

Leaked CCP files document mass detentions

Written by Taipei Times

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A security camera hangs over a street in a renovated section of the Old City in Kashgar, Xinjiang, China, on Sept. 6 last year.

Photo: Reuters

A rare and huge leak of Chinese government documents has shed new light on a security crackdown on Muslims in China's Xinjiang region, where Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) ordered officials to act with "absolutely no mercy" against separatism and extremism, the *New York Times* reported.

Human rights groups and outside experts say more than 1 million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been rounded up in a network of internment camps across the far-western region.

The 403 pages of internal papers obtained by the *Times* provide an unprecedented look into the highly secretive Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) controversial crackdown, which has come under increasing international criticism, especially from the US.

The documents include previously unpublished speeches by Xi, as well as directives and reports on the surveillance and control of the Uighur population, the newspaper said on Saturday.

The leak also suggests that there has been some discontent within the party about the crackdown.

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The documents were leaked by an unnamed member of the Chinese political establishment who expressed hope that the disclosure would prevent the leadership, including Xi, from “escaping culpability for the mass detentions,” the *Times* said.

In a 2014 speech to officials made after militants from the Uighur minority killed 31 people in a train station in southwestern China, Xi called for an all-out “struggle against terrorism, infiltration and separatism” using the “organs of dictatorship,” and showing “absolutely no mercy,” the *Times* said.

In the speeches, Xi did not explicitly order the creation of a large network of camps, but called for the party to use the “organs of dictatorship” to deal with extremism.

The internment camps expanded rapidly following the appointment in 2016 of a new CCP chief in Xinjiang, Chen Quanguo (陈全国).

Chen, according to the *Times*, distributed Xi’s speeches to justify the crackdown and urged officials to “round up everyone who should be rounded up.”

Reputed within the party for his handling of minority groups, Chen earlier led iron-fisted policies aimed at crushing dissent in Tibet.

The trove of leaked documents included a guide to answering questions from students who had returned home to Xinjiang to find their families missing or detained in camps.

Officials were instructed to say the students’ family members had been infected with the “virus” of extremist thinking and needed to be treated before “a small illness becomes a serious one.”

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Xinjiang regional government did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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The documents also shed light on the party's punishment of one official, Wang Yongzhi (王勇智), who was investigated from 2017 to last year for disobeying party orders.

Wang released on his own initiative more than 7,000 people from camps in Xinjiang, and feared that "rounding up so many people would knowingly fan conflict and deepen resentment," according to a confession by Wang leaked to the *Times*.

China, after initially denying the camps, has described them as vocational schools aimed at dampening the allure of Muslim extremism and violence through education and job training.

However, rights groups and foreign media have reported that official documents and satellite images show the facilities are equipped and run like prisons.

The leak "confirms in black and white, in the party's own words, its conscious and systematic extrajudicial mass internment of Muslims in Xinjiang," said James Leibold, an expert on ethnic relations in China and a professor at Melbourne's La Trobe University.

The documents show that "there was resistance on a local level" with local officials who disagreed with the policy facing punishment or being purged, Leibold said.

The fact that the documents were leaked is "a significant indicator that there are many inside the party who think this is an unwise policy and wish to hold Xi Jinping and Chen Quanguo accountable," he said.

Additional reporting by the Guardian

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