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Blowback: China and the Afghan Arabs*

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Much of the terrorism threatening the post-communist world is a by-product of the role played in Afghanistan by the United States and its allies in replacing communism with the new "foe," Islam. The claim that Operation Cyclone of 1979 contributed to the dismantling of the Soviet Union is revisited by this author two decades on, as Islamist militancy spreads from Xinjiang and Chechnya to Algeria and the Philippines. For its part in this war, Beijing is learning—as it struggles to pacify its predominantly Muslim Xinjiang—that "As you sow, so will you reap!" Hence, this article sets out to argue that the ongoing violence in Xinjiang is a result of Beijing's inconsistent policies toward Islam and *its support for the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, exploring in the process the factors that make the Uyghurs' demand for secession an acute problem for Beijing. Against a background characterized by a cycle of violence and human rights violations in which the Beijing-commanded troops and the allegedly externally-aided Uyghur "separatists" remain locked, the article examines Western attitudes toward*

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*This article addresses the birth of new trend of anti-China Jihad, and the way in which the "Afghan Arabs" were responsible for this birth. Until this day, many of the chief military experts in the Jihad circles of Afghanistan are Arabs who saw action during the anti-Soviet war. For years, the media has been using the same term in the context of highlighting this phenomenon. Moreover, many key sources in the study of Jihad and Islamism literature use the term, in the same way used here. Of the most striking examples is Usama Bin Laden, a Yemeni-origin Saudi, who remains a leading Afghan Arab figure.

the situation, in seeking to demonstrate that economic considerations prevail. The article finds evidence that the role of external players in aiding the Muslim Uyghurs' ongoing struggle is exacerbating this cycle. The discussion surveys the way in which China, as well as Central Asian neighbors, face threats of Islamist militancy. The article concludes that containing the Xinjiang Islamist threat is likely to backfire, much in the same way containment of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan produced the ongoing blowback of terrorism. This analysis raises a number of important and timely questions and addresses, from a neutral standpoint to the Xinjiang problem, the necessity of a better understanding of Islam and Muslims.

KEYWORDS: **Afghanistan; China; Islam; human rights; Russia**

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Introduction

This article seeks to argue that the increasing violence in Xinjiang, which is likely to continue despite the ongoing crackdown, is a result of Beijing's inconsistent policies toward Islam *and* its support for the Mujahedin in Afghanistan—a political ploy that continues to backfire.

The Muslim Uyghurs demand Xinjiang's secession from China proper and claim the right to an independent state. This article seeks to analyze the factors that give rise to this bid for independence, and its internal and regional ramifications—all which pose a problem for Beijing. Based on a brief historical background of Islam in Central Asia and China, section one sets the scene by examining the suppression of Islam under Soviet and Chinese rule, the use of Muslim Mujahedin against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia, and highlighting its repercussions for China.

Given Xinjiang's importance as a strategic transport corridor to Central Asia as well as its massive oil and mineral reserves, Beijing does not welcome the Uyghur bid for independence. This bid attracts state oppression, which fuels further unrest, thus locking Beijing in a cycle of violence, counterviolence, and suppression of fundamental freedoms. In this context, section two examines Xinjiang's strategic and economic importance by highlighting the region's transport, communications, agriculture, industry, energy, minerals, nuclear power prospects, and foreign invest-

ment opportunities.

Xinjiang's stability is central to Beijing's aspirations for better economic and cultural ties with Central Asia, and is also important for China's stability given the current threats by "separatist" sentiment and action. Beijing, however, considers Uyghur separatism hard to suppress given the aid provided by external players. In the context of discussing Xinjiang's separatism, section three begins with an outline of the "strike-hard" policy. The discussion then explains how Islamist militancy became part of Xinjiang's separatist movement, highlights the role of external players in neighboring states and beyond, and looks in detail at China's role in supporting the Mujahedin in the Afghanistan anti-Soviet war as well as the resulting blowback.

Having examined Xinjiang's importance for both Beijing and the Uyghurs, the history of the region's separatism and Islamist militancy, and China's support of the Mujahedin, section four sums up Beijing's policy toward its Muslim population in general, Xinjiang's Islamist militants in particular, and its Central Asian policy toward the spreading Islamist thrust. The study concludes by providing a reading of Xinjiang's future and the possible problems that may arise, ending with suggestions for future research directed at a better understanding of these problems.

Islam, Central Asia, and China

This section provides a general survey of the history of Islam and its role in Central Asia and China, and, in this context, examines the Soviet and Chinese policies toward Islam. The discussion specifically addresses the suppression of Muslims under Soviet and Chinese rule; the use of Muslim Mujahedin against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan; and the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia, including repercussions for China.

A Historical Overview

Since its arrival in China and Central Asia, Islam's influence on the religion's own adherents was ignored or underestimated by the various

ruling dynasties. Instead of taking into account the central role of Islam in the lives of Muslims, non-Muslim rulers maintained policies that sought to suppress (as did the Russians) or ignore (as did the Chinese) this religious focus. In the Chinese case, important is to comprehend a fundamental Chinese belief: the dominance of the Han[1] race—the majority of people living on Chinese soil—while all others, including those who share the same territory, are considered "barbarians."[2] This belief was especially dominant in imperial China where the need for expansion required accepting the "barbarians" whose territories were annexed. Necessary was thus to control the "barbarians" and insure their loyalty through a process of integration. Historical records show that as early as A.D. 229, the "barbarian problem" occupied an important place in Han Chinese policymaking.[3] As the empire continued to expand, there was a need for assimilation to incorporate the new groups into the Chinese state. Under the Qing, a combination of a "divide-and-rule" policy and the use of military force was administered in order to play one group against the other, a necessary move to maintain control. Both policies were unsuccessful given the local resistance in such areas as Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang.[4]

This central role of Islam pivots on it being more than just a religion housed in mosques and recited along with Quran verses, but is rather reflected in the unity of religious belief and Muslim daily life. A look at the five pillars of Islam[5] and the ways in which they constitute a fundamental

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[1]This "central" belief is reflected even in contemporary China. In Mandarin, the words for "China" (*Zhong guo*), for instance, mean "The Middle Kingdom." There is a demonstrable distinction between a "Middle Kingdom person" (*Zhong guo ren*) and an "outer country person" (*wai guo ren*). World political maps produced in the PRC place China in the middle of the map as opposed to the left side as in maps produced elsewhere.

[2]The 1990 census records a total of 1,042,482,187 Han population out of a grand total of 1,133,682,501.

[3]June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 8.

[4]Ibid., 9. Other methods, such as those used by the Qing, included military force against at least two Muslim rebellions during the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries.

[5]These are declaring submission to Allah, the only God, and that Muhammad is his prophet (*s hahadah*), turning to Mecca five times a day for prayer (*salah*), fasting during daytime for the whole month of Ramadan (*sawm*), paying alms to aid the poor (*zakat*), and making the

part of a Muslim's life would demonstrate why attempts to forcibly change Muslim customs actually mean undermining Muslim religious beliefs. Failing to understand this point can create problems because, to the truly committed Muslim's mind, preserving one's religion is a duty for which, in extreme cases, death is welcomed as martyrdom. Having failed to accept Islam's special characteristics, the Russians and the Chinese had to deal with the Muslim rejection of oppressive policies that restricted Islamic practices. Unlike Islam's tolerance of other monotheistic faiths and their adherents living under Muslim rule, Soviet and Chinese rulers lacked—as evidenced by their policies—sufficient understanding, acceptance, or tolerance of Islam and Muslims.

Islam under Soviet Rule

Central Asia's official Islam had a limited jurisdiction under the Tsarist Russian administration. This administration controlled the hajj, *waqf* revenues,[6] construction of mosques, and madrasas, and sought to oust Muslim education through Russianization and the modification of Sharia laws. Muslim response was shaped by pan-Islamist, pan-Turkist, nationalist movements, some of which had Sufi origins. The reformist *Jadidism*,[7] for instance, conceived an organized Muslim political movement that engaged in resistance that reached a peak during World War I. Many Kyrgyz

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journey to Mecca for pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime by each able-bodied, sane, solvent, adult Muslim (*hajj*).

[6]A *waqf* is a religious endowment: revenue-generating properties, arable land, farm, or oasis administered by the donor or members of his family. Typically, *waqf* revenues finance mosques, religious schools, and other religious institutions. In the absence of official sponsorship, mosques and other religious institutions with economic problems were often out looking for new donors/*waqfs*. This enhanced the politico-economic weight of *waqfs* the revenues from which mosques, center of Muslim communities, were controlled.

[7]Its most prominent ideologue is Ismail-bek Gasprinski (1851-1914) who called for modernization of Islamic education and unification of Muslims by "borrowing" from the West to revitalize intellectual and social life; emphasized rationalism, observation, personal experience, and common sense; and encouraged a liberal reading of the Quran and the Sunna. The movement had a profound impact on the thinking of educated Muslims in Russia and Central Asia. For a discussion of this, see Ludmila Polonskaya and Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia* (Reading, Mass.: Ithaca Press, 1994), 59-62; and Abdujabbar A. Abduvakhitov, "The Jadid Movement and Its Impact on Contemporary Central Asia," in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 65-76.

and Kazakhs moved to China in the aftermath of the subsequent massacres, where they gradually integrated into the growing non-Chinese Muslim population in Xinjiang.[8]

Inconsistent Russian policies toward Islam reflected a lack of understanding of the influence of Islamic ideologies, as mirrored in the alternation of persecution and compromise with Islam, a reversal of policies that added fuel to the fire. For example, on January 30, 1918 a Red Army attack on Turkestan that killed many followers of the *Basmachi*[9] movement resulted in Muslims calling for jihad[10] and declaring the area a *dar-al-harb*.[11] Coinciding with the Muslim struggle for regional independence and the internal Red-White Russian Civil War, this and other similar incidents forced a different policy. This new approach consisted of granting concessions to Islam by, for example, restoring Sharia courts and Islamic madrasas, admitting mullahs to the communist party, and declaring Friday a day of rest.[12]

Soviet policies were just as inconsistent: by 1920, Sharia was narrowly functioning and its laws were made secondary to Soviet laws. Consequently, Islam was withdrawn from school curricula and mullahs were persecuted for preaching Islamic teachings in mosques. By 1925, the aboli-

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[8]Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 789-90.

