

*Policy Studies 6*

**Violent Separatism  
in Xinjiang:  
A Critical Assessment**

*James Millward*



East-West Center  
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# **Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment**



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# List of Acronyms

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CACCP	Committee Against Chinese Communist Propaganda
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
ETIC	East Turkistan Information Center
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement (Shärqiy Türkistan Islam Herikiti)
ETLO	East Turkistan Liberation Organization
ETR	East Turkistan Republic
GMD	Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
SHAT	Shärqiy Türkistan Azatliq Tëshkilati (East Turkistan Liberation Organization)
ULO	Uyghur Liberation Organization (Uyghur Azatliq Tëshkilati)
URFET	United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan

WUYC

World Uyghur Youth Congress

XUAR

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

# Executive Summary

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Xinjiang is an arid region three times the size of France in the northwestern corner of the People's Republic of China, bordering on Mongolia, Russia, and several Central Asian countries. Just over half of the region's population of nearly 20 million is composed of Turkic-speaking, traditionally Muslim peoples, including over 1 million Kazakhs and some 9 million Uyghurs.

Since the 1990s, concerns about Uyghur separatism have received increasing official and media attention. These concerns have heightened since the events of 9-11 with the advent of a more robust U.S. presence in Central Asia and Chinese attempts to link Uyghur separatism to international jihadist groups. A steady flow of reports from the international media—as well as official PRC releases (a document on "East Turkistan" terrorism, a white paper on Xinjiang, and a list of terrorist groups)—have given the impression of an imminent separatist and terrorist crisis in the Xinjiang region. This study surveys open sources as well as less easily accessible Chinese documents on violent separatist and terrorist events and groups. Although the catalog of incidents seems to indicate the existence of an organized, unified, and violent Uyghur movement, careful scrutiny reveals problems with the evidence presented in both media and official sources. In fact, both the frequency and severity of violent incidents in Xinjiang have declined since 1997-98, possibly because of Chinese efforts at interdiction. While it is not negligible, the current threat of organized

Uyghur separatism and particularly of terrorist attacks on civilian targets seems less serious than claimed in official and media reports.

From its conquest by the Qing empire in the mid-eighteenth century until its incorporation in the PRC in 1949, there have been several efforts to wrest all or part of Xinjiang from Beijing's control. Though this restiveness is often portrayed as an enduring "clash of civilizations" between Chinese and Muslim realms, both the participants and the causes of these episodes have been more diverse than this simplistic formula allows. Indeed, Turkic or Uyghur nationalism has been a far more salient ideological feature than religious zeal. After 1949, despite some Islamic-colored unrest in southern Xinjiang, disturbances in the region corresponded with the political and economic disruptions of the Great Leap Forward (1959-61) and Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

In the relative openness of the 1980s, several incidents in Xinjiang unsettled Chinese leaders. Yet these too were varied in origin, organization, and outlook, consisting of demonstrations sparked by police heavy-handedness leading to rioting and shouting of anti-Chinese and Islamic slogans, on the one hand, and student demonstrations on the other. The demonstrations greatly resembled the prodemocracy student marches then common throughout China, except that the Xinjiang students, including Chinese Muslims (Hui) as well as Uyghurs, voiced concerns relating to ethnic matters.

Three clusters of events in the 1990s underlie concern about violent Uyghur separatism and terrorism. The first was an armed uprising in Baren (near Kashgar) in April 1990 whose planners employed religious rhetoric and used mosques to disseminate a call to arms. Some 200 men were apparently involved in the initial uprising; a Chinese dragnet and crackdown on the religious establishment later detained many others. The second was a series of explosions and attempted bombings in 1992-93 involving civilian targets (buses, stores, a cinema, an unoccupied hotel wing). Though some of the bombs were defused, several casualties resulted from these unclaimed attacks, including a few fatalities. The third cluster, from spring 1996 until February 1997, corresponds chronologically with the inauguration of the "Shanghai Five" organization and a high-profile "Strike Hard" campaign to round up suspected separatists. Chinese reports indicate a wave of protests, explosions, and assassinations of ethnic Uyghur officials around this time, and large numbers of arrests were logged. The Ghulja (Yining) incident of early February 1997 began as a large-scale demonstration probably in response to Strike Hard arrests,

which developed into clashes with police and attacks on Chinese civilians. After the repression of the unrest in Ghulja and a further wave of arrests, three bombs exploded on Urumqi buses later in February. Official Chinese sources report further attacks on economic targets in 1998-99, as well as occasional attacks on ethnic Uyghur officials in government and party positions since then, but no large-scale or terrorist incidents in China subsequent to the 1996-97 cluster.

Since 1998, accusations of Uyghur involvement in terrorist activities have become commonplace in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The most serious of these concern the kidnapping of a Chinese businessman (2000), an attack on a Chinese delegation in Bishkek (2000), and the assassination of a senior Chinese diplomat in a Mercedes with a Uyghur businessman and, reportedly, a stock of forged passports (2002). In addition, three prominent Uyghur community leaders were killed between 1998 and 2001. The government-controlled press in Central Asia has frequently alleged Uyghur involvement in these killings as well as in bus bombings and bazaar fires, but these reports are often contradictory and offer no clear explanation why Islamist Uyghur terrorists would want to attack Uyghur merchants or leaders.

This study presents an overview of antistate organizations and violent resistance among Uyghurs and other peoples in Xinjiang, considering both domestic and international groups and activities. I begin with a historical survey of resistance in the Xinjiang region from the Qing period through 1990. This background shows that episodes of resistance to rule from Beijing, while relatively common, have been discontinuous and characterized by a variety of ideologies, Islam being only one of them. I then take up the period since 1990, the main concern of the study. Here I present two main theses. First, from my analysis of Chinese official documents and international press accounts of violent activity attributed to Uyghurs, I argue that this record contains much inaccurate, questionable, or contradictory reporting and slanted conclusions reflecting ulterior agendas. Second, I contend that contrary to the implication conveyed by these materials and commonly voiced by journalists and analysts alike, both the frequency and severity of violent activity associated with Uyghur separatism have in fact declined since the late 1990s. There is no doubt that PRC authorities and Han citizens genuinely fear Uyghur separatist violence, and I do not mean to suggest that the threat of unrest or further violence in the region by Uyghur groups is negligible. Nevertheless, the general impression of a threat escalating since 1990 to crisis proportions today is exaggerated.



# Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment

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Separatism and resistance among Uyghurs and other groups in Xinjiang, while not new, have since 1990 emerged as a major concern of the PRC government and international observers. Not only have a number of violent incidents in Xinjiang drawn international attention, but Uyghur groups outside China have increasingly succeeded in bringing their concerns about human rights abuses and their desire for an independent state to audiences in Europe, North America, and Asia, garnering some sympathy on human rights issues if not for their separatist goal. At the same time, new concerns in the post-Soviet era about "Islam's bloody borders" have led some to cast the troubles in Xinjiang as part of a grand showdown between Muslims and non-Muslim states. Indeed the activities and ideology of jihadist groups in Afghanistan and former Soviet Central Asia have led many to surmise that political Islamism underlies Uyghur separatist and nationalist sentiments. Since its declaration of "war on terror" in late 2001, the U.S. government has taken unprecedented interest in Xinjiang's problems and has even detained some two dozen Uyghur prisoners in its irregular prison camp in Guantanamo. Post 9-11 developments in U.S.-China relations have allowed the PRC to cast its Xinjiang problem in the same Manichean terms favored by the Bush administration and thus justify draconian measures in its antiseparatist campaign and ongoing crackdown on religion, bilingual education, travel, and other aspects of life for Xinjiang's non-Han people, especially Uyghurs.<sup>1</sup>

This study surveys antistate organizations and violent resistance among Uyghurs and other peoples in Xinjiang, considering both domestic and international groups and activities. I begin with a historical survey of resistance in the Xinjiang region from the Qing period through 1990. This background shows that episodes of resistance to rule from Beijing, while relatively common, have been discontinuous and characterized by a variety of ideologies, Islam being only one among them. I then take up the period since 1990, the main concern of the study. Here I present two main theses.

First, from my survey of Chinese official and international press accounts of violent activity attributed to Uyghurs, I argue that this record contains much inaccurate, questionable, or contradictory reporting and slanted conclusions reflecting ulterior agendas. Wrong facts and dubious

interpretations are commonly recycled, and some have found their way into academic and think-tank analyses. Second, I argue that contrary to the implication conveyed by these reports, commonly voiced by journalists and analysts alike, both the frequency and severity of violent activity associated with Uyghur separatism has in fact declined since the late 1990s. Uyghur separatists have in the past threatened and in several cases carried out what might be generally recognized as

***There is no doubt that PRC authorities and Han citizens genuinely fear Uyghur separatist violence***

terrorist acts, and according to PRC reports violence continues in Xinjiang in the form of assassinations of local officials—often themselves Uyghurs—associated with juridical, religious, and family planning arms of the Chinese government and Communist Party. There is no doubt that PRC authorities and Han citizens genuinely fear Uyghur separatist violence, and I do not mean to suggest that the threat of unrest or further violence is negligible. Nevertheless, the general impression of a threat escalating since 1990 to crisis proportions today is exaggerated.

### **Historical Background**

#### *Qing Period (1758-1911)*

Conquest by the Manchu Qing empire in the mid-eighteenth century brought the territories now known as Xinjiang under Qing rule, during which time Manchu, Mongol, and some Uyghur officials oversaw a military government staffed at local levels by functionaries of local ethnicities (Uyghur, Mongol, or Han, depending on location). After an unsuccessful



uprising sparked by rapacious Manchu and Uyghur officials in Uch Turfan (1765), the region remained generally peaceful until the late 1820s. In 1828 descendents of the former rulers of Tarim Basin oases, a Sufi clan known as the Khojas, began a series of invasions of southwestern Xinjiang with some support from the khanate of Khokand, Kyrgyz tribesmen, and local affiliates of the Khojas' particular Sufi order. Although these attacks disrupted Qing rule in Khotan, Yarkand, and especially Kashgar and led to massacres of Chinese merchants, they could not overthrow Manchu citadels or prevent the Qing military from reasserting control. The raids grew increasingly brutal and narrow in their base of local support and in the 1850s came to an end.

In the 1860s a massive rebellion broke out among Chinese Muslims (Hui) in the northwestern Chinese provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu. The unrest spread to neighboring Xinjiang when Hui troops in the Xinjiang garrisons mutinied on rumors that Qing authorities planned to preemptively disarm and massacre them. Uyghurs then joined Hui or staged their own rebellions in cities throughout Xinjiang. A chaotic situation ensued: several parties ruling in different oases, the Uyghurs dominating the south and west, Hui controlling the east and north. The Qing imperial government, nearly bankrupted by the massive Taiping Rebellion in southern China and the indemnities levied by Western powers after the Arrow War (1860), was unable to do anything about its former domain in Xinjiang until the 1870s. In the meantime, outside powers moved into the vacuum: Yaqub Beg, a Khokandi militarist (unrelated to the earlier Khojas), established an emirate in southern Xinjiang, extending his rule as far as Turfan after battles with Uyghur and Hui leaders. For its part, Russia occupied the fertile Yili Valley in the north. In the late 1870s, after a systematic campaign financed by foreign loans, the Qing succeeded in reconquering most of Xinjiang. Qing armies fought fiercely with mainly Hui forces in the Turfan-Urumqi-Manas area but faced little resistance further west after Yaqub Beg died of a stroke in 1877.<sup>2</sup> In 1881, despite initial reluctance, Russia was forced by international diplomatic and Qing military pressure to return to the Qing most of the Yili Valley territory it had annexed. Before this retrocession, thousands of local Turkic Muslims (known then as "Taranchis," today as Uyghurs) emigrated to lands still controlled by Russia rather than fall again under Qing rule.<sup>3</sup>

*Republican Rule (1911-49)*

Though there was some non-Han participation in the 1911 revolution in Xinjiang, the end of Qing rule consisted primarily of a transfer of allegiance by military figures from the Qing court to a new, nominally republican government. Unlike Mongolia and Tibet, in Xinjiang the replacement of the Inner Asian Qing dynastic regime with a nationalist Chinese government did not stimulate a declaration of independence on the part of non-Han local elites—any seizure of power by Uyghurs at this point would have been impossible in any case, as there was no unified Uyghur opposition and Chinese monopolized military force.

