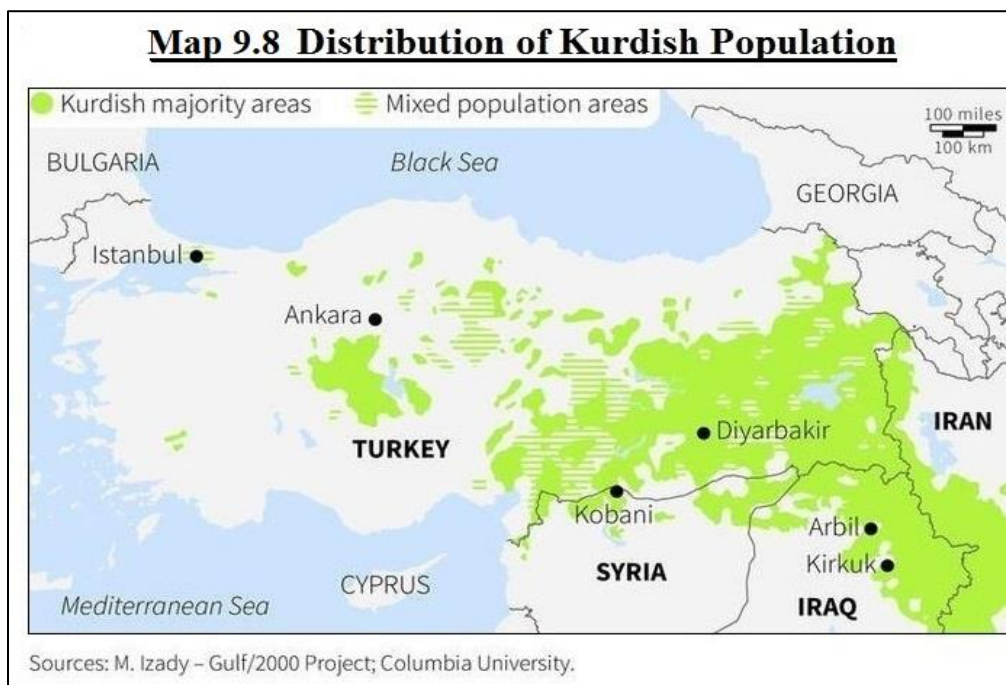
Source: SIPRI 2021

However, despite Ankara's minimal dependence on Beijing for its security, and despite its close strategic military alliance with Western democracies in the context of NATO, Turkey has nevertheless engaged in joint military exercises with China over the course of the last decade. In September 2010, Turkey and China held secret aerial drills at a Turkish training space in the Central Anatolia region, much to the irritation of the Americans, who had supplied the F-4 fighter jets used by the Turkish Air Force (Kemal 2010). Turkey also sent observers to the Sino-Russian joint naval and aerial exercises taking place in Siberia in 2018 (Ergan 2018), and held high-level talks with Chinese Brigadier General Chen Qingsong in Ankara in 2018, when both sides committed to expanding military cooperation (Gurcan 2018). Another apparent security alliance-related contradiction is the fact that Turkey is a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and in 2013, then-Prime Minister Erdogan apparently toyed with the possibility of dropping Turkey's bid for membership in the European Union in exchange for full membership into the SCO (Dalay 2013). While these anecdotes demonstrate a degree of security and defence cooperation between Turkey and China, it would be incorrect to exaggerate the level of Turkish security dependence on China, given its continued strong ties to NATO.

9.6 Turkish Vulnerability to Separatism

It should come as no surprise to anyone following the news in recent years that Turkey is extremely vulnerable to secessionism, particularly by the Kurdish minority living along its southeastern border. Kurds make up just under 20% of the Turkish population, numbering approximately 15.5 million (CIA World Factbook 2020). However, like the Chinese Uyghur ethnic minority, ethnic Kurds make up the majority of the population in 13 provinces of the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions, and form a significant minority in another 8 provinces (Mutlu 1996, 526-527)(see Map 9.8). What makes the Kurdish question so challenging for the government in Ankara is that it transcends Turkey's borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The region at the crossroads of these four countries has long been known as Kurdistan, and the Kurdish minorities of each country make up the majority ethnic group in this broader region. Like Xinjiang, Kurdistan is rich in natural resources —namely petroleum— which makes it a vital

economic lifeline for the four countries that currently profit from its wealth (New York Times, 2018). Also, like Xinjiang, the wealth from natural resources has not been equitably distributed to the Kurdish citizens of the region, leaving these provinces underdeveloped compared to the rest of Turkey (Ünver 2015, 116-118). However, unlike Xinjiang, the transnational nature of Kurdish nationalism and secessionism makes it challenging to implement a unified response across all four countries that make up the region of Kurdistan. Turkey's approach to containing the threat of Kurdish separatism has closely resembled Beijing's approach to Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, which we will outline below.



We take up this story after the end of World War I, when the victorious allied powers forced the defeated Ottoman Empire to sign the Treaty of Sèvres in August 1920, making “Kurdistan an autonomous province under Ottoman suzerainty, with the possibility of petitioning the League of Nations for independence after one year” (Howard 2016, 89). As the modern Turkish constitution was being developed in 1924, Atatürk sought to foster a sense of Turkish nationalism among all ethnic groups, even those that were not ethnic Turks. However, this idea was quickly proven to be window dressing, as new laws were passed making Turkish ethnicity a prerequisite to be employed by the state, whether in the bureaucracy or in the military (Kuzu 2018, 71-72). As early as 1924, Ankara “banned Kurdish schools,

associations, and publications,” in an effort to assimilate the Kurdish ethnic minority, and in 1928, it launched a campaign to eliminate the use of non-Turkish languages in the country (Kuzu 2018, 73-75). These policies, along with a centralization of power away from peripheral Kurdish provinces and a secularization of Turkish politics all provoked the formation of a Kurdish resistance, beginning with an armed rebellion led by Kurdish Sheikh Said in 1925, which forced Atatürk to declare martial law to suppress the insurgency. Additional measures were subsequently taken to further assimilate the Kurdish population, including Resettlement Law no. 8885 (May 1926), which involved resettling Turks to Kurdish-majority provinces, and vice versa, resulting in further rebellions by the Kurds who felt they were being increasingly marginalized (Kuzu 2018, 82-85).

For several decades, Turkish assimilation policies seemed to be working, as any Kurdish rebellions were easily quelled and a ban on ethnically-based organizations (including political parties) left few options for Kurdish separatists to mobilize widespread support (Kuzu 2018, 86). As Turkey underwent democratic consolidation during the 1960s, Kurds gained greater access to tertiary education, but economic inequality remained prevalent within Kurdish regions. During this time, any attempt to mobilize opposition to the status quo was thwarted as “the state moved quickly to shut down cultural magazines and Kurdish-language newspapers, charging the editors and writers with communism or separatism” (Marcus 2007, 19). As the Iraqi Kurdish independence struggle heated up across the border, some Turkish Kurds felt inspired to form the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP) in 1965, becoming the first Kurdish nationalist group in Turkey since the last rebellions had been crushed in the 1930s. Kurdish students in Turkey also formed their own group called the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearth (DDKO) in 1969, around the same time that leftist militants began launching violent attacks in pursuit of a socialist revolution. Finally, amid this instability, worker strikes caused the Turkish military to take control of the country through a coup in 1971, effectively outlawing all political organizations including Kurdish nationalist groups (Marcus 2007, 20-22). The next year, while protesting against the Turkish security forces’ killing of leftist militants, a young Kurdish university student named Abdullah Ocalan was detained and jailed for seven months, during which he is said to have learned a great deal

about both his Kurdish identity and the strategies for launching a revolution (Marcus 2007, 25). Over the next few years, Ocalan would form networks with other Kurdish nationalists, and ultimately formed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1978, which would develop into both a political and militant organization driven by both socialist and nationalist ideologies (Marcus 2007, 26-40), which plagued and continues to plague the Turkish government in Ankara to this day.

