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The Proscription of The East Turkestan Islamic Movement and Its Impact on The Golden Age Between China and Great Britain

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Abstract:

This study analyses the factors behind the listing and anticipated delisting of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) within the scope of the Chinese- British relations. This study answers the following questions: what are the circumstances that led to listing the ETIM? What could be the potential factors for delisting it by the UK, and how have the Sino-British ties evolved since the listing of ETIM in 2016? What are the implications of listing Chinese terrorist groups on Chinese-British relations? We attempt to answer the above questions by analyzing the evolution of the Chinese-British relations and their claimed 'Golden Era' through descriptive and comparative analysis. We conclude that the British proscription process is used more as a diplomatic tool to manage foreign relations as the majority of proscribed organizations are not seen as posing a direct internal threat to the UK's domestic security. This comes with a comparison to the USA's position in listing the ETIM after 2001 and delisting it nearly two decades later to navigate strategic ties within the international community. As China's position shifts in the international community, the proscription of terrorist organizations changes amongst designator - countries based on their national interests.

Keywords: Sino-British ties, golden era, ETIM, counterterrorism.

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حظر حركة تركستان الشرقية الإسلامية وأثره على العصر الذهبي بين الصين وبريطانيا

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الملخص:

تُحلل هذه الدراسة العوامل الكامنة وراء إدراج حركة تركستان الشرقية الإسلامية على قائمة الإرهاب البريطانية، وتتنبأ إزالتها من القائمة، وذلك ضمن نطاق العلاقات الصينية البريطانية. تُجيب الدراسة على الأسئلة التالية: ما هي الظروف التي أدت إلى إدراج حركة تركستان الشرقية الإسلامية على قائمة الإرهاب البريطانية؟ وما هي العوامل المحتملة التي قد تؤدي إلى إزالتها من ذات القائمة؟ وكيف تطورت العلاقات بين البلدين منذ إدراج الحركة في عام 2016؟ وما هي تداعيات إدراج جماعات إرهابية صينية على قائمة الإرهاب البريطانية على العلاقات الصينية البريطانية؟ وللإجابة على التساؤلات أعلاه، تُحلل الدراسة تطور العلاقات الصينية البريطانية و"العصر الذهبي" المزعوم، اعتمادًا على منهج التحليل الوصفي والتحليل المقارن.

تخلص الدراسة أن عملية تصنيف وإدراج الحركات على قائمة الإرهاب البريطانية تُستخدم كأداة دبلوماسية من قبل بريطانيا لإدارة العلاقات الخارجية، حيث لا تُشكل غالبية الحركات المحظورة تهديدًا داخليًا مباشرًا للأمن الداخلي لبريطانيا. ويأتي ذلك مقارنةً بموقف الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية في إدراج حركة تركستان الشرقية الإسلامية بعد عام 2001 وإزالتها بعد قرابة عقدين من الزمن وذلك بغرض إدارة علاقاتها الاستراتيجية في المجتمع الدولي. ومع تغير وضع الصين ومكانتها في المجتمع الدولي قد تشهد حالة حظر الحركات الإرهابية تغيرًا بين الدول المصنفة لهذه الحركات وفقًا لمصالحها الوطنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلاقات الصينية البريطانية، العصر الذهبي، حركة تركستان الشرقية الإسلامية، مكافحة الإرهاب.

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Introduction:

This paper examines the factors behind listing and delisting of nonstate actors as terrorist groups and specifically the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) on UK'S proscription list and its impact on Sino-British relations post what is commonly known as the 'golden era'. In other words, we examine the effect of listing the ETIM on the UK and China's relations in terms of their diplomatic expectations. The main questions that we set to answer are: what are the factors behind proscribing the ETIM by the UK and how the Sino-British relations have evolved since the listing of ETIM in 2016? Proscription could be used as a diplomatic tool signaling further cooperation between two countries. We argue that the proscription of the ETIM came as a gesture signaling larger cooperation between the two countries beyond security, which solidified their 'golden era'. The procession of such golden expectations had its ups and downs as we have seen with the recent counter sanctions from China and the human rights accusations by the EU as well as China's stance for the Russian-Ukraine war, which contributed to the dwindling ties between the two countries. This comes with the incidence paralleling the USA's delisting of the ETIM from their foreign terrorist organizations list in 2020 following similar accusations against China (Kashgarian, 2020). Such signaling foreshadows a shift in alliances between powers. It also shows that utilizing the delisting mechanism might not be primarily for countering terrorism, but it is for other diplomatic reasons between countries. The USA's perceived threat of the ETIM on their own domestic front is far-fetched and does not seem direct or imminent. As we set out to closely examine the ETIM's proscription as a claimed counterterrorism tool, we observe the impact on many facets of the Sino-British relations and the direction it has gone through signaling foreign policy alignment between the two governments.

We shed light on the deeper understanding for how proscription is used as a tool to strengthen diplomatic ties between

designator and inflicted government, regardless of the actual and direct threat the organization might pose to the designator country. We attempt to demonstrate how the process by which countries designate terrorist groups is vague and is subject to bilateral political considerations. Diplomatic closeness between governments is demonstrated through various variables. We focus on trade as an economic variable between the two counties and how it is impacted due to the designation of the ETIM as a diplomatic tool signaling overlap in preferences. Another contribution of this paper is that it adds to the very few academic research that focuses on the ETIM considering the Sino-British relations. We attempt to fill the gap that contributes further to richer explanatory factors for counterterrorism tools as justifications for shifting alliances and signaling of international support. This comes as recent contention on the role of rising powers and changing power parity in the international order increases, where proscription could be a tool used as a by-product for impacting cooperation between governments. Finally, this paper also contributes to the understanding of the scope that listing or proscription of terrorist organizations can be widened as a tool not only for external foreign relations but also as a justifier for more trade and economic agreements.