[9]"*Basmachi*" was a rural bandit resistance in the name of Sharia and Jihad mostly active in rural areas. It was composed of former Khokand military units, landowners, merchants, village and clan notables, tribal chiefs, Sufis, unemployed tenant farmers, and workers. It was able to win minor political concessions from the Russians but was later crushed. See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 797-98; and John Obert Voll, "Soviet Central Asia and China: Integration or Isolation of Muslim Societies," in *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, and Society*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 129.

[10]The term "jihad" signifies an effort directed toward a determined objective; it consists of military action with the object of expanding Islam and—if need be—of its defense in a just nonoppressive war.

[11]Polonskaya and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, 85. The term "*dar-al-harb*," traceable to the Medina period of the Prophet's life, means the "land of war," being territories under perpetual threat of a missionary war, or those where (a) Islamic law is not in force; (b) Muslims and protected non-Muslim people-of-the-book (*dhimmis*) enjoy no protection; or (c) the territory in question directly adjoins a declared *dar-al-harb* territory.

[12]Polonskaya and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, 41-81; Marie Bennigsen Broxup, "The Last *Ghazawat*: The 1920-1921 Uprising," in *The North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance towards the Muslim World*, ed. Abdurahman Avtorkhanov et al. (London: Hurst, 1992), 112-45; and Stephen J. Blank, "Soviet Reconquest of Central Asia," in Malik, *Central Asia*, 40-64.

tion of Islamic institutions was under way. By the end of the 1930s, Soviet totalitarianism—which had no space for religious views—was established; an anti-Islam campaign unfolded, reaching its climax under Stalin.[13] Chinese republicans, in the meantime, were rewarding Chinese Muslims for their support of the revolution by permitting a more relaxed atmosphere for Islamic practices. Nevertheless, non-Chinese Muslims, given their strong sense of nationalism, were antagonized. Of the latter, many as a result joined the communist forces of Mao Zedong—a leader who voiced support for equality between minorities and the Han Chinese at the time—and separate regiments were organized for them. They were promised religious freedom upon the communist takeover in return for the pledge of their famed combat skills.[14]

The Soviet policy of forced atheism ignored Islam's specific features and Muslims' modulated concept of political identity, minority nationality, and Islamic heritage.[15] An anti-Islam attack was launched: communist party branches in Muslim areas were purged of Muslim nationalist leaders who, along with 'ulama, sheikhs, and mullahs, were either exterminated indiscriminately or died in forced-labor camps. During the 1918-20 Russian Civil War, all official Muslim life was crushed: Latin then Cyrillic alphabets replaced Arabic, mosques were destroyed, madrasas and *maktabs* (popular form of informal religious schools) were closed, Sufi tariqas (orders) were declared illegal, and properties belonging to Muslim individuals and institutions were nationalized. To further suppress Islam, the Soviets in 1924-38 imposed territorial demarcation of Central Asia's autonomous republics,[16] separating Islam from national traditions and deliber-

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[13]Polonskaya and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, 83-92.

[14]Muhammad Ibrahim Qureshi, *World Muslim Minorities* (Islamabad: World Muslim Congress, 1993), 77; and Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 818-19.

[15]This point was made as early as 1958 in Baymirza Hayit, ed., *Documents: Soviet Russia's Anti-Islam Policy in Turkestan* (Düsseldorf, Germany: Forschungsdienst Osteuropa, 1958), 7.

[16]Organized into six USSR republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzya, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and eight USSR autonomous republics including Bashkirya, Dagestan, Tataristan, and other Caucasian units. There are also four lesser-scale autonomous provinces in the Caucasus. See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 802.

ately opposing pan-Islamism.[17]

These policies had the opposite effects to what the Russians had hoped for: suppression of official Islam sent Muslim religious life underground under the auspices of Sufi tariqas *and* into the hands of fanatic mullahs.[18] Ethnic tension and nationalist sentiments grew due to divisions imposed upon Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks. Each group strived to preserve their respective religious traditions, particularly in the case of the Tajiks and Uzbeks.[19] As a result, there was a comparatively extensive practice of Islamic traditions, festivals, and rites among all sociodemographic groups of the population, which indicated not only a relative stabilization of the level of religiosity, but also a mass basis for Islam's continued existence in the Soviet Union.[20]

During Russia's Great Patriotic War Against Nazi Germany (1941-45), persecution of religious beliefs decreased superficially and official Islam was legalized in order to avoid internal Muslim discontent that could have had serious domestic implications. In 1943, the Religious Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was formed, some mosques resumed operation, and numerous Muslims were sent to *al-Azhar* in Cairo for religious study. There, they were exposed to the thought of modernist reformists Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abdu, and Hassan al-Banna, as well as the radical Sayyid Qutb—the ideas of whom all had a

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[17]Polonskaya and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, 92-95.

[18]For a discussion of the practice of official Islam and its institutions in contrast to parallel "unofficial" Islam, see Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire—A Guide* (London: Hurst, 1985), 13-23; John O. Voll, "Muslim Minority Alternatives in China and the Soviet Union," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 6, no. 2 (July 1985): 349-52; Abduvakhitov, "The Jadid Movement," 65-76; and United States Institute of Peace, "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Prospects for Political Evolution and the Role of Islam" (1992), 14. For a discussion of the clergy's role in Central Asian Muslim republics as of 1989, see Sergei Petrovich Poliakov (Martha Brill Olcott, ed.), *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia*, trans. Anthony Olcott (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 105-12.

[19]The preservation of the village form of Islamic life, the *mahalla*, in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is a proof that Islam demonstrated creative potential despite long-term suppression. See Polonskaya and Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, 94-98; Victor Spolinkov, "Impact of Afghanistan's War on the Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia," in Malik, *Central Asia*, 98-99; and Poliakov, *Everyday Islam*, 11-19, 76-80.

[20]Yaacov Ro'i, "The Secularization of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Essex, UK: Frank Cass, 1995), 13-14.

widespread influence in the Muslim Middle East and beyond.[21] Their influence was subsequently manifested in the Central Asian 'ulama's rhetoric, thus mirroring reformist ideas then common in the Orient. The official Islam establishment was encouraged in order to strengthen ties with Muslims abroad. Such contacts posed a serious threat to the Soviets with the launch of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, which coincided with the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.

To sum up, Soviet policies toward Islam exhibited uncertainty and confusion. This led to inconsistency that was reflected in the alternation of first oppressive and then tolerant policies toward Muslims. This cycle is now being acknowledged; in the words of a Russian scholar: "Twenty years ago we considered religious beliefs to be dying. Now we are reaping the harvest of this neglect."[22] Chinese policies toward Islam, as will be shown, have not been different.

Islam under Chinese Rule

China's Islam policy has historically been linked to the Middle Kingdom's internal and external power relationships. Under strong governments, Muslims enjoyed prosperity and many held high office during the Tang and Yuan dynasties. Unstable governments in the face of foreign intrusion or invasion tended to suppress Muslims out of fear of any potential uprising. To reinforce political control, the Qing's anti-Islam policy set off many Muslim rebellions throughout the dynasty's rule.[23] Like the Russians, Chinese policies toward Islam and Muslims were largely inconsistent. During the late nineteenth century, the Qing crushed rebellions by

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[21]Reformism and modernism, the blend of which has inspired the Salafiyya movement in the Muslim Middle East, contributed to the psychological mobilization of Muslims in colonized Central Asia and aided the reconstruction of their Islamic political identity. See Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 563-70, 634. The works of Qutb and al-Mawdudi were already entering the Soviet Union through contacts in the Middle East. See Martha Brill Olcott, "Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia," in Ro'i, *Muslim Eurasia*, 34.

[22]Mikhail Piotrovsky, quoted in Dale F. Eickelman, "Introduction: The Other 'Orientalist' Crisis," in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 3.

[23]I-fan Yang, *Islam in China* (Hong Kong: Union, 1957), 2-4; and Owen Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History—Collected Papers, 1928-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 206.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintained a monopoly on state power, although with much difficulty and many casualties. Other governments may have collapsed following the "death" of an ideology; Beijing, for its part, continues to face the internal problem of the rise of Uyghur nationalism challenging the Han "foreign occupation." Beijing is not unique in this respect: Moscow has had problems with its Muslims due to similar types of anti-religious policies.[55]

Beijing's economic interests in Central Asia are reflected in cross-border connections with Muslim Central Asia's governments. By the same token, links between Muslims in these countries and the Xinjiang Muslims —who share common borders, history, religion, and culture—are creating a "new awakening among the indigenous Muslims of Xinjiang ··· with regard to their Islamic, as well as their Pan-Turkic identity."[56] This religio-ethnic resurgence in Xinjiang is influenced by other factors such as the correlation between the impact of Pakistani and other Islamist activists and traders in Xinjiang, and the degree of resurgence in the area.[57] With cross-border "infiltration" come, as Warikoo explains, "drugs, arms, subversives, and external initiatives to resurrect the movement for an independent Eastern Turkestan, which contests China's sovereignty over Xinjiang."[58] Naturally, these activities feed local unrest in Xinjiang, such as the Baren uprising in 1990, which "developed into a mass protest with calls for a *jihad* to drive the Han unbelievers out of Xinjiang and establish the East Turkestan state."[59] The Chinese media then reported that "young Uyghur

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[55]See Hayit, *Documents*, 11.

[56]Kulbhushan Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," in *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane (London/New York: I.B. Tauris and the International Institute for Asian Studies, 1998), 269-82. Cross-border migrations started on a large scale since 1917 and reoccurred during China's 1950s Great Leap Forward and 1960s Cultural Revolution. See Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Zed, 1995), 221.

[57]Pakistani merchants have been visiting Kashgar since the opening of the Karakorum Highway in 1982. See Amar Grover, "Chinese Whispers," *Geographical Magazine* 71, no. 5 (May 19, 1999): 48.

[58]Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," 279. See also Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 126-60; and U.S. General Accounting Office, "Drug Control: U.S. Heroin Control Efforts in Southwest Asia and the Former Soviet Union" (1997), 24-29, 32-35, 38-42.