The government tried desperately to limit the growth in support for the PKK, implementing a host of laws to restrict the rights of the Kurdish population to openly express their unique ethno-cultural identity, and re-implementing deportation policies that forced Kurds to relocate away from Kurdish regions. The declaration of a state of emergency in July 1987 enabled Turkish officials and security forces to violate the human rights of the Kurdish nationalists in an effort to destroy the PKK, including by restricting the press, free expression and the right to speak one's mother tongue (Kuzu 2018, 88). Although the PKK has been listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, the European Union and a number of other countries (Turkey MFA 2020), it has also received support from several countries, including weapons and training from Greece (The Irish Times 1999), demonstrating a degree of international recognition of the organization. Also, worth noting, the United Nations and several of its member states have refused to list the PKK as a terrorist organization, including most notably China. According to Dorsey (2019), in meetings between Chinese and Turkish officials, the Chinese have often argued that their "massive effort to fundamentally alter the belief system of Turkic Muslims, packaged as a fight against political violence, is no different from Turkish attitudes toward the Kurds," essentially suggesting that the two countries should support each other's efforts to eliminate these groups, which they accuse of posing a serious threat to peace and stability (Dorsey 2019). Perhaps this is why Turkey has made a more concerted effort in recent years to demonstrate support for China's counter-terrorism strategies, even becoming a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation security coalition in 2012 (Xinhua 2012). Thus, it is quite clear that with an active Kurdish separatist movement advocating for secession from Turkey (1/1), with significant in-group support from Kurdish Turks (1/1) and political representation by the PKK in the Turkish parliament (1/1), Turkey undoubtedly faces significant

vulnerability to secessionism (3/3). This could play an important role in determining the recent policy shifts by Ankara to offer some degree of support to Beijing, which repeatedly claims to be facing a similar secessionist threat from the Uyghurs in the XUAR.

9.7 Turkish Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

By virtue of its centrality and its popularity as a tourist hub, Turkey has become somewhat of a hotspot for Islamist terror organizations, with several active religious extremist groups operating in the country, although most are based in neighbouring countries. Among them are the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* (ISIS), *Al Qaeda*, the *Muslim Brotherhood*, and *Hamas*, with *Turkish Hezbollah* as the only major home-grown terror group (Counter Extremism Project 2020). Many of these groups have orchestrated terrorist attacks in Turkey, which has forced Ankara to respond with a whole host of new policy initiatives, including (1) a police outreach program to prevent radicalization in at-risk communities, (2) the promotion of a moderate Islam by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) to undercut extremist messaging, and (3) a reward program to incentivize Turkish citizens to inform police about suspected terrorists (U.S. Embassy in Turkey 2014). In addition to these measures, Turkish security forces continue to conduct military raids against targets suspected of planning terrorist attacks within the country (Counter Extremism Project 2020). Ankara has also increased its international counter-terrorism efforts, hitting ISIS targets in neighbouring Syria in what is undoubtedly an effort to limit the group's impact in Turkey (Hannon 2017). Evidently, these measures have had some degree of success in reducing Turkey's vulnerability to Islamist terrorism. In 2018, although Turkey was still ranked as highly impacted by terrorism, placing 16th out of 160 countries, it also saw a significant decrease in the number of deaths from terrorist attacks, with only 40 deaths in 2018 compared to 123 in 2017 (Institute for Economics & Peace 2019). However, religious extremism has not only been the cause of terrorist attacks in Turkey in recent years; it has also become a central part of the political landscape under President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Before forming the AKP in 2001, Erdoğan had gained a reputation as a prominent Islamist in the country. He was even prevented from running for a seat in the 2002 national election following a four month prison sentence in 1998 for reciting a poem which was said to incite religious hatred (Gol 2016). Since the AKP came to power in 2002, Turkey has witnessed a fundamental change in the influence of Islam in Turkish politics and society. Not only has the Diyanet grown in size and funding, it has also become “more conservative in its religious interpretations and embraced an Islamist approach to religion” (Sarfati 2019, 2). Sarfati (2019) argues that the AKP has not only consolidated its control over the “state religious establishment and religious schools, it has also co-opted most of the country’s Islamic civil society organizations by incorporating them in the party’s patronage network” (Sarfati 2019, 3). Many have accused Erdoğan of pursuing an Islamist agenda in Turkey, including by punishing those who criticize Islam, forcing public schools to adopt conservative Islamic practices and gradually enabling the Diyanet to integrate *sharia* legal principles into Turkish law (Cagaptay 2018). Even in Turkish foreign policy, the AKP has been supportive of Islamist parties in Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia, bolstering its credentials as a quasi-Islamist party in its own right (Sarfati 2019, 4). In fact, in a poll conducted in late 2017 to ascertain the level of trust in Turkish religious authorities, President Erdoğan was found to have the highest level of trust (40%) despite not even being a formal religious authority (Sarfati 2019, 4). This Islamization of Turkish politics and society is in stark contrast to the secular principles of Atatürk, the nation’s founding father, and brings it more into line with the Islamist ideological underpinnings of Saudi Arabia and Iran. It also makes Turkey’s recent policy shift to refrain from criticizing Beijing’s treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang all the more surprising.

The attempted coup d’état allegedly orchestrated by the supporters of Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen in 2016 was the culmination of a power struggle between two Islamist organizations: the Gülen Movement and the AKP. Both are inspired by Islamist ideology, but they have depicted themselves as moderate reformists seeking to incorporate progressive Western values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law into Turkey, as well as a “gradual, bottom-up Islamization of society through schools, education centers” (Ayan 2019). In fact, the Gülen Movement is well known for its network of more than

a thousand schools in more than a hundred countries that offer a secular education while also emphasizing the importance of Islamic doctrine (Pew Research Center 2010). When Erdoğan officially came to power in 2003, the same secular factions (i.e. the Turkish military and judiciary) that were responsible for his jailing in 1998 sought to restrict the AKP's efforts to Islamize Turkey, which resulted in the formation of an alliance with the Gülen Movement. "Gülen's followers provided crucial support for the AKP, which subsequently secured them three election victories. In return, Erdogan offered protection to the Gülen community's opaque businesses and pious activities" (Gol 2016). This alliance lasted for close to ten years, until a number of disputes caused the two sides to become adversaries. First, the AKP supported the flotilla organized by a Turkish charity, the *Humanitarian Relief Foundation*, which sought to disrupt Israel's blockade of the Gaza region of Palestine in 2010, which resulted in the deaths of ten Turkish citizens (Bilefsky & Arsu, 2010). Gülen publicly criticized the AKP for having supported the flotilla, siding instead with Israel and its American backers. Following this event, the two groups became increasingly hostile towards each other, with Gülenists accusing the AKP of mishandling the Kurdish issue, while Erdoğan attacked Gülen's international network of schools (Lord 2018, 272-274). The attempted coup on July 15, 2016, which the AKP quickly blamed on Fethullah Gülen and his supporters, "offered the government carte blanche to not only carry out a widespread purge and crackdown on all opposition but, at the same time, to transform the regime, expanding its hold over the state" (Lord 2018, 276). The Gülen Movement was designated a 'terrorist organization' by the Turkish government, and Gülen exiled himself to the United States where he remains today.

There is no doubt that Turkey is vulnerable to religious extremism, as there are violent religious extremist groups that pose a genuine threat to domestic stability (1/1). However, the country has also been governed by the Islamist AKP since 2002, so religious extremism has flourished under these circumstances and has significant local support (1/1). Although the labeling of the Gülen Movement as a terrorist group may have convinced some outside observers that the AKP is fighting against religious extremism (1/1), experts have not been fooled by this window dressing. Erdoğan continues to push an Islamist agenda, giving money to the Islamic religious establishment, and investing heavily in the creation

of new Islamic schools to replace secular public schools of old (Gall 2018). There are even those who accuse the AKP of having pursued a rapprochement with the theocratic Iranian regime, from which Turkish Islamists take their inspiration (Ozeron et al. 2020). Given this, it is more appropriate to say that Turkish politics has already succumbed to religious extremism, although it also clearly remains vulnerable to religious extremism.) Therefore, with an overall score of 3/3, it is quite likely that this variable has a significant influence on Ankara's level of support for Beijing's repression of Muslim minorities as so-called counterterrorism. Furthermore, as noted in the previous section, Turkey has become a dialogue partner in the Chinese-led SCO, which demonstrates its willingness to engage with China on countering violent religious extremism, a central issue of focus for this security alliance.

