

**FREEDOM FIGHTERS OR TERRORISTS?
EXPLORING THE CASE OF THE UIGHUR PEOPLE**

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Committee on Foreign Affairs
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

Honorable Chairman, distinguished members of the subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight, it is my privilege to testify to you today on the case of the Uighur people. It is my firm belief that there is very little evidence to support the claim that the people in question, either the detainees in Guantanamo Bay, or the Uighur people in general, are terrorists. Many of them could not either be accurately described as “freedom fighters.” The vast majority of the nearly 10 million people known as the Uighur (pronounced Oy-gur), living primarily in the province of Western China known as the “Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region”, which most Uyghur and pre-1940 maps of the area refer to as “Eastern Turkestan,” are upstanding citizens of the People’s Republic of China, primarily agriculturalists and urban-dwellers in the largest cities and oases across the region. They are still the largest population group in the region, and as an official “minority nationality,” receive certain special privileges along with several other minorities, many of them also Muslim (including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, etc.), but are now being surpassed in population by a growing number of Han Chinese settlers from the interior of China.

In the report below, I will argue that the incidents of violence that have occurred in the region are best understood as incidents of civil unrest and rarely can be described as “terrorism” in the traditional sense of the terms (which I take to mean random acts of violence against civilian populations). The struggles for independence of the Uighur people from the Chinese nation-state that have taken place since its incorporation in 1949 are best understood in the context of efforts to attain sovereignty, not as a religious or Islam-inspired campaign. Except for the fact that the Uighur are a Muslim people, their concerns and issues resemble that of Tibet, and the occasional violence that takes place in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China and protests against Chinese rule, are rarely if ever described as “terrorist.” As will be demonstrated below, the characterization of the Guantanamo Uighurs as “ETIM terrorists” is a misnomer at best, and at worst a calculated mischaracterization of a group of people whom the Bush administration and the Department of Defense determined comprise no threat to the US. At the same time, this testimony will show that the region of Xinjiang (pronounced Sheen-Jeeahng), has been extremely peaceful since the late 1990s, and rather than a site of terrorist independence, it has been caught up in an economic boom that would be the envy of any of its surrounding Central Asian states. This testimony will not support an independent Uighuristan or separate state, lest it fall into the same turmoil as its Central Asian neighbors (see Figure 1), but rather encourage greater autonomy, direct engagement of the Chinese with the Uighurs to better understand their complaints, and the need for the US to not contribute support (even if inadvertently) to any separatist or Islamist sentiments that might be brewing in the region. Indeed, China should be congratulated for the enormous economic and social transformation of the region over the past two decades, but at the same time should be encouraged to find ways to preserve and promote the vibrant and extraordinary Central Asian civilization that Uighur culture represents.

¹ Dru C. Gladney is a cultural anthropologist, Professor of Anthropology at Pomona College, and currently serving as President of the Pacific Basin Institute in Claremont, CA. Further background material and analysis relevant to the subject of the current paper can be found in the author’s *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and other Sub-Altern Subjects* (Chicago Univ. Press, 2004). In addition, Dr. Gladney has published over 100 academic articles and the following books: *Ethnic Identity in China* (Fort Worth: Harcourt-Brace, 1998), *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, editor), and *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic of China*, 2 ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

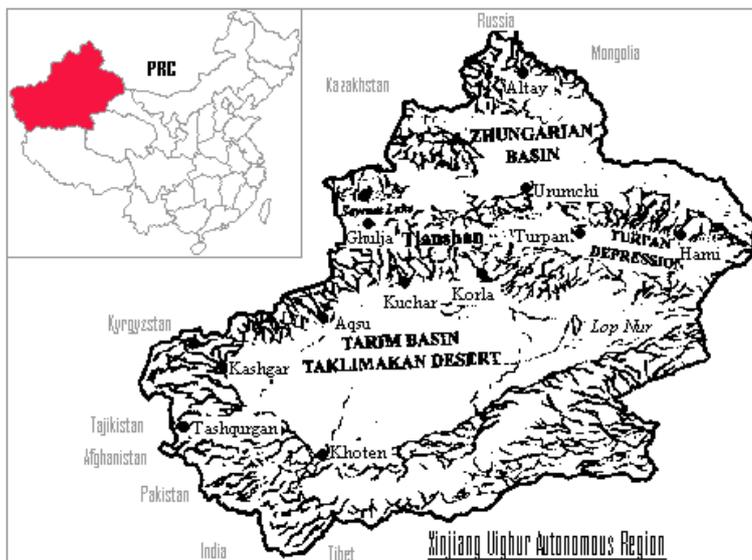


Figure 1: Countries Bordering Xinjiang

2. INTRODUCTION

In 1997, bombs exploded in a city park in Beijing on 13 May (killing one) and on two buses on 7 March (killing 2), as well as in the northwestern border city of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, on 25 February (killing 9), with over 30 other bombings in 1998, and 6 in Tibet that year as well. Most of these are thought to have been related to demands by Muslim and Tibetan separatists. Numerous members of the Uighur Muslim minority have been executed since those events of the late 1990s, with hundreds arrested on suspicion of taking part in ethnic riots and engaging in separatist activities. Though sporadically reported since the early 1980s, such incidents were rather frequent in the late 1990s, and harsh treatment by suspects involved in those incidents was documented in a scathing report of Chinese government policy in the region by Amnesty International.² The Wall Street Journal reported the arrest on 11 August 1999 of Rebiya Kadir, a well known Uighur businesswoman once sent to represent the Xinjiang region to the International Women's Conference in Beijing, during a visit by the United States Congressional Research Service delegation to the region, indicated China's strong response to these tensions.³ Amnesty International labeled Rebiya a "prisoner of conscience" as her only tangible offense was an unsuccessful attempt to meet with the USCRS.⁴ Her release to the US in 2005, and her active role in promoting a "World Uighur Congress" has led to her assuming a prominent position among the Uighur exile community both in the US and abroad.

It is important to note that these arrests and Uighur protests have rarely been connected to freedom of religion issues, but rather a range of "indigenous rights" issues, of which religion is only one concern. Chinese officials argue that "splittists" violate the law and that full freedom of religion is allowed under Article 36 of the constitution.⁵ An earlier White Paper on nationalities policy in China published just prior to the 50th

² Amnesty International, *Peoples Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (London, 21 April 1999)

³ *Wall Street Journal*, Ian Johnson, "China Arrests Noted Businesswoman in Crackdown in Muslim Region", 18 August 1999

⁴ Amnesty International, 10 March 2000, "China: Uighur businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer sentenced to eight years' after secret trial" News Service 47/00, AI INDEX: ASA 17/10/00. Cited by ikelly@amnesty.org, X-MIMETrack: Serialize by Router on fox/I.S./Amnesty International(Release 5.0.2b (Intl))16 December 1999) at 10/03/2000 05:32:56 PM.

⁵ Freedom of Religion law, Article 36 of the PRC Constitution: "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not

Anniversary of the PRC in October 1999, argued that religious freedom was guaranteed for all minorities, but acknowledged continuing problems in minority regions, especially vast economic inequities.⁶ The White Paper surveyed minority problems and accomplishments and concluded:

China has been a united, multi-ethnic country since ancient times.... Although there were short-term separations and local division in Chinese history, unity has always been the mainstream in Chinese history.... In China, all normal religious activities...are protected by law.... The state had offered 16.8 billion yuan [2.2 billion USD] of subsidies to minority areas by 1998.... The Chinese government is well aware of the fact that, due to the restrictions and influence of historical, physical geographical and other factors, central and western China where most minority people live, lags far behind the eastern coastal areas in development.⁷

Despite on-going tensions and frequent reports of isolated terrorist acts, there has been no evidence that any of these actions have been aimed at disrupting the economic development of the region. Not a single incident has been directed at infra-structure (railways, bridges, power stations, airports), which one would expect if there were a well-organized terrorist or separatist conspiracy. Most confirmed incidents have been directed against Han Chinese security forces, recent Han Chinese émigrés to the region, and even Uighur Muslims perceived to be too closely collaborating with the Chinese Government. Most analysts agree that China is not vulnerable to the same ethnic separatism that split the former Soviet Union. But few doubt that should China fall apart, it would divide, like the USSR, along centuries old ethnic, linguistic, regional, and cultural fault lines.⁸ If China did break apart, Xinjiang would split in a way that would resemble the tumult experienced in neighboring regions like modern Kashmir, or the mid-1990s violent civil war of Tajikistan.

The historical discussion of the Uighur in Section 3 of this paper will attempt to suggest why there have been on-going tensions in the area and what the implications are for future international relations and possible refugee flows. The ethnic and cultural divisions showed themselves at the end of China's last empire, when it was divided for over 20 years by regional warlords with local and ethnic bases in the north and the south, and by Muslim warlords in the west. Ethnicization has meant that the current cultural fault lines of China and Central Asia increasingly follow official designations of national identity. Hence, for Central Asia, the break-up of the USSR did not lead to the creation of a greater "Turkistan" or a pan-Islamic collection of states, despite the predominantly Turkic and Muslim population of the region. Rather, the USSR dissolved along ethnic and national lines that had been created by the Soviet State itself. China clearly is not about to fall apart anytime soon. Yet it also has continuing ethnic and religious conflicts and it must solve them for other more pressing reasons.

3. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Chinese histories notwithstanding, every Uighur firmly believes that their ancestors were the indigenous people of the Tarim basin, which did not become known in Chinese as "Xinjiang" ("new dominion") until the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the identity of the present people known as Uighur is a rather recent phenomenon related to Great Game rivalries, Sino-Soviet geopolitical maneuverings, and Chinese nation-building. While a collection of nomadic steppe peoples known as the "Uighur" have existed since before the eighth century, this identity was lost from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.

It was not until the fall of the Turkish Khanate (552-744 C.E.) to a people reported by the Chinese historians as *Hui-he* or *Hui-hu* that we find the beginnings of the Uighur Empire. At this time the Uighur were only a

believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the state. Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination" 4 December 1982: 32.

⁶ China State Council, "National Minorities Policy and its Practice in China", Beijing, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, September 1999.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1999: pp. 2, 3, 13-14, 34, 50.

⁸ Dru C. Gladney, "China's Ethnic Reawakening", *Asia Pacific Issues*, No. 18 (1995), pp. 1-8

collection of nine nomadic tribes, who, initially in confederation with other Basmil and Karlukh nomads, defeated the Second Turkish Khanate and then dominated the federation under the leadership of Koli Beile in 742.⁹ Gradual sedentarization of the Uighur, and their defeat of the Turkish Khanate, occurred precisely as trade with the unified Chinese Tang state became especially lucrative. Sedentarization and interaction with the Chinese state was accompanied by socio-religious change: the traditional shamanistic Turkic-speaking Uighur came increasingly under the influence of Persian Manichaeism, Buddhism, and eventually, Nestorian Christianity. Extensive trade and military alliances along the old Silk Road with the Chinese state developed to the extent that the Uighur gradually adopted cultural, dress and even agricultural practices from the Chinese. The conquest of the Uighur capital of Karabalgasun in Mongolia by the nomadic Kyrgyz in 840, without rescue from the Tang who may by then have become intimidated by the wealthy Uighur empire, led to further sedentarization and crystallization of Uighur identity. One branch that ended up in what is now Turpan, took advantage of the unique socio-ecology of the glacier fed oases surrounding the Taklamakan and were able to preserve their merchant and limited agrarian practices, gradually establishing Khocho or Gaochang, the great Uighur city-state based in Turpan for four centuries (850-1250). With the fall of the Mongol empire, the decline of the overland trade routes, and the expansion of trade relationships with the Ming, Turfan gradually turned toward the Islamic Moghuls, and, perhaps in opposition to the growing Chinese empire, adopted Islam by the mid-fifteenth century.

The Islamicization of the Uighur from the tenth to as late as the seventeenth century, while displacing their Buddhist religion, did little to bridge their oases-based loyalties. From that time on, the people of "Uighuristan" centred in Turpan, who resisted Islamic conversion until the seventeenth century, were the last to be known as Uighur. The others were known only by their oasis or by the generic term of "Turki". They speak a "Turkic" language, that is closely related to modern Uzbek (though unlike the Cyrillic Uzbek script borrowed from Russian, they use a modified Arabic script that was revived in the 1970s). With the arrival of Islam, the ethnonym "Uighur" fades from the historical record. Indeed, the late Joseph Fletcher concluded that contemporary Uighur identity was just as much a product of modern notions of nationalism as former Soviet and Chinese Communist policies which did much to "invent" nationalities, perhaps in order to "divide and rule" them as to recognize and incorporate them into their new nation-states. Joseph Fletcher concluded:

...The Uighur empire (ca. 760-840) once stretched as far as Kashgaria. But the idea that the Kashgarians and the inhabitants of Uighuristan were one and the same nationality--let alone that they were all Uighurs--is an innovation stemming largely from the needs of twentieth-century nationalism.¹⁰

The Uighur culture and its people's genetic make-up, reflect the fact that they migrated from Mongolia to the region now known as Xinjiang or Eastern Turkistan. The region was always been at the center of a "civilizational cross-roads", involving millennia travel and inter-mixing by speakers of Iranian, Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Turkic, Mongolian, and even European tongues. Until their rather belated conversion to Islam (compared to the rather rapid conversion of other Central Asian peoples), the Uyghurs were shamanists, Buddhists, Manichaeans, and even Nestorian Christians. The Uyghur-dominated oases of the region, due to their superior agricultural and mercantile economies, were frequently over-run by nomadic powers from the steppes of Mongolia and Central Asia, and even intermittently, Chinese dynasties who showed interest in controlling the lucrative trade routes across Eurasia. According to Morris Rossabi, it was not until 1760, and after their defeat of the Mongolian Zungars, that the Manchu Qing dynasty exerted full and formal control over the region, establishing it as their "new dominions" (*Xinjiang*), an administration that had lasted barely 100 years, when it fell to the Yakub Beg rebellion (1864-1877) and expanding Russian influence.¹¹ Until major migrations of Han Chinese was encouraged in the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing were mainly interested in pacifying the region by setting up military outposts which supported a vassal-state relationship. Colonization had begun with the migrations of the Han in the mid-nineteenth century, but was cut short by the Yakub Beg rebellion, the fall of the Qing empire in 1910, and the ensuing warlord era which dismembered the region until its incorporation as part of the People's Republic in 1949. Competition for the loyalties of the peoples of the

⁹ For an excellent historical overview of this period, see Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *Cambridge History of China: Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States (907-1368)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

10 Joseph Fletcher, "China and Central Asia, 1368-1884." In *The Chinese World Order*. John King Fairbank, ed. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press. 1968: 364, nt. 96.

