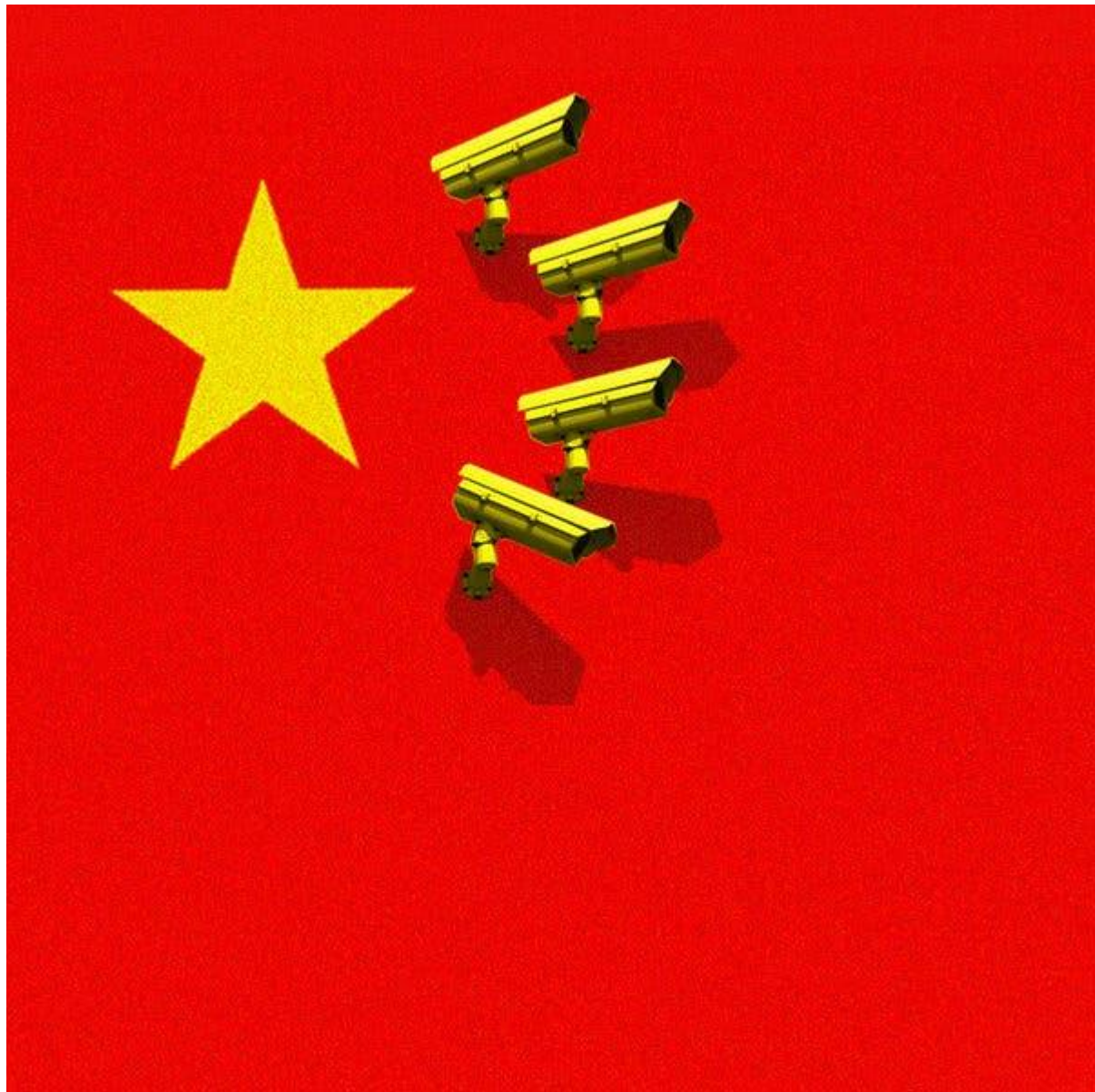


This Is Not Dystopian Fiction. This Is China.

Communist leaders engage in modern-day totalitarian brainwashing, bizarre lies and industrial-level indoctrination to suppress Muslims.

By The Editorial Board of The Times

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Credit...Illustration by Nicholas Konrad; photograph by Getty Images

“Ying shou jin shou” — “Round up everyone who should be rounded up.”

The echo of “1984,” “Brave New World” or “Fahrenheit 451” is unmistakable. But this is not dystopian fiction. It’s a real bureaucratic directive prepared by the Chinese leadership, drawing on a series of secret speeches by Xi Jinping, China’s authoritarian leader, on dealing ruthlessly with Muslims who show “symptoms” of religious radicalism.

There’s nothing theoretical about it: Based on these diktats, hundreds of thousands of Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Muslims in the western Xinjiang region have been rounded up in internment camps to undergo months or years of indoctrination intended to mold them into secular and loyal followers of the Communist Party.

This modern-day totalitarian brainwashing is revealed in a remarkable trove of [documents leaked to The New York Times](#) by an anonymous Chinese official. The existence of these re-education camps has been known for some time, but nothing before had offered so lucid a glimpse into the thinking of China’s bosses under the fist of Mr. Xi, from the obsessive determination to stamp out the “virus” of unauthorized thought to cynical preparations for the pushback to come, including how to deal with questions from students returning to empty homes and untended farms.

The latter script is eerily Orwellian: Should students ask whether their missing parents had committed a crime, they are to be told no, “it is just that their thinking has been infected by unhealthy thoughts. Freedom is only possible when this ‘virus’ in their thinking is eradicated and they are in good health.”

That someone from within the unforgiving, secretive Chinese leadership would take the enormous risk of leaking 403 pages of internal documents to a Western newspaper is in itself amazing, especially since the documents include an 11-page report summarizing the party’s investigation into the activities of Wang Yongzhi, an official who was supposed to manage a district where Uighur militants had staged a violent attack but who eventually developed misgivings about the mass detention facilities he had built. “He refused,” said the report, “to round up everyone who should be rounded up.” After September 2017, Mr. Wang disappeared from public view.

It becomes clear from the documents that Mr. Xi is far more concerned by any challenge to the Communist Party’s image of strength than foreign reaction. Already in May 2014 he told a leadership conference, “Don’t be afraid if hostile forces whine, or if hostile forces malign the image of Xinjiang.” Accordingly, the Chinese government made no effort to deny the leaked documents, but rather portrayed the crackdown in Xinjiang as a major success against terrorism and [accused The Times](#) of smearing China’s “antiterrorism and de-extremism capabilities.”

What the documents really reveal is not an effective antiterrorism campaign, but rather the paranoia of totalitarian leaders who demand total fealty in thought and deed and recognize no method of control other than coercion and fear. Mr. Xi and other top government officials reveal in these papers a conviction that the Soviet Union collapsed

because of ideological laxity and spineless leadership, and a top security official attributed terrorist attacks in Britain to the British government's "excessive emphasis on 'human rights above security.'" And Mr. Xi argued that new technology must be part of the broad campaign of surveillance and intelligence-gathering to root out dissidence in Uighur society, anticipating Beijing's deployment of facial recognition, genetic testing and [big data](#) in Xinjiang.

Whoever leaked these revealing documents obviously disagreed and had the courage to do something about it. His or her brave action is a cry to the world.

International outrage could turn that into a wake-up call for China's leaders, despite their totalitarian swagger, if the world begins to see them as pariahs, not just trading partners. The whistle-blower, and the untold thousands of Chinese Muslims suffering under the yoke of Mr. Xi, deserve that.