9.8 Analysis and Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this chapter, along with Indonesia, Turkey is the Muslim-majority country with the lowest level of support for China's treatment of the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, for some obvious reasons. However, since early 2019, Ankara has shifted its stance on the Xinjiang re-education camps, where an estimated one million Turkic Muslims have been held (deHahn 2019), largely replacing public criticism of Beijing's policies with bilateral discussions behind closed doors, and working increasingly closely with the Chinese. Our examination of the four independent variables has revealed that three of them could have plausibly influenced Turkey's policy shift. First and foremost, although Ankara has not been traditionally dependent on exports to China, or even on FDI from China, these have been steadily increasing in the past three years since Turkey joined the Belt and Road Initiative. Large investment projects financed by the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank and a growth in bilateral trade could likely be the deciding factor influencing Erdoğan's decision to cease his own criticism of Beijing's policies towards Turkic Muslims in the Xinjiang region, out of a fear of economic retaliation should he persist. The second variable of significance here is Turkey's vulnerability to secessionism, which might make Ankara more sympathetic to Beijing's narrative of countering Uyghur separatism. Turkey has long confronted challenges posed by Kurdish separatist organizations like the

KPP, and it has taken a very similar approach to that pursued by Beijing with respect to the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, as well as the Tibetans and Inner Mongolians. Similarly, Turkey's vulnerability to religious extremism could also have influenced its decision to offer some limited support to China. However, the fact that Turkey suffers significantly from both of these variables raises the question of why Ankara is not more supportive of Beijing's indoctrination camps in the XUAR. Here, we can look at the limited security dependence, as well as the ethnic ties to the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims being targeted by Beijing's policies, along with the pressure being exerted by the Turkish people for their government to defend the rights of these Muslims in China. Ultimately, it appears that *realpolitik* considerations have likely prompted Ankara's recent shifts in policy, however the reluctance of the Turkish government to provide more active, vocal support to Beijing is likely the result of ideological and normative considerations, such as the desire to stand up for their co-ethnic Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang.

Chapter 10 - Analysis & Conclusion

“If the international community does not condemn the human rights abuses in Xinjiang province by the Government of China, a precedent will be set and these methods will be adopted by other regimes. Complacency is entrenched by a lack of access to Xinjiang; by the lack of free press; and through the silencing and harassment of Uyghurs living abroad. The Government of China has yet to face consequences for its actions.”

Subcommittee on International Human Rights, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Parliament of Canada, November 2018

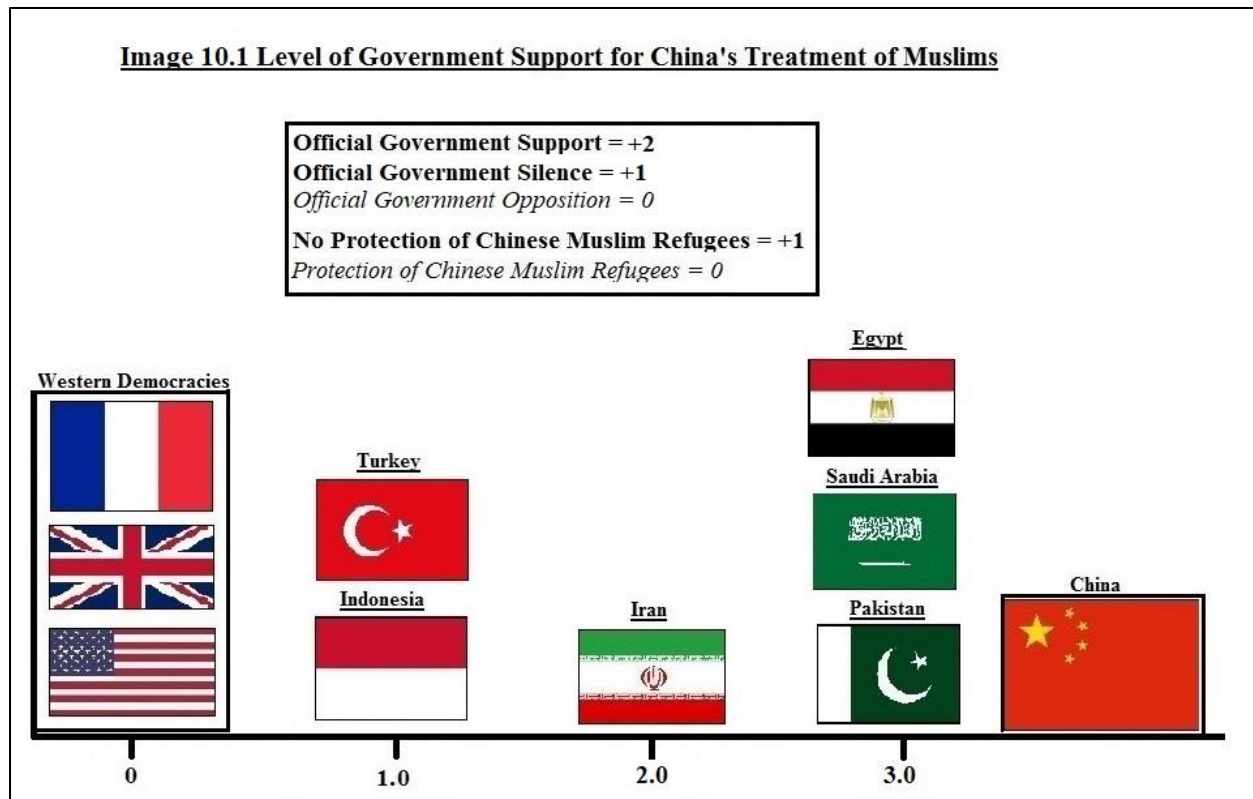
10.1 Introduction

Since long before the introduction of the so-called ‘vocational training centres’ in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 2017, democratic governments and civil society organizations have been openly criticizing China’s treatment of its Muslim minorities. The appearance of these re-education camps, which have allegedly imprisoned more than one million Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities, has only exacerbated the global denunciation of Beijing’s approach to governing Islam within its territory. However, despite increased scrutiny from Western democracies, “Chinese officials have convinced countries to support Beijing publicly on the issue, most notably Muslim ones in Africa, Asia and the Middle East” (Perlez 2019). Over the course of this dissertation, we have examined several possible explanations for this puzzling phenomenon and evaluated their explanatory value in understanding the surprisingly high level of support among Muslim-majority nations for China’s treatment of its Muslim minorities. We studied the relations between China and six Muslim-majority case countries: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Turkey, assessing the (1) economic dependence on China, the (2) security dependence on China, the (3) vulnerability to secessionism and (4) the vulnerability to religious extremism for each case. In this final chapter, we will break down the results

and findings for each variable and draw some preliminary conclusions. We will also outline some additional variables that were not explored in this dissertation, but which may also influence these countries' foreign policy positions with respect to Beijing. Before doing so, however, the next section will briefly review the overall level of support for China's Muslim policies (dependent variable) within each of the six Muslim-majority case countries, taking into consideration the positions of governments, religious leaders, English-language media and the citizens. This will provide the context necessary to analyze each of the four independent variables and the findings that were obtained from this research.

10.2 Level of Support for China's Muslim Policies

As we outlined in the first chapter as well as in each individual case study chapter, the six Muslim-majority countries chosen for this research vary markedly in terms of their level of support for China's treatment of Muslim minorities in the XUAR, the dependent variable of this study. When we compiled the indicators of support from each country's government, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had the highest level of support with scores of 3/3, Iran followed closely with a score of 2/3, and then at the lower end of the scale, Indonesia and Turkey each had a score of 1/3 (see Image 10.1). Until late 2020, Turkey and Indonesia would likely have received a score of 0/1, as they only recently began to deport Uyghurs back to China at Beijing's request, and have done so as quietly as possible so as not to arouse further protests from their citizens and civil society organizations. While these two cases are by no means representative of the governments of Muslim-majority countries more broadly, they were nevertheless important cases to analyze for the purpose of better understanding which factors have influenced the decision of such governments to support, oppose or remain silent towards China's persecution of its Muslim minorities in the XUAR.



10.3 Economic Dependence on China

While each of the six Muslim-majority case countries has extensive trade and investment relations with China, there is still some variance that is worthwhile acknowledging. In the first chapter, we outlined how this independent variable would be evaluated: (1) imports from China as a percentage of total imports; (2) exports to China as a percentage of total exports; and (3) Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) as a percentage of the total (see Table 10.2). It is quite clear from this data the extent to which each country is dependent on its economic relations with China, however, to systematize this measure, we gave each country an overall score out of 3. Countries earn 0/1 if an indicator was between 0 and 5%, they score 0.5/1 if the indicator was between 5% and 20%, and they are given a score of 1/1 if the indicator was above 20%, representing a high level of dependence. For the FDI measure, we have included the figures from before and after each country's formal accession to the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for comparison, but for the purpose of evaluating their economic dependence on

China in the years since the existence of the XUAR indoctrination camps have become widely known, we used only the data from after the countries joined the BRI, as the timing of these two events largely coincide.