¹¹ Morris Rossabi, "Muslim and Central Asian Revolts" in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr. (eds.), *From Ming to Ch'ing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)

oases in the Great Game played between China, Russia and Britain further contributed to divisions among the Uighur according to political, religious, and military lines. The peoples of the oases, until the challenge of nation-state incorporation, lacked any coherent sense of identity.

Thus, the incorporation of Xinjiang for the first time into a nation-state required unprecedented delineation of the so-called nations involved. The re-emergence of the label “Uighur”, though arguably inappropriate as it was last used 500 years previously to describe the largely Buddhist population of the Turfan Basin, stuck as the appellation for the settled Turkish-speaking Muslim oasis dwellers. It has never been disputed by the people themselves or the states involved. There is too much at stake for the people labeled as such to wish to challenge that identification. For Uighur nationalists today, the direct lineal descent from the Uighur Kingdom in seventh century Mongolia is accepted as fact, despite overwhelming historical and archeological evidence to the contrary.¹²

The end of the Qing dynasty and the rise of Great Game rivalries between China, Russia, and Britain saw the region torn by competing loyalties and marked by two short-lived and drastically different attempts at independence: the proclamations of an “East Turkestan Republic” in Kashgar in 1933 and another in Yining (Ghulje) in 1944.¹³ As Linda Benson has extensively documented,¹⁴ these rebellions and attempts at self-rule did little to bridge competing political, religious, and regional differences within the Turkic Muslim people who became officially known as the Uighur in 1934 under successive Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) warlord administrations. Andrew Forbes describes, in exhaustive detail, the great ethnic, religious, and political cleavages during the period from 1911 to 1949 that pitted Muslim against Chinese, Muslim against Muslim, Uighur against Uighur, Hui against Uighur, Uighur against Kazak, warlord against commoner, and Nationalist against Communist.¹⁵ There was short-lived independent Uighur rule during two important periods, which Uighur today claim provide indisputable evidence of self-governance and even secular-inspired democratic rule. Uyghurs, Uzbeks, and other Central Asian Turkic peoples formed an “Eastern Turkestan Republic” (ETR) in Kashgar for less than a year in 1933, that was often inspired by religious, Islamic ideals. A decade later, the Soviet Union supported another attempt at independent Uighur rule, establishing a more secular nationalist state, another “Eastern Turkestan Republic” in the northern part of Xinjiang, now the town known as Yining (where there was a Russian consulate in recognition of this newly formed nation-state). During 1944-45, the ETR fought against the Chinese Nationalists (KMT) who were holding southern Xinjiang. Due to a wartime alliance between the KMT and the Soviets, the Russian eventually pressured the ETR to cooperate with the Chinese, and they formed an uneasy alliance, until the Chinese communists defeated the KMT and occupied the region in 1949, in what they described as a “peaceful liberation” (due to Sino-Soviet cooperation at that time). Uighur nationalists at that time had hoped to achieve a semi-independent Republic along the Soviet lines of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, but they had to settle for recognition as a Chinese “minority nationality” with an Autonomous Region of Xinjiang (with much less juridical authority than the Soviet Republics). The extraordinary factionalism and civil disunion during this period which caused large scale depletion of lives and resources in the region, still lives in the minds of the population. Indeed, it is this memory that many argue keeps the region together, a deep-seated fear of widespread social disorder.¹⁶

¹² The best “Uighur nationalist” retelling of this unbroken descent from Karakhorum is in the document “Brief History of the Uyghers”, originating from the Eastern Turkestani Union in Europe, and available electronically at <www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1730/buh.html>. For a review and critique, including historical evidence for the multi-ethnic background of the contemporary Uighur, see Dru C. Gladney, “Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Identity in China: Considering the Uyghurs and Kazakhs” in Victor Mair (ed.), *The Bronze Age and Early Iron Age People of Eastern Central Asia: Volume II* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Man, 1998), pp. 812-34. For a discussion of the recent archeological evidence derived from DNA dating of the desiccated corpses of Xinjiang, see Victor Mair, “Introduction” in Victor Mair (ed.), pp. 1-40

¹³ The best discussion of the politics and importance of Xinjiang during this period is that of an eyewitness and participant, Owen Lattimore, in his *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950)

¹⁴ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1990)

¹⁵ Andrew Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

¹⁶ James Millward’s history is the best overview of this tumultuous period, see [Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang](#). New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Today, despite continued regional differences among three, and perhaps four macro-regions, including the northwestern Zungaria plateau, the southern Tarim basin, the southwest Pamir region, and the eastern Kumul-Turpan-Hami corridor, there are nearly 8 million people spread throughout this vast region that regard themselves as Uighur, among a total population of 16 million.¹⁷ Many of them dream of, and some agitate for, an independent “Uighuristan”. The “nationality” policy under the KMT identified five peoples of China, with the Han in the majority. The Uighur were included at that time under the general rubric of “Hui Muslims”, which included all Muslim groups in China at that time. This policy was continued under the Communists, eventually recognizing 56 nationalities, the Uighur and 8 other Muslim groups split out from the general category “Hui” (which was confined to mainly Chinese-speaking Muslims).

A profoundly practical people, Uighur and regional leaders actually invited the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into the region after the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949. The “peaceful liberation” by the Chinese Communists of Xinjiang in October 1949, and their subsequent establishment of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on 1 October 1955, perpetuated the Nationalist policy of recognizing the Uighur as a minority nationality under Chinese rule. The on-going political uncertainties and social unrest led to large migrations of Uighur and Kazak from Xinjiang to Central Asia between 1953 and 1963, culminating in a Central Asian Uighur population of approximately 300,000. This migration stopped with the Sino-Soviet split in 1962 and the border was closed in 1963, reopening 25 years later in the late 1980s.¹⁸

The separate nationality designation awarded the Uighurs in China continued to mask very considerable regional and linguistic diversity, with the designation also applied to many “non-Uighur” groups such as the Loplyk and Dolans, that had very little to do with the oasis-based Turkic Muslims that became known as the Uighur. At the same time, contemporary Uighur separatists look back to the brief periods of independent self-rule under Yakub Beg and the Eastern Turkestan Republics, in addition to the earlier glories of the Uighur kingdoms in Turpan and Karabalghasan, as evidence of their rightful claims to the region. Contemporary Uighur separatist organizations based in Istanbul, Ankara, Almaty, Munich, Amsterdam, Melbourne, and Washington may differ in their political goals and strategies for the region, but they all share a common vision of a continuous Uighur claim on the region, disrupted by Chinese and Soviet intervention. The independence of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics in 1991 has done much to encourage these Uighur organizations in their hopes for an independent “Uighuristan”, despite the fact that the new, mainly Muslim, Central Asian governments all signed protocols with China in Shanghai in the Spring of 1996 that they would not harbour or support separatists groups. These protocols were reaffirmed in the 25 August 1999 meeting between Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, committing the “Shanghai Five” nations (China, Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) to respecting border security and suppressing terrorism, drug smuggling, and separatism (see Figure 2).¹⁹ The policy was enforced on 15 June 1999, when three alleged Uighur separatists (Hammit Muhammed, Ilyan Zurdin, Khasim Makpur) were deported from Kazakstan to China, with several others in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan awaiting extradition.²⁰ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has evolved from what was originally a trade and border settlement alliance to become an increasingly powerful multi-lateral organization with a strong focus on anti-terrorism security cooperation.

¹⁷ Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uighur Nationalism along China’s Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 8. For Uighur ethnogenesis, see also Jack Chen, *The Sinkiang Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 57, and Dru C. Gladney, “The Ethnogenesis of the Uighur”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1990), pp. 1-28

¹⁸ The best account of the Uighur diaspora in Central Asia, their memories of migration, and longing for a separate Uighur homeland is contained in the video documentary by Sean R. Roberts, *Waiting for Uighurstan* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Center for Visual Anthropology, 1996)

¹⁹ CNN News Service, Rym Brahimi, “Russia, China, and Central Asian Leaders Pledge to Fight Terrorism, Drug Smuggling”, 25 August 1999 (electronic format <www.uygur.org/enorg/wunn99/990825e.html>)

²⁰ Eastern Turkistan Information Center, “Kasakistan Government Deport Political Refugees to China”, Munich, 15 June 1999 (electronic format: <www.uygur.org/enorg/reports99/990615.html>)

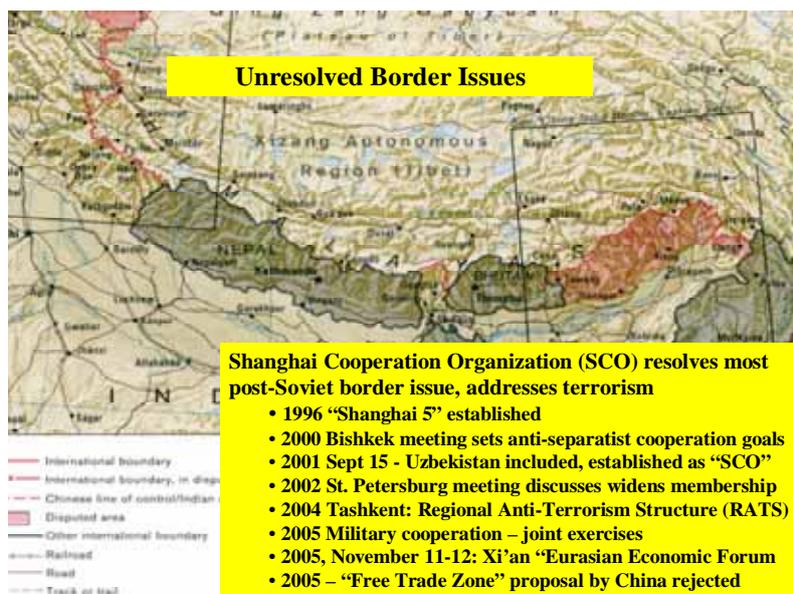


Figure 2: Overview of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

That Islam became an important, but not exclusive, cultural marker of Uighur identity is not surprising given the socio-political oppositions with which the Uighur were confronted. In terms of religion, the Uighurs are Sunni Muslims, practising Islamic traditions similar to their co-religionists in the region. In addition, many of them are Sufi, adhering to branches of *Naqshbandiyya* Central Asian Sufism. Uighur's are powerfully attached to their musical traditions, colorful dress, and patronage of saintly tomb complexes (*mazar*).²¹ These practices are anathema to the strict Wahhabi-inspired Islamist codes of the Taliban and al-Qaida, with many Sufi's and folk artists severely persecuted by them.

However, it is also important to note that Islam was only one of several unifying markers for Uighur identity, depending on those with whom they were in co-operation at the time. This suggests that Islamic fundamentalist groups such as the Taliban in Afghanistan will have only limited appeal among the Uighur. For example, to the Hui Muslim Chinese in Xinjiang, numbering over 600,000, the Uighur distinguish themselves as the legitimate autochthonous minority, since both share a belief in Sunni Islam. In contrast to the formerly nomadic Muslim peoples, such as the Kazak, numbering more than one million, the Uighur might stress their attachment to the land and oasis of origin. Most profoundly, modern Uighurs, especially those living in larger towns and urban areas, are marked by their reaction to Chinese influence and incorporation. It is often Islamic traditions that become the focal point for Uighur efforts to preserve their culture and history. One such popular tradition that has resurfaced in recent years is that of the *Mashrap*, where generally young Uighurs gather to recite poetry and sing songs (often of folk or religious content), dance, and share traditional foods. These evening events have often become foci for Uighur resistance to Chinese rule in past years. However, although within the region many portray the Uighur as united around separatist or Islamist causes, Uighur continue to be divided from within by religious conflicts, in this case competing Sufi and non-Sufi factions, territorial loyalties (whether they be oases or places of origin), linguistic discrepancies, commoner-elite alienation, and competing political loyalties. These divided loyalties were evidenced by the attack in May 1996 on the Imam of the Idgah Mosque in Kashgar by other Uighurs, as well as the assassination of at least six Uighur officials in September 1997. It is this contested understanding of history that continues to influence much of the current debate over separatist and Chinese claims to the region.

4. CHINESE NATIONALITIES POLICY AND THE UIGHUR

²¹ See the important article by a Uyghur female ethnohistorian on Uyghur tomb complexes and grave veneration with beautiful color photographs by Rahile Dawut, “Shrine Pilgrimage among the Uighurs” *The Silk Road Journal* 2009 Winter/Spring (6) 2: 56-67.
http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/vol6num2/srjournal_v6n2.pdf

The Uighur are an official minority nationality of China, identified as the second largest of ten Muslim peoples in China, primarily inhabiting the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (see Table 1).

