

# Xinjiang and the Uyghur Challenge

## *The Emergence of Uyghur Nationalism and Separatism*

How and when did the Uyghurs, the largest group of Turkish-speaking Muslim natives of Xinjiang, acquire their ethnic or national consciousness and separatist drive? Early in the nineteenth century, the Muslims of Central Asia seemed to lack a modern national consciousness. (Edwin O. Reischauer, John K. Fairbank, and Albert Craig, *East Asia, the Modern Transformation*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1965., p. 368.) As the Qing dynasty declined, and was beset by rebellions from the 1850s to the late 1870s, including those in northwest China involving the Muslims in Xinjiang, the British and the Russian empire-builders were vying with each other to extend their sphere of influence, or actual rule, into that region (Ibid., pp. 366-370.) The British and the Russians supported the regime of the Khokandian adventurer, Yakub Beg, who occupied southern Xinjiang militarily from 1865 to 1877 (Ibid. pp. 368-369.) After taking over the Kyrghyz and Kazakh steppe and the homeland of other Muslims in Central Asia, an area viewed by the Russians as Western or Russian Turkestan, Russian forces invaded Qing China's Ili River valley in 1871. The Russians at first named the Muslim inhabited Tarim Basin of southern Xinjiang as Chinese Turkestan, a name they later changed to East Turkestan, perhaps as a step towards detaching it from China. (Wikipedia, "Xinjiang". Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang>.) Even though the Qing Chinese military commander Zuo Zongtang reconquered Xinjiang, except for the Russian-held Eli region, in 1878, and the Qing restructured it officially as a province, the idea that the Uyghurs were Eastern Turks had taken root in the Uyghur consciousness. It was only a small step from ethnic nationalism to demanding self-rule or independence. Although Uyghur nationalism and drive for independence had been manipulated by imperial powers for their own purposes, it has also to be seen in the context of the spread of the ideas of modern nationalism and self-determination to all corners of the world, especially during the twentieth century.

Unaware of their latent separatism, the Qing helped the Uyghurs to settle all over Xinjiang after Zuo Zongtang pacified the area, facilitating thereby the growth of the Uyghur population in other parts of Xinjiang. After the Qing dynasty was replaced by a nationalistic but unstable Republic of China in 1912, the complex interaction of certain warlords and Uyghur nationalists with the Kuomintang (KMT)-

controlled government, and later also with the Soviet invading forces in Xinjiang, brought into existence two relatively short-lived East Turkestan Republics in certain parts of Xinjiang, before that region was reunited with the rest of China by the military action of the CCP in 1949. In 1955, the PRC designated Xinjiang (about 1/6 of China's territory) as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), because the Uyghurs were the largest ethnic group residing there. Being acknowledged as an ethnic minority, the Uyghurs would enjoy all the privileges given to ethnic minorities under China's affirmative action laws. Uyghur separatism subsided for a time, but never completely went away.

### *The Population and Geography of Xinjiang*

Besides the Uyghurs, Xinjiang has been the home of many other ethnic groups, including the Hans, the Huis (Chinese-speaking Muslims), the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyzs, and Mongols, among others. Recognizing thirteen non-Uyghur groups as natives of this region, the Qing also designated thirteen autonomous prefectures or counties, covering over 50% of the XUAR for these ethnic minority groups (Wikipedia, Xinjiang. Available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang>.) Although Xinjiang occupies 1/6 of China's territory, its total population remained relatively small, because only 4.3% of it offers habitable oases, while majestic mountain ranges (the Tianshan, the Kunlun, the Karakoram, the Altai and the Pamirs) and forbidding deserts (the Taklamakan and the Gobi) comprise the rest.

The historical population of the XUAR had been a guessing game and only very rough estimates were available until the PRC started to take a census in 1953. When the Qing first conquered the region in 1759, the population was estimated to have been around 260,000 people. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one scholar gave a figure of 155,000 Han and Hui Chinese in northern Xinjiang and a little more than twice that number of Uyghurs in southern Xinjiang. (James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 306. Wikipedia, History of Xinjiang. Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Xinjiang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Xinjiang).) In 1953, China's census reported 3.64 million Uyghurs, constituting 75% of Xinjiang's population, while the 299,000 Han Chinese made up 6%. (*China's Statistical Year Book 1953*, Population of Uyghurs.) In 2000, the total population of the XUAR reached 18.5 million with 8.35 million Uyghurs and 7.49 million Han Chinese. (James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 306.) Compared with the earlier year, the percentage of

Uyghurs in the total population of Xinjiang decreased to 45% and that of the Hans increased to 40%. Since the Uyghurs as a minority in China were not subject to the single-child family rule, and they did have more children on average, the increase must have been immigration of Hans to Xinjiang. Although Han migration to Xinjiang has not been a Chinese government policy, with the aim of making the Chinese a majority in that region, it has become a Uyghur as well as a Western concern. However, the percentage of Uyghurs in the total population of China increased from 0.62% in 1953 to 0.66% in 2000, while that of Han Chinese decreased from 93.94% in 1953 to 91.60% in 2000, due largely to the one-child policy. (Wikipedia, Demographics of China. Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_China).) In 2014, the total population of Xinjiang increased to 23.2 million, of which 14.6 million were ethnic minority, or 63% of the total. (The State Council Information Office of the PRC, September 2015, China White Paper, "Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang." Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c\\_134655252.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm).) The decrease of Hans from 40% to 37% in Xinjiang from 2000 to 2014 shows that there has not been an inexorable trend of Han population increase in Xinjiang.

The majority of the Uyghurs lived in both the cities and rural areas of southern XUAR, whereas most of the of the Hans settled in its northern cities. Urumqi, the capital of the XUAR, was built mainly by Han Chinese according to James Millward. (James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007.) In 2010 some 12.5% of Urumqi's residents were Uyghurs, while 75% were Hans (Wikipedia, Urumqi, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urumqi>.)