Table 10.2 Economic Dependence on China

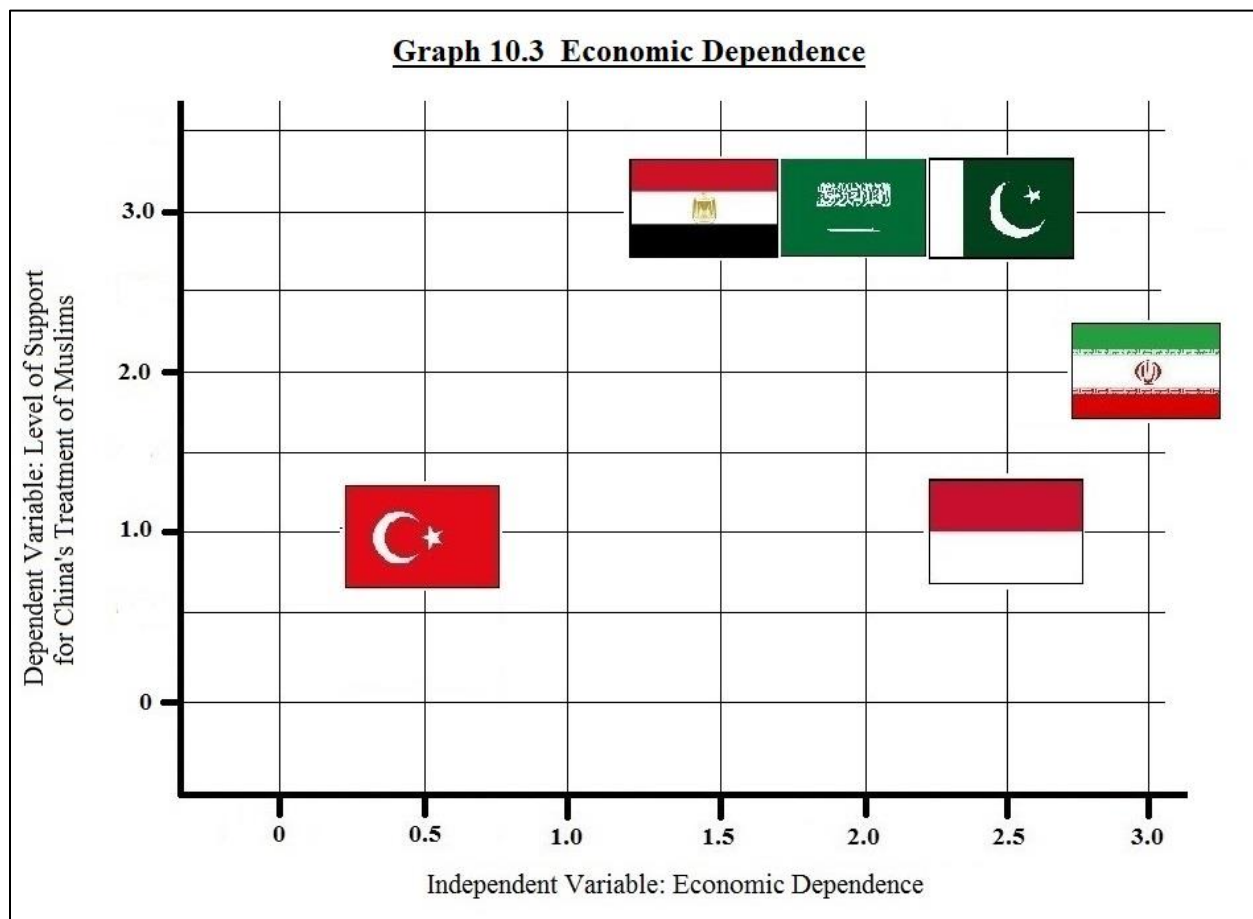
Case Country	Chinese Imports as % of Total	Exports to China as % of Total	Chinese FDI as % of Total (Before/After BRI)	Level of Dependence
Egypt	13%	4%	9.6% / 53%	1.5/3
Saudi Arabia	19%	17%	10.9% / 40.19%	2/3
Iran	37%	31%	56.39% / 59.8%	3/3
Pakistan	27%	7.5%	42.13% / <i>Unknown*</i>	2.5/3
Indonesia	22%	14%	16% / 25.75%	2.5/3
Turkey	11%	1.9%	7% / 4.4%	0.5/3

(Source: China Global Investment Tracker 2019; Index Mundi 2018; Observatory of Economic Complexity 2017)

**Data for Pakistan's FDI inflows are inconsistent, but we know that Chinese FDI in Pakistan is significant and increasing since the BRI.*

Unsurprisingly, Iran has had the highest level of economic dependence on China, due in no small part to the harsh sanctions imposed on it by the United States and many of its allies. Chinese imports accounted for 37% of Iran's total imports in 2017, while Iranian exports to China represented 31% of its total exports. Meanwhile, Chinese investment in Iran represented 56% of total FDI inflows from 2005 to 2012, and with the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, Chinese investment has grown to just under 60%. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia also depend significantly on trade with and investment from China, and Egypt has grown increasingly dependent on Chinese investment, particular since the introduction of the BRI. Also, not surprising is Turkey's general lack of dependence on its economic ties

with China, at least until very recently. Although Chinese imports accounted for 11% of Turkey's total imports in 2017, its exports to China represented only 1.9% of total exports, as the majority of Turkish exports went to European powers. Chinese investment into Turkey was also comparatively low, making up only 7% of total FDI inflows before Turkey's accession to the BRI in 2016, and only 4.4% in the two years since for which data is available (2017-2018). This data appears to confirm the hypothesis of many scholars and journalists who have consistently argued that Muslim-majority countries have withheld their criticism of Chinese treatment of Muslims because of their economic dependence on China. This also appears to prove the 'Subaltern' Realist theory, which posits that those countries that are economically dependent on a hegemonic power will support that hegemon's international policy objectives to avoid risking a conflict with the lifeblood of their economic development.



However, while there is clearly a positive correlation between the economic dependence variable and the level of support for China's Muslim policies among the six Muslim-majority case countries (see Graph 10.3), it is by no means a perfect correlation. For example, while Egypt has a very high level support for Beijing (3/3), its level of economic dependence on China has remained comparatively low, with the exception of FDI which has increased exponentially since the launch of the BRI in 2013. Chinese imports to Egypt represented only 13% of its total imports in 2017, while Egyptian exports to China made up only 4% of its total exports. Chinese FDI into Egypt had also been quite limited before the launch of the BRI, representing only 9.6% of total FDI inflows from 2006 to 2012, but this has since risen to 53% of total inflows over the period from 2013 to 2018. Meanwhile, Indonesia, which has a comparatively low level of support for Beijing (1/3), has nevertheless been highly dependent on its economic relations with China, likely due to its geographic proximity and the growing regional trade alliance. In 2017, imports from China made up 22% of Indonesia's total imports, while its exports to China represented 14% of Indonesian exports. Before the BRI, Chinese FDI into Indonesia made up 16% of total inflows, and this has grown to 26% since 2013. Evidently, the economic dependence variable exerts influence on the levels of support for China in some cases, but the two outliers discussed above raise questions about the analytical power of this variable to explain the positions taken by Muslim-majority countries on China's policies in the XUAR, which will be discussed further below.