Table 1
Population of Muslim Minorities in China and Xinjiang²²

Minority Ethnonym	Location	Language Family	2000 Census Population	Percent in Xinjiang
Hui	All China, esp. Ningxia, Gansu, Henan, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Yunnan, Hebei, Shandong*	Sino-Tibetan	9,816,805	7.9%
Uighur	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	8,399,393	99.8%
Kazak	Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai	Altaic (Turkic)	1,250,458	--
Dongxiang	Gansu, Qinghai	Altaic (Turkic)	513,805	--
Kyrgyz	Xinjiang, Heilongjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	160,823	--
Salar	Qinghai, Gansu	Altaic (Turkic)	104,503	--
Tajik	Xinjiang	Indo-European	41,028	--
Uzbek	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	16,505	--
Baonan	Gansu	Altaic (Mongolian)	14,502	--
Tatar	Xinjiang	Altaic (Turkic)	4,890	--

*Listed in order of size. Source: Yang Shengmin and Ding Hong, Editors, 2002, *An Ethnography of China (Zhongguo Minzu zhi)*, Beijing: Central Nationalities Publishing House

Many Uighur with whom I have spoken in Turfan and Kashgar argue persuasively that they are the autochthonous people of this region. The fact that over 99.8 per cent of the Uighur population are located in Xinjiang, whereas other Muslim peoples of China have significant populations in other provinces (e.g. the Hui) and outside the country (e.g. the Kazak), contributes to this important sense of belonging to the land. The Uighur continue to conceive of their ancestors as originating in Xinjiang, claiming to outsiders that “it is our land, our territory”, despite the fact that the early Uighur kingdom was based in what is now Outer Mongolia and the present region of Xinjiang is under the control of the Chinese State.

Unprecedented socio-political integration of Xinjiang into the Chinese nation-state has taken place in the last 40 years. While Xinjiang has been under Chinese political domination since the defeat of the Zungar in 1754, until the middle of the twentieth century it was but loosely incorporated into China proper. The extent of the incorporation of the Xinjiang Region into China is indicated by Chinese policies encouraging Han migration, communication, education, and occupational shifts since the 1940s. Han migration into Xinjiang increased their local population a massive 2,500 per cent between 1940 and 1982 compared with the 1940 level (see Table 2), representing an average annual growth of 8.1 per cent. Indeed, many conclude that China’s primary programme for assimilating its border regions is a policy of integration through immigration.²³ This was certainly the case for Inner Mongolia, where Mongol population now stands at 14 per cent, and given the following figures may well be the case for Xinjiang.

TABLE 2
Muslim and Han Population Growth in Xinjiang, 1940 - 1990²⁴

²² *Renmin Ribao* [Beijing], “Guanyu 1990 nian renkou pucha zhuyao de gongbao [Report regarding the 1990 population census primary statistics]”, 14 November 1991, p. 3; Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, p. 21

²³ For China’s minority integration program, see Colin Mackerras, *China’s Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994)

²⁴ Table based on the following sources: Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims*, p 7; Judith Banister, *China’s Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp 322-3; *Minzu Tuanjie* [Beijing], No. 2 (1984), p 38; Peoples Republic of China, National Population Census Office, *Major Figures of the Fourth National Population Census: Vol. 4* (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 1991), pp. 17-25

Ethnic group				% population increase	% population increase
	1940 - 1941	1982	1990	1940-1982	1982-1990
Uighur	2,941,000	5,950,000	7,194,675	102.31	20.92
Kazak	319,000	904,000	1,106,000	183.38	22.35
Hui	92,000	571,000	681,527	520.65	19.36
Kyrgyz	65,000	113,000	139,781	73.85	23.70
Tajik	9,000	26,000	33,512	188.89	28.89
Uzbek	5,000	12,000	14,456	140.00	20.47
Tatar	6,900	4,100	4,821	-40.58	17.58
Han	202,000	5,287,000	5,695,626	2,517.33	7.73
Total Population	4,874,000	13,082,000	15,155,778	168.40	15.85

Note: Military figures are not given, estimated at 275,000 and 500,000 military construction corps in 1985. Minority population growth rates during the 1980s are particularly high in part due to reclassification and reregistration of ethnic groups.

The increase of the Han population has been accompanied by the growth and delineation of other Muslim groups in addition to the Uighur. Accompanying the remarkable rise in the Han population, a dramatic increase in the Hui (Dungan, or mainly Chinese-speaking Muslim) population can also be seen. While the Hui population in Xinjiang increased by over 520 per cent between 1940 and 1982 (averaging an annual growth of 4.4 per cent), the Uighur population has followed a more natural biological growth of 1.7 per cent. This dramatic increase in the Hui population has also led to significant tensions between the Hui and Uighur Muslims in the region, and many Uighur recall the massacre of the Uighur residents in Kashgar by the Hui Muslim warlord Ma Zhongying and his Hui soldiers during the early part of this century.²⁵ These tensions are exacerbated by widespread beliefs held among the exile Uighur community and international Muslims that the Muslim populations of China are vastly underreported by the Chinese authorities. Some Uighur groups claim that there are upwards of 20 million Uighur in China, and nearly 50 million Muslims, with little evidence to support those figures.²⁶

Chinese incorporation of Xinjiang has led to a further development of ethnic socio economic niches. Whereas earlier travellers reported little distinction in labour and education among Muslims, other than that between settled and nomadic, the 1982 census revealed vast differences in socio-economic structure (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Occupational Structure of Muslim Minorities in China
in per cent, 1982²⁷

Occupation	Hui	Uighur	Kazak	Dong Xiang	Kyrgyz	Salar	Tajik	Uzbek	Bao An	Tatar	All Ethnic Groups
Scientific Staff	5.75	4.25	11.25	1.00	7.00	3.25	5.75	17.25	1.50	23.50	4.00
Administration	1.75	0.75	2.00	0.25	1.50	0.75	2.75	3.75	2.25	4.50	1.00

²⁵ Forbes, pp. 56-90

²⁶ See the discussion of population numbers in Eastern Turkistan Information Center, "Population of Eastern Turkistan: The Population in Local Records", Munich, n.d. (electronic format: <www.uygur.org/enorg/turkistan/nopus.html>). A useful guide with tables and breakdowns is found in International Taklamakan Human Rights Association (ITHRA), "How Has the Population Distribution Changed in Eastern Turkestan since 1949", N.d. (electronic format <www.taklamakan.org/uighur-L/et_faq_pl.html>), where it is reported that the Xinjiang Uighur population declined from 75 per cent in 1949 to 48 per cent in 1990. The problem with these statistics is that the first reliable total population count in the region did not take place until 1982, with all earlier estimates highly suspect according to the authoritative study by Judith Banister (Banister, *China's Changing Population*)

²⁷ Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, p. 32; table adopted from People's Republic of China, National Population Census Office, *Population Atlas of China* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.xx, 28

Office & related workers	1.75	1.00	2.00	0.25	1.75	0.75	2.00	3.25	0.75	4.25	1.00
Commercial workers	3.50	1.50	1.25	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.50	10.75	0.50	5.25	1.25
Service workers	4.00	1.50	1.50	0.25	1.00	0.75	0.75	6.50	0.50	4.50	1.25
Farming, forestry, fishing & animal husbandry	60.75	84.00	74.50	96.75	84.00	90.50	85.75	31.50	92.25	38.50	84.00
Production & transport	22.25	7.00	7.50	1.25	4.00	3.25	2.50	27.00	2.25	19.25	7.50
Others	0.25	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.25	--

Differences in occupational structure between the Uzbek and Tatar on the one hand, and the Uighur and Hui, on the other, suggest important class differences, with the primarily urban Uzbek and Tatar groups occupying a much higher socioeconomic niche. This is also reflected in reports on education among Muslim minorities in China (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Educational Level of Muslim Minorities in China in per cent, 1990²⁸

Educational Level	Hui	Uighur	Kazak	Dong Xiang	Kyrgyz	Salar	Tajik	Uzbek	Bao An	Tatar	All China
University Graduate	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.05	0.3	0.3	0.2	2.6	0.2	3.6	0.5
Undergraduate	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.08	0.5	0.3	0.3	1.9	0.1	2.5	2.4
Technical School	1.6	1.6	2.6	0.30	2.4	0.9	2.1	4.7	1.0	5.8	17.6
Senior Middle School	6.2	3.5	5.5	0.60	3.4	1.6	2.5	10.8	2.9	11.0	6.4
Junior Middle School	19.9	11.9	16.4	2.80	10.2	6.3	9.3	20.3	7.2	22.0	23.3
Primary School	29.1	43.9	43.9	12.00	43.4	18.8	40.4	33.7	16.2	32.7	37.2
*Semi-literate or Illiterate	33.1	26.6	12.3	82.60	24.9	68.7	33.5	8.3	68.8	4.9	22.2

*Population age 6 and above who cannot read or can read very little

The Uighur are about average in terms of university graduates (0.5 per cent) and illiteracy (26.6 per cent) as compared with all other ethnic groups in China (0.5 and 22.2 per cent respectively). The Tatar achieve the highest representation of university graduates among Muslims (3.6 per cent) as well as the lowest percentage of illiteracy (4.9 per cent), far below the average of all China (22.2 per cent). The main drawback of these figures is that they reflect only what is regarded by the state as education, namely, training in Chinese language and the sciences. However, among the elderly elite, there continues to be a high standard of traditional expertise in Persian, Arabic, Chagatay, and the Islamic sciences, which is not considered part of Chinese “culture” and education. Although elementary and secondary education is offered in Uighur, Mandarin has become the language of upward mobility in Xinjiang, as well as in the rest of China. Many Uighur have been trained in the thirteen Nationalities Colleges scattered throughout China since they were established in the 1950s. It is these secular intellectuals trained in Chinese schools who are asserting political leadership in Xinjiang, as opposed to traditional religious elites. Many Uighurs in Urumqi point to the establishment of the Uighur Traditional Medicine Hospital and *Madrassah* complex in 1987 as a beginning counterbalance to this emphasis on Han education.²⁹ However, most Uighur I have spoken with feel that their history and traditional culture continues to

²⁸ People’s Republic of China, Department of Population Statistics of State Statistical Bureau and Economic Department of State Nationalities Affairs Commission, *Population of China’s Nationality (Data of 1990 Population Census)* [*Zhongguo Minzu Renkou Ziliao (1990 nian Renkou Pucha Shuju)*] (Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House, 1994), pp. 70-3, 76. See also Dru C. Gladney, “Making Muslims in China: Education, Islamicization, and Representation” in Gerard A. Postiglione (ed.), *China’s National Minority Education: Culture, State Schooling and Development* (New York: Garland Press, 1999)

²⁹ The late Uighur historian Professor Ibrahim Muti’i in an unpublished 1989 paper provides an excellent historical synopsis of the role of the Central Asian Islamic *Madrassah* in traditional Uighur education. Professor Muti’i argues that it was the *Madrassah*, more than religious or cultural continuities, that most tied the Uighur into Central Asian traditions. Ibrahim Muti’i, personal communication, May 1989.

be down-played in the state schools and must be privately re-emphasized to their children. It is through the elementary schools that Uighur children first participate formally in the Chinese nation-state, dominated by Han history and language, and most fully enter into the Chinese world. As such, the predominant educational practice of teaching a centralized, mainly Han, subject content, despite the widespread use of minority languages, continues to drive a wedge between the Uighur and their traditions, inducting them further into the Han Chinese milieu.

The increased incorporation of Xinjiang into the political sphere of China has led not only to the further migration of Han and Hui into the region, but opened China to an unprecedented extent for the Uighur. Uighur men are heavily involved in long-distance trade throughout China. They go to Tianjin and Shanghai for manufactured clothes and textiles, Hangzhou and Suzhou for silk, and Guangzhou and Hainan for electronic goods and motorcycles brought in from Hong Kong. In every place, and especially Beijing, due to the large foreign population, they trade local currency (*renminbi*) for US dollars. Appearing more like foreigners than the local Han, they are often less suspect. "We use the hard currency to go on the *Hajj*", one young Uighur in the central market square of Kunming, Yunnan Province, once told me, "Allah will protect you if you exchange money with me". While some may save for the *Hajj*, most purchase imported or luxury goods with their hard currency and take them back to Xinjiang, selling or trading them for a profit - a practice that keeps them away from home six months out of the year. As Uighur continue to travel throughout China they return to Xinjiang with a firmer sense of their own pan-Uighur identity vis-a-vis the Han and the other minorities they encounter on their travels.

International travel has also resumed for the Uighur. An important development in the last decade was the opening of a rail line between China and Kazakstan through the Ili corridor to Almaty, and the opening of several official gateways with the surrounding five nations on its borders. With the resumption of normal Sino-Central Asian relations in 1991, trade and personal contacts have expanded enormously. This expansion has led many Uighur to see themselves as important players in the improved Sino-Central Asian exchanges. On a 1988 trip from Moscow to Beijing through the Ili corridor, I was surprised to find that many of the imported Hong Kong-made electronic goods purchased by Uighur with hard currency in Canton and Shenzhen found their way into the market place and hands of relatives across the border in Almaty - who are also identified by the Kazakstan state as Uighur. However, since the late 1990s, Uighur travel abroad has been more restricted due to security concerns, and it is nearly impossible for most average Uighur citizens to obtain a passport.