[59]Michael Dillon, "Xinjiang: Ethnicity, Separatism, and Control in Chinese Central Asia,"

moved toward assimilation, especially during the Great Leap Forward (1958-59). Beijing realized that the implementation of such policies could jeopardize the diplomatic support China needed from Muslim Middle Eastern, African, and Asian states that protested the oppression of Muslims, thus compromising security of its Soviet borders.[28] Following the end of this ill-fated movement, Beijing sent a number of Chinese delegations to Mecca for pilgrimage and encouraged controlled Sino-Muslim interaction with Muslim countries in an attempt to regain the needed Muslim support.[29] A great famine struck China in 1959, causing Muslims further economic hardships that were only made the more acute in underdeveloped areas (such as Xinjiang) due to the relocation of large numbers of Han settlers following the completion of the Hami railway during the same year.

Instead of learning from the unsuccessful Soviet experience in dealing with Islam, "For years, until the fall of the Gang of Four, the PRC leadership employed ··· a nationalist policy on the Soviet model in its own Muslim regions."[30] During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), oppression of Muslims reached unprecedented levels—especially at the hands of the Red Guards who were keen on ending special privileges granted to minority nationalities. This brutality entailed burning mosques, killing imams, persecuting leaders, dispersing families, prohibiting Quran study, and forbidding Islamic circumcision, marriage, and funeral practices. By 1975, strict measures imposed upon Islamic practices were somewhat relaxed. Following Mao's death and the overthrow of the "Gang of Four" in 1976, Muslims were partially rehabilitated. Yet, the integration of Han Chinese in Muslim areas continued. While the rights to observe Islamic practices were recognized, no assurances were given that religious freedom would be protected—thus indicating a pattern of inconsistency similar to Soviet policies.[31]

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[28]The impact of Islam on China's policy is discussed in Yitzhak Shichor, "The Role of Islam in China's Middle-Eastern Policy," in *Islam in Asia*, ed. Raphael Israeli and Anthony Hearle Johns, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 305-17; and Lilian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East* (London/ New York: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 95-124, 268-89.

[29]Richard C. Bush, Jr., *Religion in Communist China* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1970), 288-89.

[30]Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, 38.

[31]For a further discussion of China's policy toward Muslims then, see Clyde-Ahmad Winters,

Deng Xiaoping launched China's reform and opening-up program in December 1978 in order to liberalize the economy and reactivate contact with the outside world following the country's decade-long isolation during the Cultural Revolution. In addition to social and economic repercussions of reform, China's policy under Deng opposed national and local nationality chauvinism. Effective national regional autonomy and minority rights were implemented—as can be seen in the 1982 PRC Constitution, the 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities,[32] and in the fact that senior government posts were assigned to Muslims.[33] Deng's government faced a serious challenge when students demonstrated in Beijing (April-June 1989), demanding democracy and freedom. The resulting ruthless suppression on the night of June 3-4 was perhaps an indication of the government's ability to control. In addition to the crackdown, the government also sent Uyghur students in Beijing back to Xinjiang in order to promote "the government line on the events in Beijing to their co-nationals."[34] This demonstrates Beijing's desire to prevent possible echoes of the Tiananmen events in its predominantly Muslim northwest. These concerns are justified given the ongoing Muslim discontent in Xinjiang, an area where separatism is on the rise.[35]

"Operation Cyclone": Whose Victory?

Despite this Chinese and Soviet confusion in dealing with Islam, Muslims kept their distinctive cultural identities and religious practices. This success is shown in the Muslims' ability to consolidate and thus

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Mao or Muhammad: Islam in the People's Republic of China (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1979), 27-41.

[32] Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 153-56.

[33] The minister in charge of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, for instance, was a Uyghur: Ismail Ahmat. Ibid., 159.

[34] Ibid., 164.

[35] These problems are evidenced elsewhere in China, such as the mass demonstrations associated with "Chinese Rushdi Affair." The "affair" refers to the Shanghai-published *Sexual Customs* book, which denigrated Islam and caused Muslim demonstrations in 1989 thus leading to recalling the book and punishing its authors. For details, see Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1-7; and Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*, 276.

preserve religious features despite the external influences to which they were exposed. However, the growth of strong Muslim separatist sentiment and action was partly a result of the separate policies of the Chinese and Soviet regimes. Implementing such policies meant the oppression of Muslims and the insuring of their political subordination to the control of both government and party apparatuses despite partial autonomy and assimilation of considerable sectors of the Muslim population. Muslim separatist sentiment was compounded by a religious factor: for a Muslim majority, a Muslim government is the one legitimate form of governance—with jihad destined to replace a non-Muslim government. These problems were intensified by several factors including the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan in 1979, the Islamic revolution in Iran during the same year, *and* the Chinese role in this Afghanistan war. According to Halliday, "Had Pakistan not played the base-area role it did, and had not the Chinese and Arabs provided their backing, it is much less likely that the Russians would have gone into Afghanistan directly."[36]

The adage "my enemy's enemy is my friend" was the United States' motto in backing the Mujahedin in the Afghanistan war against their shared enemy, the communist Soviets. Afghanis fought this war side by side with "thousands of young men dispatched by the religious establishments of most Islamic countries"[37] *and* thousands of Bin Laden-led Mujahedin.[38]

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[36]Fred Halliday, *Threat from the East? Soviet Policy from Afghanistan and Iran to the Horn of Africa* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1982), 111.

[37]Mark Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam* (Boulder, Colo./Oxford: Westview, 1998), 1. A good example of how these young Muslims took part in the war and what was to become of them on returning home, and one that fits what is now common knowledge about their involvement, is that of the Mujahed turned parliamentarian Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli of Yemen. For the complete story, see Katherine Roth, "Afghanistan and the Yemeni Jihad: A Surprising Visit to Post-war Aden—Part 1" (Institute of Current World Affairs, 1994).

[38]Usama Bin Laden had reportedly attracted 4,000 volunteers from Saudi Arabia alone: see Dilip Hiro, "The Cost of an Afghan 'Victory'," *The Nation*, February 15, 1999. The figure is claimed to have been 9,000 in Robert Fisk, "Talks with Osama Bin Laden: How an Afghan 'Freedom Fighter' Became 'America's Public Enemy Number One'," ibid., September 21, 1998. Bin Laden's exact whereabouts remain unknown and there have been speculations he might leave his current base in Afghanistan for Yemen. See "Yemen May Offer Sanctuary" and "Bin Laden 'To Move for Fear of U.S. Attack'," *South China Morning Post*, July 31, 1999; and "Taliban Claims U.S. to Hit at Bin Laden," *The Financial Times*, August 11, 1999.

This "holy" war was conducted under CIA's supervision, financed by mainly American and Saudi money, administered by Pakistani intelligence, fought with Chinese arms and training, and supported by Egyptian recruitment and arms-manufacturing efforts. According to Cooley, the first Chinese arms for the Afghanis were spotted as early as June 1979, six months before the Soviet invasion.[39] Some studies have suggested that Cairo became another main source by 1985; Tel Aviv, at least on one occasion, sold arms captured during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, while London, Istanbul, and Washington were among the main suppliers of arms for the Mujahedin in Afghanistan.[40]

When the Soviets withdrew into Tajikistan in February 1989, officials in Washington and elsewhere celebrated "Moscow's retreat as the first, crucial step in the reemergence of an independent Afghanistan ready to ally with the United States."[41] Instead, Operation Cyclone's victorious holy warriors became a thorn in the sides of their former mentors. No one realized that spawning Islamist militancy to defeat the Soviet Union was equivalent to sowing the seeds of a phenomenon that would spread throughout the Muslim world and beyond, threatening the interests of those who initially exploited the movement for their own purposes.

Islamic Revival in Post-Soviet Central Asia

Following the relaxation of repressive measures imposed upon Islam during the 1960s in China and the 1970s in the Soviet Union, Muslims in both states had the opportunity to contact the Muslim world that was experiencing a strong Islamic revival. They brought home a strong revivalist trend, which was put into perspective by the Islamic revolution of Iran and the Mujahedin's resistance to the Soviet aggression. After the Soviet Union

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[39]John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto, 1999), 72-73; Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 10-11; United States Institute of Peace, "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia," 23; and Hiro, "The Cost of an Afghan 'Victory'."

[40]Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 32; and Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*, 180-82.

[41]Hiro, "The Cost of an Afghan 'Victory'." For a discussion of the U.S. policy in the post-war Afghanistan, see Richard Mackenzie, "The United States and the Taliban," in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. William Maley (London: Hurst, 1998), 90-103.

disintegrated, Central Asian Muslims were able to take the Islamic cause into their own hands. Sufi tariqas had had an important role in the Islamization of Central Asia, playing an equally important role in the Islamic revival of the post-USSR region.[42] Important to note is that Islam's role in the region is different from that of political Islam or Islamic fundamentalism. Decades of communist rule and deprivation of unrestricted religious activity invited more radicalized views, some of which attracted adherents. One observer has noted "the main form of development of civil society has been the tremendous religious revival throughout the area. Despite the exaggerated fears about fundamentalism, Islam is not inherently destabilizing."[43] This brings about an illuminating contrast to the view of one analyst who, in the context of examining the post-Soviet expansion of the Muslim world, warns of assuming that "Islamic fundamentalism will ultimately sweep across Central Asia. Religion may in fact provide a framework of reference for relations with Islamic Middle Eastern states but not a great deal more."[44] Beijing's religious policy, in the view of another analyst, "has not been better than the Soviet repression in Central Asia, and the consequences of these policies have been very similar: both led to Islamic resurgence and rousing aspirations for political independence."[45] The unfolding situation in the region appears to be aiding the last view.

Islamist resurgence in Dagestan in 1999 coincided with militant Islamist activities in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, events of which continue to unfold. Dagestan's militant Islamists have called on Chechnya and all "the Mujahedin and defenders of the religion of God"[46]

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[42]In China, there is concern over the possibility of Sufi orders forming any political aspirations, an assumption about which little appears to be known. See Lilian Craig Harris, "Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World," *The China Quarterly*, no. 133 (March 1993): 126-27.

[43]United States Institute of Peace, "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia," 9.

[44]Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "New Frontiers: Iran, the GCC and the CCARS," in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1994), 110.

