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This book's release was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was quickly sweeping the world as the book was being prepared for publication. However, this delay offers me an important opportunity to contextualize the book's content in our present moment of global crisis and provide related updates on the situation of Uyghurs in China. This is particularly important given the book's thesis that the fate of the Uyghurs inside China has been facilitated by the intersection of local and global political processes. While the book focuses on the ways that the Global War on Terror (GWOT) has intertwined with the story of the Uyghur cultural genocide, one can expect that the COVID-19 global pandemic will serve as an equally important watershed moment in global political processes that will inevitably also impact the fate of Uyghurs inside China.

It is first important to note that the full extent of the impact of the public health crisis created by COVID-19 on Uyghurs inside China remains unknown. From the appearance of the disease in Wuhan in December 2019 until May 2020 when I wrote this preface, there has been very little reliable information coming out of the Uyghur homeland. There are multiple reasons for this. First, the entire People's Republic of China (PRC) remained mostly in lockdown during this time, making accurate information from far-flung regions even scarcer than usual. Second, the PRC expelled from China the best international journalists covering the Uyghur cultural genocide from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post* during Spring 2020. While this was done largely in retaliation for

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restrictions on Chinese journalists in the US, it also served to stall ongoing investigations into PRC actions against Uyghurs. Finally, the attention of the world writ large, and thus of journalists, has been diverted from the plight of the Uyghurs and focused squarely on the global response to the pandemic.

Fortunately, initial impressions suggest that the worst-case scenario of the disease spreading among the likely over one million Uyghurs still in some form of internment or incarceration appears to have not come to pass. Officially, the numbers of those infected and killed by the virus in the Uyghur region of China remained low at the time of writing this preface, with the number of cases under 100 and the number of deaths below five. Of course, given the PRC's track record of blatant misinformation about this region since 2017, there is no reason to believe these statistics, and, given the unprecedented numbers of Uyghurs in overcrowded penal institutions, it remains possible that the virus did serious physical damage to this population about which we may never know. However, no reliable evidence had emerged as of this preface's writing of the mass illness and/or deaths of Uyghurs in internment and incarceration, and, given China's apparent containment of the virus, it is likely that the spread of COVID-19 in the Uyghur homeland, even if greater than official statistics assert, has been limited, at least into May 2020.

If it appears that this worst-case scenario had not transpired, available information does suggest that the global pandemic was already creating a situation by May 2020 where PRC actions facilitating the Uyghur cultural genocide were being consolidated and normalized. In particular, the processes described in Chapter 6 and the conclusion of this book that point to a transition from mass internment to a system of coerced and segregated residential labor, including family separation and population transfers, appear to have accelerated during the first months of the pandemic. This also seems to have been accompanied by increased assimilation measures, particularly targeting children, and perhaps even efforts to encourage Han settlement in the region. While the details of these actions remain sparse, they may point to a new phase in the campaign to destroy Uyghur identity and transform their homeland that could render the region unrecogniz-

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able to international observers once they are able to return there after the pandemic is under control globally. In this sense, the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic for the Uyghurs may be its role as a smoke-screen that obscures the measures that were taken against them as a people since 2017, and helps to erase the memory of both Uyghur culture in China and the Uyghur homeland as they existed before 2017.

The first signs of these actions to consolidate and normalize what is happening to Uyghurs inside China were apparent already in late February 2020 as the various coerced residential labor programs for rural Uyghurs, both inside their homeland and in inner China, were resumed if not increased.¹ Taking place while China was generally in lockdown to contain the pandemic, this green light given to Uyghur factory workers raised speculation that this already marginalized population might also be among the 'expendable' workers used to re-start the country's economy while most Chinese people were kept safely isolated. Uyghurs in exile appeared to further confirm this mass mobilization of rural Uyghur laborers through the re-posting of videos from the Uyghur region on social media showing large labor brigades, with suitcases and wearing pandemic-mandated masks, presumably being transported to work in factories. While such programs are officially framed as voluntary, in the context of the mass internment and incarceration of Uyghurs that has been ongoing since 2017, it is assumed that not participating would be viewed as subversive and punishable by imprisonment or internment.

As described in Chapter 6 of this book, these labor programs, while less violent and more palatable to outside observers than the mass internment camps, play a critical role in the control and 'transformation' of China's rural Uyghur population. Inside the homeland, the state is mobilizing thousands of rural Uyghurs, both former internees and others, to work in scores of new residential factories throughout the region, helping to depopulate rural towns that were once overwhelmingly Uyghur and destroying the bonds of family and community that make up Uyghur culture. Additionally, these programs also seek to 'transform' these new factory workers by mandating that they take political 're-education' and Chinese-language classes while removing them from a Uyghur linguistic and cultural

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milieu. Even more insidious are the related labor programs that bring rural Uyghur laborers to factories in inner China, where they are segregated in special dormitories, not allowed to leave factory grounds, and subjected to 're-education' after work hours. In addition to attempting to 'transform' those rural Uyghurs participating, these programs inside China proper also ostensibly help to depopulate the Uyghur homeland of Uyghurs, perhaps establishing a limited form of ethnic cleansing.