First: Literature Review

1. Evaluating Counterterrorism:

The Counterterrorism literature looks at evaluating such efforts implemented by government authorities on the decay or failure of terrorist attacks and their prevention (Frey2004; Cronin 2009; Byman 2021; Bandyopadhyay and Sandler2021). Looking at the designator country in terms of its alliances and foreign policy direction sheds light on the use of proscription as a tool for diplomatic relations. Emphasis on the designation time coinciding with the current designator country's administration's national interest is one way to understand how this counterterrorism tool is

utilized by countries to strengthen their cooperation in other areas not necessarily directly related to countering terrorism.

Counterterrorism efforts by governments are broadly broken into two categories: passive and active. Passive efforts include installing metal detectors in airports, fortifying embassies, and implementing preventative policy domestically with extra screening at airports or more inclusionary measures in societies more susceptive to being radicalized. By examining the effect of increased passive effort on the number of terrorist incidents, scholars found that by adding metal detectors in airports in the USA from 1973, terrorists have changed the type of hostage mission they conduct to avoid metal detectors (Sandler et al. 1991). This counterterrorism effort affected terrorist activities by diversifying their strategy. Active measures on the other hand, are also known as proactive measures that governments can take to deter terrorist activity, such as, destroying base operations, camps, infiltration, and retaliation efforts (Acre and Sandler2005).

The majority of literature utilizes interrupted time-series analysis (Sandler et al 1991; Lum et al 2006; Demir & Guler2022; Hsu & McDowall 2020) to evaluate the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts on the attacks of terrorist groups. There is literature that looks at policy impact on the recurrence of terrorist acts. For example, the installation of metal detectors in airports is believed to be associated with a decrease in hijackings and threats of hijackings. However, such preventative measures are also associated with an increase of other hostage incidences and bombings as other means of terror (Sandler et al.1991). The modes of terrorism are related to government reaction, where a shift in the behavior of terrorist groups can be an adaptation to the implemented governmental counterterrorist effort in place.

Categorizing terrorism in an all-inclusive camp risks scholars falling into a unidimensional lens of evaluation. The evolution of terrorism as an act makes countering it not as simple. Every group has different stages of developing and is fueled by differing

degrees of grievances, where it attracts different support based on the message it is conveying and based on the domestic and international scene. This is where global alliances, foreign policy cooperation and the power struggle in the global structure come into play as explanatory factors for labeling and designating terrorist groups.

2. Listing and Delisting of Terrorist Groups:

Since the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States of America (USA), the reality of defining civil liberties and the concept of national security became mainstream. People started feeling the pressure of restrictions on their rights in the name of national security and this debate has spread beyond the USA. Many countries started publicly recording their proscription lists as well as their mechanism for countering such phenomenon.

Studies look at the impact, effectiveness, and consequences of counterterrorism efforts by governments but only a handful of studies examine the impact of proscription as a counterterrorism tool on the country's diplomatic relations as well as on domestic stability (Jarvis & Legrand 2018). The importance of analyzing proscription efforts comes as an essential factor to understanding the demise of terrorism around the world. As countries act under their own self-interest, where their sovereignty is a strong determining factor, the mechanism of proscription can sometimes be vague, and its implementation is up to interpretation. This only exacerbates the process of accountability and gives governments more freedom to practice the myriad forms of oppression and restrictive civil liberties in the name of counterterrorism. In the United Kingdom for example, the Home Secretary office has the responsibility of proscribing and maintaining the list of terrorist organizations with Parliament's consent (UK Home Office 2021). The European Union (EU), moreover, established its own list outlining any person or group engaged in terrorist activities and the consequences thereof as a supranational entity. The EU terrorist list also justifies its efforts giving credit to September 11

as the catalyst for their active counterterrorism listing and sanctioning efforts (European Council 2022).

The reasons behind designations by countries is a matter of contention because the definition of 'terrorism' remains unclear. However, having international organizations such as the EU with a unified mechanism makes the concept respectively generalizable across the region and can be uniformly studied. It is important to establish emphasis on the ubiquity of the cost associated with listing as "governments expend resources putting groups on lists to "name and shame" them, and subject them to formal sanctions" (El Masri & Phillips 2021, 1). The debate of designation has been growing among policymakers and academics and focused literature is immensely needed (De Jonge2004; Asal et al. 2012; Jarvis & Legrand 2016). There are many reasons behind designations and some stem from strategic alliances to economic interest and even as soft power for a particular agenda.

Lastly, 'labeling' might have unintended consequences and can encourage more violence. Labeling terrorist groups within a narrow definition might be problematic especially when groups today execute tactics that are closer to guerrilla warfare, which stem from civil conflict and resemble more of an insurgent group (Moghadam et al. 2014). Hence, identifying, qualifying, and labeling groups to be on terrorist lists might need a reshaping based on origins, capability, and threat level among others, where a closer look on terrorist groups' threat perception by designator is much needed. This is where we take a specific case of the UK's proscription and the East Turkestan Islamic Party/Movement (ETIP/ETIM) to establish the relationship and impact of such designation on UK and Chinese relations.