6. UIGHUR RESPONSE: STRUGGLES TO SUSTAIN CULTURAL SURVIVAL

Increasing integration with China has not been smooth. Many Uighur resent the threats to their cultural survival and have resorted to violence. After denying them for decades and stressing instead China's "national unity", official reports have detailed Tibetan and Muslim conflict activities in the border regions of Tibet, Yunnan, Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Inner Mongolia. With the March 1997 bus bombings in Beijing, widely attributed (though this has never been verified) to Uighur separatists, coupled with the Urumqi bus bombings on the day of Deng Xiaoping's 1997 memorial on 25 February, Beijing can no longer keep them secret. The Yining uprising on 7 February 1997, which left at least nine dead and hundreds injured, with seven Uighur suspects arrested and most probably slated for execution, was heavily covered by the world's media. This distinguishes the last few events from on-going problems in the region in the mid-1980s that met with little media coverage.

In 1996, the *Xinjiang Daily* reported five serious incidents since February 1996, with a crackdown that rounded up 2,773 terrorist suspects, 6,000 lbs of explosives, and 31,000 rounds of ammunition. Overseas Uighur groups have claimed that over 10,000 were arrested in the round-up, with over 1,000 killed. The largest protest from 2 to 8 February 1996, was sparked by a Chinese raid on an evening *Mashrap* cultural meeting. Protests against the arrests made during the meeting led to 120 deaths and over 2,500 arrests. On 2 March 1996 the pro-government *mullah* of Kashgar's Idgah mosque and his son were stabbed by knife-wielding Uighur militants, on 27 May there was another attack on a senior government official, and in September of the same year six Uighur government officials were killed by other Uighurs in Yecheng.

The government responded severely in the late 1990s with a widespread arrests and new policy announcements. In Spring 1998, the National Peoples Congress passed a New Criminal Law that redefined "counter-revolutionary" crimes to be "crimes against the state", liable to severe prison terms and even execution. Included in "crimes against the state" were any actions considered to involve "ethnic discrimination" or "stirring up anti-ethnic sentiment". Many human rights activists have argued that this is a thinly veiled attempt

to criminalize “political” actions and to make them appear as illegal as traffic violations, supporting China’s claims that it holds “no political prisoners”. Since any minority activity could be regarded as stirring “anti-ethnic feeling”, many ethnic activists are concerned that the New Criminal Law will be easily turned against them.

On 12 June 1998 the *Xinjiang Daily* reported “rampant activities by splittists inside and outside China”, that had contributed to the closure of 10 “unauthorized” places of worship, the punishment of *mullahs* who had preached illegally outside their mosques, and the execution of 13 people on 29 May in Aksu county (an area that is 99 per cent Uighur) supposedly for murder, robbery, rape, and other violent crimes. Troop movements to the area have reportedly been the largest since the suppression of the Baren township insurrection in April 1990, perhaps related to the nationwide “Strike Hard” campaign. This campaign, launched in Beijing in April 1997 was originally intended to clamp down on crime and corruption, but has now been turned against “splittists” in Xinjiang, calling for the building of a “great wall of steel” against them. The *Xinjiang Daily* on 16 December 1996 contained the following declaration by Wang Lequan, the Region’s First Party Secretary: “We must oppose separatism and illegal religious activities in a clear and comprehensive manner, striking hard and effectively against our enemies”. These campaigns, according to an April 1999 Amnesty International report, led to 210 capital sentences and 190 executions of Uighur since 1997.³⁰

Chinese authorities are correct that increasing international attention to the plight of indigenous border peoples have put pressure on the regions. Notably, the formerly elected chair of the Unrepresented Nations and People’s Organization (UNPO) based in the Hague is the Uighur, Erkin Alptekin, son of the Uighur Nationalist leader, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, who died in Istanbul in December 1995 where there is now a park dedicated to his memory. There are numerous international organizations working for the independence of Xinjiang [under the name of Eastern Turkestan], based in Amsterdam, Munich, Istanbul, Melbourne, and New York. An organization that seeks to coordinate these disparate movements is the World Uyghur Congress, which met recently in Washington, DC, from May 21-25, and elected Madam Rebiya Kadir as President (<http://www.uyghurcongress.org>). Clearly, with Xinjiang representing the last Muslim region under communism, Chinese authorities have more to be concerned about than just international support for Tibetan independence.

The real question is, why call such attention to these Tibetan and Muslim activities and external organizations? From 1998 to 2008, there was a decade without a single report of Uighur-related violence. The Istanbul-based groups have existed since the 1950s, and the Dalai Lama has been active since his exile in 1959. Separatist actions have taken place on a small but regular basis since the expansion of market and trade policies in China, and with the opening of overland gateways to Xinjiang in addition to the trans-Eurasian railway since 1991, there seems to be no chance of closing up shop. In his 1994 visit to the newly independent nations of Central Asia, Li Peng called for the opening of a “new Silk Road”. This was a clear attempt to calm fears in the newly established Central Asian states over Chinese expansionism, as was the April 1996 Shanghai communique that solidified the existing Sino-Central Asian borders. This was perhaps the clearest example of Chinese government efforts to finally solidify and fully map its domestic territories.

Practically speaking, China is not threatened by internal dismemberment. Such as they are, China’s separatists are small in number, poorly equipped, loosely linked, and vastly out-gunned by the People’s Liberation Army and People’s Police. Local support for separatist activities, particularly in Xinjiang, is ambivalent and ambiguous at best, given the economic disparity between these regions and their foreign neighbours, which are generally much poorer and in some cases, such as Tajikistan, riven by civil war. Memories in the region are strong of mass starvation and widespread destruction during the Sino-Japanese and civil war in the first half of this century, not to mention the chaotic horrors of the Cultural Revolution. International support for Tibetan causes has done little to shake Beijing’s grip on the region. Many local activists are calling not for complete separatism or real independence, but more often express concerns over environmental degradation, anti-nuclear testing, religious freedom, over-taxation, and imposed limits on child-bearing. Many ethnic leaders are simply calling for “real” autonomy according to Chinese law for the five Autonomous Regions that are each led by First Party Secretaries who are all Han Chinese controlled by Beijing. Extending the “Strike Hard” campaign to Xinjiang, Wang Lequan, the Party Secretary for Xinjiang, has declared “there will be no compromise between us and the separatists”. Documented separatist and violent incidents in Xinjiang have dropped off dramatically

³⁰ Amnesty International, *Peoples Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights*

since the late 1990s. Philip Pan reported in a July 14, 2002 *Washington Post* interview that local Xinjiang security officials were only able to cite three relatively small occurrences.³¹

Beijing's official publication of the separatist issue may have more to do with domestic politics than any real internal or external threat. Recent moves such as evidenced in the 2008 Olympics suggest efforts to promote Chinese nationalism as a "unifying ideology" that will prove more attractive than communism and more manageable than capitalism. By highlighting separatist threats and external intervention, China can divert attention away from its own domestic instabilities of natural disasters (especially the 2008 Sichuan earthquake), economic crises (such as the Asian economic downturn's drag on China's currency), rising inflation, increased income disparity, displaced "floating populations", Hong Kong reunification, and the many other internal and external problems facing Jiang Zemin's government. Perhaps nationalism will be the only "unifying ideology" left to a Chinese nation that has begun to distance itself from Communism, as it has from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in the past. This is perhaps why religiously-based nationalisms, like Islamic fundamentalism and Tibetan Buddhism, are targeted by Beijing, while the rise of shamanism and popular religion goes unchecked. At the same time, a firm lid on Muslim activism in China sends a message to foreign Muslim militant organizations to stay out of China's internal affairs, and the Taliban to stay well within their Afghan borders. Although it is hard to gauge the extent of support for Uighur separatism among the broader population, it is clear that cultural survival is a critical concern for many, and a significant attempt to preserve Uighur culture is taking place, assisted to some extent by international tourism and the state's attempts to demonstrate its goodwill toward its restive Muslim population.

6. INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

The People's Republic of China, as one of five permanent voting members of the UN security council, and as a significant exporter of military hardware to the Middle East, has become a recognized player in Middle Eastern affairs. With the decline in trade with most Western nations after the Tiananmen massacre in the early 1990s, the importance of China's Middle Eastern trading partners (all of them Muslim, since China did not have relations with Israel until 1993), rose considerably. This may account for the fact that China established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in August 1990, with the first direct Sino-Saudi exchanges taking place since 1949 (Saudi Arabia cancelled its long-standing diplomatic relationship with Taiwan and withdrew its ambassador, despite a lucrative trade history). In the face of a long-term friendship with Iraq, China went along with most of the UN resolutions in the war against Iraq. Although it abstained from Resolution 678 on supporting the ground-war, making it unlikely that Chinese workers will be welcomed back into Kuwait, China enjoys a fairly solid reputation in the Middle East as an untarnished source of low-grade weaponry and cheap reliable labour. Frequent press accounts have noted an increase in China's exportation of military hardware to the Middle East since the Gulf War, perhaps due to a need to balance its growing imports of Gulf oil required to fuel its overheated economy.³²

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, China has also become an important competitor for influence in Central Asia and is expected to serve as a counterweight to Russia. Calling for a new interregional "Silk Route", China is already constructing such a link with rails and pipelines. The ethnicization of several Central Asian peoples and their rise to prominence as the leading members of the new Central Asian states, will mean that economic development and cross-border ties will be strongly influenced by ancient ethnic relations and geopolitical ties.

Since the early 1990s, China has been a net oil importer.³³ It also has 20 million Muslims. Mishandling of its Muslim problems will alienate trading partners in the Middle East, who are primarily Muslims. Already, after the ethnic riot in February 1997 in the northwestern Xinjiang city of Yining, which led to the death of at least nine Uighur Muslims and the arrest of several hundred, Turkey's then Defence Minister, Turhan Tayan, officially condemned China's handling of the issue, and China responded by telling Turkey to not interfere in China's internal affairs. Since that time, possibly due to China's rising economic influence, there has been

³¹ Philip Pan "In China's West, Ethnic Strife Becomes 'Terrorism'" *Washington Post* July 14, 2002: A4.

³² James P. Dorian, Brett Wigdortz, Dru Gladney, "Central Asia and Xinjiang, China: Emerging Energy, Economic, and Ethnic Relations", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1997), p. 469

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 461-86

almost no official condemnation from Muslim populated nations over China's treatment of the Uighur or other domestic Muslim problems.

Muslim nations on China's borders, including the new Central Asian states, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, though officially unsupportive of Uighur separatists, may be critical of harsh treatment extended to fellow Turkic and/or Muslim co-religionists in China on a popular level. However, officially their governments rarely intervene in China's domestic affairs. The April 1996 signing of border agreements between China and the five neighboring Central Asian nations revealed that there would be no hope for Uighur separatists that they would receive any official support from their Central Asian sympathizers. The text of the Mutual Declaration of the representatives of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China signed on 5 July 1996 specifically prevents Kazakhstan from assisting separatists in China. It also indicates that the Uighurs within Kazakhstan will receive little support from their government, and a number of suspected Uighur separatists have in fact been returned to China from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As stated above, the importance of trade between Central Asia and China is the primary reason. In addition, none of the countries in the region wishes to have border problems with China. At a popular level, however, the Uighurs receive much sympathy from their Central Asian co-religionists, and there is a continuing flow of funds and materials through China's sporadically porous borders.

Dorian, Wigdortz, and Gladney have documented the growing interdependence of the region since the mid-1990s.³⁴ Trade between Xinjiang and the Central Asian republics has continued to grow, and the number of Chinese-Kazak joint ventures continues to rise, now approaching several hundred. Xinjiang exports a variety of products to Kazakhstan, as well as to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine. Increased economic co-operation with China is providing Central Asia with additional options for markets, trade routes, and technical assistance.

As noted in the discussion of the Uighur people above, cross-border ethnic ties and interethnic relations within Xinjiang continue to have tremendous consequences for development in the region. Muslims comprise nearly 60 per cent of Xinjiang's population, and most of them are Uighur. Being Turkic, the Uighurs share a common Islamic, linguistic, and pastoralist heritage with the peoples of the Central Asian states (Table 5).

The Uighurs and other Turkic groups in the region are also closer culturally and linguistically to their Central Asian neighbours than they are to the Han Chinese. This closeness was demonstrated most dramatically following the Sino-Soviet 1960 breakdown in political relations, that in part led to an Ili rebellion in 1962 which contributed to nearly 200,000 Uighurs and Kazaks fleeing across the border to the Soviet Kazak Republic.³⁵ The majority of the 160,000 Uighurs in Kazakhstan today stem from that original migrant population. Most scholars feel, however, that given the comparatively stronger economy in China and the numerous border agreements signed between the Central Asian states under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a similar uprising now would not lead to such a large cross-border migration. Not only is the border much more secure on the Chinese side than in 1962, but the other Central Asian states would most likely refuse to accept them.