The seeds of a Uyghur nationalist movement had been planted, however, by the end of the nineteenth century. Wealthy industrialists and mer-

***The seeds of a Uyghur nationalist movement had been planted...by the end of the nineteenth century.***

chants in Kashgar, Turfan, and Yili, who had traveled to Kazan, Istanbul, and Europe, launched a movement to modernize Uyghur education. (Similar developments elsewhere in Central Asia are known as "jadidism," from *usul-i jadid* or "new method" education.) Teachers from outside Xinjiang and from new teachers' colleges in Kashgar, Turfan, and elsewhere fanned out throughout the province. Together with many new journals and newsletters—and despite sur-

veillance by Chinese warlords—the new schools instilled Turkic and eventually Uyghur nationalist ideas in Uyghur children and readers through the 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the people influenced by this "Uyghur enlightenment" later became involved in the rebellions of the early 1930s. In fact a little-understood secret organization may have linked Uyghur leaders in Turfan, Kucha, and Khotan. The rebellion—really a series of rebellions—that erupted in 1931 was not, however, centrally planned or commanded. After an initial rural jacquerie against a lascivious Chinese military commander in Hami, the cities ringing the Tarim Basin rebelled against the authority of the Chinese warlord government in Urumqi. Then things got very complicated. In the course of 1932-33, a Chinese Muslim (Hui) warlord from Gansu entered the fray, Han forces in northern Xinjiang mutinied, mutually competing Uyghur armies arose, and the leader of the initial uprising ultimately allied with Chinese authorities in Urumqi (who enjoyed Soviet backing) against both Hui warlord armies (backed by the ROC govern-

ment in Nanjing) and a newly declared East Turkistan' Republic (ETR) in Kashgar (which sought to escape both Chinese and Soviet influence). In the end, Soviet intervention with air power and chemical weapons crushed Han, Hui, and Uyghur resistance and established the warlord Sheng Shicai as governor in Urumqi.

Despite the ideological confusion and shifting political and ethnic loyalties of this period, the East Turkistan Republic (November 1933-February 1934) established in Kashgar has become a milestone of Uyghur nationalist history and a precedent cited by today's independence advocates. The ideological outlook of the short-lived ETR government was essentially the nontheocratic, reforming approach of the jadidists, though it wrestled with identity questions, debating whether to call itself "Uyghuristan" before ultimately using both "East Turkistan Republic" and "East Turkistan Islamic Republic" in official materials.<sup>6</sup>

The Chinese Guomindang (GMD) government reestablished control over Xinjiang from the early 1940s, ousting Sheng and cutting off Soviet influence. By 1944, however, a combination of lingering resentment of harsh warlord rule, economic hardship following a GMD embargo on Xinjiang's trade with the Soviet Union, and the chauvinism of GMD officials led to full-scale rebellion among Kazakhs and Uyghurs in northern Xinjiang and Kirghiz in Tashkurghan (in the southwestern corner of the province). Once again, this rebellion was characterized in its early stages by interethnic competition, ambiguity with regard to the role of Islam, and Soviet military support. A new regime, similarly called the East Turkistan Republic, emerged in northern Xinjiang in the summer of 1945. This was a secular, socialist government backed and to a degree controlled by the Soviet Union; it has been compared to the Republic of Mongolia after 1924. The Soviet Union pressured the ETR to reach a cease-fire with the GMD Chinese forces in Urumqi soon after the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (August 14, 1945); the ETR and GMD then entered into an arrangement to govern Xinjiang jointly. This coalition notwithstanding, tensions remained high and the ETR continued virtually without GMD interference in northern Xinjiang. In late 1949 Chinese Communist forces occupied Xinjiang, facing only minor military resistance, mainly from independent Kazakhs organized by Osman Batur.

#### *PRC Period (1949-89)*

The PRC occupation of Xinjiang was facilitated by Guomindang surrender in the south and a deal struck with the Soviet Union in the north,

together with the elimination of the ETR leadership in a mysterious plane crash. Though Xinjiang, unlike Tibet, did not require full-scale military conquest, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) efforts to consolidate its rule and develop its policies did face sporadic resistance from Uyghurs, especially in the southern Tarim Basin. An internal source refers to 19 revolts and 194 cases of "counterrevolutionary" separatist activities in Xinjiang from 1951 to 1981—though it is not clear exactly what these labels mean.<sup>7</sup>

In December 1954 an organization of some 300 members from Khotan, Karakash, and Lop counties led by one Abdimit attacked a labor reform camp and several county seats, including Khotan. The internal PRC source providing this account links Abdimit to Muhammad Emin Bughra. (Bughra had led an independence movement in Khotan in the early 1930s; after 1945 he served as a minister in the GMD Xinjiang government; after 1949 he led an exile Uyghur group in Kashmir and Turkey until his death in 1964.) According to this same source, a series of "counterrevolutionary riots"—which either erupted or were exposed in the planning stages across southern Xinjiang, in Turfan, and in Yining (Ghulja) between 1954 and 1956—were related to Emin and Abdimit's group, and all shared an Islamic focus.

Despite these challenges, the PRC largely succeeded in bringing the Islamic establishment under its control while reforming land tenure, dispossessing powerful Uyghur landholders, and redistributing lands once held as shrine and mosque endowments. This success was due in part to a relatively liberal policy with regard to Uyghur religious life and other forms of cultural expression in the early years of the PRC.<sup>8</sup> But the radical collectivization and industrialization drive known as the Great Leap Forward (1958-61) was accompanied by a more assimilationist cultural thrust, political attacks on Xinjiang natives associated with the former ETR and Soviet Union, and an upsurge in Han in-migration and settlement in northern Xinjiang. These factors, together with the famine caused by the Great Leap, led to an exodus of some 60,000 people (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and others) and 30,000 head of cattle to the Soviet Union in April-May 1962. This exodus was followed by violent demonstrations in central Yining (Ghulja) city involving 2,000 people, during which the crowd called for the overthrow of the Communist Party and "elimination of the problem of the Chinese." Regular PLA troops and Xinjiang *bingtuan* (production-construction corps) militia sealed the border and quashed the riot. Chinese sources blame the exodus and Yining incident on Soviet machinations.<sup>9</sup>

Though outside our purview here, it is worth recalling that by far the largest and most violent incidents of unrest in PRC Xinjiang have had little to do with minority peoples. Instead they involved Han Chinese factions fighting a near-civil war during 1967-68, the high point of the Cultural Revolution (1965-76). At times during these clashes, 50,000 *bingtuan* workers marched on Urumqi; air force, militia and Red Guard units fought pitched battles over the railway line near Hami; the control of the Lop Nor nuclear test facility was even in doubt. Furthermore, the disruptive legacy of the Cultural Revolution lingered into the Deng Xiaoping era. In 1979, some 8,000 Chinese youth from Shanghai and other eastern cities who had been dispatched to Xinjiang in the previous decade demonstrated in Aksu. They occupied party and government offices for 40 days; 1,000 of them staged a hunger strike. This may have been the largest—and certainly the longest—lasting-popular demonstration in Xinjiang's modern history. Despite the massive defiance, PRC authorities dealt with these Han "educated youth" with leniency, drawing up a schedule by which they could return to their home cities.<sup>10</sup>

We do know of one minority-led political group active during the Cultural Revolution. The East Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party (Shärqiy Turkistan Khälq Inqilawi Partiyisi), the most serious "counter-revolutionary separatist conspiracy" since 1949, operated in Xinjiang for at least two years from February 1968 or perhaps earlier.<sup>11</sup> Before it was crushed, this party maintained central and branch offices in each of Xinjiang's prefectures and cities and issued some 50 separate publications. Allegedly the group sought to establish an independent ETR that was secular, communist, and pro-Soviet in orientation. The USSR initially offered help to this party, but veterans of the movement in exile today say that the Soviets never fulfilled their promises.<sup>12</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, there was also ethnically charged trouble in the north: Chinese press calls for "unity" in 1969 suggest considerable unrest among Kazakhs in northern Xinjiang and among the Uyghurs in Yining (Ghulja) city. Kazakh herd sizes declined precipitously in these years, and a news report from early 1969 describes an uprising of 4,000 Uyghurs in Yining, allegedly with Soviet support.<sup>13</sup>

Following the rise of Deng Xiaoping, the situation in Xinjiang, as in China as a whole, became generally more stable than during the ceaseless political campaigns of the Maoist years. Reforms in "nationality" policies advanced by Hu Yaobang with particular regard to Tibet and Xinjiang

relaxed the more assimilationist aspects of cultural policy and brought non-Han cadres back into the party and government, from which many had been purged during the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution years. Nevertheless, as in China itself, this relaxation may have encouraged an airing of grievances, and a wave of student demonstrations occurred in Xinjiang in the 1980s. In December 1985, some 2,000 non-Han students

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from Xinjiang University and six other institutions of higher learning demonstrated in Urumqi, shouting slogans against nuclear testing, private immigration of Han Chinese, and extension of the PRC's family planning policy to minorities in Xinjiang. (These issues continue to concern many Uyghurs up to the present; although the PRC stopped nuclear testing in 1996, it is widely believed that the radiation has continued to damage the health of Uyghurs in southeastern

Xinjiang.) In June 1988, some 300 students marched after the discovery of derogatory graffiti in a toilet in the physics building of Xinjiang University. In addition to slogans in support of freedom, democracy, and equality of the nationalities, some students shouted "Drive out the Han!" and "Oppose Han migration to Xinjiang!" And during the heady days of May 1989, Muslim students marched in Urumqi in a demonstration organized by Hui students to express rage at the publication in Shanghai of *Sexual Customs (Xing Fengsu)*, a book containing insulting misrepresentations of Islam. This demonstration turned ugly in People's Square, where cars, motorbikes, and windows were smashed and rioters clashed with police, leaving almost 200 injured.<sup>14</sup> Hui students also demonstrated in Beijing and other Chinese cities over this book, which was ultimately withdrawn by Chinese authorities and its publisher sanctioned.

The internal Chinese publications that comprise our main source on unrest in Xinjiang during the 1980s also mention an "East Turkistan Independence Organization," led by a seventeen-year-old Uyghur from Akto county near Kashgar, and a group or groups known as "Spark" or "Spark Alliance" organized by middle and high school students in Akto and Yining and accused of anti-Chinese, antisocialist, and separatist views as well as stockpiling weapons. Though it is unclear how real a threat small gangs of teenagers posed to state security, such groups nevertheless suggest a degree of disenchantment with the Chinese state among young Uyghurs

in the 1980s.<sup>15</sup>

In 1980-81 there were also a few incidents of serious unrest that did not directly involve students. In three out of the four cases recorded for these years, some sort of altercation (police mistreatment of an inebriated Uyghur, a fire in a mosque, a fight between a Han and a Uyghur youth) blew up into a major demonstration or riot involving hundreds or as many as 2,000 people. The participants in these incidents, in Aksu, Yarkand, and Kashgar, attacked Han persons and property and shouted slogans that left little doubt about their sentiments (if we can trust the Chinese internal documents that recount these events): "Beat the Khitays to death,"<sup>16</sup> "Drive out the Khitays," and "Down with the scum of the nationalities." And in Yarkand (where a suspicious mosque fire brought on the riot): "To burn a mosque is to burn Islam," "Long live the Islamic Republic," "Defend to the death the independent banner of Islam," and "Down with the infidels."

### *Patterns*

While rebellions and other violent incidents aimed at rule from Beijing have been relatively numerous since the Qing conquest of Xinjiang in the mid-eighteenth century, it is a mistake to view their causes or ideologies in monolithic terms. Though disturbances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did draw to an extent upon local disenchantment with imperial rule, they usually had outside stimuli or leaders (the Khojas, Khokand, Yaqub Beg, Chinese Hui Muslims). Overall the outbursts of the early twentieth century reflect more the general anarchy of the warlord period and the weight of Soviet influence than any coherent or overarching Islamic or even ethnonationalist motivation. The two East Turkistan Republics of 1933 and 1945-49, however, while diametrically opposed in their relationship to the Soviet Union and to socialism, did share a similar Turkic or Uyghur nationalist outlook that derived from the modernist and nationalist Uyghur educational and intellectual movement (jadidism) of the 1900s through 1920s, and not from theocratic Islamism. As best we can tell from incomplete data filtered through PRC sources, this outlook also broadly characterizes those Uyghurs who organized against PRC rule in the 1950s and 1960s—with Islam a stronger rallying point in the south and Soviet influence more prominent in northern Xinjiang.