10.4 Reliance on Chinese Arms Transfers and Security Cooperation

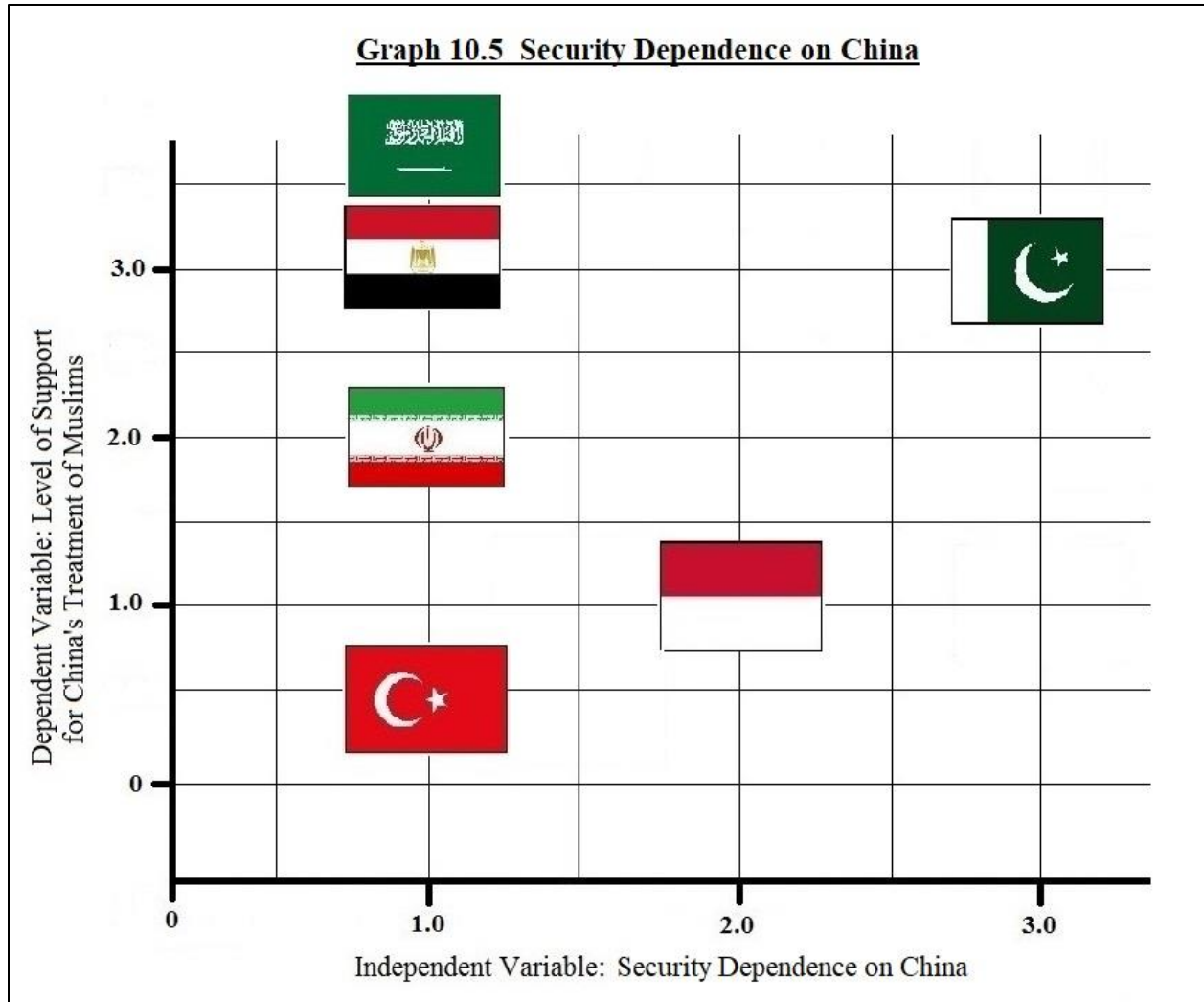
Turning our attention to the six Muslim-majority case countries' reliance on Chinese arms transfers and security cooperation, it becomes clear that this independent variable lacks even the limited explanatory power of the previous one. Although the data for Pakistan and Turkey appear to align with our hypothesis, as the former has high levels of security dependence on China and support for Beijing's policies in XUAR and the latter has the opposite, the four other case countries appear to disprove the hypothesis. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran (at least since 2015) have very limited security dependence on China despite their high levels of support for its policies towards Muslim minorities, whereas Indonesia,

which has low levels of support for Beijing, nevertheless has a moderate level of security dependence on China (see Table 10.4).

Table 10.4 Security Dependence on China

Case Country	Importance of Chinese Arms Imports (% of total, 2010-2020)	Total Score (out of 3)	Level of Support for Beijing's XUAR policies
Egypt	0.6%	1/3	3/3
Saudi Arabia	0.7%	1/3	3/3
Iran	23.9% (2010-2020)/2.0% (2015-2020)	1/3	2/3
Pakistan	60% (2010-2020)/72/9% (2015-2020)	3/3	3/3
Indonesia	6.3%	2/3	1/3
Turkey	1.4%	1/3	1/3

Evidently, with four out of the six case countries yielding data for this variable that challenges the hypothesis put forward in the introduction of this thesis, it is possible to conclude that this variable does not help to predict the level of support from Muslim-majority countries' governments for Beijing's policies in the XUAR (see Graph 10.5). However, it nevertheless offers an important conclusion: if countries that are highly dependent on China for their domestic security were to find alternative security partners, this would not necessarily impact their level of support for China's treatment of its Muslim minorities. Likewise, in countries that have strong security relations with China and depend on China for its arms transfers, this security dependence does not necessarily translate into strong support for Beijing's policies. As such, we can dismiss this independent variable for lacking explanatory validity, and turn our attention to the importance of the remaining variables.



10.5 Vulnerability to Secessionism

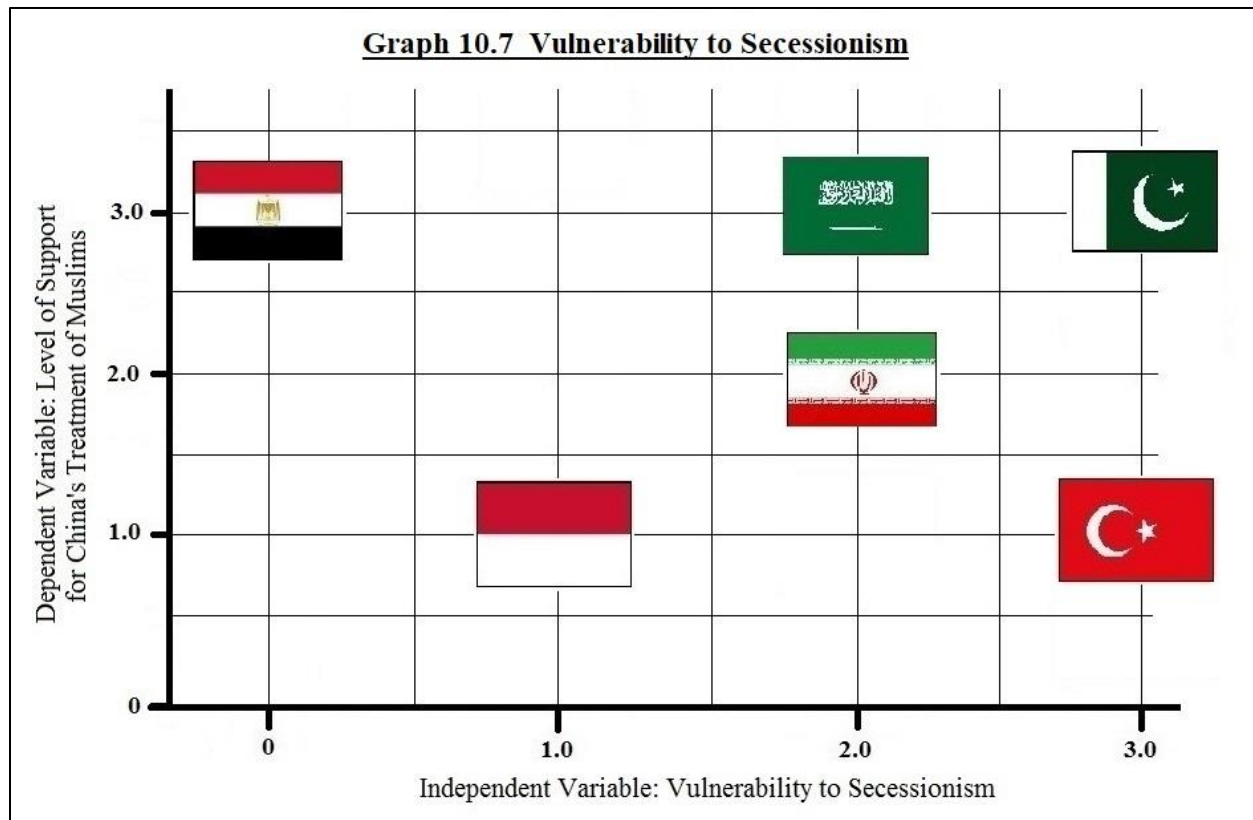
The third independent variable stemmed from the hypothesis that a common vulnerability to secessionism would make countries support other governments' repressive approaches to combatting this threat in their territories. As expected, evaluating a country's vulnerability to secessionism is also quite complicated, particularly given the propensity of many countries to securitize issues of secessionism to justify a repressive response. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, we looked at three indicators: whether or not the countries ever (1) faced a genuine threat from a domestic separatist movement seeking independence from the state; and if so, if this movement had (2) popular support from regional in-group audiences; and/or (3) political support from domestic politicians or political parties. For each indicator,

we gave the countries one point if the answer was yes and zero points if the answer was no (see Table 10.6).