TABLE 5
Ethnic populations of Central Asia, Xinjiang (thousands)³⁶

	Kazakstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenista n	Uzbekistan	Xinjiang (China)
Kazaks	6,535	37	11	88	808	1,710.00
Kyrgyz	14	2,230	64	1	175	139.80
Tajiks	25	34	3,172	3	934	33.51
Turkmen	4	1	20	2,537	122	--
Uzbeks	332	550	1,198	317	14,142	14.46
Russians	6,228	917	388	334	1,653	8.10

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 480

³⁵ The best documentation of this period and the flood of Kazaks and Uighurs to the USSR from Xinjiang is to be found in George Moseley, *The Party and the National Question in China* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1966)

³⁶ Dorian, Wigdortz, Gladney, p. 465

Ukrainians	896	108	41	36	153	--
Byelorussians	183	9	7	9	29	--
Germans	958	101	33	4	40	--
Tatars	328	70	72	39	657	4.82
Karakalpaks	--	--	--	--	412	--
Koreans	103	18	13	--	183	1.00
Uighurs	185	37	--	--	36	7,195.00
Han	na	na	na	na	na	5,696.00
Hui	na	na	na	na	na	682.00
Mongolian	na	na	na	na	na	138.00
Dongxiang	na	na	na	na	na	56.40

Opportunities in Xinjiang's energy sector attract many migrants from other parts of China. China's rapidly growing economy has the country anxiously developing domestic energy sources and looking abroad for new sources. In 1993, with domestic oil consumption rising faster than production, China abandoned its energy self-sufficiency goal and became a net importer of oil for the first time. During 1996, China's crude oil production reached a record high of 156.5 million tons, while imports of crude were up 37.5 per cent over 1995, to 22 million tons. China is expected to import as much as 30 per cent of its oil by the year 2000. As China develops into a modern economy, it should see a rise in demand comparable to that experienced in Japan, where demand for natural gas and other energy needs has quadrupled in the past 30 years. This is particularly why China has begun to look elsewhere for meeting its energy needs, and Li Peng signed a contract in September 1997 for exclusive rights to Kazakhstan's second largest oil field. It also indicates declining expectations for China's own energy resources in the Tarim Basin. Estimated 10 years ago to contain 482 billion barrels, today, even the president of China National Petroleum Corporation admits that there are known reserves of only 1.5 billion barrels.

China hopes to make up for its dependence on Kazakhstan oil by increasing trade. China's two-way trade with Central Asia has increased dramatically since the Chinese government opened Xinjiang to the region following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. By the end of 1992, formal trade had jumped by 130 per cent; total border trade, including barter, is estimated to have quadrupled since the early 1990s. Ethnic ties have facilitated this trading surge: those with family relations benefit from relaxed visa and travel restrictions. Large numbers of "tourists" from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan make frequent shopping trips into Xinjiang and return home to sell their goods at small village markets. Xinjiang has already become dependent on Central Asian business, with the five republics accounting for more than half of its international trade in 1993.

Most China-Central Asia trade is between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan (Xinjiang's largest trading partner by far). From 1990 to 1992, Kazakhstan's imports from China rose from just under 4 per cent to 44 per cent of its total. About half the China-Kazak trade is on a barter basis. Through 1995, China was Kazakhstan's fifth largest trade partner, behind Russia, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland. China's trade with Kyrgyzstan has also increased rapidly. Through 1995, Kyrgyzstan was Xinjiang's third largest trading partner, after Kazakhstan and Hong Kong. As early as 1992, China ranked as Uzbekistan's leading non-CIS trading partner. Since then, bilateral trade has increased by as much as 127 per cent per year, making Uzbekistan China's second largest Central Asian trading partner. This may be one of the most promising economic relationships developing in Central Asia. The large and relatively affluent Uzbek population will eagerly purchase Chinese goods once remaining border restrictions are relaxed and better transportation is built. Bilateral trade with Tajikistan increased nearly ninefold from 1992 to 1995. However, with much of Tajikistan in turmoil in the mid-1990s and the country suffering from a deteriorating standard of living, trade dropped by half in 1996. Trade between China and Turkmenistan has also risen rapidly. China is already importing Turkmen gas to satisfy the growing energy requirements in the northwest corner of the country. The sale of natural gas accounts for 60.3 per cent of the total volume of Turkmen exports.

While the increasing trade between Central Asia and China is noteworthy, it essentially is a reflection of China's rapidly growing trade with the entire world: trade with Central Asia increased by 25 per cent from 1992 to 1994; during the same period total Chinese trade increased almost twice as fast. In fact, during 1995, only 0.28 per cent of China's US\$ 280.8 billion overseas trade involved the five Central Asian republics, about the same as the trade with Austria or Denmark. Despite the small trade volumes, China is clearly a giant in the region and will play a major role in Central Asia's foreign economic relations. For example, China's two-way trade with Kazakhstan is greater than Turkey's combined trade with all five Central Asian republics. This is so even though predominantly Muslim Central Asia is of a much higher priority for Turkey than for China.

Multinational corporations are beginning to play a larger role in the development of the region. In Kazakstan, for instance, foreign firms are estimated to control more than 60 per cent of electric power output. A proposed Turkmenistan-China-Japan natural gas pipeline, part of the envisaged "Energy Silk Route" which would connect Central Asia's rich gas fields with northeast Asian users, demonstrates the potential for co-operation among countries. But it also highlights the growing importance of international companies - in this case Mitsubishi and Exxon - in financing and influencing the course of oil and gas development in the region. With a potential price tag of US\$ 22.6 billion, this pipeline - as well as many smaller and less costly ones - would not be possible without foreign participation. Hence, the "new Great Game" between China and Central Asia involves many more players than the largely three-way Great Game of the nineteenth century. Yet these new international corporate forces do not supersede local ethnic ties and connections that extend back for centuries.

There is a risk that unrest in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region could lead to a decline in outside oil investment and revenues, with such interests already operating at a loss. Exxon once reported that its two wells struck in the supposedly oil-rich Tarim basin of southern Xinjiang came up dry, with the entire region yielding only 3.15 million metric tons of crude oil, only a small fraction of China's overall output of 156 million tons. The World Bank lends over US\$ 3 billion a year to China, investing over US\$ 780.5 million in 15 projects in the Xinjiang Region alone, with some of that money allegedly going to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which human rights activist Harry Wu has claimed employs prison *laogai* labour.

It is clear that ethnic separatism or Muslim complaints regarding Chinese policy will have important consequences for China's economic development of the region. Tourists and foreign businessmen will certainly avoid areas with ethnic strife and terrorist activities. China will continue to use its economic leverage with its Central Asian neighbours and Russia to prevent such disruptions. China's security measures and development investment have insured a decade of peace in the region since the troubles of the 1990s, and this has dramatically assisted trade and investment in the region. The question then becomes, if China's development policies have been so successful, why are the Uighurs still restive?

Landlocked Central Asia and Xinjiang lack the road, rail, and pipeline infrastructure needed to increase economic co-operation and foreign investment in the region. Oil and gas pipelines still pass through Russia, and road and rail links to other points are inadequate. A new highway is planned between Kashgar, Xinjiang, to Osh, Kyrgyzstan, to facilitate trade in the area. At the same time, China is planning a new rail link between Urumqi and Kashgar. New links from Central Asia could follow several routes west through Iran and Turkey, or Georgia and Azerbaijan, to the Black Sea or the Mediterranean; south through Iran to the Persian Gulf or through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea; or east through China to the Pacific. All the routes pass through vast, remote, and perhaps politically unstable regions, and those involving Iran face difficulties in gaining Western financing.

China's international relations with its neighbours and with internal regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet have become increasingly important not only for the economic reasons discussed above, but also for China's desire to participate in international organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the Asia-Pacific Economic Council. Though Tibet is no longer of any real strategic or substantial economic value to China, it is politically important to China's current leadership to indicate that they will not submit to foreign pressure and withdraw from Tibet. Uighurs have begun to work closely with Tibetans internationally to put political pressure on China in international fora. In a 7 April 1997 interview in Istanbul with Ahmet Türköz, vice-director of the Eastern Turkestan Foundation, which works for an independent Uighur homeland, he noted that since 1981, meetings had been taking place between the Dalai Lama and Uighur leaders, initiated by the deceased Uighur nationalist Isa Yusup Alptekin. As previously mentioned the elected leader of UNPO (the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization based in The Hague), an organization originally built around Tibetan issues, is Erkin Alptekin, the son of the late Isa Alptekin. These international fora cannot force China to change its policy, any more than the former annual debate in the U.S. over the renewal of China's Most-Favoured Nation status. Nevertheless, they continue to influence China's ability to co-operate internationally. As a result, China has sought to respond rapidly, and often militarily, to domestic ethnic affairs that might have international implications.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government feared that the new independence of the neighbouring Central Asian Republics might inspire separatist goals in Xinjiang. It also worried that promoting regional economic development could fuel ethnic separatism by resurrecting old alliances. China, however, was reassured by an agreement reached in April 1996 with Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to avoid military conflict on common borders. It is also resting easier after assertions from Muslim states that they would

not become involved in China's internal affairs. Thus, China's policy of encouraging economic development while keeping a tight lid on political activism seems to have the support of neighbouring governments, despite not satisfying the many demands of local and cross-border ethnic groups.

Despite increasing investment and many new jobs in Xinjiang, the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups complain that they are not benefiting as much as recent Han immigrants to the region. As noted above, this is a major factor in Uyghur complaints about cultural preservation. A front page article in *The New York Times* has documented the "urban renewal" projects in Kashgar that have decimated the cultural heritage of the city, what many Uyghurs feel is at the heartland of their ancient civilization.³⁷ They insist that the growing number of Han Chinese not only take the jobs and eventually the profits back home with them, but that they also dilute the natives' traditional way of life and leave them with little voice in their own affairs.

7. CYBER-SEPARATISM AND ETIM

Though generally silenced within China, Uyghur voices can still be heard virtually, on the internet. Perhaps due to Chinese restrictions on public protest and a state-controlled media, or the deleterious effect of a war on domestic terrorism that this testimony has documented began in the late 1990s, very few Uyghur protests can be heard today in the region, at least not public ones. International campaigns for Uyghur rights and possible independence have become increasingly vocal and well organized, but only outside of China and on the internet. Supporting primarily an audience of approximately over 500,000 expatriate Uyghurs (yet few Uyghurs in Central Asia and China have access to these internet sites), there are at perhaps as many as 50 international organizations and web sites working for the independence of "Eastern Turkestan," and based in Amsterdam, Munich, Istanbul, Melbourne, Washington, DC and New York. Estimates differ widely on the number of Uyghurs living outside of China in the diaspora. As Sean Roberts has noted, Uyghurs in Central Asia are not always well-represented in the State censuses, particularly since 1991. Shichor estimates approximately 500,000 living abroad, about 5-6% of the total world Uyghur population.³⁸ Uyghur websites differ dramatically on the official Uyghur population numbers, from up to 25 million Uyghur inside Xinjiang, to up to 10 million in the diaspora.³⁹

Although the United Nations and the United States government have agreed with China that at least one international organization, ETIM, is a Uyghur-sponsored terrorist organization, the vast majority of the Eastern Turkestan independence and information organizations disclaim violence. Supported largely by Uyghur émigré's who left China prior to the Communist takeover in 1949, these organizations maintain a plethora of websites and activities that take a primarily negative view of Chinese policies in the region. Although not all organizations advocate independence or separatism, the vast majority of them do press for radical change in the region, reporting not only human rights violations, but environmental degradation, economic imbalances and alternative histories of the region. In general, these websites can be divided roughly into those that are mainly information-based and others that are politically active advocacy sites. Nevertheless, whether informational or advocacy, nearly all of them are critical of Chinese policies in Xinjiang.

Key informational websites that mainly provide Uyghur and Xinjiang related news and analyses, include the Turkestan Newsletter (Turkistan-N) maintained by Mehmet Tutuncu of SOTA, www.euronet.nl/users/sota/Turkestan.html, the Open Society Institute's www.erasianet.org, The Uyghur Information Agency's www.uyghurinfo.com, and the virtual library of the Australian National University based "Eastern Turkestan WWW VL" www.ccs.uky.edu/~rakhim/et.html. An increasing number of scholars are building websites that feature their own work on Xinjiang and provide links to other sites and organizations engaged in research and educational activities related to the region. One of the best sites in this genre is that by

³⁷ See Michael Wines, *The New York Times*, May 27, 2009, "Urban renewal hits Silk Road China will demolish site in Kashgar, historic town inhabited by Uyghurs"p. A1.

³⁸ See Yitzhak Shichor, "Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence." Unpublished paper, 2002.

³⁹ See, for example, www.Uyghur.org, the site supported by Anwar Yusuf, President of the Eastern Turkestan National Freedom Center in Washington, D.C. who has suggested there are up to 25 million Uyghurs worldwide. Shichor (*ibid.*) based on information from Enver Can in Munich, estimates there are about 500 Uyghurs in Germany (mostly in Munich), 500 in Belgium (mostly from Central Asia), 200 in Sweden (mostly from Kazakhstan), 40 in England, 35 in Switzerland, 30 in Holland and 10 in Norway. In addition, there are an estimated 10,000 Uyghurs in Turkey, 1,000 in the United States, 500 in Canada, and 200 in Australia (mostly in Melbourne).

Dr. Nathan Light of the University of Toledo, which not only includes most of his dissertation and useful articles on Uyghur history, music, and culture, but also directs readers to other links to the region: <http://www.utoledo.edu/~nlight>. While there are a plethora of internet sites and web-links to Xinjiang and Uyghur human rights issues, there is as yet no central site that is regularly updated. Information on Uyghur organizations and internet sites can be found at www.uyghuramerican.org. An interactive question-and-answer site with a “Special Report: Uighur Muslim Separatists” can be found at the Virtual Information Center, an open-source organization funded by USCINCPAC, www.vic-info.org.