The Xinjiang students who demonstrated in the 1980s seem to have shared much with their Han peers who in those same years took to the

streets of Beijing and elsewhere in China. Muslim students in Xinjiang, however, joined their calls for freedom and democracy with concerns over ethnic discrimination and the future of their nation (*minzu, millät*). Internal Chinese sources indicate considerable dissatisfaction with the Chinese state, as well, reflected in the appearance of a few small resistance organizations and occasional riots triggered by Uyghur altercations with police or Han Chinese.

### **Violent Incidents Since 1990**

International attention to Xinjiang has grown in tandem with the increased opening of the region to tourists, journalists, scholars, business-  
 es, congressional delegations, and international organizations since the mid-1980s. At the same time, the Western press has paid growing attention to ethnic discord in the region. Following the 9-11 events, the U.S. attack on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and establishment of U.S. military bases in the Central Asian republics, the situation of Uyghurs has received unprecedented attention in university and think-tank settings and even a mention by the U.S. vice-president on one of the Sunday morning news shows.

### ***Following the 9-11 events...the situation of Uyghurs has received unprecedented attention***

This gradual growth of awareness of Xinjiang's problems over the past decade has given journalists and other outside observers the impression that separatist unrest and violent incidents have themselves been escalating along a similar, steadily-upward trajectory toward a crisis point today. The sudden 180-degree shift in official Chinese depictions of the situation in Xinjiang in September 2001, as we shall see, has supported this impression, as has the U.S. crisis mentality regarding international terrorism following the attack on New York's World Trade Center. In fact, however, violent outbreaks in Xinjiang have occurred in clusters. Although the relatively few large-scale incidents in the 1990s were better publicized than those of the 1980s, they were not necessarily bigger or more threatening to the state. There have been, moreover, few incidents of antistate violence—none large-scale—since early 1998. And none of them since the 1997 Urumqi bus bombings, alleged to be the work of Uyghur terrorists, have targeted civilians.



*The PRC's 2002 Document on East Turkistan Terrorism*

Xinjiang authorities began discussing the violence in Xinjiang openly in the late 1990s. In March 1999, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Governor Abdulahat Abdurishit (Abdurixit) claimed that there had been "thousands" of explosions, assassinations, and other incidents in the 1990s; around the same time, internal party documents claimed 380 fatalities from serious incidents in 1998 alone and 100 victims from twenty-seven incidents in the first months of 1999.<sup>17</sup> Concerned perhaps about the region's image and negative impacts on potential foreign investment, officials moderated their statements in the early 2000s. In welcoming Chinese and international trade partners to the Urumqi trade fair on September 2, 2001, Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan together with Abdulahat Abdurishit proclaimed that the situation in Xinjiang was "better than ever in history." While mentioning separatism, they stressed that "society is stable and people are living and working in peace and contentment." Xinjiang's nightlife, Wang enthused, continues until 2 or 3 A.M.! (Because Xinjiang runs on Beijing time, this is really the equivalent of 12 or 1.)<sup>18</sup>

Two weeks later, the official line on Xinjiang's stability reversed again. Following the September 11 al Qaeda attacks on the United States, official PRC pronouncements began to stress the threat of "terrorism" in Xinjiang as China's leadership maneuvered to position itself "side by side with the United States in the war against terror."<sup>19</sup> This apparently required a revision of the official description of separatists in Xinjiang. What had generally been described as a handful of separatists was now a full-blown "terrorist organization." While often interpreted simply as a PRC effort to gain cover for its ongoing crackdown in Xinjiang, this shift should also be seen in the broad context of U.S.-China relations since the coming to power of the Bush administration, which early on had infamously characterized China as a "strategic competitor" with the United States. Positioning itself as an ally in the "war on terror" has helped Beijing warm its somewhat chilly relations with Washington.

On January 21, 2002, the Information Office of the PRC State Council released a document titled "East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity" that provided a catalog of violent acts allegedly committed by separatist groups in Xinjiang. It also mentions several organizations in implied connection with the incidents on the list. This document is the most comprehensive public accounting to date of

separatist resistance and organizations in Xinjiang; it is also the PRC's first public acknowledgment of the extent of antistate activity in the region. It reveals that Xinjiang has experienced, besides the demonstrations and bombings known from other sources, a number of assassinations of lower-level political figures—especially Uyghur members of the Xinjiang and national Chinese Islamic Association, as well as the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a "united front" body of the PRC government. The document also details incidents of economic sabotage aimed at business and cultural centers and the cotton and natural gas industries.

Any study of Xinjiang separatism must take the claims of the January 2002 document into account. Some aspects of this document, however, lead one to treat its contents with caution. For example, it begins with a background sketch that goes further than previous PRC historical interpretations to claim outright that "the central government has never ceased jurisdiction over Xinjiang" since the Han dynasty established an outpost there in 60 B.C. This claim of uninterrupted central Chinese administration in Xinjiang is unfortunate. As any student of Chinese history knows, since the Han period there have been several extended epochs when no "central government" could claim jurisdiction even over the central provinces of China, let alone over Xinjiang. (In fact, no power based in China ruled Xinjiang between the withdrawal of the Tang dynasty from the area in 755 and the Qing conquest in 1758, although Kublai Khan exercised some influence in the 1260s.)<sup>20</sup>

More relevant to our concerns here are problems in the document's treatment of events in the 1990s. While its preface claims that terrorist acts killed 162 people (and injured 440) over the past decade, the document itself enumerates only 57 deaths. Most of these people died in small-scale incidents with only one or two victims. The selection criteria for including these incidents, as well as many that resulted in no deaths, while excluding acts that led to the remaining 105 deaths are unclear. But if we are safe in assuming that the document likely mentions all spectacular acts of separatist violence, including those involving high loss of life, then we are left to conclude that over 100 deaths from "terrorism"—nearly two-thirds the claimed total—occurred in small-scale or even individual attacks. Though definitions of terrorism are notoriously arbitrary, it seems legitimate to question what makes the unlisted acts "terrorist" or "separatist" as opposed to simply criminal. One may also conclude from the

document that the frequency and size of incidents of antistate violence in Xinjiang have declined since 1997 or 1998.

The PRC's 2002 document is less than systematic in its treatment of terrorist or separatist organizations. Though it mentions several, it does so in scattered references throughout the document. Moreover, the document in both its Chinese and English versions relies frequently on such vague generic terms as "the 'East Turkistan' terrorist organization," which it intersperses confusedly with references to specific groups, many of which also have "East Turkistan" in their names. Because in Chinese the compound "Dongtu" (East Turkistan) is used both in a generic sense, for all "East Turkistan" groups, and as a specific abbreviation for any name beginning with "East Turkistan," the result is ambiguity over whether a given act was committed by a specific group known to espouse a separatist line (such as the East Turkistan Liberation Organization, or ETLO) or by unknown perpetrators whom the authors of the document claim, without providing evidence, to be East Turkistan separatists. Moreover, the English version of the document uses the singular form ("the 'East Turkistan' terrorist organization") for terms that in Chinese (which lacks a definite article) are generic and possibly either singular or plural. The document thus implies that there is a unified East Turkistan terrorist organization of considerable strength. From all other indications, however, this is not the case.

The U.S. government has unfortunately amplified the erroneous impressions conveyed by the PRC's 2002 document on East Turkistan terrorism. When in August 2002 the U.S. embassy in Beijing announced the designation of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as a terrorist organization associated with al Qaeda, its statement adopted much of the language of the PRC document and accused ETIM specifically of more than two hundred acts of terrorism resulting in 162 deaths and 440 injuries. In casting the announcement in these terms, the U.S. spokesman thus attributed to ETIM specifically *all* the violent incidents of the past decade in Xinjiang that the PRC document itself blames only on unnamed groups or on ETLO. PRC press reports subsequent to Washington's announcement took advantage of the U.S. error by proclaiming that the United States had designated the "East Turkistan movement"—that is, all groups espousing independence, even nonviolent ones—to be terrorists.

*The PRC's 2002  
document is less than  
systematic*

The erroneous notion that a unified anti-American and anti-Chinese organization, ETIM, is mainly responsible for the violence in Xinjiang is becoming part of conventional wisdom on the region through repetition in press accounts and think-tank pieces.<sup>21</sup>

In December 2003, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security released an official list of terrorist organizations containing the names of four groups, including ETIM and ETLO, as well as the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and the East Turkistan Information Center (ETIC).<sup>22</sup> The first two groups figure prominently in the January 2002 document; the latter two do not appear at all.

### *Major Incidents in Recent Years*

The incidents surveyed here include the prominent, large-scale incidents of violence and unrest since 1990. I have not included nonviolent incidents of collective action (demonstrations, protests, and the like). For other events not treated here, including assassination attempts on Uyghur members of the PRC government and party, see the January 2002 document, "East Turkistan Terrorists Cannot Get Away with Impunity," which is our only source for these incidents.

*January 5, 1990: Talip Incident in Yarkand.* Xinjiang authorities moved to close privately run religious schools and return students to their home districts following an increase in the numbers of madrasas and *talips* (students) over the previous decade. Several hundred religious students demonstrated in Yarkand, shouting such slogans as "Study and protect Islam" and "Down with the Kafirs" (nonbelievers).<sup>23</sup>

*April 5, 1990: Baren Incident.* Akto township (about 10 kilometers south of Kashgar) in Baren county had been named an "Ethnic Unity Model Town" in 1984. Six years later this designation proved ironic when evidence of an armed uprising against Chinese rule emerged. According to one report, the rebels planned a series of synchronized attacks on government buildings all across the Kashgar area and had acquired horses to speed their movements. The plot, allegedly led by Zeydin Yusuf and the "Islamic Party of East Turkistan," was partially exposed in March; the group is said then to have spread a call to arms through mosques and cassette tapes. When trouble broke out, it involved some 200 armed men (according to Chinese accounts) who engaged in a battle with police (six or seven killed) before retreating into the mountains. There PLA troops

using air power eventually crushed the rebellion and initiated a crackdown with arrests all across southern Xinjiang. Issues underlying this uprising included Chinese migration to Xinjiang and reports that the Chinese government would extend its one-child family planning policy to minority nationalities, including Uyghurs.<sup>24</sup>

*February 5, 1992: Urumqi Bus Bombs.* Three were killed and twenty-three injured in two explosions on buses in Urumqi; the PRC's 2002 document claims that other bombs were discovered and defused around the same time in a cinema and a residential building. Five men were later convicted in this case and reportedly executed in June 1995.<sup>25</sup>

*February 1992-September 1993: Bombings.* During this period there were several explosions in Yining, Urumqi, Kashgar, and elsewhere; targets included department stores, markets, hotels, and centers of "cultural activity" in southern Xinjiang. One bomb in a building of the Nongji Company (apparently a firm concerned with agricultural equipment) in Kashgar on June 17, 1993, killed two and injured six. One bomb went off in a wing of the Seman Hotel in Kashgar, though no one was hurt in this explosion. The PRC's 2002 document claims that in the 1993 explosions two people were killed and thirty-six injured overall.<sup>26</sup>

*July 7, 1995: Khotan Demonstration.* Preceding this event, Chinese authorities had arrested two imams of the Baytulla mosque in Khotan for discussing current events in their Koranic teaching and replaced them with a new imam, the young and charismatic Abdul Kayum. When Kayum began to advocate improved women's rights in his sermons, he too was arrested for raising proscribed topical issues. Some days later, on July 7, a crowd converged on a party and government office compound near the mosque, demanding information about the imam's whereabouts. When the confrontation turned violent, the government called in large numbers of riot police who trapped the demonstrators in the compound, deployed tear gas, and arrested and beat many of them. Official reports mention injuries to 66 officials and police but supply no figures regarding demonstrator casualties. This event is not mentioned in the PRC document on East Turkistan terrorism.<sup>27</sup>

*April-June 1996: Protests, Assassinations, Bombings, Crackdown.* Reports indicate an increase in violent protests and official repression in the spring of 1996. International newspapers and wire services provide vague and

unconfirmed accounts of numerous uprisings or protests throughout Xinjiang; some exile Uyghur sources claim injuries in the hundreds and as many as 18,000 arrests. Specific incidents in this period include bombings in Kucha (alleged to have killed four) and assassinations in the Kashgar,

***Reports indicate an increase in violent protests and official repression in the spring of 1996.***

Kucha, and Aksu areas of Uyghur officials belonging to the Islamic Association of China and a Uyghur deputy to the XUAR People's Congress. Possibly related to these events are three major political developments. The first was the release by the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo on March 19 of a secret directive (CCP Central Committee Document 7) warning of illegal religious activities and foreign influence and infiltration into Xinjiang.<sup>28</sup> The second was

the signing of a mutual tension-reducing and security treaty by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the so-called Shanghai Five, on April 26 (now expanded to include Uzbekistan and known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The third was the announcement of the first "Strike Hard" anticrime and antiseparatist campaign late that same month.