Table 10.6 Vulnerability to Secessionism

Case Country	Existing Threat	In-group Support	Domestic Political Support	Total Score (out of 3)	Level of Support for Beijing's XUAR policies
Egypt	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/3	3/3
Saudi Arabia	1/1	1/1	0/1	2/3	3/3
Iran	1/1	1/1	0/1	2/3	2/3
Pakistan	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	3/3
Indonesia	0/1	0/1	1/1	1/3	1/3
Turkey	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	1/3

In addition to these data points, we also explored the various engagements between China and each of the six Muslim-majority case countries to determine whether or not they have any security or military cooperation which could be seen as demonstrating support for each other's efforts to contain the secessionist threat. Interestingly, the country with little to no legitimate secessionist threats (Egypt) has also been most supportive of China's treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Meanwhile Turkey, which faces a significant threat of secessionism, is the least supportive of China's treatment of its Muslim minorities in the XUAR. Only in the cases of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan do we see a positive correlation between this variable and the dependent variable, as these three countries are moderately to highly vulnerable to secessionism and also very supportive of China's response to the supposed Uyghur separatist movement. The case of Indonesia also suggests a positive correlation, as its low level of vulnerability to secessionism corresponds with its low level of support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR (see Graph 10.7). It is worth noting that in the case of Indonesia, the government's willingness to grant sovereignty to East Timor and enable democratic participation of West Papuans and



Acehnese may have resulted in Jakarta's increased opposition to China's response to Uyghur separatism, instead advocating for giving the geographically concentrated minority ethno-religious group the right to choose their own path. In the case of Turkey, although Ankara has been extremely resolute in its desire to eliminate Kurdish separatism, this issue has existed since long before the Uyghur re-education camps first surfaced in the XUAR, and may be considered a distinct issue altogether. Given the fact that Turkey only began to shift its stance on China's policies in 2019, it is unlikely that this factor played a decisive role in this decision.

10.6 Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

As with the previous independent variable, measuring each case country's vulnerability to religious extremism was challenging, given the complexity of each country's domestic political situation and the other threats that their governments face. However, over the course of this dissertation, we have observed that each of the case countries is highly vulnerable to religious extremism, and according to the

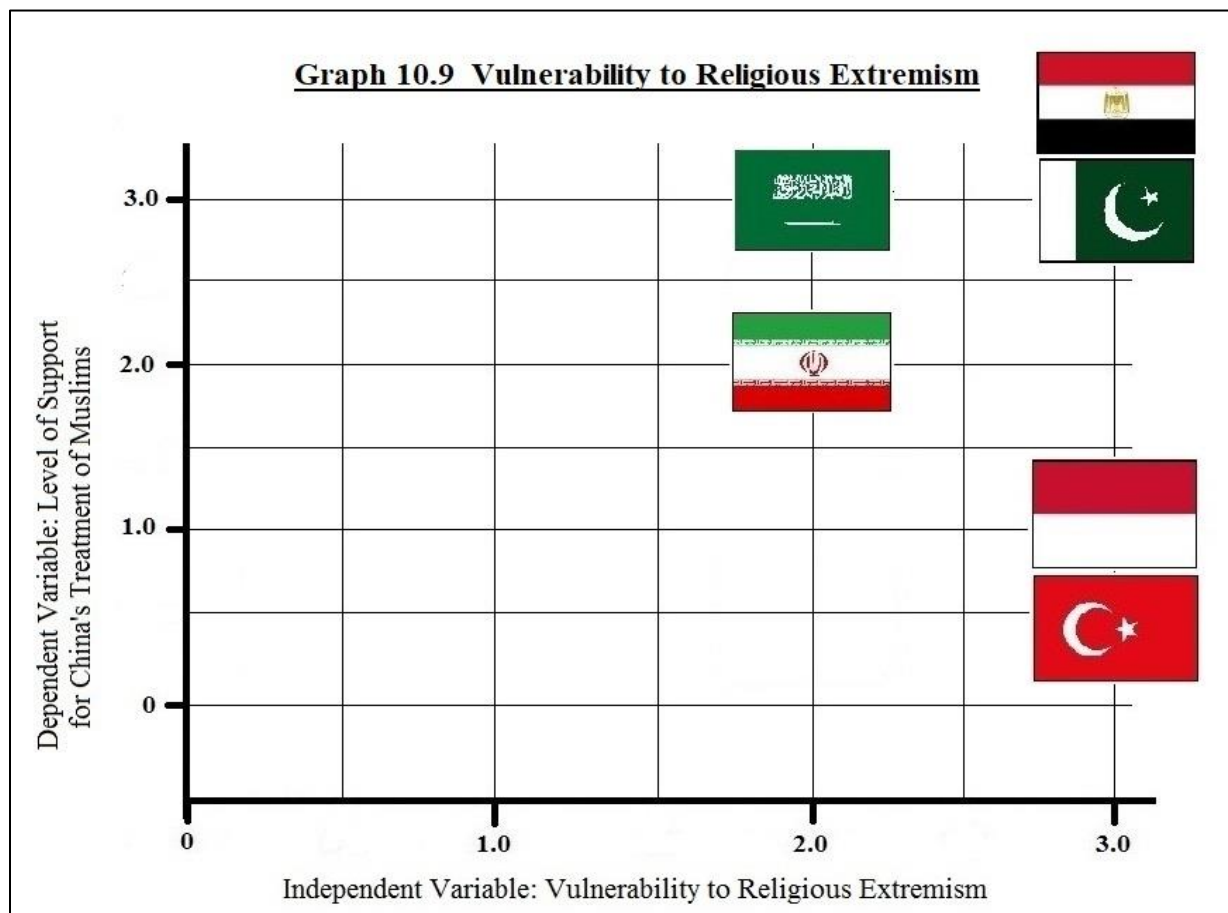
Institute for Economics and Peace, all six of the Muslim-majority countries we selected rank in the top 40 (out of 160) countries in terms of the impact of terrorism (Global Terrorism Index 2019). In order to evaluate the level of vulnerability to religious extremism of each case country for the purpose of drawing potential correlations with our dependent variable, we looked at whether or not they (1) face the threat, real or invented, of terrorism or violent conflict spurred by religious extremism; and if so, if this extremism had (2) popular support from domestic audiences; and/or (3) recognition from the international community. As with the previous variable, we gave each case country one point if the answer for the indicator was yes, and zero points if the answer was no (see Table 10.8).

Table 10.8 Vulnerability to Religious Extremism

Case Country	Existing Threat	Domestic Support	International Recognition	Total Score (out of 3)	Level of Support for Beijing's XUAR policies
Egypt	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	3/3
Saudi Arabia	1/1	0/1	1/1	2/3	3/3
Iran	1/1	0/1	1/1	2/3	2/3
Pakistan	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	3/3
Indonesia	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	1/3
Turkey	1/1	1/1	1/1	3/3	1/3

In addition, as with the previous variable, we also looked at existing forms of cooperation between China and each case country on security, counterterrorism and similar matters to confirm whether or not this variable could plausibly influence the dependent variable. Ultimately, we found that all case countries were significantly vulnerable to religious extremism, including Indonesia and Turkey, which are the least supportive of Beijing's policies in the XUAR which are framed as an approach to countering extremism. Meanwhile, countries that are extremely supportive of Beijing's efforts to curb religious extremism in the XUAR, like Pakistan and Egypt, are also significantly vulnerable to religious extremism (see Table 10.8). The lack of divergence among our six case countries on this variable makes it

difficult to identify a correlation, and the scatter plot suggests that no such correlation exists (see Graph 10.9). Both Saudi Arabia and Iran, perhaps by virtue of being sources of authority for the *Sunni* and *Shi'a* sects of Islam respectively, have proven to be less vulnerable to religious extremism, and have even been accused of exporting their own versions of Islamism to other parts of the Muslim world (Marcus 2019). Despite being comparatively less vulnerable to religious extremism, these countries nevertheless have shown very high levels of support for Beijing in its approach to combatting this threat, demonstrating the insufficiency of this variable in explaining the phenomenon that is the focus of this dissertation. However, it is worthwhile to note that the little support for Beijing that has been exhibited by Indonesia and Turkey (i.e. deporting Uyghurs back to China) may have been prompted by their common vulnerability to religious extremism, which has made them sympathetic to Beijing's narrative that the Xinjiang indoctrination camps are a strategy for eliminating religious extremism among the Uyghurs and Turkic Muslims of the region.