3. Counterterrorism Diplomacy Trends:

The UK and the USA have a publicly acknowledged bilateral cooperation. The UK is a strategic partner to the USA on the war on terror as it has been a partner in the coalition against ISIS (U.S. Department of state 2020). This cooperation publicizes its strong

stance against terrorism and remains united on dealing with Iraq and Syria 2020. This extends to a holistic cooperation with the European Union (EU) and the USA on similar grounds for counterterrorism efforts, where the EU and the USA have aligned visions.

Since 2002, both the UK and India, established what is known as the 'foreign ministry led joint working group' (JWG) on terrorism, which has recently been extended to include a newly created defense related JWG (The Hindu Bureau 2022). As a gesture of cooperation and alignment on the same vision, the UK has proscribed similar groups as its partners while the joint effort grows strong and united under one cause. Both countries exchanged dialogue on the similar threat perceptions and their possible impact on their respective internal stability as well as their dyadic relationship (Foreign, Commonwealth& Development office 2022). This is to align their visions on what tactical approach they would take towards the prosperity of such cooperation (Roy-Chaudhury 2019).

This dyadic cooperation extended to strategic alliances around the globe, which produced counterterrorism visions stemming from highly reactionary to proactive ones resulting in restricting many debated civil liberties. For instance, China's 2015 counterterrorism legislation gave authority for the Chinese government to act in ambiguity with a broad scope dealing with terrorism in the name of national security. For example, businesses in technology and telecommunications are obligated to cooperate with the government in sharing information and other responsibilities as requested by government officials under the guise of protecting the national security of the country (Byman & Saber2019). The restrictions extend to government mandated censorship of social media accounts, media in general, and communications providers to answer the call for intelligence sharing when summoned (Byman & Saber 2019, 4).

Second: 'Golden Era' Overview:

The UK-China 'golden era' was popularized in 2015, when the two countries started dialogue for bilateral cooperation for mutually beneficial outcomes. The relationship started with focus on economic trade and open market communication with talks about counterterrorism collaboration to follow. Counterterrorism efforts have not been largely highlighted, unlike trade ventures, because counterterrorism was viewed as a 'given', where both countries have agreed to follow the UN Charter and international law on the matter (Yan 2019). It is essential to clarify that what is meant by the 'golden era' between China and the UK is largely economic with strengthening trade ties and economic expectations, with spillover of cultural exchange and education. With Boris Johnson's reign, the UK's evident fondness to China was ever publicized, where his agenda was solidified to include China's interests bilaterally (Wintour 2021b). However, post-BREXIT, scholars have predicted that these ties will only strengthen as the UK looks elsewhere for opportunity, but as seen today the UK's position and public statements signals deterioration of the golden era (Goh 2018).

The relationship took a different turn with the term 'complexity' used in many reports from the UK governing bodies towards the relationship. The rough turns that the complex relationship took was multi-faceted, from the vague signaling of the UK's expectations and how they consider trade a crucial part of shaping security relations between countries (House of Lords 2021). In their report, the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee in 2021, called for the UK government to be more specific on its path dealing with China and acknowledge that trade cannot be independent from security. This comes after years of uncertainty with cultural clashes and divergent decision-making approaches between the two governments. For example, the controversy about Huawei and 5G networks, one country two systems Hongkong, and Xinjiang human rights abuses allegations.

This made the UK weary of continuing a relationship with a publicly 'controversial' partner. The UK acknowledges China's economic and military strength but knows the diverging norms and tolerance to international standards, which can contradict their policy approaches.

2021 marks the year of deterioration in cooperation between the two countries. One factor was China's counter measures to the EU sanctions on human rights. China announced sanctions on 10 individuals and four entities in the EU (Parry 2021), because those entities and individuals threaten its sovereignty by misinformation and misrepresenting the government's actions. This decision followed the EU sanctions on a Chinese entity for allegations of human rights abuses coinciding on the same day of the counter Chinese sanctions. This signifies one of the first uses of the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR). The plan comes at a time where an ambitious trade agreement has been in negotiation between China and the EU known as the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment. China's countersanctions caused the talks about this agreement to come to an observable halt (Emmott 2021).

Moreover, with Liz Truss' past agenda, we witnessed a divergence from Boris Johnson's unquestionable support to China. As the former Prime Minister for the UK, she has differences in policy direction. For example, her open support for Israel comes in opposition to the consistent support of China's United Nations General Assembly as well as the UN Security Council voting for the Palestinian cause and against Israel's occupation (Shuaibi et al. 2024). With her tougher China stance, Truss sustained a solid consistency with the EU on China's rivalry with cautious navigation through any bilateral or multilateral cooperation. Today the UK sees a consistency with such view with the current PM Rishi Sunak, however he states a clear need for dialogue and efforts to solve challenges with China as he sees the strategic

importance of cooperation between the governments (MacLellan & Suleiman2022).

The House of Lords report in 2021 demonstrates a conversation spill over to the weaker relationship around the counterterrorism agenda. Clear statements from the report showcase the concern about human rights abuses and allegations of genocide observed in the Xinjiang region, which leads to differences on how each of the countries define and perceive terrorism. Not only can we see difference in definitions but diverging views on counterterrorism efforts being enforced in the name of counterterrorism.