The high numbers of "suspected terrorists, separatists, and criminals" arrested—initially given by PRC sources as 1,700 and later raised to "several thousand"—may thus be the result, not of any upsurge of separatist activity or ethnic unrest at this time, but rather the Strike Hard campaign itself, which placed a political premium on speed and quantity of arrests and convictions. Based on available information it is difficult to be certain which of these factors are related to the unrest of 1996 and to what extent.<sup>29</sup>

*February 5-8, 1997: Yining (Ghulja) Incident.* Official Chinese reports are themselves inconsistent on the causes and nature of this event—ranging from denials that it happened, to calling it a case of "beating, smashing, and looting" by "drug addicts, looters, and 'social garbage,'" to blaming it on separatists and religious elements bent on stirring up holy war.<sup>30</sup> The PRC's 2002 document blames this "serious riot" on the "'East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah' and some other terrorist organizations." (The document does not mention this group in any other context or attribute to it any other activity in Xinjiang or abroad; nor are there any references to it in other sources.) Uyghur and non-Chinese press and NGO sources on

the Yining (Ghulja) Incident are more consistent, though the story they tell differs from the Chinese reports.

The incident followed—and by many accounts was related to—the state prohibition of Uyghur social organizations known as *mäshräp*. *Mäshräp* in the generic sense refers to many kinds of Uyghur gathering, usually of young men, often involving musical performance. From 1994, Uyghurs in Yining city and surrounding villages began reviving a more traditional form of *mäshräp* as young men's clubs governed by strict Islam-inspired rules of conduct, hoping in this way to address social problems, especially the drug and alcohol abuse that beset Uyghur youth. The groups developed into an unofficial but increasingly organized network of boys' clubs, which besides holding group meetings sponsored a soccer tournament bringing together teams representing multiple *mäshräp* chapters. Chinese authorities began scrutinizing the *mäshräp* movement in 1995, detaining some of its leaders, and refusing to permit a *mäshräp* soccer tournament. (Officials confiscated goals from soccer fields all across the city.)<sup>31</sup>

The Strike Hard campaign, which began in 1996, may have increased state pressure on the *mäshräp*, now operating underground. The campaign certainly cracked down on "illegal religious activities," including private Koranic instruction, in the Yining area, and religious students were among those swept up in the wave of arrests. In early 1997, around the time of Ramadan, police arrested two Uyghur religious students (*talips*), resulting in a clash and dozens of arrests. The next day several hundred people demonstrated for the release of those arrested the night before; many of these demonstrators were themselves arrested; protests continued for the next few days and turned violent. Antiriot police and troops reportedly used dogs, tear gas, fire hoses, beatings, and live ammunition on demonstrators and bystanders. Rioters torched vehicles and attacked police and Chinese residents; their banners and slogans included calls for Uyghur equality and independence as well as religious sentiments. Authorities sealed off Yining city for two weeks and in the aftermath of these events reportedly arrested thousands of people, particularly those associated with Islam. Several people died in the course of the riots. Amnesty International has documented many cases of physical mistreatment of detainees, including severe frostbite of people held in an open stadium, many of them wet from being hosed down. Trials, public sentencings, and executions of people allegedly involved in the Yining Incident continued for years after the event.<sup>32</sup>

*February-March 1997: Bus Bombings.* On February 27, 1997, coinciding with memorial ceremonies for Deng Xiaoping, bombs exploded on three buses in Urumqi, killing 9 and seriously wounding 68. A group known as the Uyghur Liberation Party claimed responsibility for the bombings from Almaty; later Chinese authorities executed eight men they said were responsible. Press accounts at the time commonly associated the Urumqi bus bombings with a March 7 explosion on a bus in central Beijing, and one expatriate Uyghur, Yusupbek Mukhlisi, asserted that Uyghurs were responsible for this as well.<sup>33</sup> Though this speculation continues to be recycled by Western press accounts and academic articles,<sup>34</sup> XUAR chairman Abdulahat Abdurishit denied in May 1997 that the Beijing bombing was connected to those in Urumqi or perpetrated by Uyghur separatists, and the PRC's document on East Turkistan terrorists does not mention the Beijing incident.<sup>35</sup>

*Other Events in 1997.* In late April 1997, a crowd of some 1,000 attempted to free 27 prisoners sentenced to execution for involvement in the Yining Incident. Police fired on the crowd, killing two and injuring several. In October, unconfirmed reports emerged of riots as well as attacks on government and party offices in small cities in the vicinity of Urumqi (eastern Xinjiang) on September 24. One PRC source denied reports of bombings during this period, but a Beijing newspaper reported that nine officials and representatives had died in separatist violence around this time and said that Beijing police were on alert for terrorist attacks on places in the capital frequented by foreigners.<sup>36</sup>

*February-April 1998: Bombings.* The PRC's 2002 document refers to six explosions at economic and industrial targets, including a gas pipeline near Qaghiliq, in February and March 1998. The bombs caused damage amounting to roughly \$120,000. The following month eight bombs went off at homes and offices of officials in the same county,

including that of the Public Security Bureau and a local CPPCC chairman. Eight people were injured by these explosions.

*July-September 1999: Trouble in Khotan.* Internal CCP sources detail spo-

***It is unclear whether these events...represent a flare-up or simply a background level of anti-Chinese resistance***



radic incidents of attacks on Public Security personnel, offices, and Han Chinese in the Khotan area, as well as arson of cotton stocks. In September 1999, police shot and killed a man described as "a terrorist leader" and arrested 21 others with him. It is unclear whether these events, known to us only because this particular document was leaked, represent a flare-up or simply a background level of anti-Chinese resistance in southern Xinjiang.<sup>37</sup>

*January 2000: Possible Attack on Aksu Area Police Station.* One U.S. newspaper reported that in early January 2000, militants attacked a police station "in the isolated town of Aksu," kidnapping five policemen. (Aksu is in fact a major city on the region's main east-west highway.) The attackers were later apprehended after a raid on their headquarters and a dramatic shootout with police helicopters.<sup>38</sup> A survey of news databases has found no other reports of this incident; the PRC's 2002 document lists only an attack on a police station in the town of Zepu in October 1999 in which one policeman was killed.

#### *Incidents Outside China*

With the exception of the Zepu police station incident in 1999 or 2000, about which there are contradictory reports, neither publicly available Chinese sources nor the world press have reported major violent incidents by suspected Uyghur separatists within China since the spring of 1998. But the PRC's 2002 document, Central Asian authorities, and press accounts have linked Uyghurs to several violent incidents with political overtones outside China over the past few years.

*March 1997: Disturbance at the Chinese Consulate-General in Istanbul.* The PRC's 2002 document on East Turkistan terrorism claims that shots were fired at the Chinese consulate-general in Turkey in March 1997 and a flag was burned during a demonstration. Independent news sources reported on the flag burning (on February 8, 1997, following the Yining Incident) but not the gunfire.<sup>39</sup>

*1998: Attack on Hashir Wahidi, Founder and Head of the Uyghur Liberation Organization.* Wahidi was attacked in his house in Kazakhstan by unknown assailants and died a few months later, allegedly from injuries he sustained in the beating.<sup>40</sup> The Uyghur Liberation Organization later merged with the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan to form the Uyghuristan People's Party.

*May 31 and June 1, 1998: Osh Bus Bombings.* Two explosions, one on a bus and one in a piece of luggage that had been removed from a bus, killed five people in Osh oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz authorities apprehended and sentenced a Turk, a Russian, and two Uyghurs for the bombing.<sup>41</sup>

*1999: Series of Attacks on Chinese in Turkey.* In October, Turkish police detained ten individuals, said to be members of ETLO, in connection with assaults on Chinese nationals.<sup>42</sup>

*March 2000: Involvement with Chechens.* Russia arrested two Uyghurs whom it charged with fighting for the Chechen terrorists. Extradited to the PRC for trial, they confessed to smuggling ammunition but denied joining the fighting. According to some reports, they were in fact cooks. (It is a commonly held stereotype in Central Asia that Uyghurs excel at food preparation; there are many Uyghur restaurants across the region.)<sup>43</sup>

*March 2000: Assassination of Nigmat Bazakov.* Bazakov was the second president of Ittipaq, a Uyghur cultural organization affiliated with the Kyrgyzstan People's Kurultay (Congress).<sup>44</sup> According to official versions, Bazakov was shot by members of ETLO (or SHAT) after he refused to cooperate with them and make donations. Kyrgyz authorities arrested and tried four men whom they said were members of ETLO, including four Uyghurs (three PRC citizens and one Turkish citizen) and an Uzbek (in some reports likewise said to be Uyghur). The same men were also accused of an attack on a Chinese government delegation in May 2000 and the kidnapping of a Chinese businessman. One of the accused, Kasarji Jalal, was in prison at the time of the Bazakov shooting on a weapons charge.<sup>45</sup> In May 2002, Kyrgyz authorities extradited to China two men, Mamet Yasin and Mamet Sadik, whom authorities said were responsible for killing Bazakov and the attack on the Chinese delegation. A few days later, in gratitude for their cooperation on the case, the Chinese Public Security Ministry presented Kyrgyz police with twelve police trucks at a televised ceremony at Torugart Pass on the Sino-Kyrgyz border.<sup>46</sup>

The trial and publicized gift of the trucks angered Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan, many of whom believe Bazakov's murder to be the work of Chinese agents. Bazakov had run for the Kyrgyz parliament before his death, and although he lost the election he had made a strong showing. Others theorize that the wealthy Bazakov was killed in a business dispute.

*April-May 2000: Bazaar Fires, Attack on Chinese Delegation, and Kidnapping of a Chinese Businessman.* In April 2000, a fire broke out in a Bishkek market (the Tour Bazaar) specializing in Chinese commodities; in May, members of a Chinese delegation sent to investigate the fire (Chinese citizens with Turkic names) were attacked in their car near a hotel in Bishkek; the Kyrgyz driver and one member of the Chinese delegation were killed; two other Chinese citizens were wounded. The day after the shooting, a second fire broke out in the Tour Bazaar. Later in May, a Chinese businessman was kidnapped in Osh and a ransom of \$100,000 was demanded for his release.<sup>47</sup> The Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO; Uyghur Azatliq Tashkilati) stands accused of these crimes in the PRC's 2002 document; another source credits ETLO.<sup>48</sup> The perpetrators allegedly fled to Kazakhstan, where they killed two policemen before being apprehended. Four Uyghurs were sentenced to death for the murder of the Chinese delegation members.