10.7 Explanatory Strength of the Independent Variables

The graphs above demonstrate the possibility of limited correlations between each of the four independent variables and our dependent variable, but there are also obvious outliers for each. In the case of the economic dependence variable, we see a discrepancy most prominently in two case countries: on the one hand, Egypt is not very dependent on China economically but has nevertheless shown a high degree of support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR, while Indonesia has shown very little support despite a relatively high degree of economic dependence on China. On the security dependence variable, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran all demonstrate high or moderately high levels of support for Beijing despite no significant arms imports from China, while Indonesia is the opposite. These two independent variables represent core *realpolitik* considerations, namely the desire to maintain strong economic and security ties with China. However, Indonesia may simply depend on China for trade, investment and arms transfers due to geographic proximity, despite being politically and ideologically opposed to some of Beijing's key policies. Meanwhile, the countries that are supportive of Beijing's policies in the XUAR without depending on China for their economic or security needs, may simply not need assistance from Beijing in these two spheres, but are nevertheless supportive of China's policies out of ideological respect for the principles of non-interference and sovereignty, confronting secessionism and eliminating religious extremism. Given the fact that significant dependence on China has not automatically translated into strong support for China, nor has limited dependence automatically translated into limited support, we can confidently conclude that these *realpolitik* considerations are not the most significant variables to influence the level of support among Muslim-majority countries for China's treatment of Muslims.

Turning to the ideologically-driven independent variables, vulnerability to secession demonstrated a notable ability to predict the dependent variable, but still had two obvious outliers: Egypt, which faces no significant secessionist threat, nevertheless has a high degree of support for Beijing, while Turkey is highly vulnerable to Kurdish secessionism but maintains a low level of support for Beijing's policies in the XUAR. Once again, Egypt's exceptionalism demonstrates the insufficiency of this variable, as the complete absence of a secessionist threat has not resulted in Cairo's reluctance to support

Beijing's policies to supposedly counter secessionism in Xinjiang. Conversely, despite significant vulnerability to secessionism, Ankara has decidedly not supported these policies, which speaks to the inability of this common secessionist challenge to influence the policy-making considerations of Turkish officials. Finally, the data for the fourth independent variable revealed a high degree of vulnerability to religious extremism among all six case countries. Here, the outliers are the two cases (Indonesia and Turkey) that have resisted supporting Beijing's policies in the XUAR, which are framed as a counter-terrorism strategy. Once again, despite facing their own problems with religious extremism, these two cases have not allowed this common vulnerability to influence their position vis-à-vis China on the Muslim indoctrination camps, demonstrating that this variable is also not completely determinative. Table 10.10 summarizes the data for each variable among the six case countries, and the data that appears to align with the hypotheses are in bold.

Table 10.10 Overview of Variables

Case Country	DV: Support for China's XUAR policy	IV1: Economic Dependence	IV2: Security Dependence	IV3: Vulnerability to Secession	IV4: Vulnerability to Religious Extremism
Egypt	3/3	1.5/3	1/3	0/3	3/3
Saudi Arabia	3/3	2/3	1/3	2/3	2/3
Iran	2/3	3/3	1/3	2/3	2/3
Pakistan	3/3	2.5/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
Indonesia	1/3	2.5/3	2/3	1/3	3/3
Turkey	1/3	0.5/3	1/3	3/3	2/3
Variable Strength		4/6	2/6	4/6	4/6

As we can see in the table above, the economic dependence variable aligns with the dependent variable in four out of six of our case countries. Evidently, it is not essential for a Muslim-majority country to be economically dependent on China to support Beijing's policies in the XUAR (e.g. Egypt).

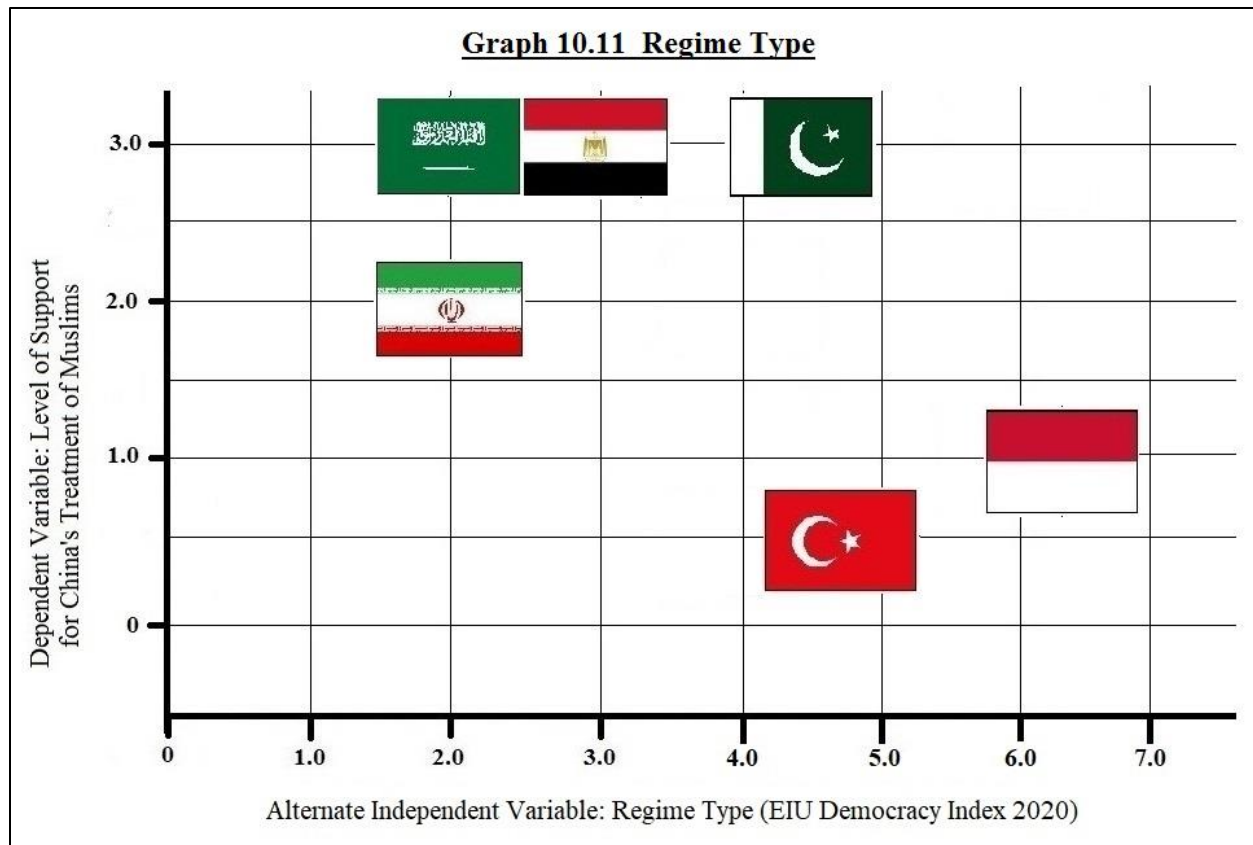
However, economic dependence could help to explain why a country that would otherwise openly condemn Beijing (e.g. Indonesia) might choose to remain largely silent on the issue, and even deport Uyghurs back to China at Beijing's request. The same can be said of security dependence, with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran not needing Chinese arms transfers to show strong support for Beijing, while Indonesia's moderate dependence on Chinese arms transfers may explain what little support they have shown to date. Indonesia makes a strong case for the relevance of the *realpolitik* considerations (economic gains and security) in determining its level of support for China, which plausibly could have been even lower if Indonesia were less dependent on China. For the ideologically-driven independent variables, they both align with the dependent variable in four out of six case countries. Egypt's high level of support for Beijing despite lacking any secessionist threat proves that the vulnerability to secessionism is not imperative for a Muslim-majority country to be supportive of China's effort to suppress the East Turkestan secessionist movement. However, the fact that Turkey is highly vulnerable to both secessionism and religious extremism could explain why Turkey has shown at least some degree of support for Beijing despite a general lack of *realpolitik* incentives (i.e. limited economic and security dependence on China), and close ethnic, linguistic and religious ties to the Turkic Muslims of the XUAR who are the victims of Beijing's policies. The data presented above, and particularly the data for Turkey, allows us to conclude that ideological considerations are more influential than *realpolitik* considerations in determining how a Muslim-majority country will position itself on the issue of the Xinjiang indoctrination camps and China's policies of mass detention of Uyghurs and other Muslims.