### *Revival of Uyghur Separatism*

Nationalistic Uyghur historians claimed, unsupported by evidence, that the Uyghurs were the indigenous inhabitants of Xinjiang, an area that had been independent from the Chinese state for 6,000 years. (Wikipedia, History of Xinjiang. Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Xinjiang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Xinjiang).) They viewed all other peoples as immigrants to that region. (Ibid.) They credited the origin of the world civilization to their 6,000 years old civilization, which according to them, also invented gunpowder, paper, the compass and printing. Documented history showed, however, that the Chinese had a tradition of setting up military colonies and commanderies to control Xinjiang since 120 BCE in the Han Dynasty. Being a Central Asian crossroads and battleground, successive waves of peoples, among whom were various

Turkish tribes, Mongols and Manchus, in addition to the Hans, had conquered this area and settled there. The Uyghurs, whose Buddhist ancestors migrated from Mongolia to the Tarim Basin during the ninth century, were relative late-comers. The Uyghurs liked to think of themselves as racially pure Caucasians and original believers of Islam, without being tainted with a Buddhist past. Western scholars, who had examined historical records and material evidence, pointed out that the ancient Uyghurs were a Buddhist Mongolian type of people when they moved to the Tarim Basin. They were later converted to Islam by Muslim invaders, and became racially mixed with the Persians and other Caucasoid Central Asians in Xinjiang.

The weakening and disintegration of the centralized Chinese state during the 1850s to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with foreign intrusion into China, stimulated the development of Uyghur nationalism that hankered after an independent state. After China was reunited in 1949, with the establishment of the XUAR in 1955 which gave the Uyghurs a number of important privileges as an ethnic minority, their urge for independence was not entirely dispelled.

A number of factors combined together contributed to the revival of Uyghur separatism and the reappearance of the threat of the “East Turkestan” to China. These included the Uyghurs’ belief in the above-mentioned unsubstantiated account of their historical claim to Xinjiang, the rise of Islamic radicalism, resentment of increased Han migrants into XUAR and their relative wealth, and U.S. support for Uyghur separatists. Violent incidents perpetrated by Uyghurs in the 1990s shocked the Chinese and caught the world’s attention. (James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 365-366.) Jiang Zemin’s government attributed these acts to the influence of radical Islamic extremists among the remnant “East Turkestan” separatists, who had fled abroad after 1949, and now joined up with domestic ones to carry out sabotage activities using violent means to destroy and terrorize their opponents. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, *The History and Development of Xinjiang*, June 12, 2003. Available at [http://news3.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2003-06/12/content\\_916306.htm](http://news3.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2003-06/12/content_916306.htm).) The Chinese government also said that the Uyghur separatists were supported by international anti-Chinese forces, aiming to weaken the security and stability of China. These violent attacks against an innocent public, that could occur anywhere in China besides Xinjiang, continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the local separatists evolving into global jihadists.

Rediya Kadeer (see below) and the Uyghur separatists blamed the so-called Chinese persecution of the Uyghurs and religious repression for the violent incidents. Adopting similar views to these Uyghur exiles, the U.S. government often urged the Chinese authorities to respect the human rights and religious freedom of the Uyghurs. The U.S. also admonished the Chinese authorities not to use counterterrorism as a cover to oppress the Uyghurs. China's normal response to what it regarded as U.S. interference in its internal affairs was that every nation in the world would take measures to check violent disorder, protect its public and its security. The Chinese government has repeatedly stated its policy and actions as regards protecting the human rights and religious freedoms of all peoples in China, including ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs.

The Chinese government was particularly anxious about violent incidents by Uyghur and Tibetan separatists during 2008, the year of the Beijing Olympic Games. From March to August 2008, there were protest marches, knife attacks on security personnel, and bombing of police stations in towns and cities with a high concentration of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. (Wikipedia: "2008 Uyghur Unrest"). Soon after this wave of violent incidents subsided and many of the activists were put under arrest, Xinjiang was again rocked by a serious violent episode. (*Time*: "China, At Least 140 Dead in Xinjiang Province Clashes".) It was triggered by a YouTube video showing Uyghur workers, who had been accused of theft, being beaten up by some Han Chinese in the province of Guangzhou in southern China. (Kerry Brown, *Hu Jintao*, p. 67.) Street protests of large numbers of enraged Uyghurs in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, escalated into riots in which more than 200 people were killed, most of them Han. (Ibid.) The rioters also set fire to over 200 cars and shops. (*Time*, "China: At Least 140 Dead in Xinjiang Province Clashes", available at <http://content.time.com/timeworld/article/08,599,1908785,00html>.) The disturbance was sufficiently serious to oblige Hu Jintao to cut short his attendance at the G8 meeting in Italy. (Kerry Brown, *Hu Jintao*, pp. 67-68.) The region was pacified within a few days with a massive presence of police and security forces. (Kerry Brown, *Hu Jintao*, p. 68.) Although the central government put most of the blame on the Uyghur separatists, it also removed the Urumqi Party Secretary and Police Chief.

### *The East Turkestan Islamic Movement and Global Jihadism*

The Chinese government considered the Uyghur separatists as Muslim terrorists whose aim was to create an Islamic state in Xinjiang, if not in an even larger area. Although the Uyghur separatist organizations in Xinjiang went under many names, a Chinese security chief identified the East Turkestan Islamic Movement

(ETIM), which might be an umbrella for a number of Islamic jihadist groups, as “the most direct and realistic threat” to China. (Beina Xu, Holly Fletcher, and Jayshree Bajoria, “The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)”, the Council of Foreign Relations, Updated: September 4, 2014.) A 21 January 2002 report by the Chinese government provided a compilation of notable violent incidents perpetrated by the East Turkestan Terrorist forces between 1900 and 2001. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, “East Turkestan” Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity”, January 21, 2002, Xinhuanet, Beijing.) According to this report, the East Turkestan Terrorists took part in dozens of incidents of setting off bombs and explosive devices, targeting markets, stores, buses, hotels, and homes of officials. They attacked government offices and police stations, and set fire to timber markets, cotton purchasing stations and many commercial establishments in big cities, leaving a trail of casualties. They plotted to instigate riots and disturbances that heightened intercommunal tension. Many innocent people suffered physical violence and property destruction. Many local Muslim officials, and their family members, were assassinated by the separatists, probably to discourage the local Muslims from working with the Chinese government. The Chinese authorities discovered bases used by the terrorists to train jihadists, underground hideouts and tunnels containing explosives and equipment for making arms and ammunitions. According to a Chinese official tally, from 1900 to 2001 they were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang that killed 162 people and injured more than 440. In addition to terrorist acts inside China, these terrorist forces also attacked Chinese officials in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan.