*May 2001: Murder of the President of a Uyghur Charitable Foundation.* Dilbirim Samsakova (Dilberim Samsaqova), founder of the Nazugum Fund (a charitable organization benefiting Uyghur women from China and Central Asia), disappeared in Almaty on May 24. She was a vocal advocate on Uyghur issues, a member of the East Turkistan executive committee based in Germany, and had served as legal adviser for the four Uyghurs accused of the 1998 bus bombings in Osh, Krygyzstan. In March 2001 she sheltered the widow and children of a Uyghur man, an alleged member of the ULO, who had been killed in an exchange of gunfire with Kazakh authorities in September 2000. Samsakova's bludgeoned body was discovered near a reservoir on June 9, 2001.<sup>49</sup>

*February 12, 2002: Fire in the Tour Bazaar, Bishkek.* A suspicious fire razed the Tour Bazaar, a major place of business for Uyghur merchants since 1996, which had suffered fires in the past. Uyghur groups report that the fire broke out simultaneously in several areas of the bazaar and say that water service to the bazaar had been mysteriously interrupted that day. In addition, Kyrgyz police reportedly stole goods and cash and firemen demanded payments before attempting to extinguish the blaze.<sup>50</sup>

*June 2002: Senior Chinese Diplomat and Uyghur Businessman Killed in Bishkek.* Wang Jianping, first secretary at the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, was shot while driving in a Mercedes with a Uyghur businessman, Umar

Nurmukhamedov. Kyrgyz officials speculated at the time that it was Nurmukhamedov, not the Chinese consular official, who was the primary target in what may have been a contract killing. Informal reports claim that a cache of forged passports was found in the Mercedes' trunk at the time of the shooting. Two ethnic Uyghurs (Kyrgyzstan and Turkey nationals), said to be members of ETLO, were extradited in August 2002 to China by Kyrgyz authorities for the crime; however, the Kyrgyzstan interior minister, Bakirdin Subanbekov, publicly stated his belief that the crime was economic, not political, in nature. The suspects were in possession of weapons and multiple passports at the time of their arrest.<sup>51</sup>

*December 2002 and May 2003: Explosions in Kyrgyzstan.* An explosion on December 27, 2002, in the Dordoi Bazaar, Bishkek's largest market, was at first variously explained as caused by a container of fireworks (according to the Chinese Xinhua news agency) or a gas canister. Authorities later announced that the explosion had been the work of Uyghur terrorists. An explosion at a currency exchange office at the Bakay Bank in Osh on May 8, 2003, was first blamed on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and then on Uyghurs. Four men, including a leader of the "Islamic East Turkistan Party," were arrested in Almaty in late May and accused of both bombings. Uyghur activists denounced the arrests, deny Uyghur involvement, and point to the IMU as more likely perpetrators.<sup>52</sup>

*March 2003: Bus Attack near Naryn, Kyrgyzstan.* A highway bus was attacked while traveling toward China from Kyrgyzstan along the mountain route often used by traders. The assailants killed 22 people, including 19 Chinese citizens, and burned the bus. In July 2003, Kyrgyz authorities announced that two of the killers had escaped to Turkey and were members of ETLO (or SHAT).<sup>53</sup>

### **Uyghur Groups Linked to Violence**

The PRC's 2002 report on East Turkistan terrorism alleges that "most of the explosions, assassinations, and other terrorist incidents that have taken place in Xinjiang in recent years are *related* to these organizations" (emphasis mine), referring to groups the document names. The section of the document where these crimes are detailed, however, links only four specific violent incidents with specific groups. The Yining Incident, which we know from other sources to have been largely spontaneous, is blamed on an "East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah," a name mentioned in connection with

nothing else. Moreover, the document claims that ETLO is responsible for arson in Urumqi, poisoning (one fatality) in Kashgar, and exchanges of gunfire with police on the Xinjiang border. The Kashgar poisoning is the only death or injury in Xinjiang attributed to a specific named group. All other incidents in the document are blamed generally on the "'East Tukistan' terrorist organization" and other ambiguous references.

Here I present a brief background on those groups that according to press accounts and the January 2002 document have engaged in violent activity since the mid-1990s. This is not a complete accounting of the many, mostly small, Uyghur groups espousing nationalist or separatist positions, most of which operate outside of China.<sup>54</sup> I discuss only groups linked to (or alleged to be linked to) violent acts.

#### *East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)*

According to the PRC's 2002 report, in February 1998 Hasan Mahsum, leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM; Shärqiy Türkistan Islam Herikiti), sent "scores of terrorists" into China, where they established about a dozen bases in Xinjiang and "inland regions" and trained more than 150 terrorists in fifteen training classes. They also set up large numbers of "training stations" in scattered areas, each consisting of three to five members, and workshops producing weapons, ammunition, and explosives. Xinjiang police uncovered "many" of these training stations and workshops, confiscating antitank grenades, grenades, detonators, guns, and ammunition.

The most serious of the accusations against this group, from the United States' point of view, is ETIM's connections to al Qaeda and the Taliban—including a meeting with Osama Bin Laden, receipt of al Qaeda funds, and training of Uyghurs in Taliban and al Qaeda camps. ETIM's leader, Hasan Mahsum, has denied having contacts with al Qaeda or intending to carry out terrorist acts.<sup>55</sup> In May 2002, the Kyrgyz government extradited to China two Uyghurs accused of planning attacks on embassies and public places in Bishkek. In August 2002, U.S. deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage announced that the United States considered this group to be a terrorist organization and would freeze any assets it held in the United States. The U.S. embassy in Beijing further

***All other incidents in the document are blamed generally on the "'East Tukistan' terrorist organization"***

announced that the United States had received intelligence reports from a non-Chinese source that ETIM planned to attack the U.S. embassy in Bishkek. Despite the unfortunate manner in which the United States publicized its designation of ETIM and implied that its information on the group came from the PRC's 2002 document, U.S. sources maintain that the assessment of ETIM was based on intelligence from outside the PRC, including interrogations of prisoners taken to Guantanamo after the Afghanistan War. At U.S. and PRC urging, in September 2002 the United Nations added ETIM to its own list of terrorist organizations.

According to Kakharman Khozhamberdi, the head of the Uyghuristan People's Party, Hasan Mahsum built ETIM by gathering Uyghurs who had been dispersed by the U.S. attack on Afghanistan. Khozhamberdi suspects that Mahsum may in fact be a Chinese agent; Mahsum, for his part, has called Khozhamberdi a "*dinsiz*," an infidel.<sup>56</sup>

The Pakistan government announced in December 2003 that Pakistani forces had killed Hasan Mahsum in October during a raid on an al Qaeda hideout in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area.<sup>57</sup>

#### *East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO)*

The East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO; Shärqiy Türkistan Azatliq Tëshkilati, or SHAT) headed by Mehmet Emin Hazret, stands accused of violent incidents both inside and outside Xinjiang, including the murders of Nigmat Bazakov and Wang Jianping, fifteen incidents of arson in Urumqi, a poisoning in Kashgar, a series of attacks on Chinese

nationals in Turkey, arms smuggling, shootouts with Chinese border guards, and, most recently, the attack on a China-bound bus in the Kyrgyzstan mountains and murder of its passengers. One source also credits ETLO with the ransom kidnapping of a Chinese businessman and bombings in Osh. (Elsewhere these crimes are blamed on ULO.) Chinese and Central Asian official announcements often link ETLO to IMU and Chechen and Afghan terrorist training

camps. Hazret has denied having any links to ETIM or involvement in any of the past incidents of which ETLO stands accused. In a January 2003 interview, however, he said that ETLO's "principal goal is to achieve independence for East Turkistan by peaceful means. But to show our ene-

***Despite Chinese urging, the United States has not placed ETLO alongside ETIM on its list of terrorist groups***

mies and friends our determination on the East Turkistan issue, we view a military wing as inevitable." Nevertheless, sources with information on the interrogation of Uyghur prisoners in Guantanamo express skepticism over the Chinese claims that ETLO/SHAT is an international terrorist organization opposed to U.S. interests. Despite Chinese urging, the United States has not placed ETLO alongside ETIM on its list of terrorist groups.<sup>58</sup>

#### *United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan (URFET)*

Yusupbek Mukhlisi, leader of the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan (URFET; also known as the United National Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan), organized the group in the mid-1970s, most likely with the assistance of the Soviet KGB. He received a good deal of press coverage in the mid-1990s and visited the United States to meet State Department officials in 1996. The following year, Mukhlisi announced that his group would embark on an armed campaign against China. From around that time, he began to issue a series of press releases from Almaty characterized by wild claims regarding the "real" size of the Uyghur population, the rate of Chinese immigration to Xinjiang, the number of uprisings and executions ongoing in Xinjiang, and his own supposedly vast organization of secret armed cells in China. These releases alone are largely responsible for creating the impression of an active, organized, violent resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang in the 1990s. A Chinese internal-circulation article written in March 1999 equates Mukhlisi's URFET with ETLO and describes this group as the greatest separatist threat to China. The author of the report also writes that Mukhlisi "was involved" in both the Urumqi and Beijing bombings—although, as we have seen, Xinjiang authorities have publicly denied that the Beijing bombing was related to Xinjiang separatism.

Mukhlisi and URFET are not mentioned in the PRC's 2002 document on East Turkistan terrorism. Moreover, the 80-year-old Mukhlisi is now largely discredited and resented by other exile Uyghur groups in Central Asia for exaggerating Uyghur involvement in militant activities—as he did, for example, in March 1997 by announcing that the Urumqi bombings (on the day of Deng Xiaoping's memorial) were the work of his own and two allied Uyghur groups in Kazakhstan, by all accounts a false claim not even credited by the PRC.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO)*

The Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO; Uyghur Azatliq Tashkilati), also referred to as the Uyghuristan Liberation Organization, is occasionally confused with ETLO in press accounts.

This group was founded by Hashir Wahidi (Ashir Wahidi), who claimed in 1996 to have over 1 million supporters in Xinjiang and 12,000 more abroad in Central Asian countries. He was then 76 years old. In 1998, Wahidi was attacked and badly beaten by intruders in his home and died some months later.

*There is, however, a degree of confusion in news sources*

The PRC's 2002 document and Kyrgyz official and press accounts hold ULO responsible for the spate of violent incidents in Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 2000, including the fire in the Tour Bazaar, the attack on the Chinese delegation, and the kidnapping of a Chinese businessman. Ten Uyghurs, including Kyrgyz, Chinese, Uzbek, and Turkish nationals, were arrested in connection with these events.

They are said to have confessed to membership in ULO, connections with "similar Afghan and Uzbek organizations," training in terrorist camps, fighting in Chechnya, and engaging in terrorist acts in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and China. There is, however, a degree of confusion in news sources—some perhaps deliberate—between ULO and the similarly named ETLO. One 2001 analysis in a Kyrgyzstani newspaper, for example, states that ULO murdered Nigmat Bazakov, a crime usually attributed by official sources to ETLO.<sup>60</sup>

In September 2001, ULO merged with URFET to form the Uyghuristan People's Party, an unregistered group based in Kazakhstan that aspired to become a party with Central Asian regional status. The group remains highly circumscribed in its activities due to Kazakhstan's restrictions on unregistered parties: it is not permitted, for example, to hold formal conferences. In its public program, the Uyghuristan People's Party rejects terrorism. But according to its current head, Kakharman Khozhamberdi, it differentiates between civilian targets and what it considers legitimate targets in the pursuit of national liberation for the Uyghurs. In mid-2003, the Kazakh government fined Kakharman Khozhamberdi 15,000 tengge (about 100 dollars) for "illegal political activity."<sup>61</sup>

*Other Named Groups*

In addition to ETIM, ETLO, and ULO, the PRC's 2002 document cites



several other groups: the East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah (to which it attributes the 1997 Yining Incident), the Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party, the East Turkistan Islamic Party, the East Turkistan Opposition Party, the Islamic Holy Warriors, and the East Turkistan International Committee. I have been unable to learn more about these groups. Likewise, other groups cited in the literature are either moribund or have in recent years avoided international publicity or mention in published Chinese reports.<sup>62</sup>

Generally the claims regarding the existence and activities of Uyghur militant groups should be treated with some caution. For example, allegations that a group known as the Wolves of Lop Nor bombed a bus in Beijing in March 1997 turn up in some reports; but Xinjiang authorities have themselves denied that Uyghurs were involved in that incident. Yusupbek Mukhlisi, leader of URFET, has claimed that the "Tigers of Lop Nor" attacked military targets in Xinjiang in 1993. Though this is possible, the group is mentioned in no other context (and Mukhlisi is given to exaggeration).