10.8 Alternate Explanations

Looking at the results presented above, it is quite clear that no single independent variable can fully explain the level of support from our six Muslim-majority case countries for China's policies towards Muslim minorities in Xinjiang on its own. Given there is a clear need to consider many different explanations for the positions of Muslim-majority countries vis-à-vis China's repressive policies towards Muslims in the XUAR, it is possible that other factors may have also contributed to these positions that

were not featured in this dissertation. In the introduction, we briefly outlined the theory of anti-Americanism among many Muslim-majority countries, as well as the ideological alliances that China has formed in multilateral organizations like the United Nations as possible explanations for the silence of Muslim-majority countries in the face of China's human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslims. Another theory that has surfaced as a result of the findings of this research is the regime type of individual Muslim-majority countries, or the strength of democratic institutions, norms and rights in each country.

Setting aside the difficulties in quantifying this variable, it is easy to see how countries with greater democratic freedoms would allow more space for opposition voices, mass protests or the formation of political parties advocating for secessionism or religious ideologies. Using scores out of 10 from the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (2020), we have plotted the data to see whether this variable may have yielded additional conclusions. Indonesia (6.3) and Turkey (4.48), which despite serious flaws in their democracies, nevertheless allow free press, free expression, free assembly and the formation of opposition political parties to a certain extent, are also the least supportive of Beijing's policies, whereas Egypt (2.93), Saudi Arabia (2.08) and Iran (2.20), governed by a military ruler, monarchy and theocracy (respectively), impose severe restrictions on these freedoms and have also been highly supportive of Beijing's repression in the XUAR. With this variable, Pakistan (4.31) would be the greatest outlier, with a moderate level of democratic freedoms despite very high levels of support for China (see Image 10.10). This brief analysis allows us to see that regime type could offer an additional ideological explanation for the position of Muslim-majority countries with a degree of validity.



10.9 Policy Implications

This dissertation demonstrated the importance of *realpolitik* considerations in determining whether or not a Muslim-majority country's government will support or oppose China's treatment of its own Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Preserving strong economic and security partnerships with China, or supporting Beijing's efforts to suppress threats of secessionism or religious extremism to justify their own responses to such threats in their own countries evidently influenced our six case countries' position on this issue to varying degrees. However, the existence of outliers like Egypt, whose scores on the independent variables largely did not correspond to Cairo's high level of support for Beijing, as well as Turkey and Indonesia, whose scores on independent variables would suggest a higher degree of support for Beijing than their current levels, has prompted the consideration of additional ideological variables like anti-Americanism or democratic governance, which may have influenced these countries' positions. In this section, I would like to posit yet another explanation which relates to both of the alternatives

explored in the previous section, and has fundamental policy implications for Western democracies: the formation of an anti-Western, anti-Democratic alliance led by China.

This idea suggests that many Muslim-majority countries and other developing countries might be shifting closer to Beijing, which is creating its own world order to challenge the one created last century by Western democracies intent on forging a so-called ‘Liberal International Order’, or LIO (Chen Weiss & Wallace 2021, 635). As China’s power has grown, the world order has become bipolar, with many Western democracies falling into the American camp, while much of the developing world has sided with Beijing. In recent years, we have witnessed “an increasingly confident and unapologetic China, one that not only refutes American criticism of its internal affairs but that presents its own values as a model for others” (Lee Myers 2021). Although America’s key alliances appear to be strong, and many Western democracies are growing increasingly confrontational towards China (Ford & Goldgeier 2021), a growing number of developing countries of the ‘Global South’ are falling into the Chinese camp, largely because Beijing does not demand domestic political changes of its allies, but only international political support for China’s objectives (Piccone 2018).

If there is truly a Chinese-led international order being formed as an alternative to the US-led LIO, this could explain why countries that lack *realpolitik* reasons for supporting Beijing’s treatment of Chinese Muslims (e.g. Egypt) would nevertheless give China their support. Conversely, countries that may have some *realpolitik* reasons for supporting Beijing (e.g. Indonesia) may nevertheless decide to express opposition to these policies to align more closely with the US and its Western democratic allies. The implication of this bipolarity is that the country that offers the greatest incentives to join its camp will undoubtedly form the largest alliance, which could allow it to exert greater influence in multilateral organizations where each state gets a vote, like the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Already, we can see that China has gained the advantage, with a greater number of countries supporting its Xinjiang policies publicly in the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly, compared to the number of countries that jointly condemn China’s policies in Xinjiang (see tables in Chapter 1). Evidently, *realpolitik* considerations are part of the incentives, most notably Chinese foreign direct

investment in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as well as Chinese security cooperation, including through arms transfers and technical exchanges through joint military exercises. Ideological considerations like common responses and mutual assistance in the face of threats from secessionist movements or religious extremism may also be a calculation. However, the implication of a Chinese-led anti-LIO alliance is that, even if the Western democratic world could offer greater economic and security assistance, or increase their material and political support for governments' responses to secessionism and religious extremism in the 'Global South', these countries may remain firmly in the Chinese camp simply due to their ideological opposition to Western democracies and their historical interference in these countries' internal affairs.

So as Western democracies pressure Muslim-majority countries to condemn China's treatment of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, they must acknowledge the fact that their pleas are falling on deaf ears. Compelling the 'Global South' to accept and defend the norms, values and systems of governance of the LIO, such as human rights and democracy, is exactly what has driven Muslim-majority countries to join the alternative Chinese world order. For too long, Western democracies have used coercion (metaphorical sticks), like sanctions, conditional development assistance and public shaming in multilateral forums, in an effort to force the 'Global South' to comply with their political demands. Instead, the LIO ought to try using metaphorical carrots, like technology transfers, unconditional development assistance and political support (whenever possible) to incentivize the 'Global South' to reconsider their alignment with China. For far too long, China has forgone global leadership in favour of fostering strong bilateral ties with the 'Global South' and making itself indispensable to these developing countries in desperate need of a hegemonic patron. It is high time for the LIO to pursue the same type of positive, constructive relations with these countries, put aside their cultural, ideological and political differences, and focus on what they need in order to develop sustainably. If Western democracies want to rally support against China's treatment of its Muslim minorities and other oppressed groups from among the 'Global South', they need to first show the 'Global South' that they can be as appealing a partner as Beijing has been over the past few decades. Increasing economic and security cooperation might help somewhat, as might the offering

of material and political support to respond to secessionist and religious extremist threats, but ultimately the LIO needs to provide a stronger ideological alternative than it has been, if it wants to convince the states of the ‘Global South’ that China’s world order is not the best fit for them.

10.10 Concluding Remarks

This dissertation aimed to unpack and explain one of the most contentious phenomena of our time, and it is no big surprise that several questions remain unanswered. Evidently, without having access to interviews with high-level officials and diplomats from the six Muslim-majority case countries, it was always going to be a challenge to confidently deduce their level of support for China’s policies in Xinjiang with any level of certainty. Furthermore, due to the complexity of the variables we examined in this research, the indicators are not comprehensive, and therefore any attempt to replicate this study would require the same indicators to be used. Should someone decide to use different indicators for the same variables, it is entirely possible that they may come to a different conclusion. However, I would encourage similar studies to be conducted in the future, because this is an ongoing situation, and as new developments occur, Muslim-majority states may eventually shift their positions from supporting Beijing to actively opposing it. As such, it will be important for future research to be carried out to determine which variables ultimately caused the Muslim world to cease its support for China’s persecution of its Muslim minorities.

Although this dissertation fails to make the sort of broad theoretical conclusions only possible through large-N quantitative studies, the profound qualitative analysis of six important Muslim-majority countries nevertheless allowed some preliminary conclusions to be drawn. First, it is clear that the broad support (explicit or implicit) across the Muslim world for China’s treatment of its own Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region reinforces the theory of ‘Subaltern’ Realism, as many of these states are economically dependent on China, and they have been notably compliant to Beijing’s domestic and foreign policy positions and objectives. Second, China’s efforts to construct a new set of international norms and values has clearly resonated with many Muslim-majority countries, who have

refrained from criticizing Beijing's domestic policies, in support of the Chinese value of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states. Third, analyzing China's depiction of the re-education camps in Xinjiang as being aimed at countering secessionism and violent extremism, we can clearly see a constructivist dimension to this phenomenon. By securitizing the alleged Uyghur secessionist threat and supposed threat of religious extremism, Beijing has legitimized such justifications for inhumane policies like re-education camps and violent crackdowns by security forces. For many Muslim-majority countries who face similar challenges from secessionist movements or religious extremism, this has provided a new justification to give the international community for their own violent responses to these threats, with the seal of approval of the rising global hegemon, China. If supporting China's policies validates their own responses to secessionism or religious extremism, and if joining the Chinese-led, anti-Western, anti-democratic world order helps them ensure continued economic and security cooperation with China, we should expect that Muslim-majority countries will continue to support Beijing unless and until the Western democratic LIO can provide a better alternative.

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