There are a growing number of Central Asia-related sites that increasingly contain information and discussion of events in Xinjiang, even though Xinjiang is often normally not considered a part of Central Asian Studies, and due to its rule by China, often falls under Chinese studies or Inner Asian studies. See for example, Harvard’s Forum for Central Asian Studies, www.fas.harvard.edu/~centasia, which run by Dr. John Schoeberlein, maintainst the Central Asian Studies World Wide site, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~casww/>, and the list-serve, CentralAsia-L: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~casww/CASWW_CentralAsia-L.html that frequently reports on Xinjiang-related issues. An informational website for “For Democracy, Human Rights, Peace and Freedom for Uzbekistan and Central Asia,” with links to Uyghur and East Turkistan sites is <http://www.uzbekistanerk.org/>. In addition, “Silk Road” sites, increasingly focus on the Uyghur issue. For example, [The Silk Road Foundation](http://www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html), is a general information site for Central Asia, with sections on Xinjiang and a links page to other Uyghur issues: <http://silk-road.com/toc/index.html>. Interestingly, a [NOVA/PBS](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/chinamum/taklamakan.html) website reports on the Taklamakan Mummies, an issue often used to establish claims of territorial history by China and the Uyghurs, particular page is a report research developments concerning the tracing of the mummies ethnicity: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/chinamum/taklamakan.html>.

While most of these sites do not claim to take a position on the Uyghur independence issues related to Xinjiang, most of them tend to report information that is more supportive of Uyghur claims against the Chinese State. An example is the GeoNative “informational site” www.geocities.com/athens/9479/uighur.html maintained by the Basque activist, Luistxo Fernandez, who seeks to report “objectively” on minority peoples less represented in the world press. Yet his site, which does provide a useful chart on English/Uighur/Chinese transliterated placenames, after providing a basic summary of the region, contains the statement: “Chinese colonization by Han people is a threat to native peoples.”⁴⁰ [Abdulrahkim Aitbayev’s Page](http://www.ccs.uky.edu/~rakhim/et.html) is another so-called informational Website containing current reports of Chinese police action in various areas of Xinjiang, as well as links to other sites and articles that are generally critical of China: <http://www.ccs.uky.edu/~rakhim/et.html>.

An important addition to “informational” websites is the site maintained by the Uyghur service of Radio Free Asia, as part of its regular broadcast to Xinjiang and surrounding regions, reportedly beamed from transmitters in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (see <http://www.rfa.org/service/index.html?service=uyg>). According to their site, Radio Free Asia (RFA) broadcasts news and information to Asian listeners who lack regular access to “full and balanced reporting” in their domestic media. Through its broadcasts and call-in programs, RFA aims to fill what is regarded as a “critical gap” in the news reporting for people in certain regions of Asia. Created by Congress in 1994 and incorporated in 1996, RFA currently broadcasts in Burmese, Cantonese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Mandarin, the Wu dialect, Vietnamese, Tibetan (Uke, Amdo, and Kham), and Uyghur. Although the service claims to adhere to the highest standards of journalism and aims to exemplify accuracy, balance, and fairness in its editorial content, local governments have often complained of bias in favor of groups critical to the regimes in power. The Uyghur service has been regularly blocked and criticized by the Chinese government, and has been cited in the past for carrying stories supportive of so-called separatists, especially the case of Rebiya Kadeer, but despite the cooperation of the U.S. and China on the war on terrorism, the site has continued its regular broadcasting. When I asked the Uyghur director of the service, Dr. Dolkun Kamberi, if the increased Sino-U.S. cooperation on terrorism and the labeling of ETIM as an international Uyghur terrorist group had lead to any restriction on their funding or broadcast content, he said that there had been no changes in funding level or content.

⁴⁰ See www.geocities.com/athens/9479/uighur.html. “The entire paragraph reads: Area: 1.6 million sq. km. Population: 14 million (1990 census), Uyghurs: 7.2 million (official), 14-30 million (estimates by the Uyghur organizations abroad). Capital: Urumchi. The Sinkiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region in China (Xinjiang Uygur Zizhiqu in Chinese) is also known under the names Eastern Turkestan or Chinese Turkestan. Uyghur people prefer Uyghuristan. It is inhabited by the Uyghurs also known under names Uighur, Uigur, Uygur, Weiwuer, Sart, Taranchi, Kashgarlik. The other native peoples are [Kazak](#), [Uzbek](#), [Kyrghyz](#), [Tajik](#), [Tatar](#). Chinese colonization by Han people is a threat for the native peoples.”

Funding for the informational sites are generally traceable to academic organizations, advertising, and subscription. It is much harder to establish funding sources for the advocacy sites. While most sites are supported primarily by subscribers, advertising, and small donations from Uyghurs and other Muslims outside of China sympathetic to the Uyghur cause, there is no evidence that the organizations and the sites they sponsor have ever received official government sponsorship. Other than the Radio Free Asia Uyghur service, which is supported by the U.S. government, there is no other government that officially supports dissemination of information related to Uyghur human rights issues. However, many Uyghur organizations in the past have claimed sympathy and tacit support from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Australia, Germany, France, Holland, and Canada.

Advocacy sites openly promote international support for Uyghur- and Xinjiang-related causes. These sites and organizations they often represent take a strong and critical stance against Chinese rule in Xinjiang, giving voice they say to a “silent majority” of Uyghur in Xinjiang and abroad who advocate radical political reform, if not outright independence, in the region. These sites include the International Taklamakan Human Rights Association, which contains links to several articles and Websites concerning East Turkistan, Uyghurs, and Uyghuristan: <http://www.taklamakan.org/>; the Uyghur American Association, that contains links to articles and websites concerning issues of human rights and territorial freedom among Uyghurs in Xinjiang, as well as listing 22 other organizations around the world that do not have Websites: <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/>; the East Turkistan National Congress, led by Enver Can in Munich <http://www.eastturkistan.com/>.

An interesting U.S. based site includes the Citizens Against Communist Chinese Propaganda (with one page entitled “Free East Turkistan!”), which bills itself as a counter-propaganda site (using the fight fire with fire approach), based in Florida and led by Jack Churchward who started the organization, Free Eastern Turkestan, that originally made its name for itself through a series of protests against a Chinese owned and operated theme park, “Splendid China”, located in Kissimmee, Florida that they found denigrating to especially Uyghurs and Tibetans (with its mini-replicas of mosques and the Potala Palace): <http://www.caccp.org/>.⁴¹ The Uyghur Human Rights Coalition is a website reporting human rights abuses of Uyghurs in China and containing links to articles and other sites, <http://www.uyghurs.org/>. KIVILCIM is an East Turkistan Information Website advocating independence, but in Uyghur language: <http://www.kivilcim.org/> along with <http://www.doguturkistan.net/>. Other advocacy sights include the East Turkestan Information Center www.uygur.org, the Eastern Turkestan National Freedom Center www.uyghur.org, The Uyghur Human Rights Coalition www.uyghurs.org which publishes personal testimonies of human rights abuses, and other more popular sites including www.taklamakan.org, www.ugyur.net, www.turpan.com, www.afn.org, www.eastTurkestan.com. As most of these sites are cross-linked, they often repeat and pass along information contained on other sites.

There are a number of publicly known Uyghur advocacy organizations, which grew to nearly 20 in the late 1990s, but seemed to have declined in membership and activities since September 2001.⁴² In the United States, one of the most active information and advocacy groups in the Washington, D.C. area is the Uyghur American Association who’s chairmen have been Alim Seytoff and Turdi Hajji.⁴³ Founded like many advocacy groups in the late 1990s, it supports various public lectures and demonstrations to further raise public awareness regarding Uyghur and Xinjiang issues. The Uyghur Human Rights Coalition (www.uyghurs.org), and located near the Georgetown University campus, tracks human rights issues and has organized several demonstrations and conferences in the Washington, DC metro area, originally very active in pushing for the release of Rebiya Kadir.⁴⁴ One of the earliest Uyghur advocacy organizations established in the U.S. in 1996 was the

⁴¹ For a comparative study of the role of theme parks in ethnic identity construction in China and the U.S., see Dru Gladney, In Press. “Theme Parks and Path Dependency: Comparing the Polynesian Cultural Center and the China Ethnic Cultural Park” in “Chinese Ethnology: Practice and Theory” Taipei: Academia Sinica.

⁴² A list of some of the international Uyghur and East Turkistan organization can be found on <http://uyghuramerican.org/Uyghurorganiz.html> and http://www.uygur.org/adres/uygur_organization.htm.

⁴³ See their website introduction: <http://uyghuramerican.org/> "The Uyghur American Association was established on May 23, 1998 in Washington D.C. at the First Uyghur American Congress. The growing Uyghur community in the United States created a need for a unified Uyghur organization to serve the needs of the community here and to represent the collective voice of the Uyghurs in East Turkistan."

⁴⁴ See their organizational statement www.uyghurs.org “The Uyghur Human Rights Coalition (UHRC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating Americans, particularly university students, about the Chinese government's human rights violations against the Uyghur people of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (known to the Uyghurs as East Turkistan). Through its educational efforts, the UHRC strives to build

International Taklamakan Human Rights Association (ITHRA, www.taklamakan.org), whose president is Ablajan Layli Namen Barat, maintains the active list-serve, UIGHUR-L, as well as list-serv covering events in Inner (Southern) Mongolia, SMONGOL-L. In Europe, most the Uyghur organizations are concentrated in Munich where there are the largest number of Uyghur émigrés, including the Eastern Turkestan (Uyghuristan) National Congress (www.eastturkistan.com) whose president is Enver Can; the East Turkestan Union in Europe led by Asgar Can, the Eastern Turkestan Information Center (www.uygur.org) led by Abduljelil Karakash which publishes the on-line journal, *The World Uyghur Network News*; and the World Uyghur Youth Congress (www.uyghurinfo.com) chaired by Dolqun Isa; in Holland, there is the Uyghur Netherlands Democratic Union (UNDU) led by Bahtiyar Semsiddin and the Uyghur House chaired by Shahelil; the Uyghur Youth Union in Belgium chaired by Sedullam and the Belgium Uyghur Association chaired by Sultan Ehmet; in Stockholm, Sweden the East Turkestan Association chaired by Faruk Sadikov; in London there is the Uygur Youth Union UK chaired by Enver Bugda; in Moscow the Uyghur Association chaired by Serip Haje; in Turkey organizations include the EastTurkestan Foundation led by Mehmet Riza Bekin in Istanbul, the East Turkestan Solidarity Foundation led by Sayit Taranci in Istanbul, and the East Turkestan Culture and Solidarity Association led by Abubekir Turksoy in Kayseri; in Canada is the Canadian Uyghur Association based in Toronto and chaired by Mehmetjan Tohti; in Australia is the Australian Turkestan Association in Melbourne chaired by Ahmet Igamberdi; in Kazakhstan there are several organizations based in Almaty listed on the internet, but they are difficult to contact in the region having met with recent government sanctions, including Nozugum Foundation, the Kazakhstan Regional Uyghur (*Ittipak*) Organization chaired by Khahriman Gojamberdie, the Uyghuristan Freedom association chaired by Sabit Abdurahman, the Kazakhstan Uyghur Unity (*Ittipak*) Association chaired by Sheripjan Nadirov, and the Uyghur Youth Union in Kazakhstan chaired by Abdurexit Turdeyev; and in Kyrgyzstan one finds in Bishkek the Kyrgyzstan Uyghur Unity (*Ittipak*) Association chaired by Rozimehmet Abdulnbakiev, the Bishkek Human Rights Committee chaired by Tursun Islam. While these are the main organizations listed on the internet, many of them are no longer accessible and there are several other smaller organizations that are not readily listed.

It is difficult to assess who the audience is for these websites and organizations, as they are all blocked in China, and mostly inaccessible in Central Asia due to either inadequate internet access or the high costs of getting on the net. Many Uyghurs I have talked with in China and in Central Asia have never heard of most of these sites. Interestingly, government officials in Xinjiang interested in the information provided on these sites also have said they do not have access. It is clear that Uyghurs in the Western diaspora, particularly in Europe, Turkey, the United States, Canada, and Australia are frequent readers and contributors to these sites. In addition, events in the region since September 11 have led an increasing number of journalists and interested observers of the region to begin visiting the sites more regularly. In terms of content, it is interesting to note that a cursory monitoring of these sites reveals very little that can be associated with militant or radical Islam, and almost no calls for an Islamic “Jihad” against the Chinese state. Most of the issues as noted above involve documenting the plight and history of the Uyghurs under Chinese rule in Xinjiang as opposed to their glorious, independent past and long history in the region. It is also important to note that few Chinese inside or outside of China have visited these sites so that they are quite unaware of these alternative histories. Although there are several sites available in Turkish and Uyghur, there is not one in Chinese. As such, like all internet groups, it is a self-selected audience and rarely reaches beyond those who already support and are interested in the agenda supported by the site.

Financial support for these organizations and websites come mostly from private individuals, foundations, and subscriptions (though these are rare). While it has been reported that wealthy Uyghur patrons in Saudi Arabia and Turkey, who became successful running businesses after migrating to these countries in the 1940s, have strongly supported these organizations financially in the past, there is no publicly available information on these sources. Many Uyghur who migrated to Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s, became successful in construction and restaurant businesses, and were thus in a much better position to support Uyghur causes than the more recent Uyghur émigrés.⁴⁵ Uyghurs in Central Asia and in the West who have been able to migrate from Xinjiang in increasing numbers in the last 20 years or so have generally been much poorer off than the

a broad base of support for the Uyghur people's struggle to obtain democratic freedoms and self-determination and to protect their culture and environment.”