From the late 1990s, across the border from Xinjiang, China’s home-grown terrorist forces became increasingly linked to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan as well as to the radical Islamic Taliban movement there. Strengthened by Al Qaeda’s financial and material support and by the training they had received in Afghanistan, key members of ETIM would return secretly to China to organize cells and carry out terrorist activities. Over 100 foreign trained terrorists were captured by the Chinese authorities, who claimed to have evidence to support their view that most of the explosions, assassinations and other terrorist incidents that had taken place in Xinjiang in recent years had been engineered by “East Turkestan” organizations beyond China’s borders, with the collusion of a handful of people inside China.

Many Western reports corroborated the Chinese claim that ETIM had joined up with Al Qaeda and other transnational Islamic jihadist movements. (Wikipedia, “East Turkestan Islamic Movement”, available at

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_Turkestan\\_Islamic\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Turkestan_Islamic_Movement).) In 1998, the ETIM leader, Hasan Mahsum, tried to protect the movement by transferring its headquarters to Taliban-controlled Kabul. A statement issued by Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri called for Jihad in Xinjiang against the Chinese as a part of the movement's worldwide campaign. From then on ETIM made China into a global jihadists' target of attack. Among the grievances the jihadists had against China was that China enforced male and female equality.

### *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)*

China tried to cultivate closer relations with Muslim central Asian republics, fearing their support for these internationalized Uyghur separatists. In 1996, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia met in Shanghai to form an informal group, dubbed the "Shanghai Five", for the purpose of solving disputes, enhancing mutual security, and economic cooperation (James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, 2007). After a series of bombs in Tashkent targeted the Uzbek President Islam Karimov in 1999, Uzbekistan also joined the group in 2001, and it was renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Having added military cooperation and the struggle against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism to its common purpose, China established a joint terrorism center in Bishkek, provided military aid to Kyrgyzstan, and engaged in joint military exercises with the SCO partners. (Charles Carlson, "Central Asia: Shanghai Cooperation Organization Makes Military Debut". Available at <http://www.rferl.org/content/articls/1103974.html>.) In 2004, Mongolia became the first formal "observer" of the SCO. (CACI Analysis, 9/19/2007 Issue, Richard Weitz, "SCO Fails to Solve Its Expansion Dilemma" 9/19/2007 Issue. Available at <http://www.cacianalysis.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11480...articles-caci-analyst-2007-9-19-art-11480.html?tmpl=component&print=1>.) In 2005 India, Pakistan and Iran were also given observer status. Since the SCO was serving as a geopolitical counterweight to U.S. influence in Central Asia, its members rejected the U.S. application for observer status. (Ariel Cohen, "The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization" September 7, 2006. Available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/the-dragon-looks-west-china-and-shanghai-cooperation-organization>.) The SCO has helped China to achieve the important goal of making it difficult for the Muslim Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang to use these Muslim Central Asian countries to promote their cause, and as bases of operation. The increase in trade among the member nations, especially in the energy sector, has served the interests of all concerned. On matters of

transnational security, the SCO has enhanced the cooperation of the states in this region in combating terrorism and extremism, but it has not been a match for NATO in membership, cohesiveness and unity of values.

After 10 years as observers, India and Pakistan decided to join the SCO in 2015. (The Indian Express, Anil Sasi, "10 Years on, SCO Decides to Induct India as Full Member". Available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/10-years-on-sco-decides-to-induct-india-as-full-member/>.) Apart from security considerations, the new members were attracted by the growing economic exchanges, and the prospect of further expansion of the members' connectivity.

### *Turkey's Position on the Chinese Uyghurs*

While the Central Asian Republics would not allow the Uyghur issue to undermine their relationship with China, Turkey offended China when its Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called Chinese policy towards the Uyghurs "genocide" after the July 5, 2009 Uyghur riots. (Financial Times, July 14, 2009, Kathrin Hille in Beijing and Delphine Strauss in Ankara, "China hits out at Turkey 'genocide' comments". Available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5a2ded0e-709f-11de-9717-00144feabdc0.html#axzz47GXPWml8>.) The China Daily described Erdogan's remark as "irresponsible" and "groundless." (Ibid.) The Sino-Turkish relationship was briefly strained after Erdogan's outburst. Chinese historical records show that the ancestors of modern Turks lived in and near the Xinjiang region before they migrated westward from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The documented records of the Chinese Han and Tang dynasty - *Shi Ji, Jiu Tang Shu and Xin Tang Shu* - provide the oldest sources of Turkish military, political, and cultural history. The Turks therefore identify themselves with the Chinese Uyghurs. Denying support for Uyghur separatism, the Turkish Foreign Ministry expressed concern for their Muslim kins' wellbeing in Xinjiang. Although there are much larger numbers of Uyghurs scattered among the Central Asian republics, Turkey has been more helpful towards the Uyghurs who sought shelter abroad. (*Wall Street Journal*, Jeremy Page and Emre Pe, "5 Things to Know About Turkey and the Chinese Uighurs", 30 January, 2015. Available at <http://blogs.WSJ.com/briefly/2015/01/30/5-things-to-know-about=turkey-and-the-chinese-uighurs/>.) Since China and Turkey have long-term strategic and trade relationships which are important to both sides, occasional spats over Uyghurs have not seriously damaged their overall positive relationship.



(Middle East Institute, Giray Fridan, "Sino-Turkish Relations: An Overview", October, 4, 2013. Available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/sino-turkish-relations-overview>.)