Third: The Two States' Approach to Counterterrorism

1. UK's Proscription Framework:

Proscription is meant as a tool for countering terrorism, whether domestic or foreign. September 11, 2001, became once again a large motivator for counter terrorism agendas and enforcement tools, which allowed for alternatives in dealing with extremism, such as with asset freezing sanctions rather than active efforts such as aggression by the government against the terrorist organizations. The UK was keen to establish efforts that could interject the potential of homegrown extremism and dismantle or weaken a group before it reaches its peak in strength and influence (Legrand & Jarvis 2014), which required multiple definitions of terrorism to widen the scope of interpretation. Prior to 2001, the attention of countering terrorism was on the Irish Republican organizations amongst others, which the 'Terrorism Act 2000', gave the UK new powers to act in the name of national security (Marques da Silva & Murphy2012).

Today, there is large consensus on the objective of proscription in the UK, which falls under three main points: "…to deter proscribed organizations from coming to the UK; to disrupt the ability of such organizations to operate; to support foreign governments in disrupting activity and to denounce the claims of proscribed organizations to legitimacy" (Marques da Silva & Murphy 2012, 3-4). The support for other governments signifies a

strategic tool for alliances and national interest; whether such definition has been successful in deterring terrorist organizations is up for debate. With the broadened definitions and scope of proscription, however, comes greater difficulty to claim efficiency in identify terrorist organizations. There is a thin line between pure proscription aimed at protecting national security and profiling or discriminating based on race, religion, or ethnicity for underlying motivations that would serve ulterior goals (Macdonald 2011). We have witnessed of late a shift towards the UK proscribing foreign entities that do not necessarily provide a direct threat to its national security, rather are strategic groups for strengthening alliances globally.

The Kurdish migrant experience in the UK demonstrates how proscription policy is detects an international threat as impacting domestic politics. The London residents of Kurdish origins have expressed their experience as being deliberately profiled in their own community as 'persons of interest' in relation to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been active in Turkey with a long-standing armed conflict (Sentas 2015). Proscription doesn't only see the light as a tool for foreign policy, but because of such a tool, its implications can spill over to domestic politics and become a topic of contention regardless of its direct impact internally to the designator country. The example of the Kurdish residents shows that any international armed conflict either stemming from liberation, self-determination, or pure disturbance of power, is nonetheless labeled as acts of terror and qualify to be proscribed with the use of the full force of the law on persons remotely related in anyway outside such conflict. This, according to scholars, marginalizes ethnic groups (Sentas 2015; Boon-Kuo et al.2015; Fernandes 2015), which begs the question of what motivates today's proscription efforts and how effective are they in curbing the spread of terrorism?

2. China's Counterterrorism Policy*:*

Growing interest in homegrown terrorism in China led to the 2015 legislation for countering terrorism. This legislation is the first official procedure and mandate for the Chinese government to deal with its internal unrest showing interest, urgency, and strategic focus on their home-grown efforts. The main region of contention on the subject being Xinjiang. The significance of the territory is its legacy of the ancient Silk Road trade route, as it passed through the region and across to the Middle East. This region hosts the largest ethnic group, the Turkic Uyghur (Toops 2004). Its significance however, to the Chinese government extends beyond the Silk Road legacy. Xinjiang produces petroleum and natural gas, which makes it a potential threat with significant influence on China's economy. Any control or outside influence on this region would mean ample ramifications for China's ambitious economic outlook. Hence, when the word 'terrorism' and its subsequent 'counterterrorism' follows for China, scholars and policymakers automatically assume the subject of contention is Xinjiang and more specifically, the East Turkestan Islamic Party/Movement (ETIP/ETIM) as the culprit.

The year 2014 noted many incidents that triggered China's counterterrorism approach: a group conducting mass stabbing in a train station, which was accredited to extremists from Xinjiang by the Chinese government (Clarke 2015). Another incident was of unmarked SUVs responsible for an attack in the open-air market (Clarke 2015, 132). Such incidents were not only labeled by the Chinese government as acts of terrorism from the ETIM but were also publicly and officially acknowledged by international governments like the UK on its proscription list, where the British government attributed the incidents to the ETIM and as indisputable acts of terror (Gov. UK 2021).

The events of 2001 propelled cooperation with many countries including China on the topic of counterterrorism. The USA's position on listing the ETIM was made for the country's strategic

positions on other issues, which is regarded as purely political (Roberts 2020). It is worthy to note that former president George W Bush Jr called China pre-2001 as a strategic partner but this quickly shifted to a strengthening of the alliances and aligning of interest between the two countries where Bush Jr described the relationship as "…standing side by side with the American people in the pursuit of international terrorism" (Laress 2022,137). China's motives were focused on calling the internal unrest of Xinjiang as domestic terrorism and it utilized this opportunity to persuade the USA to acknowledge the ETIM as a terrorist organization on its official list in 2002 (Laress 2022). The cooperation had many faces demonstrating the strengthening of ties between the countries in this arena, where the USA allowed Chinese interrogators in Guantanamo cells to interrogate Uygur prisoners for example (Bernstein2019).

The First time China designated the Uyghur population as "terrorists" was in 2002. It is rather significant for whole ethnic groups to be considered as terrorist, because it signifies a path dependence where anyone born into this population has guilt by association. This means stifling the prosperity of a whole people making up an ethnic group. The Chinese government claimed that the Uyghur were responsible for more than 200 attacks between 1990-2001, which warranted the designation of 'terrorist' for the entire population in Xinjiang (Clarke 2015). Although outbreaks of ethnic violence have not been novel to China, the events of 2001 in the USA triggered a wave of mainstream agenda-setting for the concept of 'terrorism' and the drafting of counterterrorism visions across countries. This is when social profiling and ethnic labeling became a common tool for countries around the world.