[45]Hafeez Malik, "New Relationships Between Central Asia and Pakistan's Regional Politics," in Malik, *Central Asia*, 256.

[46]"Shura Statements on the Web," *BBC Online Network*, August 10, 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>. Noteworthy is that since the beginning of the 1999 Russian-Chechen rivalry,

to recognize and support their "new" Islamic state. Fears that this development might lead to uniting Dagestan and Chechnya[47] were proven correct by reports of Dagestani Muslim forces being led by the former Chechen prime minister, Shamyl Basayev,[48] and the fact that thousands of Chechen Mujahedin had moved to Dagestan to join the jihad.[49] Russian deployment of forces into Makhachkala and Grozny has uncovered the extent to which Moscow has taken this Islamist sweep seriously.[50] Whether this Russian action will succeed in the long run or end up as a repeat of the humiliating withdrawal and heavy casualties of the previous war in Chechnya[51] is not yet clear.

Using the example of Jadidism in Uzbekistan, some observers have suggested that despite the Soviet repression of Sufi tariqas, the ideas of "brotherhood" have acquired a new direction in the revival of Islam; this idea is "not only an important factor of the political life of the Central Asian region, it also is a force capable of generating political dynamics in other

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there have been several unconfirmed reports that the Russians are working toward "eliminating" the Chechen presence on the worldwide web.

[47]"Islamists Declare Dagestan Independent," *BBC Online Network*, August 10, 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>. A Chechen-Dagestani anti-Russian alliance, or unity, can be problematic due to the Dagestanis' rejection of Chechen presence in their territory and the difference in ethnic composition between the two groups. See "Analysis: Jihad or Russian Conspiracy?" *BBC Online Network*, August 11, 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; and Rida Mohammad Lari, "Dagestan: The Land of Conflict," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 18, 1999.

[48]For a brief bibliography of Basayev, see "Basayev Seeks to Establish an Islamic State in the Caucasus," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 18, 1999. See also *BBC Online Network*, August 10, 1999, cited in notes 46 and 47 above; "Dagestan Rebels Call in Chechen Warlord," *The Sunday Telegraph*, August 11, 1999; and "Russia Faces Spreading Revolt: Dagestan Uprising Echoes Chechnya Rout," ibid., August 15, 1999.

[49]"Yeltsin Prepares Dagestan Offensive," *The Times*, August 13, 1999.

[50]"Russian Tanks Entered Chechnya Then Left after a Few Hours—Moscow Accuses Western Intelligence Services of Helping the Dagestanis," *ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 18, 1999.

[51]Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated that "Chechnya is Russian territory and we will strike at militants wherever they are." See "Russia Mounts Dagestan Offensive," *BBC Online Network*, August 13, 1999, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>. See comments on the Russian forces' insufficient training by military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer in *The Times*, August 13, 1999; and *The Financial Times*, August 16, 1999. For a background history of Russia's involvement in Chechnya and Dagestan, see Moshe Gammer, "Russian Strategies in the Conquest of Chechnya and Daghestan, 1825-1859," in Avtorkhanov et al., *The North Caucasus Barrier*, 45-61. On Russia's war in Chechnya, see Vanora Bennett, *Crying Wolf: The Return of War to Chechnya* (London: Picador, 1998), esp. 309-488.

regions of the former Soviet Union."[52] Tariqas and other forms of "unofficial" Islam were capable of preserving more fundamentalist forms of religion under Soviet and Chinese repression while the "official" Islam establishment was nonexistent, under total state control, or had to compromise with non-Islamic structures under the communists. Under these circumstances, natural was for the already-fundamentalist forms of Islam to become more radicalized.[53] Olcott concluded that "the official response to Islam in Central Asia seems almost designed to transform the general return to Muslim observance, which characterizes society's attempt to reclaim its lost identity into the sort of political Islam that the present leaders fear the fundamentalist revival will become."[54]

This is an important development in post-Soviet Central Asia where Muslim republics are able to share their common history, culture, and Islamic background. Such affinity is made easier within a region where policies are geared toward the development of economies and the use of massive natural resources (see below). Moreover, this affinity also means a sharing of ideologies and aspirations for a stronger Muslim influence. Muslims in Xinjiang face a similar situation: their background is closer to Muslims in Central Asia than to the Han Chinese—history and cultural similarities testify to this, and the land in which they live is as rich as the rest of Central Asia. Beijing's growing interest in the until-recently-ignored Xinjiang mirrors the value of the area's vast economic potential. The path to reaping economic benefits, however, is blocked by religio-ethnic tension and secessionist activities on the part of the Xinjiang Muslim Uyghurs.

Repercussions for China

Unlike other Marxist-Leninist governments that fell in 1989-91, the

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[52]Abduvakhitov, "The Jadid Movement," 75. For a further discussion of Jadidism in Central Asia, see M. Mobin Shorish, "Back to Jadidism: The Future of Education in Central Asia," *Islamic Studies* 33, no. 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 161-82.

[53]Religion has come under attack especially during China's Cultural Revolution, and there has been religious revival in the 1980s following the adoption of a relatively conciliatory policy toward religions. See A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West: Four Decades of Change* (Boulder, Colo./Oxford: Westview, 1993), 366.

[54]Olcott, "Islam and Fundamentalism," 37.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintained a monopoly on state power, although with much difficulty and many casualties. Other governments may have collapsed following the "death" of an ideology; Beijing, for its part, continues to face the internal problem of the rise of Uyghur nationalism challenging the Han "foreign occupation." Beijing is not unique in this respect: Moscow has had problems with its Muslims due to similar types of anti-religious policies.[55]

Beijing's economic interests in Central Asia are reflected in cross-border connections with Muslim Central Asia's governments. By the same token, links between Muslims in these countries and the Xinjiang Muslims —who share common borders, history, religion, and culture—are creating a "new awakening among the indigenous Muslims of Xinjiang ··· with regard to their Islamic, as well as their Pan-Turkic identity."[56] This religio-ethnic resurgence in Xinjiang is influenced by other factors such as the correlation between the impact of Pakistani and other Islamist activists and traders in Xinjiang, and the degree of resurgence in the area.[57] With cross-border "infiltration" come, as Warikoo explains, "drugs, arms, subversives, and external initiatives to resurrect the movement for an independent Eastern Turkestan, which contests China's sovereignty over Xinjiang."[58] Naturally, these activities feed local unrest in Xinjiang, such as the Baren uprising in 1990, which "developed into a mass protest with calls for a *jihad* to drive the Han unbelievers out of Xinjiang and establish the East Turkestan state."[59] The Chinese media then reported that "young Uyghur

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[55]See Hayit, *Documents*, 11.

[56]Kulbhushan Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," in *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane (London/New York: I.B. Tauris and the International Institute for Asian Studies, 1998), 269-82. Cross-border migrations started on a large scale since 1917 and reoccurred during China's 1950s Great Leap Forward and 1960s Cultural Revolution. See Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Zed, 1995), 221.

[57]Pakistani merchants have been visiting Kashgar since the opening of the Karakorum Highway in 1982. See Amar Grover, "Chinese Whispers," *Geographical Magazine* 71, no. 5 (May 19, 1999): 48.

[58]Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," 279. See also Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 126-60; and U.S. General Accounting Office, "Drug Control: U.S. Heroin Control Efforts in Southwest Asia and the Former Soviet Union" (1997), 24-29, 32-35, 38-42.

[59]Michael Dillon, "Xinjiang: Ethnicity, Separatism, and Control in Chinese Central Asia,"

militants had been receiving weapons and unarmed combat training, in an Islamic Holy War financed by contributions ··· from the local Muslim population,"[60] and that the Mujahedin of Afghanistan "had supplied the Baren rebels with guns."[61] In 1992, there was another uprising in Baren, which Beijing remains convinced was the work of a group, made of Uyghurs and Kyrgyz, which had acquired arms and training from the Afghan Mujahedin.[62] Pakistani officials confirmed to Rashid that "hundreds of Xinjiang Islamic militants, sponsored by Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, had been trained by Afghan [Mujahedin] and had taken part in battles against the Kabul regime."[63]

In the past, China's lack of success in dealing with its Muslim population caused problems, many of which continue today. In attempting to consolidate the party's communist ideology and the authority of the regime's rule over traditionally "turbulent" areas such as Xinjiang, Beijing underestimated the differences between Xinjiang's Muslims and the rest of the country's Muslim population. Compared with ethnic Chinese Muslims (the Huis), Xinjiang's Muslims (especially the Uyghurs) are much harder to control or pacify. On the one hand, the status quo suggests that Beijing's economic interests in Xinjiang are beginning to take shape, thus gaining prospects for long-term continuity. On the other hand, the lid has been taken off a pot of a strong-flavored religio-ethnic independence stew, which is bubbling toward violence. Beijing's success in dealing with the increasing unrest in Xinjiang is being put to the test and so is the Uyghurs' struggle for "regaining" a territory they claim as theirs. The essential question, therefore, is: Why is Xinjiang so important that Beijing *and* the Uyghurs will "fight" so strenuously to control it?

Durham East Asian Papers, no. 1 (1995): 21. Mackerras argues that among the reasons that led to the April 1990 Baren uprising was the unrest in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in February 1990. See Mackerras, *China's Minorities*, 175.

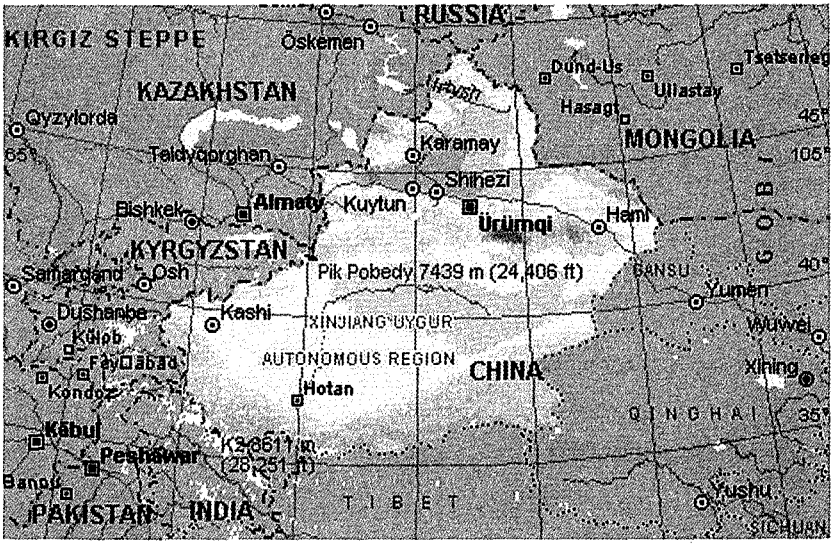
[60]Dillon, "Xinjiang," 21.