### *The U.S., China, and the Uyghurs*

While the Xinjiang Uyghur separatists were not welcomed by the Central Asian countries, China was piqued by the support they received in the United States. After September 11, 2001, the Chinese government warned the Bush administration that ETIM was a terrorist organization linked to Al Qaeda. Since President George W. Bush had an interest in Chinese support for the U.S. "war on terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq, he responded to the Chinese pressure to list ETIM as a terrorist organization and froze the group's assets. The Chinese President Jiang Zemin then responded positively to the U.S. appeal to China to support the U.S.-led war against Iraq and in Afghanistan, a country bordering China. (Kuhn, "The Man Who Changed China", pp. 472-473. Beina Xu, Holly Fletcher, and Jayshree Bajoria, "The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)", Council on Foreign Relations, CFR Backgrounders, Updated September 4, 2014. Available at <http://www.cfr.org/china/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim/p9179>.) Since 9/11, the Chinese government has tried to depict China's struggle against ETIM as a part of the U.S.-led war on terror, in order to persuade the U.S. government to stop equating the Chinese government's crackdown on the Uyghur terrorist organizations as human rights' abuse. (Beina Xu, Holly Fletcher, and Jayshree Bajoria, "The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)", Council on Foreign Relations, CFR Backgrounders, Updated: September 4, 2014, available at <http://www.cfr.org/china/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim/p9179>.)

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 devastated the ETIM's infrastructure, and its leader, Hasan Muhsum, was later killed by a counter-terrorist operation of the Pakistani army. (The following Wikipedia sources provide the above narrative on Hasan Muhsum's death: 1. *Wikipedia*, "East Turkestan Islamic Movement", available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_Turkestan\\_Islamic\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Turkestan_Islamic_Movement). 2. *Wikipedia*, "Hasan Mahsum", available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasan\\_Mahsum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasan_Mahsum).) In 2002, the U.S. captured twenty-two Uyghurs from a camp in Afghanistan and detained them in the U. S. Naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on suspicion of being enemy combatants. After they had been cleared of terrorism charges they were transferred to countries that would offer them refuge or grant them asylum. These included Albania,

El Salvador, Bermuda, Pakistan, Palau and Switzerland, (Congressional Research Service, Shirley A. Kan, July 15, 2010, “U.S.-China Counterterrorism Cooperation: Issues for U.S. Policy,” pp. 14-20. Wikipedia, Uyghur detainees at Guantanamo Bay, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uyghur\\_detainees\\_at\\_Guantanamo\\_Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uyghur_detainees_at_Guantanamo_Bay).)

The U.S. invasion of Iraq antagonised ETIM, which broadened its object of attack to include U.S. interests and changed its name to the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) to denote the increased scope. (Wikipedia, “East Turkestan Islam Movement”, available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East\\_Turkestan\\_Islamic\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Turkestan_Islamic_Movement). Note 28) The Chinese however continued to see them as ETIM rather than TIP. TIP took pride in being an inclusive Islamic movement that joined together jihadists of different national origins to wage a holy war against the infidels. (Ibid. note 33) While busy spreading its terrorist activities in many parts of the world, TIP/ETIM did not leave attacking China out of its focus. In 2013, TIP/ETIM claimed a suicide attack in Tiananmen Square that caused the deaths of 5 people and injured 38. (Wikipedia, “East Turkestan Islamic Movement”, notes 442, 445 and 446.)

### *The World Uyghur Congress (WUC)*

The cooperation between the U.S. and China on counterterrorism did not prevent the U.S Congress from supporting the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) financially with a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy. (Wikipedia, “World Uyghur Congress”, available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Uyghur\\_Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Uyghur_Congress), recovered on 11/123/15.) The WUC, founded by Uyghur exiles in Western countries and Turkey in 2004, sited its headquarters in Munich, Germany, and an office in Washington D.C. (Ibid.) It accused China of occupying Xinjiang, which they called East Turkestan. The WUC and its affiliated organizations were designated by the Chinese government as terrorist organizations fomenting unrest in Xinjiang with the aim of splitting China.

The WUC president, Rebiya Kadeer, elected in 2006, was a highly successful Uyghur entrepreneur, who in the 1990s had served as an official of the Chinese legislature as well as other branches of the Chinese government. (Wikipedia, “Rebiya Kadeer”, available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebiya\\_Kadeer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebiya_Kadeer). Note, 7 and 8, 9, 10, 11.) She was arrested by the Chinese authorities in 1999, after supplying confidential reference material on separatism to her husband, Siddiq Rouzi, who left China to work for the U.S. Radio

Free Asia and Voice of America as an activist for Uyghur independence in Washington D.C. (Ibid. notes 6,8,13,14.) In 2000, she was tried and imprisoned for leaking state secrets. (Ibid. note, 8, 14) In 2005, China succumbed to pressure from the U.S. government and agreed to release her early into U.S. custody on medical grounds. (Ibid. note 16 and 17.) In 2006, when two of her sons were imprisoned in China after being convicted of economic and security crimes, the U.S. House of representative passed a resolution demanding that the Chinese government release them, and change its repressive policy towards the Uyghur people. (Ibid.) The Chinese government managed to resist the U.S. demand this time. (Ibid. Notes 22 and 23.)

As president of WUC and the American Uyghur Association, Kadeer traveled the world, in Dalai Lama fashion, attending conferences, making speeches, and meeting world leaders in order to spread the message that the Chinese government oppressed the Uyghurs. Like the organizations fostered by Tibetan exiles, the WUC and its affiliates also use the web and mass media to tarnish China's image, accusing its government of violating human rights, and the religious freedom of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. (Wikipedia, "World Uyghur Congress". CNN, Joe Sterling, "Dragon Fighter shines the light on Uyghur grievances", July 29, 2009. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/World/asiapcf/07/29/china.activist.profile/index.html?iref+nextin>.) Being in close touch with the Dalai Lama, Kadeer aspired to be the Dalai Lama of the Uyghurs. (CNN, Joe Sterling, "Dragon Fighter shines the light on Uyghur grievances.", July 29, 2009.) She told Joseph Hammond, who interviewed her for the "Diplomat" magazine, that the Uyghurs in exile "coordinated with the Tibetan Government-in-Exile". (The *Diplomat*, "Rebiya Kadeer", an article by Joseph Hammond, October 25, 2013.) Like the Dalai Lama, Kadeer accused the Chinese government of committing "genocide" and "culture genocide" against, in her case, the Uyghurs rather than the Tibetans. (Ibid. CNN, Joe Sterling, "Dragon Fighter shines the light on Uyghur grievances", July 29, 2009.) Following the Dalai Lama's example, Kadeer also went to Japan to call on the Japanese government to support the cause of Uyghur separatism in 2009. (Chinaview, "China lodges solemn representation over Japan's