China's approach has been effective in combating terrorism only in the short term. Whereas addressing the root cause of extremism like social integration for multi-culturalism, and tolerance for diversity, have not been subjects of contention within the Chinese government, which means that the counterterrorism efforts are

merely short-term fixes maintaining the status quo. In 2013 the Tiananmen square attack of the ETIM gave way to the counterterrorism laws and the bilateral and multilateral cooperation of China and others (Yan 2019). Some critics say that this approach of China's counterterrorism vision is an excuse to build a justifiable and undeniable police state. This comes as critics observe the restrictions imposed by Chinese officials as tools for executing the 2015 mandate as a justifier for establishing a police state (Rodriguez-Merino, 2021). For example, under the 2015 anti-terrorism legislation, residence of Xinjiang must report to specific religious committees created and approved by the government, their religious activities, marriage ceremonies and any rituals or cultural activities (Yan 2019). Uyghur Muslims participating in unauthorized travel and pilgrimage would be arrested and suffer financial penalties, which also mean that they may enter re-education centers, which are claimed to be 'de-radicalization' programs (Yan 2019, 8). In 2016, which commemorates a year after the counterterrorism mandate was officially publicized, all forms of religious events in schools were forbidden in Xinjiang and the freedom of religious expression and public participation was banned (Chung 2018).

Fourth: Methods & Analysis:

We predict that foreign bilateral cooperation dictated by preferences between countries spill over to reflect the dyadic countries' proscription strategies. We utilize historical analysis to further analyze the degree of accuracy of our claim comparing the UK's listing of ETIM with the timeline of diplomatic and economic ties with China.

Our analysis demonstrates the sequence of events that shape the understanding of how proscribing the ETIM by the UK has impacted the Sino-British bilateral ties. In this case, we look at the listing date of the ETIM in the UK as the starting point and analyze the timeline of milestones within the relationship with China post the listing of the group as a terrorist organization and

how often or obvious the cooperation clearly states efforts for combating terrorism as opposed to other general purposes for strengthening or weaking of cooperation. The milestones are marked as major agreements, alliances and/or any publicly official mandate or statements from both governments asserting cooperation, preference alignment and interests. The analysis will then be observed in terms of closeness of ties and any disturbances or instances where the ties between the two countries might be ruffled. We note the stress periods to predict whether the withering of the relationship impacts the delisting of the ETIM by the UK.

This method offers specificity when working on case-based explanations while at the same time does not limit the possibility of causes through a narrow lens. Tracing historical evidence, within this context, provides better understanding of the bigger picture in identifying patterns of strengths and weaknesses within national security strategies between the UK and China and what this means for the purposes of proscribing terrorist organizations as a tool for counterterrorism. It is often essential to systematically diagnose the evidence selected, which in this case is in the timeline of interaction between the UK and China from 2016-2022 as availability of observable data permits. This tool is essential in "…describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims" (Collier 2011,823). As we conduct historical analysis and pattern seeking to understand how proscription is used and impacted as a diplomatic tool, we will be able to predict patterns for factors that impact ETIM's designation in observing focal points of weakening or strengthening the ties between the two countries.

1. The Golden Era Starts:

2016 and 2017 marked the peak of relations between the two countries. As the ETIM is officially listed as a terrorist organization by the UK, it marked a solid state of cooperation and an intention to align bilateral foreign policy objectives. The UK

government under the former Prime Minister Theresa May sought to deepen trade and investment ties with China. Despite the UK's critical view over China's actions in the South China Sea, 2016 marks a year with obvious intent for the UK to strengthen ties and find common grounds for deeper cooperation. Listing the ETIM in December 2016, meant that the UK acknowledges the threat and terrorist nature of the group as it agrees with China on how to view terrorism when it comes to the ETIM. Prior to the listing of the ETIM, the UK signed in the same year 'the Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Plant deal' (The Guardian 2016). China's General Nuclear Power Corporation (CGN) would invest in the construction of the Hinkley Point C Nuclear Power Plant in Somerset, England. This plant is expected to provide 7% of the UK's electricity needs (Egis-group). Other noteworthy achievements of this year between the two governments were: Extensive dialogue that resulted in signing multiple agreements in 2016 (Gov. UK 2016) as a platform to enhance cooperation between their respective financial institutions and the Belt and Road Initiative Memorandum of Understanding (OECD2018).

Listing the ETIM brought with it a strong stance for political, economic, and diplomatic ties between the two governments. The UK demonstrated its commitment to working with China on counter-terrorism efforts and a strong stance to demonstrate its commitment towards global security and to its national interests especially at a sensitive time when it announced to leave the EU. The potential of exiting the EU meant that the UK requires to have contingency plans in terms of its financial longevity and internal stability. Exploring extra-regional ties is essential for advancing the country's national interest. This is where the listing of the ETIM by the UK signals an era of aligning to the perception of an extra- regional threat for China- a power whose threat of terrorism is domestic. As acknowledgement of this terrorist group for the UK is not directly affecting its internal security, this move can be seen as a symbolic gesture to gain favor for collaboration in other