***Generally the claims regarding the existence and activities of Uyghur militant groups should be treated with some caution.***

The Chinese Public Security Ministry's terrorist list of December 2003 mentioned, in addition to ETIM and ETLO, the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and the East Turkistan Information Center (ETIC) as terrorist organizations with al Qaeda contacts and funding.<sup>63</sup> The accusations against both groups focus on their leaders, Dolqun Isa (Eysa) of WUYC and Abduljelil Qarkash (spelled Abudujelili Kalakash in materials released by China). A *People's Daily* report on the list claims that Isa is a former member of ETLO who has "organized and participated in all sorts of terrorist activities launched by the separatist group." The same article alleges that Qarkash planned a series of bombings of Chinese embassies in Africa.<sup>64</sup> A supplementary press release levels specific allegations of Isa's and Qarkash's provision of financial support, legal aid, and instructions to individuals in Xinjiang, South Asia, and Southeast Asia wanted by the Chinese in connection with Xinjiang separatism. Until WUYC's inclusion on the recent PRC terrorist list, press accounts outside of China mention it only in regard to political activities, such as its periodic congresses of leaders of Uyghur groups and Uyghur youth from around the world.<sup>65</sup> ETIC, based in Munich, is known primarily for its

press releases and for a website providing information and Internet links on Uyghur and Xinjiang issues. The group's spokesman, Dilxat Rexit (Dilshat Reshit), is frequently quoted in news accounts. Both WUYC and ETIC have denied PRC allegations of involvement in terrorism.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusions

We began this discussion with a survey of the history of resistance and separatism in Xinjiang since the eighteenth century. The participants in acts of anti-Chinese resistance and their motivations have been varied. Insofar as there is a common denominator, for the twentieth century this has been Uyghur nationalism—sometimes colored by Islam as a basic part of Uyghur culture but not arising from a desire to create an Islamic state per se.

Despite this ethnonationalist, as opposed to religious, basis to Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang, journalists seem to take interest in Xinjiang primarily because it is a majority Muslim area. The reasons for this are clear.

*the idea of a nexus of Islam, terrorism, and China [often] justifies running a story about Xinjiang...opportunities for untrammelled reporting are rare*

I myself once cowrote a magazine article titled "Why Islam Troubles China Too," capitalizing on the fact, startling and intriguing to a general readership, that China has a large Muslim population in Xinjiang. This fact serves as a perennial hook for pieces about Xinjiang and the Uyghurs, one that seems even more compelling in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, because it fits Xinjiang into the ongoing global narrative of "Islamic terror." Since stories about Xinjiang usually appear as sporadic features, rather than part of continuing coverage, journalists return to this hook repeatedly with

each piece about the region. Indeed, at many Western media outlets it is arguably only the idea of a nexus of Islam, terrorism, and China that justifies running a story about Xinjiang at all. Foreign journalists' access to Xinjiang is, moreover, extremely limited; correspondents credentialed by the Chinese government must apply for permission to travel to the region and are closely watched while there. Thus their opportunities for untrammelled reporting are rare, and they are forced to rely on material available in other press reports. Unfortunately, other press reports usually share the same limitations. At the same time, neither exile Uyghur nor official Chinese press releases offer objective reports on events in the region. The

problems with reporting on the Uyghurs and Xinjiang, then, are understandable. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this reporting could be improved if journalists applied the same caution in borrowing from other media reports as they already do with respect to Chinese government press releases.

The conventional wisdom about Xinjiang today might be characterized as follows: "There is a growing threat of Uyghur separatist violence in Xinjiang linked to some degree to international Islamist and terrorist movements." On the basis of publicly available materials, internal Chinese sources, and a few interviews with Uyghur leaders in Central Asia, I contend that this conventional wisdom should be modified. There was indeed a good deal of violent antigovernment and anti-Chinese activity in Xinjiang between 1990 and 1998. This activity included numerous bombings, from which deaths and injuries resulted, as well as assassinations of officials in the police, government, party, and state religious establishment. There were also at least four major demonstrations that turned violent or were violently repressed. But the situation in Xinjiang itself has quieted considerably since 1997-98. This is perhaps a result of the Strike Hard campaign, although there may still be low-level antistate and anti-Chinese violence that does not make it into news reports and may be known outside Xinjiang only through occasionally leaked documents or similar means.

Government statements and news reports tell of more violence outside Xinjiang in former Soviet Central Asia. One noteworthy feature of these accounts is the absence of any reported activity by the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) until it achieved international notoriety with its designation by the United States as a terrorist organization in August 2002. With its leader now reported dead, the future of the organization is unclear. Judging from events since 1997, the main group to watch would seem not to be ETIM, despite its designation by the United States and UN as an international terrorist organization, but rather the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO). Over the years, of course, most Uyghur groups have proved unstable; names, leaders, and presumably membership shift frequently. Thus the shelf life of such an assertion regarding ETLO is necessarily short.

Taken on their face, official releases and news reports suggest that

*the victims of this violence have mainly been Uyghurs...or other Central Asians*

some Uyghurs have participated recently in political violence in the Central Asian republics. But with the exception of the Chinese consular first secretary Wang Jianping (who may simply have been in the wrong place at the wrong time), the victims of this violence have mainly been Uyghurs (some Chinese citizens, some not) or other Central Asians. The bazaar arson and March 2003 bus attack, though arguably targeting trade in Chinese goods, were not direct assaults on Han Chinese or PRC interests. If these acts were the work of Uyghur separatists, it is hard to understand the motives behind them. How, for example, would kidnapping Japanese geologists in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan (a crime that the PRC's 2002 report blames on Uyghurs) aid the cause of East Turkistan independence? Or bombing a bus or exchange office in Osh? Or destroying the livelihoods of Uyghurs selling goods in Bishkek bazaars? Or murdering Uyghur traders on the bus home to Kashgar? Or, for that matter, targeting the U.S. embassy in Bishkek, as ETIM stands accused of doing? By contrast, one may note the dog that hasn't barked: though symbolic Han Chinese and PRC-linked targets certainly exist in the Central Asian republics, they have not been attacked—an encouraging fact but also one worthy of consideration.

Taking these reports of Uyghur involvement in political violence in Central Asia at face value, then, gives a picture more of expatriate Uyghur fractiousness than of any serious threat to Chinese interests. It is, however, perhaps not wise to take these reports at face value. Economic factors,

organized crime, rivalries over market turf, and the like seem as probable an explanation in many cases as Uyghur political terrorism. Likewise, many of the Central Asian incidents may not have been the work of Uyghurs at all. Both Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments have good reason to discover Uyghur perpetrators behind these crimes—both to satisfy the Chinese and to put blame for unrest in their countries on an inconvenient and unpopular minority. Certainly the opaque process by which Uyghurs came to be blamed for the December 2002-May 2003 events in Kyrgyzstan suggest that they have become "the usual suspects" in such cases. Finally, though the Uyghur tendency to see a Chinese hand behind all such events is mere speculation, Uyghur commentators are certainly correct in pointing out that the greatest direct beneficiary of supposed

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organized crime, rivalries over market turf, and the like seem as probable an explanation in many cases as Uyghur political terrorism. Likewise, many of the Central Asian incidents may not have been the work of Uyghurs at all. Both Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments have good reason to discover Uyghur perpetrators behind these crimes—both to satisfy the Chinese and to put blame for unrest in their countries on an inconvenient and unpopular minority. Certainly the opaque process by which Uyghurs came to be blamed for the December 2002-May 2003 events in Kyrgyzstan suggest that they have become "the usual suspects" in such cases. Finally, though the Uyghur tendency to see a Chinese hand behind all such events is mere speculation, Uyghur commentators are certainly correct in pointing out that the greatest direct beneficiary of supposed

"Uyghur terrorism" remains the PRC government itself.<sup>67</sup> The suspicious violent deaths between 1998 and 2001 of Hashir Wahidi, Nigmat Bazakov, Dilbirim Samsakova, and the writer Eminjan Osmanov (killed in an Uzbek prison), have eliminated Uyghur exile leaders and silenced vocal critics of the PRC.

At present, no Uyghur group publicly acknowledges militant or terrorist acts in China or Central Asian countries. Two groups, ULO and Mukhlisi's URFET, have in the past announced plans to engage in violent struggle against the PRC. Mehmet Emin Hazret has denied involvement in the many past incidents in Central Asia of which his group, ETLO, is accused, but he has implied that militancy toward China is "inevitable" in current circumstances. In fact it is next to impossible, based on publicly available information, to connect known Uyghur separatist organizations with most of the violent incidents inside Xinjiang in recent years. The one exception may be ETLO, which the PRC claims committed arson in Urumqi and poisoning in Kashgar and exchanged gunfire with Chinese border guards. The PRC does accuse other groups, including ETIM, of creating cells, smuggling and stockpiling arms, and so forth but apparently has not connected them with actual acts of violence or sabotage. But given that its leader is now reported dead, ETIM's future remains unclear.

The Uyghur groups on which recent attention has focused—ETLO, ULO, and ETIM—all are charged with involvement in activity outside Xinjiang in the Central Asian republics. As noted earlier, however, there is reason to doubt many of the claims emanating from Chinese and Central Asian government sources regarding these groups. Moreover, the articles on Uyghurs in the Central Asian press are often polemical in tone. Frequently they retail unsubstantiated and dubious accusations that the Uyghurs are religious extremists calling for jihad and aspiring to create an Islamic state across Central Asia—Islamist sentiments that actual leaders of Uyghur militant groups, Mukhlisi, Hazret, and Mahsum, have not echoed in their public interviews. While individual Uyghurs may be involved in Islamist organizations in Central Asia, by all indications the groups that are accused of militancy against the PRC espouse primarily nationalistic, as opposed to religious, motives and goals. Moreover, in the absence of independent information it remains an open question to what

*the notion of an imminent terrorist threat in Xinjiang or from Uyghur groups is exaggerated*

extent these expatriate groups have engaged in anti-Chinese militancy, or terrorism, at all in recent years.

In sum, then, acts of violent anti-Chinese resistance in Xinjiang have declined in frequency and severity since the late 1990s. This is not to say that there is no threat whatsoever. Nor have tensions in Xinjiang relaxed overall—quite to the contrary, I think that interethnic relations between Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang are more tense today than they were five or ten years ago. A new major violent incident or terrorist act in Xinjiang, moreover, would change our understanding of the trend since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, judging from the information currently available, I conclude that the notion of an imminent terrorist threat in Xinjiang or from Uyghur groups is exaggerated.

# Endnotes

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- 1 I am grateful for comments from participants in a series of meetings on internal conflicts in Asia organized by the East-West Center and also for the criticisms and suggestions of three anonymous reviewers of this study.
- 2 On the rebellions in the 1860s, Yaqub Beg's emirate, and the Qing reconquest, see Kim (2004).
- 3 General coverage of Qing-period Xinjiang may be found in Fletcher (1978a; 1978b) and in Millward (1998; In press).
- 4 See Millward (forthcoming).
- 5 The spellings "Turkestan" and "Turkistan" are used interchangeably in the literature. I use Turkistan here as this transcription most closely reflects Uyghur spelling.
- 6 Recent Japanese scholarship has revised Andrew Forbes's *Warlords and Muslims* (1986), the English-language work usually consulted on this period, on several key points. In particular, work by Shinmen Yasushi (1990; 1994) convincingly refutes Forbes's claims that the first ETR was a fundamentalist Islamic regime. Likewise, according to Shinmen, this state did not call itself the "Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkistan" (Forbes's TIRET). For a detailed survey of Xinjiang history see Millward (forthcoming).
- 7 See Zhang Yuxi (2003: 7). Note that the English translation of this source mistakenly transcribes the author's name as Yumo.
- 8 Zhang Yuxi (2003) implies as much when he admits "shortcomings" in the implementation of the party's ethnic and religious freedom policies (p. 3).
- 9 See Zhao Yuzheng (1991: 212); Zhang Yuxi (2003: 3).
- 10 See Zhu Peimin (2000: 354-56).
- 11 Zhang Yuxi asserts that the East Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party was established secretly in 1963.