permission for Rebiya Kadeer's visit", July 9, 2009, available at

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/content\\_11794388.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/content_11794388.htm).) Since Japan had been engaged in a territorial dispute with China over an island in the East China Sea, the Japanese government, ignoring China's protests, welcomed these representatives of China's separatist movements warmly. The WUC held a congress in Japan in 2012, when Kadeer paid a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine that honoured Japanese who died in fighting wars, including those who had been convicted as war criminals in World War II. (Wikipedia, Rebiya Kadeer. Available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebiya\\_Kadeer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebiya_Kadeer).) Lacking the Dalai Lama's spiritual appeal, Kadeer did not attract as much popular following in the West as the Tibetan monk.

The U.S. government provided similar support to the Uyghur separatists and Rebiya Kadeer to what it gave to the Tibetan exiles and the Dalai Lama. Without the U.S. help that enabled the Uyghur separatists and Rebiya Kadeer to leap onto the world stage, their cause and her activities would have remained obscure. The U.S. government, its media, other U.S.-based organizations, and friends of America abroad, all took part to propagate their message that the Chinese authorities oppressed the Uyghurs, flooding their homeland with Han Chinese migrants, in addition to violating their human rights and religious freedom. A typical example was the 29 July 2009 CNN article by Joe Sterling that publicized Rebiya Kadeer's views and actions with the title of "'Dragon Fighter' Shines the Light on Uyghur Grievances". (Available at <http://www.cfc.org/china/uyghurs-chinas-xinjiang-regions/p16870>.) The article by Preeti Bhattacharji, entitled "Uighurs and China's Xinjiang Region", published by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relation, updated on May 29, 2012, illustrates how the U.S. authorities familiarized the world with, and amplified, the Uyghur separatists' attack on China. (Available at <http://www.cfr.org>) It revealed the concern of the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) that the Chinese government had been trying to change the demography of Xinjiang by providing incentives for people to migrate to that region from other parts of China, in the name of recruiting talent and promoting stability. The Chinese government said that its policies in Xinjiang are designed to facilitate economic development, not demographic change. The Voice of America and Radio Free Asia have been broadcasting what the Chinese authorities have regarded as anti-Chinese messages in the language of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

When the U.S. was pressuring China to free Rebiya Kadeer, who had been jailed for pro-separatist activities, America's Norwegian friends made her internationally prominent by awarding her the 2004 Rafto Memorial Prize for Human Rights, and demanding her unconditional release. (Available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/6320.html>.) Determined to be on good terms with the U.S., the Hu Jintao administration not only refrained from complaining publicly to the U.S and its Western ally about honouring someone who had undermined China's security and broken its laws, but freed her and let her go to the U.S. However, in 2006, when she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Qin Gang, denounced it saying Rebiya Kadeer's "statements and actions are aimed at destroying the peace and stability of Chinese society, which runs counter to the original intention of the Nobel Peace Prize." He also wondered at the motive behind the nomination of someone like her for this prize. Accusing her of colluding with "East Turkistan" terrorist forces abroad, he added that she "distorted facts and maliciously attacked the Chinese government under the pretence of 'democracy' and 'human rights'." He concluded by saying that Kadeer frequently engaged in anti-Chinese activities with the aim of separating the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) from China.

President George W. Bush praised Kadeer highly during a private meeting with her in Prague in 2007. (Wikipedia, "Rebiya Kadeer"). Pleased to be invited to see Bush again in the White House, Kadeer said that the Uyghur issue became internationalized during the Bush administration. (*The Diplomat*, Joseph Hammond, "Rebiya Kadeer", October 25, 2009, available at [http://the-diplomat.com/2013/11/rebiya\\_kadeer/](http://the-diplomat.com/2013/11/rebiya_kadeer/)). On the matter relating to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the U.S. government supported and acted upon the narrative of the disaffected Uyghurs who portrayed the Chinese government as being severely oppressive towards them, and too restrictive towards their religious practices and cultural expressions.

After Jiang Zemin adopted a cooperative attitude to the U.S.-led war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Chinese government expected the U.S. to be more understanding of China's crackdown on the Uyghur separatists, whose destructive riots and violent attacks against innocent civilians at random in Xinjiang and other parts of China led the Chinese authorities to characterize them as terrorists like those in the ETIM, or Al Qaeda. Rebiya Kadeer, who tended to describe violent Uyghur riots as peaceful demonstrations, refused to accept the fact that Uyghur separatists posed a terrorist threat to the public in China. The U.S. authorities also adopted a position similar to Kadeer's on Uyghur terrorism. Having taken this stand, the U.S. government often urged its Chinese counterpart against using terrorism as a pretext to persecute the Uyghur dissidents of Xinjiang. Beijing was angered by the U.S. State Department's 2013 Country Report on Terrorism which

claimed that China's cooperation on fighting terrorism "remained marginal", and also that China provided insufficient evidence to prove terrorist involvement in incidents in Xinjiang. (U.S. Department of State, *Country Report on Terrorism 2013*, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/>. Reuters, "After Bombing in west, China angered by U.S. criticism in terror report", available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-idUSBREA4102L20140502>.) The Chinese foreign ministry responded with the comment that "on the issue of fighting terrorism, to make irresponsible remarks towards other countries and adopting double standards will not help international cooperation on counter-terrorism". (Reuters, "After Bombing in West, China angered by U.S. criticism in terror report, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjing-idUSBREA4102L20140502>.)