[61]Raphael Israeli, "A New Wave of Muslim Revivalism in China," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 17, no. 2 (1997): 273-74. The same point is made in Dillon, "Xinjiang," 21.

[62]Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, 222.

[63]Ibid.

Map 1



Xinjiang

Xinjiang: Treasures of the Wild West

This section seeks to examine Xinjiang's strategic and economic importance by highlighting the region's transport, communications, agriculture, industry, energy, minerals, nuclear power prospects, and foreign investment opportunities. This discussion does not aim to advocate or oppose the Uyghurs' claim for an independent state but rather seeks to analyze the factors that make this claim a problem for Beijing.

The Land and the People

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (see map 1) is China's single largest administrative unit (for the number of autonomous areas in China, see table 1).[64] Occupying China's northwestern border, the region

[64] Distinction must be made between autonomous regions and autonomous areas where the first refers to provinces while the second refers to prefectures, municipalities, and counties. See Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," 270; and Barnett, *China's Far West*, 364-65, 378-80.

Table 1
Autonomous Areas in China, 1990

Province/Autonomous Region	Province	Prefecture	Municipality	County
Gansu	—	2	1	19
Guangdong	—	—	—	3
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	1	8	12	76
Guizhou	—	3	3	43
Hebei	—	—	—	6
Heilongjiang	—	—	—	1
Henan	—	—	—	7
Hubei	—	1	2	8
Hunan	—	1	1	14
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	1	8	17	71
Jilin	—	1	5	6
Liaoning	—	—	—	10
Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	1	2	4	19
Qinghai	—	6	2	33
Sichuan	—	3	1	54
Tibetan Autonomous Region	1	6	2	76
Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region	1	13	16	71
Yunnan	—	8	5	74
Zhejiang	—	—	—	1
Total	**5**	**62**	**71**	**589**

Source: Adapted from Songqiao Zhao, *Geography of China: Environment, Resources, Population and Development* (New York/Toronto: John Wiley, 1994), 119. All place names listed are provinces except where otherwise indicated.

has an area of 1,646,000 square kilometers, almost one-sixth of China's territory. Xinjiang stretches 2,000 kilometers from east to west and 1,650 kilometers from north to south. Its capital, Urumqi, is some 3,000 kilometers away from Beijing. On the region's external borders are Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Internally, it shares borders with Gansu, Qinghai, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region.[65] Xinjiang consists of three major subregions: Zhungar Basin (north), Tarim Basin (south), and Turfan De-

[65]For a detailed description of Xinjiang, see Barnett, *China's Far West*, 343-407. See also Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 11-15; and Dillon, "Xinjiang," 1.

pression (east).[66] China's tallest mountain, Tianshan, is situated between the Zhungar and Tarim basins, the latter containing the Taklimakan, the world's second largest desert after the Sahara. Xinjiang's climate is dry continental with great extremes of winter and summer temperatures; rainfall is scant and seldom exceeds 30 centimeters annually.[67] Lattimore describes Xinjiang as "an inner backbone range of desert mountains, with peaks rising to about 24,000 feet; an outer range of desert mountains, and an irrigated oasis at each point where a stream from the inner mountains issues by a difficult gorge through the barrier-range ··· water of the streams runs to waste, vanishing in the desert or ending in reed-beds, meres, or lakes, in the Taklimakan desert."[68]

Xinjiang exhibits a sharp contrast of rich land containing an estimated one-seventh of China's oil and one-fourth of its gas reserves, while the per capita income remains around US$157.00.[69] The region's underdevelopment is attributed, in part, to varied topography and harsh climate.[70] In addition to the Han Chinese settlers, Xinjiang is inhabited by numerous indigenous peoples mainly of Turkic origin who are predominantly Muslims. While there are currently thirteen officially recognized minorities, at least eighteen can be identified.[71] These include nine Muslim minorities: Dongxiangs, Huis, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Salars, Tajiks, Tatars, Uyghurs, and Uzbeks;[72] and nine non-Muslim ones: Daurs, Hans, Manchus (including Salars

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[66]These subdivisions are referred to as *Beijiang* (North Xinjiang), *Nanjiang* (South Xinjiang), and *Dongjiang* (East Xinjiang).

[67]For a discussion of the physiography of Xinjiang, see Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 17-20; and Songqiao Zhao, *Geography of China: Environment, Resources, Population and Development* (New York/Toronto: John Wiley, 1994), 274-96.

[68]Lattimore, *Studies in Frontier History*, 186.

[69]"Crackdown in Western China," *Time Daily*, April 28, 1997.

[70]Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 13.

[71]Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 21. Much of the literature agrees on the complexity of Xinjiang's multiethnic composition but appears to be in disagreement on how many ethnic groups coexist there today. The number of minority nationalities in Xinjiang is a source of ongoing debate; some sources set the number at forty-seven: see Zhao, *Geography of China*, 288. Of those, up to ten Muslim minority nationalities inhabit Xinjiang. See Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*, 289; and Qureshi, *World Muslim Minorities*, 82.

[72]The Uyghurs include other subgroupings such as the Abdals, Dolans, Eastern Uyghurs, Kashgarliks, Keriyaliks, Kuldjaliks (also known as Taranchis), and Lopliks. Benson and

and Solons), Mongols, Russians, Xibes (Sibos), Tibetans, Tuvans, and Zhuangs.[73] For the ethnic composition of Xinjiang's population, see table 2.

Transport and Communications

In the past, the Silk Road trade link, which passes through Xinjiang, increased the region's importance to imperial China. This remains the case today as Beijing strives to modernize the area described as being in many ways "like the American Wild West of a century ago."[74] During the first half of 1999, some 1.74 million tons of goods passed through the Alataw Railway Station in Xinjiang, an open port linking China with Central and Western Asia as part of the new Eurasian Continental Bridge which begins at Urumqi's West Station and connects, via Alataw Pass, with Kazakhstan railway (since 1990).[75] In addition to the rail lines of Korla-Kashgar (operable since December 1999), Turfan-Kashgar (opened in May 1999),[76] Urumqi-Lanzhou (double-tracked in 1995), and Urumqi-Karamay (the construction of which was funded by Beijing), the World Bank partially funded the construction of the Turfan-Urumqi highway and the Urumqi-Kuytun expressway.[77] Similar improvements are reportedly taking place in

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Svanberg argue that under the Qing, the name "Uyghur" disappeared altogether and that the Uyghurs identified themselves by referring to their religion or native towns, thus names such as Kashgarlik (indicating nativity of Kashgar city) were used. For a discussion of Uyghur identity, see Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 16-21; Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brac College, 1998) 160-61; and Dru C. Gladney, "Nations Transgressing Nation-States: Constructing Dungan, [Uyghur] and Kazakh Identities Across China, Central Asia and Turkey," in Atabaki and O'Kane, *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, 301-23.

[73]For a discussion of Xinjiang's demographic structure, see Barnett, *China's Far West*, 344-48; Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, 29-34; and Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 20-24.

[74]"The Perils of China's Wild West," *World Press Review*, August 1994.

[75]"Xinjiang Cargo Transport Increases," Xinhua, July 21, 1999; Paul S. Triolo and Christopher Hegadorn, "China's Wild West," *The China Business Review* 23, no. 2 (March 13, 1996); and China Economic Information Centre, "Cargo Transport Up at China's Northern Border," July 22, 1999.

[76]Linking nine former Silk Road posts/cities, the solar-energy-operated Kashgar-Turfan rail link was opened in May 1999 at a cost of six billion *yuan* (the Chinese official currency) and is expected to end the isolation of the region, which produces 70 percent of Xinjiang's cotton and is reportedly boasting some 20 billion tons of oil and gas reserves. See "Wild West Rail Link to Open Up Trade, Tourism to Muslim Outposts," *South China Morning Post*, May 15, 1999.

[77]"China Silk Road City Seeks Old Glory," Reuters, August 19, 1999; Triolo and Hegadorn,

Table 2
Ethnic Composition of Xinjiang's Population, 1990

Ethnic Group	Population	Muslim	Non-Muslim
Daur	5,398		✓
Dongxiang	56,464	✓	
Han	5,695,626		✓
Hui	681,527	✓	
Kazakh	1,106,989	✓	
Kyrgyz	139,781	✓	
Manchu	18,403		✓
Mongol	137,740		✓
Russian	8,082		✓
Salar	3,660	✓	
Tajik	33,512	✓	
Tatar	4,821	✓	
Tibetan	2,158		✓
Tuvan	ca.3,000		✓
Uyghur	7,194,675	✓	
Uzbek	14,456	✓	
Xibe	33,082		✓
Total	**15,160,000**	**9,200,000**	**1,000,000**

Sources: Adapted from Thomas Hoppe, "Die Chinesiche Position in Ost-Turkestan/Xinjiang," *China aktuell*, June 1992, 360, as cited in Michael Dillon, "Xinjiang: Ethnicity, Separatism, and Control in Chinese Central Asia," *Durham East Asian Papers*, no. 1(1995): 48; and Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 253, citing Zhou Chongjing et al., eds., *Zhongguo renkou: Xinjiang fence* (Chinese population: Xinjiang) (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1990), 283; and State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian* (Statistical yearbook of Chinese population) (Beijing: 1990), 78-80.

air links to Xinjiang, the wind and solar energy sectors, and telecommunications infrastructure.[78] A current plan to invest 17.2 billion *yuan* in highway construction to expand the existing 32,701 kilometers of highway and over 50,000 kilometers of rural roads reveals Beijing's sizeable interest in improving this sector of Xinjiang where transport links connect China, via

"China's Wild West"; Barnett, *China's Far West*, 387-91; and "Xinjiang's First Expressway Under Construction," *China Transportation News*, July 24, 1999.