areas with China. In 2016 and 2017, the dyad conducted joint exercises for large scale evacuation scenarios (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019. This exercise was designed to strengthen cooperation between the two countries and enhance their ability to respond to threats by exchanging know-how and expertise. This comes as President Xi Jinping's state visit to the UK seals the cooperation with an official agreement to start a "Golden Era" of bilateral relations, including the expansion of bilateral trade in an array of industries (Wensha & Mingjie 2017), which comes as an official public display of alignment. The two countries have also upgraded their relationship to a "Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". Among other factors, the agreements outline the two countries' vision on counter-terrorism strategies and increased bilateral cooperation to enhance global peace (Foreign, Commonwealth& Development office 2016). The cooperation continued well into 2019 with policy outcomes between the two countries on their further economic and financial dialogue, which covered: information sharing to protecting each other's diplomatic and economic interests overseas (Assets Publishing Services 2019). This also includes cooperation on cybercrime and enhancing technological capacity building for both countries to exchange knowledge and know-how to develop a future-proof adaptive technology to protect citizens domestically and abroad. This signals to the international community that both countries are in alignment on defining and identifying threats. The Golden Era is at its peak.

2. Sino-British Ties: A Downward Slope?

2.1. The Hong Kong Dispute:

Given the historical ties that Hong Kong holds with the UK as a former colony, tensions between the Kingdom and China can involve the territory as a point of contention regardless of the strife between the two. As part of the Joint Declaration to hand over Hong Kong as an autonomous territory to China, Hong Kong

would maintain its own legal and economic systems under what is known as the 'one country, two systems' understanding (Brooke-Holland 2019). As China have been at later stages, proposing legislation that would challenge directly or indirectly the proposed Declaration's clauses, the relationship between the UK and China would seem to dwindle. For example, the UK's former Prime Minister Boris Johnson raising concerns over the treatment of protestors in Hong Kong. Protests broke out when China proposed a bill to extradite criminals and suspects to mainland China (Ramzy 2019). This would undermine the autonomy of the legal system established in Hong Kong and allow for more interference from mainland China.

At the wake of China's newly proposed national security law in June of 2020, the UK hastens to offer refuge to Hong Kong citizens affected by China's new law and allows for a new pathway to citizenship (Bartlett 2020). This move has sent alerts to China having made it clear that it does not take lightly any interventionist policies and meddling in its internal affairs, which once again set the Sino-British Golden Era two steps back (Bartlett 2020). Hong Kong, although a sovereign territory within the Peoples Republic of China, remains a concern for the UK due to its historical path dependency and the assurances that the Joint Declaration is meant to provide. However, there is a disconnect between the written clauses within the Declaration and the actual actions from both countries coupled with their national interest agendas.

2.2. Human Rights: Xinjiang Sanctions & Implications for the ETIM:

The UK joins the US, EU and other countries in imposing sanctions on Chinese officials over human rights abuses in Xinjiang (Wintour 2021a). The UK goes further to impose sanctions on Chinese officials involved in mass detention of Uyghurs (Foreign, Commonwealth& Development2021). This creates a shift in the stance of the ETIM as a terrorist organization.

Just as seen with the USA, the ETIM's designation might change from a terrorist organization to a group seeking social justice. The UK, just as deemed by the USA might shift focus to highlight that China is committing genocide on the minority Muslim population in Xinjiang following the USA's statements of the same (Gallardo2021). More notably, in early 2023, the Governor of the western region of Xinjiang cancelled his visit to the UK due to pressures from the UK officials to question him on human rights abuses and the genocide taking place in China against the Uyghur Muslims (Smout 2023).

As for the human rights concerns that have been surfacing since 2015, the UK publicizes its corporate report from its Foreign and Commonwealth Office outlining its support to help China improve its policies on torture prevention, women's rights and the death penalty among others with some concern on China's willingness to cooperate in the monitoring of Human Rights abuses in territories like Tibet (Foreign, Commonwealth& Development 2017).

Statements by UK Officials, including members of Parliament were made condemning the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, and called on the Chinese government to respect the human rights of all citizens, including the right to freedom of religion and expression (Newson 2022). The UK reiterated the need for an independent investigation into the human rights abuses, including reports of arbitrary detention, mass surveillance, and political indoctrination (Foreign, Commonwealth& Development 2022). This signals a discrepancy in both governments' views and their approach towards understanding universal human rights. The UK supported calls for international sanctions against those responsible for the human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including travel bans and asset freezes.

The UK continues to crack down on Human Rights violations and enacts 'Magnitsky-Style' sanctions following the US and Canada. These sanctions would in effect be enacted against any individual or entity believed to violate human rights globally (Timsit 2020).

Of course, this move has great implications for China, where it can easily enact countersanctions on such a move from the UK (Timsit 2020).

Noting the timeline, it is essential to understand the UK's stance on its own survival and national security. The period between 2016 and 2022 marks an unknown for UK's politics as it goes through its own BREXIT dealings. Keeping this in mind, the above events demonstrate a struggle between keeping with the international community in upholding a stringent stance against the human rights abuses witnessed in China towards the Uyghur Muslims and the survival of the UK as it seeks its own national interest and secures its survival first and foremost. Furthermore, the UK has elected to maintain economic and defense cooperation with China despite the criticism by the international community and the UK's government itself towards China.