The U.S.-China cooperation on counterterrorism did not prevent the different branches of the U.S. government continuing to act on the presumption that the Chinese regime, not being a democracy, was a persistent violator of the human rights and religious freedom of the Uyghurs, not to mention various other categories of people in China. The U.S. Senate continued to pass resolutions condemning the Chinese government and characterizing the Chinese regime as oppressive. The U.S. Congress had also adopted measures, such as sanctions against China, and dialogue with China, to pressure that country to act according to the U.S. demands on these issues. (Congressional Research Service, Tomas Lunn, September 17, 2015, "Human Rights in China and U.S. Policy issues for the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.") U.S. presidents or the Secretary of State have persistently urged China to respect the human rights and religious freedom of the Uyghurs, among others, in China.

### *China's Stand on Xinjiang*

The Chinese government had reasons not see itself in this light, and resented what it regarded as gross U.S. interference in China's internal affairs. Even though Jiang Zemin made great efforts to stay on good terms with the U.S., when he was still in power in 2001 the Human Rights Society of China brought out the above-mentioned comprehensive criticism of the U.S. support for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan separatist movement. The Hu Jintao administration's strong desire to build cordial relations with the U.S. led it to respond to the U.S. pressure to release Rebiya Kadeer in 2006. His regime restrained its impulse to blame the U.S. for trying to destabilize the Chinese state by supporting Tibetan and Uyghurs separatists, using violation of their human rights and religious freedom as pretexts, although it did complain diplomatically to a number of foreign states, U.S. included, for admitting Rebiya Kadeer and the Dalai Lama into their countries. In 2014, the regime controlled by Hu's more assertive successor, Xi Jinping, published an article

explaining China's position on Xinjiang (as well as Tibet) to the world and why China objected to the U.S. take on those regions in China. (Embajada de la Republica Popular China en Espana, Why has the West been so hard on China on "Tibet and Xinjiang issues," available at <http://es.chineseembassy.org/esp/zyxx/t1130567.htm>.)

The article started by saying that the West has never stopped interfering in "Tibet and Xinjiang issues" since the founding of the PRC, despite its positive relations with China after China's reform and opening-up. It attributed the concept of Tibetan independence and "East Turkestan" as Western imports from the time when China, under the Qing rule, was invaded by the Western imperialist nations. The period when the British in India and the Russians were endeavouring to extend their empires to those areas was especially relevant to this development. From the Cold War era onwards, the U.S. and other Western countries tried to keep these ideas alive and supported the forces of separatism in these regions, in order to contain China and separate Xinjiang (about 17% of China's territory) and Tibet (the TAR covered 12% of China's territory) from China. While the West historically used force to achieve their hegemonic goals, it now dresses up its national interest in terms of "universal values", such as human rights and religious freedom, and slanders China for violating these values when China tries to safeguard itself against separatism and religious extremism. The article also slammed Japan for supporting the separatist activities of the Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer in Japan, invoking human rights, while not acknowledging its atrocities against the Chinese in World War II.

Responding to the accusation of violating the freedom of religion of the Uyghurs, the PRC government has repeatedly declared that it respects the freedom of religious belief and protects the normal religious activities of all its citizens, including the people of Xinjiang. The Chinese government pointed out that there are 24,800 venues for religious activities, including mosques, churches, Buddhist temples and Daoist temples in XUAR. As the largest group, Xinjiang has 24,400 mosques with 28,600 clerical staff. The Chinese government has given financial support for the maintenance and repair of a number of key mosques and for the training of clergy. With the aim of training higher calibre clerics in mind, the Xinjiang government has sent 70 people, since 2001, to visit Islamic institutions of higher education in Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other countries for further studies. 50,000 people from Xinjiang have made pilgrimages to Mecca. Since the believers of Islam in Xinjiang, including the Uyghurs, have continued to live their lives as Muslims and practice their religion normally and peacefully, the Chinese authorities have been under the impression that the normal requirements of religious believers in Xinjiang have been

satisfied. In their view, some Uyghur separatists have fallen under the influences of religious extremism, and they have a tendency to slander the Chinese government.

### *Economic Development and Modernization of Xinjiang*

As in the case of their strategy towards Tibet, the leaders of China placed their hopes on modernizing the economy of Xinjiang and improving its people's living standards and conditions as a more fundamental and longer-term solution to the challenge of separatism, rather than relying only on tough security measures. Before 1949 Xinjiang, like Tibet, was a "natural economy", with most of its impoverished people relying on farming and livestock breeding. Its industry and infrastructure were severely underdeveloped. During the sixty years from 1955, when it was set up as XUAR, to 2015, it achieved rapid economic development and modernization with a great deal of help of financial and personnel resources provided by the Chinese central government as well as by the governments of some of the more developed areas, which had been paired by the central government to help Xinjiang's economic modernization (The Information Office of the State Council, September 2015, Beijing, "Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang." Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c\\_134655252.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm).) Xinjiang's revenue and expenditure, RMB170 million and RMB180 million respectively in 1955, grew to RMB128 billion and RMB332 billion respectively in 2014. Over the period from 2010 to 2014, Xinjiang collected a total of RMB454 billion in fiscal revenues, but spent a total of RMB 1,308.8 billion. Government subsidy appeared to make up for the revenue shortfall. Over the 60 years, state subsidies to Xinjiang totalled almost RMB1.7 trillion. (Ibid., p. 25.)

Xinjiang is notably rich in oil, natural gas and coal. (The New York Times, Edward Wong, December 20, 2014, "China Invests in Region Rich in Oil Coal and Also Strife." Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/world/asia/china-invests-in-xinjiang-region-rich-in-oil-coal-and-also-strife.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/world/asia/china-invests-in-xinjiang-region-rich-in-oil-coal-and-also-strife.html?_r=0).) The industries related to the exploitation of these and other resources, such as minerals and metals, are all state-owned enterprises. (The Information Office of the State Council, September 2015, Beijing, "Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang." Available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c\\_134655252.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm). p. 9.) After the reform and open-up in 1978, Xinjiang has encouraged the development of privately invested enterprises. (Ibid.) There were 720,000 individually-owned businesses in 2014, compared with 4,168 in 1978. (Ibid.) Since 2010, its rapidly growing power industry has been sending electricity produced in Xinjiang into other provinces. (Ibid.)