[78]Triolo and Hegadorn, "China's Wild West"; Dillon, "Xinjiang," 11; and "Siemens and Xinjiang Telecom Building ATM Network," *Asiainfo—Daily China News*, July 28, 1999.

the Karakorum highway, with Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia.[79]

Agriculture and Industry

Xinjiang's traditional economy was dominated by pasture, and the region remains China's leading pastoral zone that, although underdeveloped in forestry, is famous for animal husbandry with major livestock including sheep, goats, cattle, and horses[80] (including some 3.7 million cattle of which 1.6 million are cows of breeding age[81]). Xinjiang has an operable irrigation system yet experiences many drought problems.[82] The arable land is considered ideal for growing barley, corn, cotton, flax, fruits, oats, rice, sorghum, sugar beets, tomatoes, vegetables, and wheat. In the year 2000, the region's cotton production is estimated to have reached 1.5 million tons, half of China's total supply. Foreign investment is encouraged in fourteen sugar refineries producing over 300,000 tons annually, mostly for export. Significant income is generated from wool, leather, textile, petrochemicals, and food processing industries to which foreign investment is directed.[83] Almost all economic activities in Xinjiang are under the control of the Shihezi-based Production-Construction Corps (*Shengchan jianshe bingtuan*).

Founded in 1954, the Corps controls 172 giant firms, 344 industrial enterprises, 500 schools, 200 hospitals, and 46 research institutes; the Corps has its own police and courts; and nearly half of Xinjiang's prisons and

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[79]"Xinjiang to Invest 17.2 [Billion] *Yuan* in Highway Construction," *Asia Pulse*, July 9, 1999; and "Freight Forwarders Concerned over Delay in Opening of Karakorum Highway," *Business Recorder*, July 27, 1999.

[80]For further details on Xinjiang's agricultural prospects, see Zhao, *Geography of China*, 282-87.

[81]See Dillon, "Xinjiang," 8, where he sets the number at 35 million livestock, mainly sheep. Advanced embryo transplant techniques are now used in Xinjiang to improve its livestock. See "Embryo Transplants Popularized in Xinjiang," Xinhua, July 22, 1999.

[82]Dillon, "Xinjiang," 8.

[83]These include tomato paste for export to Europe and the United States, juice and wine factories, fruit industries, corn oil, and ethyl alcohol. See Triolo and Hegadorn, "China's Wild West"; Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia*, 152-81; and Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 13-15.

reform-through-labor camps (*laogai ying*) fall under its jurisdiction.[84] Recently renamed the China Xinjiang Construction Company, the Corps is staffed by a workforce of 2.4 million and its welfare system spends some 800 million *yuan* to support 400,000 pensioners. Holding Xinjiang's economic life and many of China's hopes of joining the World Trade Organization, Xinjiang's gross domestic product was 16.35 billion *yuan* in 1998; the region farms 7.4 million hectares and is China's single largest cotton producer.[85] Heavy industries in the Tianshan Northern Piedmont Plain Industrial Belt account for some 70 percent of Xinjiang's total industrial output value, while nearly 20 percent comes from industrial facilities in the Central Hexi Corridor Industrial Belt.[86]

Energy, Minerals, and Nuclear Power

The three basins of Xinjiang—Tarim, Zhungar, and Turfan—hold most of the region's petroleum potential. The 650,000 square kilometer Tarim Basin is thought to contain nearly 11 billion tons of crude oil reserves and approximately 240 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves, in addition to a sizeable reserve of gas condensate. These are the bases of current plans for the construction of highway roads, pipelines, refineries, and fertilizer plants to facilitate transporting and manufacturing the black gold products of the basin's oil fields and wells.[87] While the Zhungar Basin is home to China's oldest oil-producing town, Karamay, substantial oil and gas discoveries were recently made in the Turfan Depression.[88] China's 123 square kilometer Shixi oil field in the Zhungar Basin has proven oil

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[84]The Corps started as an offshoot of the Chinese military to farm Xinjiang and defend China's frontiers with Central Asia. For a discussion of the early years of the Corps and its role in Xinjiang's economic development, see Barnett, *China's Far West*, 386-87, 398-402. On its role within the punitive system, see James D. Seymour and Richard Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts: Prisons and Labor Reform Camps in China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 45-81; and James Hardings, "Xinjiang: Reaching Break-even Point," *The Financial Times*, August 3, 1999.

[85]See "The New Pioneers," *The Economist*, June 19, 1999, 30; Hardings, "Xinjiang: Reaching Break-even Point"; and "Xinjiang Corporation: A Stirring Giant," *The Financial Times*, August 3, 1999.

[86]Zhao, *Geography of China*, 281-82.

[87]Triolo and Hegadorn, "China's Wild West."

[88]Ibid.

reserves of about 120 million tons and gas reserves of close to 30 billion cubic meters; the field has gone into full operation and has reached a production capacity of over a million tons of oil.[89] This increases China's oil profits (recorded for the China National Petroleum Corporation) at a net profit of US$134.21 million from a 70 percent share in the output of Leng Jiapu and 54 percent of that of the Karamay oil fields.[90] China's tenth five-year plan (2001-5) highlights concentrated efforts to seek more oil and gas reserves in all three basins.[91]

Current plans to restructure the energy industry reflect the importance of Xinjiang's resources in this sector. These plans comprise the various sectors of the power industry and aim to optimize thermal power projects, develop hydropower facilities, build nuclear power plants, and generate electricity from new energy resources. In the coal industry, the goal is to increase the dressed coal production and to employ clean coal technology to facilitate the coal gas industry. In the petroleum and natural gas sector, the aim is to expand the output of oil and gas in the west and to encourage foreign investment. The liquefied natural gas (LNG) part of the plan targets developing overseas oil and natural gas resources and importing LNG as a supplement.[92] The importance of these targets is reflected in the construction of pipelines such as the 2,900-kilometer pipeline between Kazakhstan and Xinjiang.[93]

Beryl (a source of beryllium, an alloy used in atomic reactors), coal, cooper, gold, granite, gypsum, iron, jade, lead, marble, molybdenum (a lead ore), mercury, nickel, salt, soda, spodumene (lithium aluminium silicate, used in thermonuclear explosives), tin, uranium, tungsten, and zinc

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[89]"China's Largest Desert Oil Field Begins Operation," Xinhua, May 20, 1999.

[90]"Gains from Oil Field Help Fire CNPC Profits to $134m," *South China Morning Post*, May 13, 1999.

[91]For a detailed survey of China's oil and gas industry, see "Profile—China's Oil Industry (August 1999)," *Asia Pulse*, August 12, 1999.

[92]"China to Restructure Energy Industry in Short Term," ibid., July 9, 1999.

[93]"China-Kazakhstan Pipeline to Be Built Early in 21st Century," *BBC Monitoring Service*, July 12, 1999; and Richard R. Dion, "Long View of Caspian Oil Export Options Tilts to Kazakhstan-China," *The Oil and Gas Journal* 97, no. 23 (June 19, 1999): 21. On Kazakhstan's oil potentials, see "Hoping for a Gusher" and "When the Oil Runs Out," *The Economist*, August 28, 1999, 24.

are among Xinjiang's many wealthy mineral resources.[94] Other minerals, to which the right to mining is restricted due to scarcity, include decorative stones, vermiculite, asbestos, andalusite, Iceland spar, montmorillonite, bentone, sylvite, kali saltpetre, cubic nitre, gem, crystal, and magnesite.[95] China's known nuclear potential increases Xinjiang's importance given its resources of radioactive minerals: Beijing's announcement that "it had mastered the technology to build a neutron bomb" adds to the value of Xinjiang where Lop Nor has been the sight of atomic testing since October 16, 1964.[96]

Foreign Investment

Beijing is demonstrating a considerable interest in developing Xinjiang's resources to reap both short- and long-term benefits. The ongoing expansion in the communications sector, for example, is expected to considerably reduce the transportation costs of coal, raw materials, and chemical fertilizers into the region, as well as outgoing agricultural products such as cotton, fruit, and vegetables. In addition, Xinjiang's strategic location makes the region a focal point for China's links with Central Asia —albeit while also bringing dangers of drug trafficking and enhancing contacts between Islamist separatists in China and elsewhere.[97] These development plans are also expected to boost the tourism industry in the

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[94]Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, 20-22; "Stone Materials Beijing Highlight in Xinjiang," *Asiainfo —Daily China News*, July 14, 1999; China Economic Information Centre, "Resources: Jan-May Gold Output by Region," July 14, 1999; "China's Gold Output Up in June," *Asia Pulse*, August 5, 1999; and Zhao, *Geography of China*, 280-81.

[95]China Economic Information Centre, "Xinjiang Protects 13 Kinds of Minerals," July 23, 1999.

[96]"Chronology of China's Nuclear Weapons Technology Development," Agence France-Presse, July 15, 1999. China's latest nuclear test was conducted in Xinjiang according to: "China Tests New Ballistic Missile?" *Hindustan Times*, August 10, 1999; "AFP: PRC Missile Said Capable of Carrying Nuclear Warhead," *The Daily Telegraph*, August 2, 1999; and "China Tests New Long-Range Missile," Kyodo, August 2, 1999.