⁴⁵ Recent discussions on the internet regarding Turkey’s lack of support for the Uyghur cause have begun to proliferate, see Demet Tezcan, “Dogu Türkistan yine yok mu sayilacak?” *Turkistan Newsletter* Mon, 20 Jan 2003 19:15:51, Turkistan Bulteni ISSN:1386-6265.

earlier émigrés in the Middle East. This is starting to change, however, as they and their children become more well-established in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia.

Although most of these websites have limited funding and circulation, they should not be dismissed as forming only a “virtual” community without any substantial impact on events within Xinjiang. Not only have these websites served as an important source of information not available in the official Chinese media, but some scholars have begun to argue that internet sites often help to sway public opinion by virtue of their widespread availability and alternative reporting of important events.⁴⁶ While analysts are divided about the potency of the internet for swaying public opinion or influencing domestic events, there is an emerging consensus that it has clearly altered the way information is circulated and opinions are formed. Perhaps more importantly, scholars have concluded that the “virtual communities” formed by internet websites establish links and connections that can lead to broad social interactions and coalitions which have impacted political and socio-economic events. For example, it has been shown that social movements in East Timor, Aceh, Chechnya, and Bosnia have been given strong support through these internet communities, providing not only increased information but large financial transfers as well.⁴⁷ While “cyber-separatism” would never be able on its own to unseat a local government, it is clear that it does link like-minded individuals and raise consciousness about issues that were often inaccessible to the general public. For an isolated region such as Xinjiang, and the widely dispersed Uyghur diaspora, the internet has dramatically altered the way the world sees the region and the Chinese state must respond to issues within it.

It is clear that there are more than just internet organizations involved in separatist activities in and around Xinjiang. As noted above, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was recognized by the United Nations in October 2002 as an international terrorist organization responsible for domestic and international terrorist acts, which China claimed included a bombing of the Chinese consulate in Istanbul, assassinations of Chinese officials in Bishkek, and Uighur officials in Kashgar thought to collaborate with Chinese officialdom.⁴⁸ This designation, however, created a controversy in that China and the U.S. presented little public evidence to positively link the ETIM organization with the specific incidents described.⁴⁹ In 2001, the US State Department released a report that documented several separatist and terrorist groups operating inside the region and abroad, militating for an independent Xinjiang.⁵⁰ The list included “The United Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan” whose leader Yusupbek Mukhlisi claims to have 30 armed units with “20 million” Uyghurs primed for an uprising; the “Home of East Turkestan Youth,” said to be linked to Hamas with a

⁴⁶ For studies of the influence of internet in influencing wider public opinion in Asia, see a recent collection of essays in the *Asian Journal of Social Science* edited by Zaheer Baber in a special focus on “The Internet and Social Change in Asia and Beyond”, Vol. 30, No 2, 2002.

⁴⁷ For studies related to the internet’s role in building community and mobilizing support for specific causes, see Derek Foster, 1997. “Community and Identity in the Electronic Village” in David Porter, editor. *Internet Culture*. New York: Routledge Press; Steven G. Jones, 1997. “The Internet and Its Social Landscape” in Steven G. Jones, editor. *Virtual Culture: Identity and Community in Cybersociety*. London, New Delhi: Sage; Tim Jordan, 1999. *Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet*. London and New York: Routledge; Douglas Rushkoff, 1994. *Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace*. New York: Harper Collins; and Mark A. Smith and Peter Kollock, editors. 1999. *Communities in Cyberspace*. London and New York: Routledge.

⁴⁸ The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is known only as a shadowy group known only to be previously active in Afghanistan and founded in the mid-90s by Hassan Mashum. Mashum had served three years in a labor camp in Xinjiang and who recruited other Uighurs, including his number three leader Rashid who was captured with the Taliban and returned to China in Spring 2001. See Hutzler, Charles, “China-Iraq Policy Is Risky For US” *Asian Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2001.

⁴⁹ “China Also Harmed by Separatist-Minded Eastern Turkestan Terrorists,” *People’s Daily*, October 10, 2001; Eckholm, Erik, “U.S. Labeling of Group in China as Terrorist is Criticized,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2002; Hutzler, Charles, “U.S. Gesture to China Raises Crackdown Fears” *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2002.

⁵⁰ McNeal, Dewardic L. “China’s Relations with Central Asian States and Problems with Terrorism.” US Department of State, Congressional Research Service Report, 2001. See also Scott Fogden’s excellent thesis, *Writing Insecurity: The PRC’s Push to Modernize China and the Politics of Uighur Identity*. MscEcon Thesis, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2002

reported 2000 members, the “Free Turkestan Movement” whose leader Abdul Kasim is said to have led the 1990 Baren uprising discussed above; the Organization for the Liberation of Uighuristan” how leader Ashir Vakhidi is said to be committed to the fighting Chinese “occupation” of the “Uighur homeland;” and the so-called “Wolves of Lop Nor” who have claimed responsibility for various bombings and uprisings. The State Department report claims that all of these groups have tenuous links with al Qaeda, Taliban, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir (“Islamic Revival”), and the Tableeghi Jamaat. Many of these groups were listed in the Chinese report that came out in early 2002, but failed to mention ETIM. It came as some surprise, therefore, when at the conclusion of his August 2001 visit to Beijing, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage identified ETIM as the main coordinating Uyghur group to be targeted as an international terrorist group, responsible for the vast majority of violent incidents.⁵¹ Even the Chinese report, on which many believe the U.S. report was based, did not link all the groups to ETIM. At the time, very few people, including activists deeply engaged in working for an independent East Turkistan, had ever heard of the ETIM group.⁵² Even the US military did not seem to be aware of the group, as the 28 September 2001 “Special Report: Uighur Muslim Separatists” issued by the Virtual Information Center in Honolulu which is funded by USCINCPAC (the Pacific Asia Command) not only did not mention ETIM, but concluded regarding separatist violence in Xinjiang that there is “no single identifiable group but there is violent opposition coordinated and possibly conducted by exiled groups and organizations within Xinjiang.”⁵³ Privately, State Department officials have admitted to me personally that they felt the designation was a mistake. Since that time, no other groups have been so designated.

The main criticism raised by those critical of this designation is that, with so many identified groups, it has not been made clear why ETIM in particular was singled out, unless it was for the political purpose of strengthening US-China relations. Calling them “scapegoat terrorists” the Oxford Analytica report on the ETIM issue concludes that ETIM and other groups are only a “dubious threat” and has been used as an excuse for increased repression.⁵⁴ Interestingly, the Mukhlisi’s United Revolutionary Front was not included with ETIM, despite its frequent claims of responsibility for violent acts in Xinjiang, such as the 1997 train derailment and police station bombings.⁵⁵ At the same time, many Uyghur have complained to me that although there have been many reported terrorist bombings in Tibet and frequent organized protests against Chinese rule that have led to violence outside of Tibet, given the sympathy shown to Tibetans in the West, they do not see the U.S. ever siding with China in condemning a Tibetan independence organization as terrorist.⁵⁶ Despite international

⁵¹ Conclusion of China Visit Press Conference, Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage, Beijing, China, U.S. Department of State, August 26, 2002.

⁵² For example, Mehmet Hazret in a recent interview (see following discussion), claimed he had never heard of ETIM: “I hadn’t even heard of ETIM until the Chinese government mentioned its name in a report in January 2002,” he said. “But I knew the leaders of this group whom the report mentioned. For many years, they were in Chinese prisons for political reasons, and they escaped from China. We don’t have any organizational relations with them because politically we don’t share the same goals. But I cannot believe they carried out any terrorist attacks as the Chinese authorities say they did, because they themselves are victims of Chinese state terrorism.” Radio Free Asia, Uyghur service, “Separatist leader vows to target Chinese government (RFA)”, 24 January 2003. <http://www.rfa.org/service/index.html?service=uyg>

⁵³ See a “Special Report: Uighur Muslim Separatists” Virtual Information Center, 28 September 2001, p. 6,

www.vic-info.org.

⁵⁴ See “China: China Increases Suppression in Xinjiang” Oxford Analytica 20 December 2002. The report concludes: “Distinguishing between genuine counter-terrorism and repression of minority rights is difficult and the Uighur case points to a lack of international guidelines for doing so. In any case, Chinese policies, not foreign-sponsored terrorism, are the cause of Uighur unrest. China’s development and control policy in Xinjiang is unlikely to stabilise the region as long as development benefits remain so unevenly distributed.”

⁵⁵ “Exile Group Claims Bomb Blast in Xinjiang,” *AFP (Hong Kong)*, 1 March 1997, FBIS, FTS19970513001183

⁵⁶ Bombings in Tibet and other “terrorist acts” have been frequently reported in the press, “Explosion Hits Tibet’s Capital After China Announces New Regional Leader,” *Agence France Presse (Hong Kong)*, 9 November 2000, FBIS, CPP20001109000079; “Explosion Hits Tibet’s Capital After China Announces New Regional Leader,” *Agence France Presse (Hong Kong)*, 9 November 2000, FBIS, CPP20001109000079; “London Organization - Migrants’ Shops Bombed in Tibet,” *AFP (Hong Kong)*, 27 December 1996, FBIS, FTS19970409001372; “Tibet Blames Dalai Lama for Bombing in Lhasa,” *Tibet People’s Radio Network*

protests, on 27 January 2002 China executed a Tibetan monk found guilty of lethal bombings in Tibet.⁵⁷ Yet few believe Tibetan organizations for a “free” or independent Tibet would ever be considered “terrorist.” Many feel that it is only due to the fact that they are Muslims that one Uyghur group has been singled out as being terrorist. The real issue for this testimony, however, is that despite the designation of ETIM, there are active Uyghur-related activist groups which can be said to be supportive of terrorism, but have never been proved to be directly implicated in any specific incident.

Following Armitage’s announcement and the State Department’s report, the Chinese State Council issued its own report on January 21, 2002, charging that from 1990-2001 various Uyghur separatist groups “were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang” that resulted in the deaths of 162 people and injuries to 440 others. The report, titled “East Turkestan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity,” also dismissed allegations that Beijing had used the U.S.-led war on terror as a pretext to crack down on Uyghurs. The report condemned numerous Uyghur groups including Hazret’s ETLO; the ETIM; the Islamic Reformist Party “Shock Brigade”; the East Turkestan Islamic Party; the East Turkestan Opposition Party; the East Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah; the Uyghur Liberation Organization; the Islamic Holy Warriors; and the East Turkestan International Committee (see Figure 3).

Uyghur Radical Activist Groups, Selected List	
<p>United Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan Leader: Yusupbek Mukhlisi (aka Modan Mukhlisi).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 armed units, including expert bomb makers. Mukhlisi boasts of having “twenty-two million Uyghurs” ready to conduct armed struggle against PRC. Claim to have ties to several groups across the border in Kazakhstan. 	<p>East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) Leader: Hasan Houran.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reportedly responsible for assassinations of Uyghurs viewed as “collaborators” with the PRC and Central Asian governments. Dispersed throughout the region: in Tajikistan, China, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Chechnya. No. 3 leader Rashid repatriated to China from Pakistan
<p>Wolves of Lop Nor Leader: not listed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claimed responsibility for a number of bombings on trains and for several assassinations. Home city of Lop Nor is the site of one of China’s largest nuclear test sites. 	<p>Free Turkestan Movement Leader: Abdul Kasim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led April 1990 uprising in Baren, Xinjiang. PRC officials report 22 people were killed. Weapons used in the Baren may have come from Afghan Mujahadeen.
<p>Home of East Turkestan Youth Leader: not listed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Branded as Xinjiang’s Hamas. Report 2,000 members; may have undergone explosives training in camps inside Afghanistan. 	<p>Organization for the Liberation of Uighuristan Leader: Ashir Vakhidi. Committed to armed struggle against Chinese “occupation” of the “Uyghur homeland.”</p>

Figure 2. Table of Uyghur insurgent groups, adapted from “China’s Relations with Central Asian States and Problems with Terrorism.” US Department of State, Congressional Research Service Report, 2001. and Scott Fogden thesis, *Writing Insecurity: The PRC’s Push to Modernize China and the Politics of Uyghur Identity.* University of Wales, Aberystwyth, September 2002.

Figure 3: Uyghur Radical Groups Select List

(Lhasa), 27 December 1996, FBIS, FTS19970409001370; Che, Kang, “Bomb Explodes in Lhasa, Local Authorities Offer Reward for Capture of Criminals,” *Ta Kung Pao (Hong Kong)*, 30 December 1996, FBIS, FTS19970409001371; “Suspect Detained for Bomb Attack on Tibetan Clinic,” *AFP (Hong Kong)*, 14 January 1999, FBIS, FTS19990114000015; “AFP: Explosion Hits Tibet’s Capital after China Announces New Regional Leader,” *Agence France Presse (Hong Kong)*, 9 November 2000, FBIS, CPP20001109000079.

⁵⁷ See John Pomfret, “China Executes Tibetan Monk for Alleged Bombings” *Washington Post Foreign Service* Tuesday, January 28, 2003; Radio Free Asia reported that the government is silencing any reporting on the execution: <http://www.rfa.org/service/article.html?service=can&encoding=2&id=98250>.