While Xinjiang is rich in oil, it is poor in water resources. The availability of water is another important determinant, besides habitable land, of the population size and the kind of economy Xinjiang can best support. Xinjiang had 3 reservoirs with a total storage capacity of 52.34 million cu m in 1949. (Ibid. p.9.) In 2014, it had 538 reservoirs with a total storage capacity of 16.91 billion cu m of water. (Ibid. p.9.) The authorities adopted a number of water conservancy projects, especially in agriculture. By 2014, high-efficiency water-saving irrigation extended to 1.85 million ha of farmlands. (Ibid.) Water resources were made available for forage land to support the settlement of 106,000 herder families. Rural areas in Xinjiang had 1,315 water works of various sizes to provide safe drinking water to 11.3 million people. (Ibid.) The farmers and herders who benefited from these projects were mostly Uyghurs.

As a large strategically important and resource-rich region, China spared no effort in building the transportation system of the XUAR. In 2014 the XUAR had 175,000 km of highways. (Ibid.) In the rural area, 99.93% of the towns and 98.71% of villages were linked by roads. Railways developed from scratch reached 5,760 km in 2016, with a high-speed rail connecting Lanzhou and Urumqi. (Ibid.) Xinjiang has the most airports and longest air routes of all of China's provinces. (Ibid.)

The building of infrastructure together with the opening-up policy have integrated Xinjiang more closely with China as well as with the outside world. Many international trade fairs have been held in Urumqi. (Ibid., p. 10.) Xinjiang has traded with 186 countries in the world, and cross-border trade has developed well between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan through Khorgas. (Ibid.) It has 23 state-class industrial clusters, and leads China in solar and wind power research and technology. (Ibid.) Its imports and exports grew from US\$51 million in 1955 to US\$27.7 billion in 2014, an average annual rate of 11.3%. (Ibid.) Recently it has also become a favourite area for foreign investment and contract business. (Ibid.) Being a fascinating place for both Chinese and international tourists, the modernization of Xinjiang's infrastructure facilitated the growth of tourism in Xinjiang.

Xinjiang's rapid economic development enabled its gross regional product (GRP) to grow from RMB1.2 billion yuan in 1955, to 927.3 billion yuan in 2014, about 116-fold over that of 1955 in real terms, with an annual growth rate of 8.3%, or 0.2 percentage point higher than the national average during that period.

(Ibid., p. 8.) Its per capita GRP rose from RMB241 in 1955 to RMB40,648 in 2014, about 24-fold in real terms. (Ibid.) The per capita disposable income of both urban and rural residents has grown considerably. (Ibid. p. 12.) Although an income gap between the rural and urban population persisted, it has continued to narrow over the years. (Ibid.) The percentage of rural population decreased from 84.9 in 1955 to 53.9 in 2014. (Ibid. p. 8.)

The above figures give a general picture of economic development, but they do not show how the different ethnic groups have fared in Xinjiang. A middle Eastern publication outside China likes to point out the large disparity in per capita GDP between the richer Han Chinese in northern cities and the poorer Uyghurs in the southern rural areas of Xinjiang, as a cause of violent Uyghur incidents. According to the analysis of this publication, the significantly lower standard of living of the Uyghurs by comparison with the Hans in Xinjiang, and the Uyghur resentment of it, as a major contributory factor to Uyghur unrest.

Peoples' living standards and conditions have been continually improving. Among the factors contributing to the improvement are the provision for an increasing number of people in this region to receive secondary, and tertiary education, and vocational training, together with the creation of millions of job for city-dwellers as well as the surplus rural labour force, especially between the years 2010 and 2014. (Ibid. pp. 12-13.) In 2014, the registered urban unemployment was 3.2%. (Ibid. p.12.) On the matter of social security, XUAR led the country in setting a system of basic old-age pensions and medical insurance that covered all the population, both urban and rural. (Ibid. p.13.) All occupational groups have been covered by unemployment benefit, compensation for work-related injuries, and maternity insurance. (Ibid. pp.13-14.) A series of projects alleviated the poverty, particularly the shortage of food and clothing, of millions of XUAR residents. (Ibid. p.14.) The public health provision of the XUAR is better than the national average. In 2014, for every 1,000 inhabitants an average of 6.22 hospital beds, 2.38 licensed doctors and 2.6 registered nurses were available. (Ibid. p.13.) From 2004, earthquake resistant, comfortable, and affordable housing projects provided homes with heating, water and other modern facilities to millions of city-dwellers and rural farmers and herdsmen. (Ibid. p. 12.) From 2010 to 2014, strenuous efforts and funding have been directed to 500 key projects related to "peoples' livelihood years" from 2010 onwards. (Ibid. pp.11-12.) Since then 70% of the region's expenditure has been spent on improving people's living conditions. (Ibid. p.11.)

*Cultural Development and Environmental Protection in Xinjiang.*

In the areas of culture, entertainment, sports and personal communications, the XUAR started with one public library and 36 cultural centres in 1955. By 2014, it had 107 public libraries, 117 cultural centres, 82 museums, over one thousand venues for cultural activities, 26,000 venues for sporting activities, in addition to access to radio and TV programs, many in the minority languages, for 3.46 million rural households. The radio, television and film industries, involving the various ethnic groups in the XUAR, had been developing rapidly. Multi-ethnic literature and arts thrived. Over 100 newspapers and nearly two hundred magazines, many in the languages of ethnic minorities were published in 2014. Ninety-eight percent of villages had phone-line connections, and there were 91 mobile phones per 100 persons. Internet coverage spread across most of the region.

The XUAR authorities strove to preserve the cultural heritage and undertook projects to collect and safeguard folk art, epic stories, poetic ballads and songs of the various ethnic groups. The network of routes of Changan Tianshan Corridor and a number of ancient city ruins were designated World Heritage Sites, among others.