3. National Interest through Trade Remains a Driver:

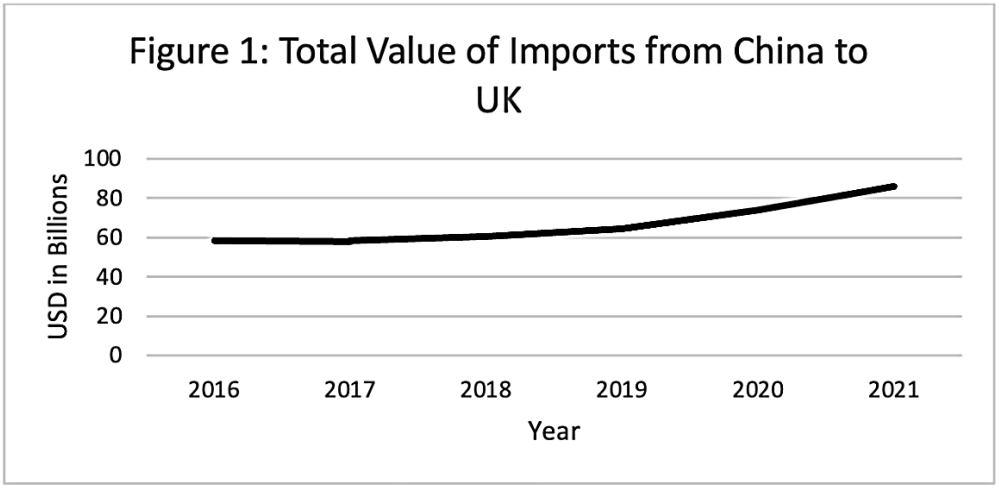
Although sanctions and strict regulatory strategies have been debated in the European Union and the UK on Chinese investments, the UK as of 2019, was at the top of the list in receiving Chinese FDI (Hanemann et al. 2019). A major influx of this FDI is in critical infrastructure entities such as Global Switch; a company that provides top tier data solutions to public and private sectors across Europe and Asia (Hanemann etal. 2019).

The UK was seeking to create a more favorable investment climate for Chinese investors by streamlining regulations and reducing bureaucracy (Interesse2022). Chinese investment was desired for key infrastructure projects, such as energy, transportation, and real estate (Dong & Xia 2022). This was seen as a way to drive economic growth, create jobs, and boost competitiveness, demonstrating the UK's priorities as preceding counterterrorism efforts and its stance towards the alleged human rights abuses by China. The UK was keen on supporting a ban carried out by the European Union and other supernational entities

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such as the UN but not directly impacting its own economic benefit as an individual country from China (Interesse2022).

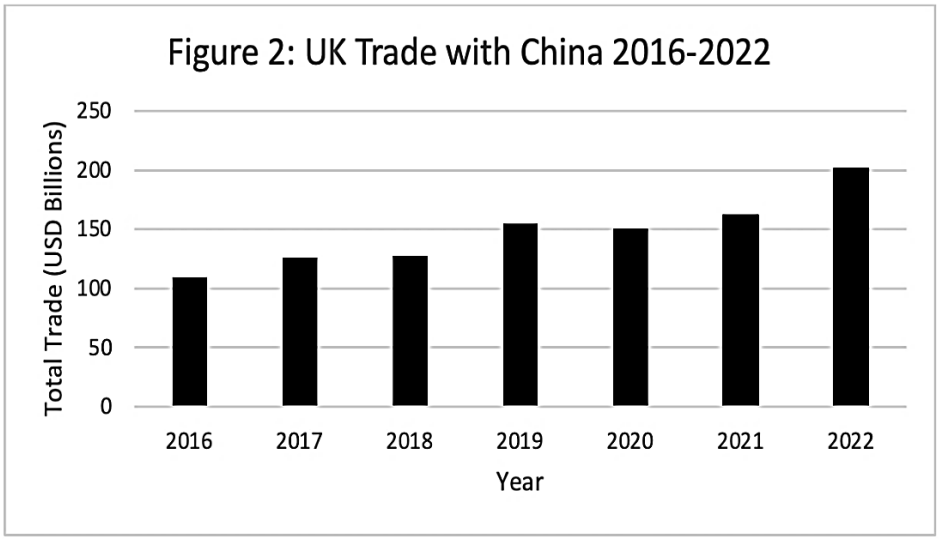
Looking at the challenges and bumps along the cooperation road, it is essential to note the actual stress the human rights allegations and sanctions had on the depth of the two governments' collaboration in critical areas like trade. Especially on how much emphasis is given towards efforts of countering terrorism during the period of cooperation. Below we see descriptive graphs showing the total import trends from China highlighting the pattern of the so called 'Golden Era' in 2016 until 2021.



Source: oec.world

A steady and growing dependence on Chinese exports to the UK demonstrate that the UK has placed national interest above all and the various contentious issues that raised concerns from the international community towards China have not affected the economic parameters of the Sino-British ties. Since the ETIM has been listed as a terrorist group, there has not been direct programs and initiatives to combat terrorism as much as the trade, financial and diplomatic relations seen throughout the 'Golden Era'. In other words, efforts towards achieving the UK's economic, financial and diplomatic goals outweigh initiatives directed towards foreign counterterrorism, especially in cases regarding

non-state actors that do not pose a direct threat to the UK such as the ETIM. Hence, this shows that listing the ETIM was more of a diplomatic tool to increase the UK's national interest stronghold as opposed to a true motive to combatting terrorism; especially in the last few years where the relationship between the two has seen tension, whereas 2020 and 2021 highlight the highest years of trade as shown in the figure above. However, as the UK starts looking elsewhere for economic assurances through various cooperation with other allies, the ETIM might once more be designated as a group other than terrorist to signal a shift in ties between China and the UK as seen with the USA.