[97]Neighboring countries have growing concerns over the escalation of drug trafficking and arms smuggling, much of which seem to enter China via Xinjiang. See *BBC Monitoring Service*, "Xinjiang Uncovers Ammunition Trafficking Case in Ethnic Area," July 16, 1999 and "Death Sentences, Executions in China," July 17, 1999. Analysts have reasons to think that religious books and cassettes are smuggled across China's border from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. See "In the Northwest, Islam Raises its Head," *Inter Press Service*, May 14, 1996; and Agence France-Presse, April 22, 1996.

region, thus bringing much-needed hard currency to the population of this largely underdeveloped region. The impact of annual floods in China's eastern provinces, where rapid urbanization is taking place, increases Xinjiang's importance as an obvious alternative given the area's considerable agricultural potential. This manifold importance is reflected in the size of investments in, for example, the Tarim Basin to which foreign firms have been drawn, especially since 1992. Similar to the foreign investment policy Beijing maintains in the coastal provinces, Xinjiang's pillar industries are prioritized for foreign investment especially in the sectors of agriculture, energy, telecommunications, textiles, food, and building materials industries. In charge of tax relief and other benefits for foreign investors in the region are the Urumqi Economic and Technological Development Zone and the Urumqi High-Tech Industrial Development Zone.[98] A good example of the efforts undertaken to attract foreign investment to Xinjiang is a key trade fair held in Urumqi in 1995 where projects in search of foreign investment included food processing ventures, textile factories, petrochemical factories, refinery-related industries, and power plants. The tourism industry, meanwhile, is also seeking foreign investment to develop tourist facilities in Xinjiang, a region that is known to have vast unexplored areas.[99]

These features of Xinjiang's wealth of natural resources and multiple economic prospects explain Beijing's keen interest in developing the area. A major hindrance to plans to develop Xinjiang's infrastructure in order to attract foreign businessmen and tourists is the Uyghurs' uncertainty over who will be the main beneficiaries of any such plans: them or the Han Chinese? The history of bloodshed between the Uyghurs and the Chinese dominates the atmosphere and feeds the cycle of violence in which both Beijing and the Uyghur nationalists remain locked. Nationalist and separatist Uyghur aspirations *and* the influence of Islamist militancy set this

[98]Triolo and Hegadorn, "'China's Wild West."

[99]Ibid. For a further discussion of China's economic policies in Xinjiang, see Gaye Christoffersen, "Xinjiang and the Great Islamic Circle: The Impact of Transnational Forces on Chinese Regional Economic Planning," *The China Quarterly*, no. 133 (March 1993): 130-51.

"cycle" in motion.

Xinjiang: Separatism and Islamist Militancy

The above discussion has highlighted Xinjiang's natural resources and strategic importance for Beijing, which is facing difficulties utilizing such wealth amidst religio-historical claims on which the Muslim Uyghurs base their struggle for autonomy and independence. This "shared" importance is one of the reasons for the ongoing state oppression—a clampdown to which the separatists are responding with increased violence.

Beijing's "Strike-Hard" Policy

Central Asia has been described as "a new centre of gravity," and Xinjiang "occupies a major part of the focal area within which lies this new centre of gravity."[100] This statement is of particular relevance to the ongoing Islamist, Russian, and Chinese competition for supremacy in the region. In effect, this places Beijing between a rock and a hard place since China has to contend with the instability of countries beyond its western borders, while at the same time being threatened by the destabilizing effects of the Xinjiang Muslim Uyghurs' refusal to submit to Beijing's rule. There is more to the Xinjiang problem than China's claims of sovereignty and the Uyghurs' demands to "regain" territorial ownership. The region's natural resources (including oil and minerals) and economic importance (comprising agricultural, communications, trade, and tourism prospects) are among Beijing's reasons for responding to the Xinjiang separatist activities with a "strike-hard" policy.[101] In general terms, this policy is designed to

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[100]Both quotations are from Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia*, 3.

[101]Numerous reports uncover the size of China's crackdown on separatists in Xinjiang. See "Police Lift Campaign Against Terrorists," *South China Morning Post*, August 30, 1999; "Beijing Abuses Muslim Rights," *The Australian*, April 21, 1999; "Beijing Sends in 1,000 Extra Troops in 'War against Separatists'" and "Muslim Separatists are Put to Death by China," *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia), February 6, 1999; "Muslim Separatists to Be Executed, Says Amnesty," *South China Morning Post*, January 17, 1999; and "Chinese City's Crackdown on Separatists Coincides with Muslim Festivities," *BBC Monitoring Service*, January 8, 1999.

control the religious practices of the millions of followers of China's five officially recognized religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism.[102] Beijing is experiencing difficulties in regulating the religious practices of China's multifaith population. The position Beijing maintains in this regard, as stated by its delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Duan Qiming, is that "No one, no association, and no religion can be allowed to violate national law, infringe upon the interests of people, forment splits among its nationalities, and sabotage national unity."[103] Xinjiang's Muslims appear to suffer most from Beijing's restrictive religious policies.

The plight of Xinjiang's Muslims is no longer a secret. The 1999 U.S. Department of State's report on religious freedom accentuates their predicament. According to the report, Beijing's own figures show that there are 18 million Muslims, 30,000 mosques, and over 40,000 imams in China. Muslims are generally permitted to visit Mecca for hajj; some 45,000 pilgrims made the journey in recent years, of whom 5,000 went in 1998. In Xinjiang, notwithstanding, Muslim religious activity, youth religious education, and the construction of mosques are largely restricted.[104] Religious practices in Xinjiang are under tight state control, a policy that is aimed particularly at Muslims suspected of separatist activities. On April 17, 1998, for example, the *Urumqi Evening News* reported that 56 mosques in Egarqi had been searched following reports that young Muslim Uyghurs who were trained abroad in Muslim religious schools were using mosques for perceived "illegal" gatherings.[105] Beijing often suspected that religious

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[102]The 1997 official figures show over 180 million religious adherents and about 3,000 religious organizations. See U.S. Department of State, "Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: China" (September 9, 1999).

[103]Quoted by Xinhua News Agency, March 29, 1996 and April 1, 1996. Historically, many faiths coexisted in China; Zoroastraism, Mithraism, and Nestorianism, among others, were brought into China from Iran. See A.H.H. Abidi, *China, Iran and the Persian Gulf* (New Delhi: Radiant, 1982), 11-12.

[104]Beijing perceives religion as a potential threat to national unity: mosques and Quranic schools are closed down since they "are seen as a potential focus point for discontent." See Amnesty International, "Religious Repression in China," ASA 17/69/96 (July 1996): 23; and U.S. Department of State, "Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: China."

[105]U.S. Department of State, "Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: China."

activities are carried out with external financial support, which leads central authorities to believe that the growing numbers of mosques and Quranic schools are "often opened with funds received from abroad" and are being used to facilitate the "infiltration of foreign hostile forces."[106] Such claims, nonetheless, do not seem to have been substantiated in the recent case of the Falun Gong group whose mass demonstrations reflect the current rise in sectarian beliefs in China that seek to fill "the void left by the decline of socialism."[107] Beijing claims success in the national campaign against the group while officially admitting that the regime's work in Xinjiang "has been seriously affected by Falun Gong."[108] The Islamic Association of China, the Beijing Parish, and the China Taoist Association have all considered the campaign necessary.[109]

Rich oil, gas, and mineral resources draw the Chinese to Xinjiang's vast unattractive desert. Here, suppression of Muslims is only the tip of the iceberg: Beijing has so far been able to conceal many other troubles, except for "occasional guarded reports in official Chinese newspapers."[110] These troubles in Xinjiang are causing a great deal of concern for Beijing, which maintains a considerable military presence in the region as part of its ongoing crackdown on Islamists.[111] Beijing's mistreatment of Muslims in

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[106]Amnesty International, "Religious Repression in China," 25, 26.

[107]"The Real Enemy Within," *The Economist*, May 1, 1999, 25-26. China's concerns with the decline of socialism appear to cause such moves as blaming the responsibility on foreign press. See "China Accuses BBC of Launching 'Invasion'," *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, August 5, 1999. See also "China: Mystics Protest at Police Crackdown," *The Financial Times*, July 22, 1999; "Chinese Official Says Falun Gong Most Serious Incident Since Tiananmen," *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, July 26, 1999; and "5,000 Arrested in China Cult Raids," *The Times*, July 26, 1999.

[108]"Xinjiang Area Said Seriously Affected by Falun Gong Fallacies," *BBC Monitoring Service*, August 9, 1999.

[109]"China Religious Leaders Support Falun Gong Ban," *BBC Monitoring Service*, August 2, 1999.

[110]"Glimpse of a Troubled Land," *The Economist*, May 1, 1999, 25.

[111]Ibid.; "Xinjiang Separatists Jailed," *The Financial Times*, August 17, 1999; "Magazine Says Separatists Killed After China Military Base Attack," *BBC Monitoring Service*, August 3, 1999; "Huge China Army Parade Held," Associated Press, July 14, 1999; "China Puts to Death 16 After Wave of Separatist Violence," *The Guardian*, January 13, 1998; "China-Xinjiang: 'Great Wall of Steel' to Quell Ethnic Unrest," *Inter Press Service*, March 11, 1997; "Resurgence of Separatism in West Puts Beijing on Guard," ibid., June 6, 1996; and "China Tightens Control over Moslems in Xinjiang," Agence France-Presse, April 22, 1996.

Xinjiang exhibits an incapability reflected in its excessive use of force against Muslims suspected of subversion.[112] Listing some of the targets, a circular from the Xinjiang People's Armed Police highlights: "Increase control on frontier crossings, put more soldiers on duty, strengthen inspection of goods crossing the border, ··· and seriously stop weapons, splittists, and reactionary pamphlets entering China."[113] Indeed, Beijing's fears of separatism and Islamist militancy are not altogether exaggerated since the Uyghurs are not the only advocates of such notion. A book by Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, proposes dividing China into seven blocs including Inner Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.[114]

Beijing seeks to stop the demands of Xinjiang's Muslim Uyghurs for political autonomy and respect for their cultural identity and religious freedom. A study of human rights monitoring reports displays the extent to which Beijing is determined to end opposition to the party's authority in Xinjiang.[115] Thousands have reportedly suffered imprisonment after summary unfair trials, torture, enforced disappearances, extra-judicial executions, random arrests, lengthy pre-trial detention, and public executions.[116]

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[112]"Muslim Rebels 'Raided Xinjiang Arms Depot and Police Station'," *South China Morning Post*, August 16, 1999; and "Separatists, Police Clash in China's Xinjiang," Kyodo, February 17, 1999.

[113]"China Sets Up Quick Reaction Forces to Counter Xinjiang Terrorists," Agence France-Presse, May 29, 1996. On the role of the People's Armed Police, see Seymour and Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts*, 81-84.

[114]This highly controversial book, published on May 19, 1999, has attracted wide criticism in China. See, for instance, "Lee's Splittism Theory Widely Condemned," *China Daily*, August 9, 1999; "Ebb and Flow," *Asiaweek*, July 30, 1999, 17; and "ASEAN Meeting: China Scores Points on Taiwan," *The Financial Times*, July 26, 1999.