Recognizing the fragility of Xinjiang's ecological system, the authorities there made environmental protection a top priority. The XUAR had set aside nature reserves, scenic spots, forest parks, world natural heritage sites and protect wetlands. Belts of sheltered forests were built to cover 95% of the farmlands. By turning large tracts of farmland into forest, the forest coverage in oases rose from 15% to 23.5%. There were major ecological projects that included prevention and controlling of desertification around the Tarim Basin, restoring 1.64 million ha of degraded lands, and enclosing 3.4 million ha of grassland to prevent grazing. Water and soil erosion were curbed over more than 4,000 sq. km. of small river valleys. Environmental protection was enforced in a number of lakes, such as Bosten, Sayram, Ulungur and Kanas Lake, all of which retained good water quality. Prevention and control of air pollution has been carried out in urban areas like Urumqi and Kuytun-Dushanzi-Wusu. The air quality of Urumqi has recently improved considerably: in 2014, there were 310 days with good air quality.

### *The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC)*

The XPCC, an economically self-sustaining military colony founded in 1954, was considered a major institutional innovation in developing and defending XUAR by the Chinese authorities, though a military-agriculture colony for the Western Region had existed way back during the Han dynasty in 206 BCE-223 CE. As an entirely self-administered military colony, the XPCC was organized into divisions and regiments,

but it was not a part of the PLA. In 2014, the XPCC with its 14 divisions and 176 regiments exercised jurisdiction over a total area of 70,600 sq. km. and a population of 2,732,900, scattered in various parts of Xinjiang's border lands. Its initial work was reclaiming wasteland, and establishing modern farms on the reclaimed land, stressing mechanization and water-saving irrigation. In 2014, its farms covered 1,327,900 ha (22% of the total in XUAR). It produced 1.6 million tons, or 36% of Xinjiang's cotton in a most efficient way. Its food processing business based on the large amounts of tomatoes and other food products it grew gave rise to many famous brands. In addition to running farms, factories and mines, it has built many cities and towns. Not merely economically entirely self-supporting, it paid taxes to the local governments, and it also worked on a number of local government transportation and hydropower projects at no cost. A number of large-scale industrial, construction, transport and commercial enterprises which it had developed were turned over to the local governments free of charge. The XPCC served the local inhabitants of different ethnic groups in many ways, including providing new technology and new crop species to local farmers. The Chinese government regarded XPCC as a key force in developing and building a modern Xinjiang, in addition to providing security to China's borders, and its nuclear facilities, without incurring cost to itself. It is to be noted that China has conducted nuclear weapons tests in Lop Nor in Xinjiang.

### *The Future of XUAR*

The Chinese government hoped that by modernizing the economy and improving the living conditions of the people of Xinjiang would take the steam out of the forces of separatism there. Several decades of economic growth and modernization brought about a host of positive developments in Xinjiang, from the infrastructure in transportation and communication, to improvements in education, medical care, housing, facilities for cultural and entertainment, and opportunities for employment, and together they have raised the standard of living, and improved the conditions in which people of that region live. Despite these beneficial developments, and the Chinese government's affirmative actions that favoured ethnic minorities, Uyghur separatism did not entirely fade away; its members carried out a number of violent incidents in the 1990s, after the reform and open-up of China.

Were the personal persecution and religious repression alleged by Uyghur exiles against the Chinese government central to their separatism? It is interesting to note that during the terrible time of the Cultural Revolution, when there were rampant abuses of human rights and complete restriction of religious freedom under the ultra-left Maoist regime, Uyghur separatists did not raise their heads in protest. Since the Uyghurs were not the only Muslims in Xinjiang, it would be interesting to ask whether other large Muslim ethnic

minorities in Xinjiang, such as the Huis (Chinese speaking), the Kazaks (Turkish) and the Kyrgyz (Turkish), felt similarly oppressed and sought separatism as a solution. Evidently they did not. It would appear that human rights abuses and restriction of religious freedom were not the real or central issues.

Independence was and still is the Uyghur separatists' key demand. The independence of the Central Asian countries during the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union seems to have breathed new life into the Uyghur movement for an independent East Turkestan. Do all Uyghurs in the XUAR want their own state? There has not been one single Uyghur agenda. (Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, "Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang, China," Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, January 2008). Some want independence. Others might prefer their region to stay as a part of China as long as they can maintain their cultural distinction. And still others seem contented to be integrated into the Chinese system, like the Muslim Huis. Those who have insight into politics and economics might see that while an East Turkestan in an poor corner of Xinjiang could benefit some powerful Uyghur elites, the common people would likely fare better in a modernizing multi-ethnic China. Then one should ask, how seriously does the Uyghur independence movement threaten the security of Xinjiang?

Violent incidents reportedly perpetrated by Uyghur separatists have continued to occur now and again in XUAR since the 5 July 2009 episode of savage rioting and mob attacks grabbed the attention of the world. For some unknown reason, 2012 (the last year of Hu Jintao's rule) turned out to be another turbulent year for Xinjiang. Since some Uyghur separatists embraced radical Islam, which had recently been growing in underground Islamic schools in Xinjiang, the authorities in Xinjiang introduced restrictive regulations in an attempt to weaken what they perceived as religious extremism. Among these regulations was the banning of women wearing burqa, as the French and Belgians had done. (Timothy Grose, James Leibold, "Why China Is Banning Islamic Veils. And Why It Won't Work", *Reporting and Opinion*, February 4, 2015.) Fasting by civil servants during Ramadan was also prohibited. These restrictions are going to be counterproductive, for these intolerant measures will alienate the Uyghurs who are not religious extremists or secessionists. These incidents do not make Xinjiang a war zone, like those currently in the Middles East. They cannot be spoken of in the same breath as the nineteenth century Muslim rebellions in Northwest China. A Western study on China's "war on terror" in Xinjiang comes to the conclusion that there is no real threat to Chinese rule in Xinjiang. (Michael Clarke, 'China's "War on Terror" in Xinjiang: Human Security and the Causes of Violent Uighur Separatism,' Griffith Asia Institute, Regional Outlook Paper No 11, 2007, p. 23.) As long as the China preserves its present unity, Xinjiang is likely to remain part of China, despite the threat from Uyghur separatists and world jihadis.