- 12 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 209-10); other information is based on interviews with Uyghur activists in Kazakhstan.
- 13 See Benson and Svanberg (2000: 139-40); see also McMillen (1979: 206, 241) citing *Hong Kong Star* of January 20, 1969.
- 14 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 207-11); Zhang Yuxi (2003: 11-12). Although these sources were intended only for limited circulation within China and are therefore more frank than public accounts, they are framed by a crude analysis that attributes all unrest to undifferentiated "religious fanaticism," "Pan-Turkism," "Pan-Islamism," and the influence of a small number of nationality separatists "abroad and at home," occasionally acting in concert with "capitalist liberals" (Zhang Yuxi 2003: 13).
- 15 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 210).
- 16 *Khitay* (*Khitai*, *Hitay*) is an ancient Turkic word for the nomadic people who conquered and ruled northern China as the Liao dynasty (907-1119); it came to mean "China, Chinese" in Mongolian and Turkic languages and was borrowed into Russian in that sense. It is the source of our own "Cathay." For unclear reasons, Han in the PRC today perceive the word as an ethnic slur.
- 17 See Becquelin (2000: 87); AFP (Hong Kong), FBIS-CHI-1999-0311, "Governor Says Xinjiang Suffering Separatist Violence," March 11, 1999. It is interesting that in the PRC's 2002 document the number of fatalities attributed to terrorism for the entire 1990s is considerably smaller than this figure for 1998 alone.
- 18 Bao Lisheng, "Chinese Officials Say Not Much Terrorism in Xinjiang," *Da Gong Bao*, September 2, 2001 (English translation published via Uyghur-L internet list-serv).
- 19 Statement by Chinese ambassador Yang Jiechi at a Washington, D.C., embassy reception, October 2001.
- 20 On May 26, 2003, the PRC State Council released a formal white paper on the question of Xinjiang history titled "History and Development of Xinjiang."
- 21 See, for example, Seva Gunitskiy, "In the Spotlight: East Turkestan Islamic Movement," Center for Defense Information (CDI), December 9, 2002, at [www.cdi.org/terrorism/etim.cfm](http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/etim.cfm) (accessed July 23, 2003).
- 22 "China Seeks Cooperation to Fight 'East Turkistan' Terrorists," Xinhuanet, December 15, 2003, at [news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-12/15/content\\_1232550.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-12/15/content_1232550.htm) (accessed December 15, 2003).
- 23 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 209); Zhang Yuxi (2003: 10).
- 24 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 210-11); Zhang Yuxi (2003: 6-7, 10, 19); Davies (2001: 77-79). Dewardric McNeal and Kerry Dumbaugh (2002: 12) follow BBC Monitoring in reporting that the 1990 uprising was led by Abdul Kasim and the "Free Turkistan Movement."
- 25 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Explosions"; see also Catherine Sampson, "Bombers Raise Chinese Fears," *The Times* (London), February 22, 1992, via LexisNexis.
- 26 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Explosions"; see also Dillon (1995: 24-25) and Ma Dazheng (2003: 11).



- 27 See Amnesty International (2002: 13-17).
- 28 Published in English translation by the Committee Against Chinese Communist Propaganda (CACCP) and Uyghur exile sources at [www.caccp.org/conf/doc7.html](http://www.caccp.org/conf/doc7.html).
- 29 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Assassinations." The following news outlets ran reports on events in this period: UPI 4/26/96 and 5/29/96; AFP 5/16/96 and 7/12/96; *Asiaweek* 6/14/96; *New York Times* 2/28/97; *United Chinese Times* 6/26/96 via *World Uyghur Network News* at [www.uyghur.org/enorg/wunn96/wunn062769.htm](http://www.uyghur.org/enorg/wunn96/wunn062769.htm); *Japan Economic Newswire* 2/27/97. This list was compiled by Amy Wong for the Minorities at Risk Project, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, titled "Turkmen [sic] (Uighurs and Kazakhs) in China" at [www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/chiturk.htm](http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/chiturk.htm), downloaded December 4, 2001.
- 30 Dautcher (2002b: 278), citing *Ming Pao*, February 11, 1997, A6 as excerpted in BBC Survey of World Broadcasts.
- 31 On the *māshrāp* see Roberts (1998a) and Dautcher (2000a).
- 32 See Amnesty International (1999: 17-22); U.S. Department of State (1998: sec. 1a) ([www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1997\\_hrp\\_report/china.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1997_hrp_report/china.html), 19 Feb. 1998); "Statement by Rizvangul Uyghur to the Congressional Hearing on Religious Persecution and Human Rights Violations, organized by the House Subcommittee on International Relations and Human Rights," October 28, 1997. More eyewitness testimony is quoted in "Demonstration to Mark the 1st Anniversary of Ghulja Uprising," *Turkistan Newsletter*, listserv, 98-2:021, February 4, 1998.
- 33 Reports to this effect were carried by Deutsche Presse-Agentur and Reuters on March 9, 1997. In August 1997, a Hong Kong paper published a report alleging that Uyghur separatists funded by the CIA were responsible for the Beijing bus bombing; see "China Reportedly Links CIA, Xinjiang Separatists to Bombing," *Ming Pao*, August 10, 1997, via BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 13, 1997. McNeal and Dumbaugh (2002: 11) mention a group known as the "Wolves of Lop Nor" that likewise claimed responsibility for the Beijing explosion. There is little other evidence of the existence of this group, though Yusupbek Mukhlisi, leader of URFET, has claimed that a group called "Tigers of Lop Nor" attacked Chinese military targets in Xinjiang in 1993. A French journalist has referred to the "Wolves of Lop Nor," providing few details, in an article; see Saint-Exupery (1997). My thanks to Thierry Kellner for this reference.
- 34 See, for example, John Pomfret, "Separatists Defy Chinese Crackdown; Persistent Islamic Movement May Have Help from Abroad," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2000; Rudelson and Jankowiak (2004: 317).
- 35 "China: Xinjiang 'Separatists' Said Not Behind Beijing Bombing," AFP (Hong Kong), May 11, 1997, via FBIS-TOT-97-131.
- 36 "Beijing Police on Alert for Xinjiang Separatists," AFP, October 3, 1997; "Separatists Kill at Least 22 in China Attacks," AFP, October 9, 1997.
- 37 "Zizhiqu dangwei changwei Simayi Tiliwaerdi tongzhi zai Hetianshi wutao banzi lingdao huishang de jianghua" (speech by XUAR Party Standing Committee member Ismail Tiliwaldi to the meeting in Khotan of the "wutao banzi" leadership), August 27, 1999, distributed by East Turkistan Information Center.

- 12 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 209-10); other information is based on interviews with Uyghur activists in Kazakhstan.
- 13 See Benson and Svanberg (2000: 139-40); see also McMillen (1979: 206, 241) citing *Hong Kong Star* of January 20, 1969.
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- 22 "China Seeks Cooperation to Fight 'East Turkistan' Terrorists," *Xinhuanet*, December 15, 2003, at [news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-12/15/content\\_1232550.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-12/15/content_1232550.htm) (accessed December 15, 2003).
- 23 See Li Ze et al. (1994: 209); Zhang Yuxi (2003: 10).
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- 25 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Explosions"; see also Catherine Sampson, "Bombers Raise Chinese Fears," *The Times* (London), February 22, 1992, via LexisNexis.
- 26 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Explosions"; see also Dillon (1995: 24-25) and Ma Dazheng (2003: 11).

- 27 See Amnesty International (2002: 13-17).
- 28 Published in English translation by the Committee Against Chinese Communist Propaganda (CACCP) and Uyghur exile sources at [www.caccp.org/conf/doc7.html](http://www.caccp.org/conf/doc7.html).
- 29 See PRC State Council (2002) under the section headed "Assassinations." The following news outlets ran reports on events in this period: UPI 4/26/96 and 5/29/96; AFP 5/16/96 and 7/12/96; *Asiaweek* 6/14/96; *New York Times* 2/28/97; *United Chinese Times* 6/26/96 via *World Uyghur Network News* at [www.uyghur.org/enorg/wunn96/wunn062769.htm](http://www.uyghur.org/enorg/wunn96/wunn062769.htm); *Japan Economic Newswire* 2/27/97. This list was compiled by Amy Wong for the Minorities at Risk Project, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, titled "Turkmen [sic] (Uighurs and Kazakhs) in China" at [www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/chiturk.htm](http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/chiturk.htm), downloaded December 4, 2001.
- 30 Dautcher (2002b: 278), citing *Ming Pao*, February 11, 1997, A6 as excerpted in BBC Survey of World Broadcasts.
- 31 On the *mäshräp* see Roberts (1998a) and Dautcher (2000a).
- 32 See Amnesty International (1999: 17-22); U.S. Department of State (1998: sec. 1a) ([www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1997\\_hrp\\_report/china.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1997_hrp_report/china.html), 19 Feb. 1998); "Statement by Rizvangul Uyghur to the Congressional Hearing on Religious Persecution and Human Rights Violations, organized by the House Subcommittee on International Relations and Human Rights," October 28, 1997. More eyewitness testimony is quoted in "Demonstration to Mark the 1st Anniversary of Ghulja Uprising," *Turkistan Newsletter*, listserv, 98-2:021, February 4, 1998.
- 33 Reports to this effect were carried by Deutsche Presse-Agentur and Reuters on March 9, 1997. In August 1997, a Hong Kong paper published a report alleging that Uyghur separatists funded by the CIA were responsible for the Beijing bus bombing; see "China Reportedly Links CIA, Xinjiang Separatists to Bombing," *Ming Pao*, August 10, 1997, via BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 13, 1997. McNeal and Dumbaugh (2002: 11) mention a group known as the "Wolves of Lop Nor" that likewise claimed responsibility for the Beijing explosion. There is little other evidence of the existence of this group, though Yusupbek Mukhlisi, leader of URFET, has claimed that a group called "Tigers of Lop Nor" attacked Chinese military targets in Xinjiang in 1993. A French journalist has referred to the "Wolves of Lop Nor," providing few details, in an article; see Saint-Exupery (1997). My thanks to Thierry Kellner for this reference.
- 34 See, for example, John Pomfret, "Separatists Defy Chinese Crackdown; Persistent Islamic Movement May Have Help from Abroad," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2000; Rudelson and Jankowiak (2004: 317).
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- 36 "Beijing Police on Alert for Xinjiang Separatists," AFP, October 3, 1997; "Separatists Kill at Least 22 in China Attacks," AFP, October 9, 1997.
- 37 "Zizhiqu dangwei changwei Simayi Tiliwaerdi tongzhi zai Hetianshi wutao banzi lingdao huishang de jianghua" (speech by XUAR Party Standing Committee member Ismail Tiliwaldi to the meeting in Khotan of the "wutao banzi" leadership), August 27, 1999, distributed by East Turkistan Information Center.

- 38 See Pomfret, "Separatists Defy Chinese Crackdown." Pomfret repeats the story that it was Uyghurs who bombed a bus in Beijing in 1997, although the Xinjiang regional chairman had denied this in May 1997.
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- 41 Aziz Soltobaev, "International Terrorists Bomb Osh, Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, August 16, 2000.
- 42 "Chinese Leader to Discuss Muslim Separatists During Turkey Trip," AFP, April 18, 2000.
- 43 "Russia Extradites Two Chinese Arrested for Joining Chechen Rebels," AFP, August 9, 2000.
- 44 This is a powerless congress uniting officially approved organizations representing minorities, moderate opposition parties, and progovernment groups. As a member, the Uyghur group Ittipaq receives office space in a central government building but no government funding.
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- 46 "Kyrgyz Police Deport Alleged Members of Uighur Separatist Movement to China," *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (Bishkek), May 24, 2002, via BBC Monitoring; "China Gives Kyrgyz Police Vehicles, Thanks for Deporting 'Terrorists,'" BBC Monitoring International Reports, May 28, 2002.
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- 48 Leyli Akilova, "Uighur Crimes in Central Asia Funding Separatist Groups in Region, China," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow), August 14, 2002, via BBC Worldwide Monitoring. Kyrgyz authorities have accused the same men imprisoned for the murder of Bazakov (generally called ETLO members) with these crimes.
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- 50 Turdi Ghoja, "Uyghur's Letter to Kyrgyz Ambassador to US," February 19, 2002, at [www.mail-archive.com/uighur-l@taklamakan.org/msg02827.html](http://www.mail-archive.com/uighur-l@taklamakan.org/msg02827.html) (accessed July 24, 2003).