Source: Department of Business & Trade – Trade and Investment Factsheet 2023
Conversion to US Dollar was based on OECD Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) and Exchange Rates: data.oecd.org

More notably, figure 2 above demonstrates the total trade that took place between the two governments and the hike in trade cooperation in the recent years regardless of political discourse on the points of contention discussed extensively earlier. The total trade between China and the UK in 2022 comprised of an 18.3% increase from the year before it in 2021. China was the UK's fourth largest trade partner towards the end of 2022 (Ell et al. 2024). Likewise, the UK's total exports to China as a major trade

partner has increased by 37.7% from 2021 and total imports from China to the UK have increased by 10.4% in 2022 (2023).

Table 1: Top 5 Partner Countries for Import to the UK 2016-2021

2016	Germany	**China**	USA	Netherlands	France	Switzerland
2017	Germany	**China**	USA	Netherlands	France	Italy
2018	Germany	**China**	USA	Netherlands	France	Italy
2019	Germany	**China**	USA	Netherlands	France	Italy
2020	Germany	**China**	USA	Netherlands	France	Russia
2021	**China**	Germany	USA	Netherlands	Norway	France

Source: oec.world

China has always been among the top trade partners to the UK and its position in the second place has been notably changed to take the top position in 2021 in the total value of imports to the UK. The apparent strife and riffles witnessed in the news between the two countries has no noticeable negative impact in trade value over the years and in fact the trade relationship is shown to strengthen. In 2020, the import value of Germany, the top trade partner, has been around USD74.5 billion, whereas China amounted to USD73.9 billion suggestion a surpass in the upcoming year, which is what happened (Oec.world 2024). Lastly, the top import from 2016 to 2021 to the UK has been gold and China has been the unmatched supplier of this product of this product throughout the study period (Oec.world 2024). Trade is seen as the single factor that could weather other political issues between the two governments as it holds a differing standard of risk and opportunity to both governments' survival and stability.

Results & Discussion:

Terrorism and countering it have been a subject of national security for countries worldwide. Delving deeper into counterterrorism tools is essential to determine their effectiveness in deterring such phenomenon. As seen above, China and the UK's 'Golden Era' and the subsequent cooperation focused more on economic opportunity and diplomacy than to monitor and effectively combat terrorism. As we have seen, the ETIM does not pose a direct threat to the UK domestically and hence, emphasizing an alignment with China on listing or proscribing the terrorism organization demonstrates a determination for establishing closer ties. Diplomatic relationships,

however, can deteriorate based on the administration in office, external pressure, and geopolitics of the time. But we have seen that the constant throughout the ties is trade and economic agreements. This sheds light on the value that countries tend to weigh on their economy as compared to countering terrorism.

China's vast economic potential cannot be ignored when it comes to providing commerce on a global scale. The UK and China continue to be strong trade partners, which triumphs the signaling of terrorism and countering it as priorities. It seems as we have seen in the analysis above that proscribing or listing terrorism organizations is used by governments to signal alignment in trade and other cooperation, whereby counterterrorism discussions and combat might be a by-product or even minimally discussed. Delisting or removing the terrorism organization from the list, moreover, also follows a similar pattern, where it was witnessed with the US that as soon as common interest and trade policy was not aligned with China anymore, a byproduct of that was to delist the ETIM from the US' terrorist list. China has demonstrated itself as a competitor and a rival in many aspects to the US' thriving economic preferences such as in technology, which is when the US' position has shifted to see China as a rival threatening its own prosperity. The US went beyond that to promote the opposite rhetoric with China claiming that the ETIM was indeed a victim of China's oppressive governance. Here we see that the essence of countering terrorism itself was not seen as a priority, rather it is the economic ties and foreign policy interests that determine how countries categorize terrorism organizations.

The findings in this paper go beyond the ETIM, demonstrating that the mechanism of listing or delisting organizations as terrorist might have been politicized and are influenced by factors other than the goal to combat terrorism. Many organizations have been delisted and listed on numerous governments' websites not due to them being dismantled, but rather due to a shift in policy preferences for the designator country. This is an important aspect to evaluate and further analyze to see how effective these lists are. To enlist a terrorist organization requires human resources for research, sessions

with political elites and decisions makers, and much more of tax-payer money and resources. Hence, it is essential to realize that the input of resources, time and effort placed into listing organizations might not equal the output it is delivering in terms of successful deterrent of terrorist activities globally.

Conclusion:

The UK listed the ETIM in 2016, where trade and other cooperation has been strengthened between the UK and China. The 'golden era' of trade and cooperation has been experiencing peaks and troughs mainly concerned with human rights abuses and democratic principles, which stem from a similar principle for listing the ETIM by the UK in the first place. During such era, we have witnessed trade cooperation and strengthening in the economic market of the UK and very little counterterrorism initiatives targeted towards the ETIM to stop the group's alleged acts of terror in China. As seen, listing terrorist groups by countries is utilized as a diplomatic tool to further economic, political and strategic cooperation. As the Sino-British ties have witnessed a decline in the past few years, trade has not been notably affected. However, global pressure could see the ETIM delisted as a by-product of shifting preferences for the UK. As of 2023, combatting terrorism has been set on the priority list in British agenda especially when it comes to China, Russia and Iran, where the ETIM might be a point of contention. Depending on the outcome of such efforts, the UK might take similar route to the USA to delist the ETIM as it signals its shifting alliances with other potential governments. The unraveling of such events could be a topic of contention for further research as more in-depth case-based research is needed to further evaluate the effectiveness of counterterrorism tools.

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