It is important to note that an internet search of many of these organizations and their backgrounds reveals little information if any. In addition, these organizations and many of the internet news and information organizations discussed above have rarely if ever claimed responsibility for any specific action, though many are sympathetic to isolated incidents regarded as challenging Chinese rule in the region. Interestingly, there seems to be very little support for radical Islam and a search for the term “jihad” (holy war) among the various websites and news postings related to these groups turns up almost no use of the term or call for a religious war against the Chinese. As noted by Jankowiak and Rudleson above, many of the Uyghur nationalists are quite secular in their orientation, and overthrow of Chinese rule is related to issues of sovereignty and human rights, rather than those of religion. By contrast, Uyghur expatriots with whom I have spent time in the U.S., Canada, Turkey, and Europe, however, tend to be quite religious, yet I have rarely heard them call for a holy war against the Chinese. Again, their concerns are more related to historic claims upon their ancestral lands, Chinese mistreatment of the Uyghur population, and a desire to return home to a “free East Turkestan”. A Uyghur family with whom I spent the Ramadan feast in Toronto in 2000 maintained a deeply religious life in Canada that they claimed was not possible in China. Although disavowing violence, their daily prayer was for a free “Uyghuristan” where their relatives could be free to practice religion. In Istanbul, the Uyghur community is quite active in the mosques in Zeytinburnu and Tuzla, and strongly advocate a “liberated East Turkestan,” but on several visits to these communities since 1993 I have never once heard them call for a jihad against the Chinese government, even in its most mild sense that John Esposito has described as “defensive jihad”, or protecting Islam from persecution.⁵⁸ If one were to compare ETIM with many of these other groups, it could be argued that ETIM as so described, is not even as radical as some of the other groups, based on their publications (see Figure 4).

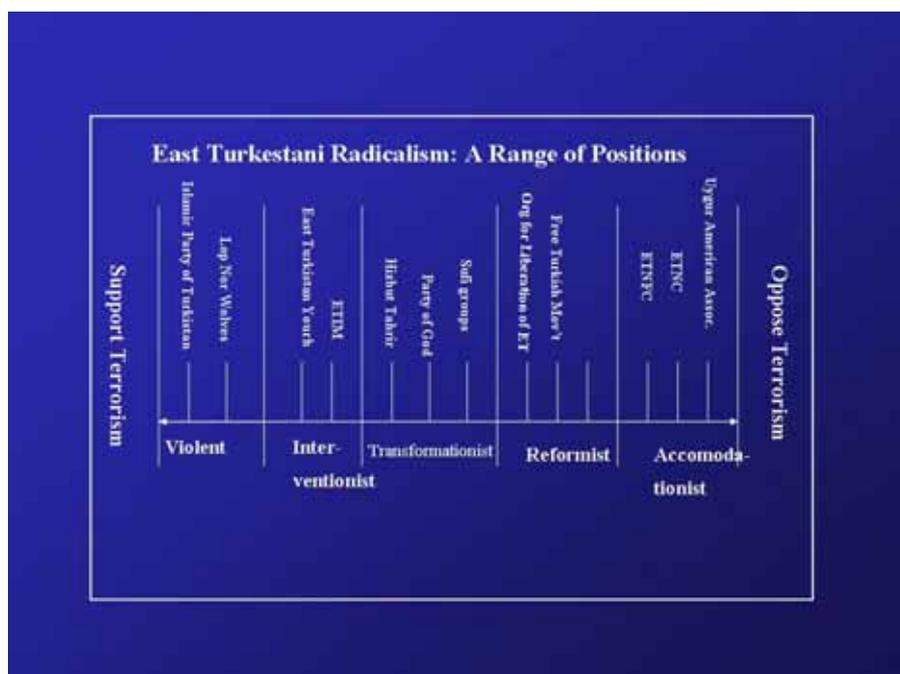


Figure 4: Comparative Chart of Uyghur Radical Groups

Source: Gladney 2004: 203-21.

As noted above, since September 11, 2001, very few groups have publicly advocated terror against the Chinese state, and most have denied any involvement in terrorist activities, though they may express sympathy for such

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the various meanings of “jihad” in Islam, see John L. Esposito, 2002. Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Pp. 26-35. For studies among Uyghur and other Turkic communities in Istanbul, see Dru C. Gladney, "Relational Alterity: Constructing Dungan (Hui), Uyghur, and Kazakh Identities across China, Central Asia, and Turkey" History and Anthropology Vol. 9, No. 2: 445-77, and Ingvar Svanberg, 1989. Kazak Refugees in Turkey: A Study of Cultural Persistence and Social Change. Stockholm and Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell International.

activities. A case in point is East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), led by the secretive Mehmet Emin Hazret. In a January 24, 2003 telephone interview with the Uyghur service of Radio Free Asia, Hazret admitted that there may be a need to establish a military wing of his organization that would target Chinese interests, he nevertheless denied any prior terrorist activity or any association with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). "We have not been and will not be involved in any kind of terrorist action inside or outside China," Hazret said. "We have been trying to solve the East Turkestan problem through peaceful means. But the Chinese government's brutality in East Turkestan may have forced some individuals to resort to violence."¹ Hazret, a former screenwriter from Xinjiang, migrated to Turkey in his 40s, denied any connection between his organization and al-Qaeda or Osama bin Laden. Nevertheless, he did see the increasing need for a military action against Chinese rule in the region: "Our principal goal is to achieve independence for East Turkestan by peaceful means. But to show our enemies and friends our determination on the East Turkestan issue, we view a military wing as inevitable...The Chinese people are not our enemy. Our problem is with the Chinese government, which violates the human rights of the Uyghur people." Once again, a common pattern to his response regarding Chinese rule in the region was not to stress Islamic jihad or religious nationalism, but to emphasize human rights violations and Uyghur claims on Eastern Turkestan.

Chinese authorities are clearly concerned that increasing international attention to the treatment of its minority and dissident peoples have put pressure on the region, with the US and many Western governments continuing to criticize China for not adhering to its commitments to signed international agreements and human rights. Last year China ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Article One of the covenant says: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." Article 2 reads: "All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence." Although China continues to quibble with the definition of "people", it is clear that the agreements are pressuring China to answer criticisms by Mary Robinson and other high-ranking human rights advocates about its treatment of minority peoples. Clearly, with Xinjiang representing the last Muslim region under communism, large trade contracts with Middle Eastern Muslim nations, and 5 Muslim nations on its western borders, Chinese authorities have more to be concerned about than just international support for human rights.

8. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

To an extent never seen before, the continued incorporation of Xinjiang into China has become inexorable, and perhaps irreversible. The need for the oil and mineral resources of the region since China became an oil importing nation in 1993 means that Chinese influence will only grow. To be sure, the Uighur are still oriented culturally and historically toward Central Asia in terms of religion, language, and ethnic custom, and interaction has increased in recent years due to the opening of the roads to Pakistan and Almaty. China has also recently announced opening the border between Afghanistan and Xinjiang via the ancient Wakhan Corridor, where there is no road but only an ancient donkey trail used since Silk Road days.² Certainly, pan-Turkism was appealing to some, but not all, Uighurs during the early part of this century. Historical ties to Central Asia are strong. Turkey's late Prime Minister Turgut Ozal espoused a popular Turkish belief when, on his first state visit to Beijing in 1985, which sought to open a consulate there, he commented that the Turkish nation originated in what is now China. Yet separatist notions, given the current political incorporation of Xinjiang into China, while perhaps present, are not practicable. As noted above, this is predicated on the assumption that China as a nation holds together. If China should fail at the centre, the peripheries will certainly destabilize, with Xinjiang and Tibet having the strongest prospects for separation given their cultural unity and attempts at government-in-exile.

The problems facing Xinjiang, however, are much greater than those of Tibet if it were to become independent. Not only is it more integrated into the rest of China, but the Uighur part of the population is less than half of the total and primarily located in the south, where there is less industry and natural resources, except for oil. As noted above, however, unless significant investment is found, Tarim oil and energy resources will never be a viable source of independent wealth. Poor past relations between the three main Muslim groups, Uighur, Kazak, and Hui, suggest that conflicts among Muslims would be as great as those between Muslims and Han Chinese. Most local residents believe that independence would lead to significant conflicts between these groups, along

ethnic, religious, urban-rural, and territorial lines. Given the harsh climate and poor resources in the region, those caught in the middle would have few places to flee. Xinjiang Han would naturally seek to return to the interior of China, since Russia and Mongolia would be in no position to receive them. Yet given the premise that only a complete collapse of the state could precipitate a viable independence movement and internal civil war in Xinjiang, there would be few places the Han would be able to go. Certainly, the bordering provinces of Gansu and Qinghai would be just as disrupted, and Tibet would not be an option. Uighur refugees would most likely seek to move south, since the north would be dominated by the Han and the western routes would be closed off by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. That leaves only the southern routes, and with the exception of Pakistan, no nation in the region would probably be equipped to receive them. Certainly, they would not be better off in present-day Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Given the on-going conflicts in Kashmir, even Pakistan, the most likely recipient of Uighur refugees, would probably not wish further destabilization of the region. Note also that the main southern route to India and Pakistan, along the Karakorum highway through the Torghurat pass, is generally passable less than six months out of the year. India, despite its poor relations with China, would certainly not want to add to its Muslim population. During many conversations in Xinjiang with local residents, Muslim and Han alike, it became clear that this fact is well-known. Most think that in such a worst-case scenario, there would be nothing to do but stay and fight.

In terms of religious freedom, as with many other policies, the Chinese constitution is laudable if honored, but in a country where rule of law often gives way to local and national politics, it is often only honored in the breach. As long as religion is perceived by Chinese officials as a threat to Chinese sovereignty, mosques and religious practice will be observed and in some cases restricted. In light of international Islamic interest, however, Chinese officials have to be careful regarding any oppressive treatment of religious practice -- generally casting it as "splittist" or seditious as in the February 1997 incident in Ili.

In the past 10 years, the opening of China to the outside world has meant much for the Uighur who, if they can obtain a passport, might travel beyond China's borders through Pakistan along the Karakorum highway, through the Ili valley into Kazakhstan, or by several CAAC flights to Istanbul from Urumqi. The number of Uighur pilgrims travelling on the *Hajj* to Mecca has increased by 300 per cent in the 1990s, but has since dropped off precipitously (though other Muslims from China travel much more freely). International contacts have allowed the Uighur to see themselves as participants in the broader Islamic *Umma*, while at the same time being Muslim citizens of the Chinese nation-state. As they return from the *Hajj*, many Uighur who generally travel together as a group have told me that they gained a greater sense of affinity with their own as one people than with the other multi-ethnic members of the international Islamic community. State promoted tourism of foreign Muslims and tourists to Muslim areas in China in hopes of stimulating economic investment is also an important trend related to this opening of Xinjiang and its borders. Urumqi, a largely Han city constructed in the last fifty years, is undergoing an Islamic facelift with the official endorsement of Central Asian and Islamic architecture which serves to impress many visiting foreign Muslim dignitaries. Most foreigners come to see the colourful minorities and the traditional dances and costumes by which their ethnicity is portrayed in Chinese and foreign travel brochures. One Japanese tourist with whom I once spoke in Kashgar, who had just arrived by bicycle from Pakistan across the Karakorum highway, said that a tourist brochure told him that the real Uighurs could only be found in Kashgar, whereas most Uighur believe that Turfan is the centre of their cultural universe. Yet many of these Kashgaris will in the same breath argue that much of traditional Uighur culture has been lost to Han influence in Turfan and that since they themselves are the repositories of the more unspoiled "Uighur" traditions, tourists should spend their time, and money, in Kashgar. This search for the so-called "real Uighur" confirms that the nationality statistics and tourism agencies have succeeded. The re-creation of Uighur ethnicity has come full circle: the Chinese nation-state has identified a people who have in the last 40 years taken on that assigned identity as their own, and in the process, those who have accepted that identity have sought to define it and exploit it on their own terms. The Uighur believe they have a 6,000 year cultural and physical history in the region. They are not likely to let it go.

The history of Chinese-Muslim relations in Xinjiang, as Millward's (2007) book documented, has been one of relative peace and quiet, broken by enormous social and political disruptions, fostered by both internal and external crises. The relative quiet of the last decade does not indicate that the on-going problems of the region have been resolved or opposition dissolved. The opposition to Chinese rule in Xinjiang has not reached the level of Chechnya or the Intifada, but similar to the Basque separatists of the ETA in Spain, or former IRA in Ireland and England, it is one that may erupt in limited, violent moments of terror and resistance. And just as these oppositional movements have not been resolved in Europe, the Uyghur problem in Xinjiang does not appear to be one that will readily go away. The admitted problem of Uyghur terrorism and dissent, even in the diaspora, is thus problematic for a government that wants to encourage integration and development in a region where the majority population are not only ethnically different, but also devoutly Muslim. How does a

government integrate a strongly religious minority (be it Muslim, Tibetan, Christian, or Buddhist) into a Marxist-Capitalist system? China's policy of intolerance toward dissent and economic stimulus has not seemed to have resolved this issue. As a responsible stakeholder, China should find ways to open dialogue with representative Uighur individuals and groups to better cooperate in finding solutions to this on-going problem. There has been much progress and relatively peaceful development of this important region. Surely a dialogue can be opened up in order to help insure a more prosperous and peaceful future, for both Uighur and Han alike.

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¹ Radio Free Asia, Uyghur service, "Separatist leader vows to target Chinese government (RFA)", 24 January 2003. <http://www.rfa.org/service/index.html?service=uyg>.

² See the Stratfor report documenting the Afghan Prime Minister's request for China to open the Wakhan corridor, June 11, 2009, "**China: Afghan FM Seeks Wakhan Corridor Supply Route**" (http://www.stratfor.com/sitrep/20090611_china_afghan_fm_seeks_wakhan_corridor_supply_route)