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- 56 Personal interview with Kakharman Khozhamberdi, June 15, 2003.
- 57 "Pakistan Confirms Its Troops Killed Top Chinese 'Terrorist,'" AFP, December 23, 2003.
- 58 See PRC State Council (2002); Leyli Akilova, "Uighur Crimes in Central Asia Funding Separatist Groups in Region, China," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow), August 14, 2002, via BBC Worldwide Monitoring; "Uyghur Leader Denies Terror Charges," Radio Free Asia (RFA), January 21, 2003; "Kyrgyzstan Police Identify Suspects in Robbery, Murder of 20," AFP, July 10, 2003.
- 59 See McNeal (2001: 11); McNeal and Dumbaugh (2002: 10); Roberts (2002: 26, n. 35); Andre Grabot, "The Uighurs—Sacrificed on Central Asia's Chess Board," AFP, April 25, 1996; "Uighur Leader: Muslim Separatists Carried Out Bus Bombings in China," AP, March 6, 1997; Ma Dazheng (2003: 191-92). Ma Dazheng's 1999 article was republished in 2003 in a book of collected pieces from the 1990s (*Guojia liyi gaoyu yiqie*).
- 60 Grabot, "The Uighurs"; K. Imatov, "The Question of the Uyghur Question," *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (Bishkek), November 1, 2001, republished by BBC Worldwide Monitoring under the headline "Kyrgyz Newspaper Analyses Threat from Uighur 'Extremists,'" November 3, 2001; "Kyrgyz Court Starts Trial of Suspected Uighur Separatists from China," *Vecherniy Bishkek*, March 12, 2001, via BBC Worldwide Monitoring. McNeal and Dumbaugh (2002: 10-11) refer to the "Organization for the Liberation of Uighurstan" and the "Uighur Liberation Organization" (or "Xinjiang Liberation Organization") as two distinct groups.
- 61 Interview with Kakharman Khozhamberdi, June 15, 2003, Almaty; Nabijan Tursun, pers. comm., November 21, 2003.

- 62 For example, the Home of East Turkistan Youth (said by some sources to be "Xinjiang's Hamas") and the East Turkestan International Committee, though listed by McNeal and Dunbaugh (2002), do not show up elsewhere. The latter group is said to be formed of "Uyghur guerrillas" who fought the PLA in 1944-49, but the PLA did not enter Xinjiang until 1949 and then faced no military opposition from the East Turkistan Republic, as the PRC was a socialist ally of the ETR and Soviet Union.
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- 67 See, for example, an article by Kakharman Khozhamberdi, chairman of the Uighurstan People's Party, titled "Who Stands to Gain from the Myth of 'Uighur Terrorism?'" in *Dozhivem do ponedelnika* (Almaty, in Russian), September 20, 2002, via BBC Worldwide Monitoring, October 8, 2002, under the headline "Only West Can Protect Central Asia from Chinese Oppression." Khozhamberdi argues that the Chinese are attempting to make all Uyghurs look like violent terrorists.

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## **Project Information**



## **The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia**

### **Project Rationale, Purpose and Outline**

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#### *Rationale*

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'etat, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan, Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries; although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in these countries as well as in Vietnam continue to confront problems of political legitimacy that could become acute; and radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. And the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia (as elsewhere) can be traced to three issues—national identity, political legitimacy (the title to rule), and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and the transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over the legitimacy of political system has declined in Asia. However, political legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time and the legitimacy of the remaining communist and authoritarian systems are likely to confront challenges in due course. The project deals with internal conflicts arising from the process of

constructing national identity with specific focus on conflicts rooted in the relationship of minority communities to the nation-state. Here too many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities but several states including some major ones still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

### *Purpose*

The project investigates the dynamics and management of five key internal conflicts in Asia—Aceh and Papua in Indonesia, the Moro conflict in southern Philippines, and the conflicts pertaining to Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Specifically it investigates the following:

1. Why (on what basis), how (in what form), and when does group differentiation and political consciousness emerge?
2. What are the specific issues of contention in such conflicts? Are these of the instrumental or cognitive type? If both, what is the relationship between them? Have the issues of contention altered over time? Are the conflicts likely to undergo further redefinition?
3. When, why, and under what circumstances can such contentions lead to violent conflict? Under what circumstances have they not led to violent conflict?
4. How can the conflicts be managed, settled, and eventually resolved? What are policy choices? Do options such as national self-determination, autonomy, federalism, electoral design, and consociationalism exhaust the list of choices available to meet the aspirations of minority communities? Are there innovative ways of thinking about identity and sovereignty that can meet the aspirations of the minority communities without creating new sovereign nation-states?
5. What is the role of the regional and international communities in the protection of minority communities?
6. How and when does a policy choice become relevant?

### *Design*

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher each, the study groups comprise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, the United

States, and Australia. For composition of study groups please see the participants list.

All five study-groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C. from September 29 through October 3, 2002. Over a period of four days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the five conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting five research monograph length studies (one per conflict) and twenty policy papers (four per conflict) were commissioned.

Study groups met separately for the second meeting. The Aceh and Papua study group meetings were held in Bali on June 16-17, the Southern Philippines study group met in Manila on June 23, and the Tibet and Xinjiang study groups were held in Honolulu from August 20 through 22, 2003. The third meeting of all study groups was held from February 28 through March 2, 2004 in Washington D.C. These meetings reviewed recent developments relating to the conflicts, critically reviewed the first drafts of the policy papers prepared for the project, reviewed the book proposals by the principal researchers, and identified new topics for research.

### *Publications*

The project will result in five research monographs (book length studies) and about twenty policy papers.

*Research Monographs.* To be authored by the principal researchers, these monographs present a book-length study of the key issues pertaining to each of the five conflicts. Subject to satisfactory peer review, the monographs will appear in the East-West Center Washington series Asian Security, and the East-West Center series Contemporary Issues in the Asia Pacific, both published by the Stanford University Press.

*Policy Papers.* The policy papers provide a detailed study of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 10,000 to 25,000-word essays will be published in the EWC Washington Policy Studies series, and be circulated widely to key personnel and institutions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, United States, and other relevant countries.

### *Public Forums*

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Two public forums were organized in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, discussed the Aceh and Papua conflicts. The second forum, cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, the Asia Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and the Sigur Center of the George Washington University, discussed the Tibet and Xinjiang conflicts.

Public forums were also organized in Jakarta and Manila in conjunction with the second study group meetings. The Jakarta public forum on Aceh and Papua, cosponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, and the Southern Philippines public forum cosponsored by the Policy Center of the Asian Institute of Management, attracted persons from government, media, think tanks, activist groups, diplomatic community and the public.

In conjunction with the third study group meetings, also held in Washington, D.C., three public forums were offered. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, addressed the conflicts in Aceh and Papua. The second forum, cosponsored by the Sigur Center of the George Washington University, discussed the conflicts in Tibet and Xinjiang. A third forum was held to discuss the conflict in the Southern Philippines. This forum was cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace.

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## Background of the Xinjiang Conflict

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as it is officially known to the Chinese (Uyghur nationalists call it "East Turkistan" or "Uyghuristan"), is a vast region in the northwestern corner of the People's Republic of China. Occupying one-sixth the total area of China, it holds only a fraction more than 1 percent of China's population, some 18 million. Xinjiang possesses rich deposits of oil, natural gas, and nonferrous metals. Chinese officials value it as a space to absorb migrants, a source of resources crucial to economic development, and a link to Central Asia. They desperately want to maintain hold of Xinjiang, fearing its loss would incite the CCP's collapse and possibly the secession of Taiwan and Tibet.

While a succession of Qing (1644-1911), Republican (1912-49), and Communist governments all laid formal claim to the territory and inhabitants of what is today Xinjiang, locals have resented and resisted each assertion of authority. Official Chinese sources claim that Xinjiang and the Uyghurs have been part of China "since ancient times," dating incorporation to the first century B.C. Yet only in the mid-eighteenth century was the whole of the region conquered militarily from the east, and then by the Manchu Qing empire. Qing rulers made the region a province only in the late nineteenth century, fearing its loss due to foreign incursions or internal rebellion. Between 1867 and 1877, for instance, Qing rulers lost control of the region when Yaqub Beg established an independent kingdom that achieved diplomatic relations with Turkey and Britain. Opposition to rule from Beijing (and for a time Nanjing) continued after the collapse of the Manchu empire and the founding of the Republic of China in 1912: Turki leaders twice established independent states of "East Turkistan"—once briefly in the southwest from 1933 to 1934 and again more successfully in the three northwestern prefectures of Xinjiang from 1944 to 1949.

Nor has the Chinese Communist Party been immune from challenges in the region. Though the party killed, imprisoned, or co-opted nearly all advocates of independence soon after taking power in 1949, Uyghur aspirations to independence did not disappear. Uyghurs within Xinjiang organized a number of opposition parties in the first postrevolutionary decade (nearly all of them quickly squelched by the party-state). Uyghur emigrés in Soviet Central Asia and Turkey continued to harbor the dream of establishing an independent Uyghur state. While the high socialist era in Xinjiang (1958-76) witnessed little secessionist violence, Chinese offi-

cials claim to have exposed several underground organizations. In 1962 tens of thousands of Uyghurs and Kazakhs rioted in the northwest city of Ghulja, and more than 60,000 fled Xinjiang for the Soviet Union. Uyghur nationalism found renewed public expression in the Reform Era (1978-), and participants in several demonstrations in the late 1980s called for independence. Peaceful demonstrations disappeared in the wake of the Tian'anmen crackdown in 1989. Since 1990 a series of violent episodes in Xinjiang has drawn international attention. The Baren Uprising in April 1990, in which several dozen Uyghurs attacked the regional government and police, was the most violent clash. Bus bombings in Urumqi in 1992 and 1997 left over ten dead and led some to label Uyghur separatists terrorists. A peaceful demonstration in Hotan in 1995, and a much larger one in Ghulja in 1997, turned violent after police attacked the demonstrators. A spate of political assassinations of regional officials and religious clerics has created a sense of uncertainty in parts of the region. Nevertheless, since 1949 there has not been a "hot conflict" in Xinjiang like those in Palestine, Chechnya, Aceh, or Mindanao. Underground Uyghur organizations in Xinjiang are all but unheard of, and there are no independent militias. Given the relative scarcity of collective violence, no international agent has explicitly called for intervention or mediation.

# Uyghur Autonomous Region, China



- Cities
- ∩ Prefecture boundaries
- ∩ Provincial boundaries
- ∩ National boundaries

The Uyghur Autonomous Region contains several non-Uyghur majority prefectures. These are: Kizilsu (Kirghiz autonomous prefecture), Altay, Tarbaghatay, and Ili (Kazakh autonomous prefectures), Bortala and Bayangol (Mongol autonomous prefectures), and Changji (Hui autonomous prefecture).

*Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply...*





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# *Policy Studies*

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## About this Issue

This study surveys the evidence for organized, violent separatist resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang, a region three times the size of France located in the northwestern corner of the PRC. Since several major violent events in the 1990s, concern has risen over the possibility that a violent separatist or terrorist movement may be emerging among the Turkic Muslim population of this region. Stories in the international media have sounded this warning steadily if sporadically over the past decade, and in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the PRC government has publicly linked groups comprised of Uyghurs from Xinjiang to al Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations. The United States and United Nations have agreed to some extent with China's assessment and designated one of the groups on China's terrorist list, ETIM, as an international terrorist organization.

After summarizing the 250-year history of various kinds of resistance in Xinjiang, this study catalogs major violent incidents since the 1990s in Xinjiang and in the Central Asian republics. It then discusses the Uyghur groups and individuals listed as separatists or terrorists. On the basis of a critical analysis of international press reports and PRC government materials, the study concludes that while ethnic tensions in Xinjiang are indeed serious, the sense of imminent crisis commonly conveyed by these reports is exaggerated. In particular, the study notes that the frequency and severity of violence have in fact declined since the late 1990s, perhaps due to Chinese efforts at interdiction.

## About the Author

Dr. James A. Millward is Associate Professor of History in the Department of History and Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

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