While programs transferring Uyghurs to work in inner China have been operational since at least 2006, the *South China Morning Post* revealed in May 2020 that the numbers of such coerced Uyghur migrant laborers are now being increased in line with quotas assigned to 19 different provinces and municipalities of the PRC, likely the same regions involved in the controversial 'Pairing Assistance Program' (PAP) that has driven the development of the Uyghur homeland since 2010.² With the quota assigned to Shenzhen alone alleged to be 50,000 laborers, one can assume that the total numbers scheduled to be transferred from the Uyghur homeland through this program over the next several years will be in the hundreds of thousands, seriously altering the demographics of the region.

As Chapter 6 of this book suggests, these labor programs appear to present an endgame for the mass internment camps that have been at the center of China's campaign against its Uyghur population since 2017. The system of mass internment, imprisonment, and surveillance that has been in place in the Uyghur homeland has effectively neutralized resistance from the Uyghur people in China and has served to destroy their social capital and break their spirits. Now, with most intellectuals still interned or incarcerated, the majority of the rural population are being marginalized and controlled through relegation to an underclass of factory labor where they are targeted for political indoctrination and assimilationist measures. Furthermore, a significant portion of this new Uyghur underclass are being transferred to inner China and separated from their homeland entirely.

In this context, it appears that the regional government has started to reimagine the role of mass internment camps in the Uyghur home-

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land as it increasingly releases former internees into these controlled labor programs. Already in December 2019, the ethnic Uyghur chairman of the regional government, Shohrat Zakir, suggested that most residents in these camps, which he calls ‘vocational training centers,’ had ‘graduated’ and were now being placed in employment, presumably in the above-mentioned factory labor programs. As a result, he also suggested that these camps would be open to the broader Uyghur public who could pursue ‘vocational training’ in them prior to job placement.³ While the information black-out from the Uyghur region since January 2020 has made it impossible to know what steps have been taken towards this end, it is possible that the smoke-screen of COVID-19 could allow for such a normalization of the mass internment camps, turning them into less violent, but still coercive and indoctrinating intake points for the expanding coercive labor programs. As such, the Chinese government might even open up these centers to international observers after the pandemic has passed in an attempt to hide and deny the extra-judicial, violent, and involuntary nature of the internment that took place in these camps starting in 2017.

Other actions by the state also suggest that the government of China is consolidating its destruction of Uyghur identity during the global pandemic. While the state is relegating large numbers of adults to residential factories, it is also stepping up the construction of boarding schools in Uyghur-populated areas, including for pre-school-aged children, where Uyghur students are taught in Chinese language and culture while being separated from their families and communities. In Khotan’s Karakash region, the local government has even allegedly issued an order requiring that all preschools in the region require live-in boarding for the 2020–2021 school year.⁴ If these reports are accurate, they may signal the early stages of a mandatory boarding school program for all Uyghur children. If that were to happen, the next generation of Uyghurs would be brought up in blatantly assimilationist institutions with little access to the cultural markers of their identity as Uyghurs.

Finally, reports since the pandemic began have also suggested that the Chinese state is now providing subsidies for outside settlers to

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the Uyghur region if they settle in new under-populated cities in the traditionally Uyghur-majority south.⁵ While the extent of this program is unknown, combined with the deliberate displacement of Uyghurs in the region through labor programs, this appears to mark a new stage of state-sponsored settler colonization by the Han majority population of China. Concurrently, it is assumed that the transformation of the landscape of the Uyghur homeland described in Chapter 6 is also continuing unabated during the pandemic to make way for this settlement.

All of these actions make sense in the context of the overall goals of the state in its campaign to destroy the Uyghur identity. As this book suggests, the state campaign against the Uyghurs in China, while couched in terms of 'counterterrorism,' has really been driven by settler colonialism, ultimately seeking to make the Uyghur homeland indistinguishable, with the exception of physical geography, from the rest of China both in appearance and demographics. In the book's conclusion, I suggest that the present trajectory in the region is successfully facilitating such a colonization, but I also argue that this process would take several years of sustained and unchallenged repression to become irreversible. Unfortunately, the signs of accelerated colonization evident during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic could facilitate the entrenchment of this process by the time the pandemic has passed, making the ultimate transformation of the Uyghur homeland into a Han-dominated part of the PRC a *fait accompli*. Furthermore, in the process, the Chinese state may be able to erase much of the physical evidence of the violent mass internment of Uyghurs since 2017 that helped propel the final chapter of this colonization.

In this context, the call to grassroots activism on the issue of the Uyghur cultural genocide that I articulate in the book's conclusion is all the more urgent today. However, now, any activism on the Uyghur issue will also need to contend with a changing geopolitical context. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global political and economic processes remains one of the largest unknowns for the future, it seems clear that the present crisis will seriously alter geopolitics. It may be that this critical juncture in world history will

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further the destruction of the world's tenuous 'rules-based order' that has been deteriorating since GWOT was declared, bringing us increasingly into the post-privacy, post-rights, and anti-diversity global environment I describe in the book's conclusion. However, it is also possible that this moment of global upheaval could facilitate a reversal of these trends, as common global suffering highlights the need for more international oversight and humanitarianism as well as for the empowerment of non-state actors to hold states and other sources of international power accountable both within and across borders. Whichever of these trajectories evolves in the aftermath of this global crisis, one can expect the world to be even more contentious than it has become during the pandemic. While likely not to be at the top of the post-pandemic global agenda, how the story of the Uyghur cultural genocide told in this book further develops may be indicative of which way a new post-2020 world order is headed.

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