[115]There is a growing body of literature on China's systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of its Muslims in Xinjiang. Two of the most relevant and up-to-date sources are: Amnesty International, "Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang [Uyghur] Autonomous Region," ASA 17/18/99 (April 21, 1999) and Seymour and Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old Ghosts*, esp. 44-127.

[116]See Amnesty International, "Gross Violations of Human Rights," 45. The report records 210 death sentences and 190 executions—since January 1997, mostly of Uyghurs convicted of subversive activities after unfair summary trials. Chinese Criminal Procedure Law is considered short of international standards for fair trial. See Amnesty International, "Law Reform and Human Rights," ASA 17/14/97 (March 1997). See also "China Torture Ordeal Claim," *The Independent*, April 24, 1999; "Chinese 'Brutality' Used to Crush Ethnic Dissent," *The Guardian*, April 21, 1999; and "Uyghur Youths Arrested During Drunken Brawl Clash After Chants for Independence," *South China Morning Post*, February 18, 1999.

Since 1980, there have been numerous reports that disturbances in Aksu and Kashgar have been suppressed by military troops. This was indeed the case after the 1990 Baren incident[117] where calls for a jihad against the Chinese were made, for which "the insurgents had acquired small arms and bombs and ··· were being trained and armed by Islamic groups in Afghanistan."[118] Muslim uprisings in Hotan, in 1995, and Kulja, two years later, were followed by arbitrary detention and torture of many Muslims, mostly Uyghurs, some of whom were forcibly returned from Kazakhstan.[119] Attempting to publicize such mistreatment attracts similarly harsh punishments.[120] Under the restrictive measures of Chinese legislation that loosely defines the concept of "state secrets," many people—including prisoners of conscience—have been detained on charges related to "leaking state secrets" while their sentences were handed down "for divulging alleged state secrets to the foreign media [while these 'secrets'] were publicized in the official press."[121]

In October 1998, China, a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, signed the International Covenant

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[117]Amnesty International, "No One is Safe: Political Repression and Abuse of Power in the 1990s," ASA 17/01/96 (March 1996): 49-53. For details of the April 1990 Baren incident, see Amnesty International, "Secret Violence: Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang," ASA 17/50/92 (November 13, 1992): 3-6. The latest figures show that out of sixty-four death sentences in Xinjiang, sixty-two were carried out; twenty-five of those executed were Uyghur political prisoners. See Amnesty International, "The Death Penalty Worldwide: Developments in 1998," ACT 50/04/99 (May 1999): 28.

[118]Michael Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict on China's Northwestern Borders: The Background to the Violence in Xinjiang," *Boundary and Security Bulletin* 5, no. 1 (1997): 83.

[119]Many are classified as "prisoners of conscience" by international human rights organizations. See Amnesty International, "Appeal for Uyghurs Arbitrarily Detained," ASA 17/02/99 (January 1999): 4; "Gross Violations of Human Rights," 13-17; and "Summary of Amnesty International Concerns," ASA 17/06/98 (February 1998): 3-5. It has been reported that four men and four children, all Muslim Uyghurs from Xinjiang, were forcibly returned to China from Kazakhstan in late August or early September 1998; the children were released after eighteen days, but the men were believed to remain in detention in Kashgar as of January 1999. See U.S. Department of State, "Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: China."

[120]"Prominent [Uyghur] Businesswoman Detained," *M2 Presswire*, August 17, 1999.

[121]Amnesty International, "State Secrets—A Pretext for Repression," ASA 17/42/96 (May 1996): 2.

on Civil and Political Rights.[122] Signing the treaty, which prohibits torture or cruel, degrading, and inhumane treatment or punishment and provides for self-determination, freedom of religion, thought and expression, and movement, constitutes momentous challenges for Beijing whose current policy in Xinjiang contravenes all such commitments. As Amnesty International commented: "At the very time that the Chinese government is seeking praise for its signature of major human rights treaties, it is high time that it honored these commitments by taking immediate action to remedy the appalling human rights situation in the XUAR [the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region]."[123]

The views of human rights defenders do not, nevertheless, constitute the same concerns held by Western governments whose interests in the "rising star" of China force them into compromising situations. In the wake of the European Union's human rights dialogue with China on February 8, 1999, China's vice-minister of foreign affairs, Wang Guangya, announced that "any country which wishes to resume the Geneva scenario would certainly do damage not only to the bilateral relations but also to the possibility of continuing the human rights dialogue."[124] This firm stance by Beijing dictates that a soft approach be maintained by the West, which most European Union governments and the United States have adopted.[125] The position of London, for example, reflects the conviction that, in Blair's words, "persuasion and dialogue achieve more than confrontation."[126] Positions

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[122]"Pledging 'Firm Resolve,' China Signs Human Rights Pact," *International Herald Tribune*, October 6, 1998.

[123]Amnesty International, "Gross Human Rights Violations in the Xinjiang [Uyghur] Autonomous Region Must Stop," ASA 17/25/99 (April 20, 1999).

[124]Quoted in Amnesty International, "Open Letter from Amnesty International to EU Governments on the Eve of EU-China Human Rights Dialogue," TG ASA 17/99.01 (February 4, 1999): 2-3. China, nevertheless, calls for help against terrorism in trouble-ridden Xinjiang. See "Plea for Global Pact on Terror," *South China Morning Post*, October 11, 1998.

[125]"Blair Quietly Brings Up Rights as UK and China Seek Smoother Course," *International Herald Tribune*, October 7, 1998; "Human Rights: Robin Cook's Tour of the Global Badlands," *The Guardian*, April 22, 1998; and "Chinese Rights and Wrongs," ibid., June 23, 1998.

[126]"A British-Chinese Partnership," *People's Daily* (Beijing) October 6, 1998. Noteworthy is that the World Bank has lent China approximately US$23 billion of which US$90 million went to Xinjiang's Production-Construction Corps, which runs most of Xinjiang's prisons and reform-through-labor camps. See Seymour and Anderson, *New Ghosts, Old*

such as these may harbor the West's economic interests in China, but do not necessarily represent concerns of the Muslim world where sentiments are strongly against oppression of Muslims in the non-Muslim world. The West, in Halliday's opinion,

> has to evolve a two-sided, balanced policy towards the issues encapsulated in the term "Islam." On the one hand, there needs to be a greater awareness of and hostility to the racism and general ethnic-religious prejudice that is directed against ··· Islamic countries···. Not least must come the recognition of how often Western Europe has permitted and indulged the oppression of Islamic peoples, whether in Palestine or in Bosnia.[127]

Sustaining good relations with China could be rewarding in economic terms, even if this requires a "soft" approach to such "thorny" issues as human rights practices or suppression of Muslims. What is in Xinjiang's uninhabitable deserts that drives Beijing to send its troops to crush Uyghur secessionists while using its weight to insure no external intervention in this "internal affair"?

As argued above, Xinjiang's stability is central to the promotion of China's aspirations for better economic and cultural ties with Central Asia. The Uyghurs' religio-nationalist sentiment contains an element of historical continuity of their inclinations for independence since the Qing dynasty incorporated Xinjiang under its rule in 1884. This is further complicated by the external support the Uyghurs are receiving from other Islamists in neighboring states and beyond, a relationship that hampers Beijing's development efforts. Beijing itself helped bring about such Islamist support as a result of its role in the Afghanistan war.

Xinjiang's Separatism

Uyghur "separatists" have their reasons—many of which have historical backing—to demand Xinjiang's secession from China proper. Uyghur nationalism, however, is a recent phenomenon: after past tendencies

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Ghosts, 228-30. China's "firm" stance does not mean it is altogether unworried about Western attitudes. See "China Accuses BBC of Launching 'Invasion'" (cited in note 107 above).

[127] Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 131.

Table 3
Muslim Autonomous Areas in China, 1990

Minority Nationality	Province/Autonomous Region	Autonomous Area
Baoan	Gansu, Qinghai Province	None
Dongxiang	Gansu Province	Dongxiang Autonomous County
Hui	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	None
	Gansu Province	Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture
		Zhangliquan Hui Autonomous County
	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture
		Yenqi Hui Autonomous County
	Guizhou Province	Weining Yi-Hui-Miao Autonomous County
	Hebei Province	Dachang Hui Autonomous County
		Mengcum Hui Autonomous County
	Liaoning Province	Fouxian Hui Autonomous Prefecture
	Qinghai Province	Hualong Hui Autonomous County
		Menyuan Hui Autonomous County
	Yunnan Province	Weishan Yi-Hui Autonomous County
Kazakh	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture
		Barkol Kazakh Autonomous County
		Mulei Kazakh Autonomous County
	Gansu Province	Dongxiang Autonomous County
	Qinghai Province	Haixi Mongol-Tibetan-Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture
Kyrgyz	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture
Salar	Qinghai Province	Xunhua Salar Autonomous County
Tajik	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	Tash Kurghan Tajik Autonomous County
Tatar	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	None
Uzbek	Xinjiang Autonomous Region	None

Source: Adapted from Muhammad Ibrahim Qureshi, *World Muslim Minorities* (Islamabad: World Muslim Congress, 1993), 81-82.

to identify themselves with the oases in which they lived, the Uyghurs began to be inspired by Central Asian Muslims. This is especially true in the Altishahr region that borders on Pakistan and Afghanistan and is home to 80 percent of Xinjiang's Uyghurs.[128] Present-day Uyghurs claim descent from Xinjiang's Turkic-speaking original inhabitants who migrated from present-day Mongolia in the ninth century.[129] Today, they are Xinjiang's

[128]Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict," 82.
[129]Ibid., 80.

largest Muslim group with a population—according to estimates by Beijing —of nearly 5.5 million, but are thought to be approximately 10-12 million (for the Muslim autonomous areas in China, see table 3). Uyghur émigré communities live in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, Turkey, and Europe.[130] They are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school of law and are divided into two groups.[131] The southern, more conservative, group is originally from the Kashgar and Yarkand areas of Xinjiang. The northern group, the Taranchis, is originally from Xinjiang's Ili valley. Both regions are known to have been the source of repeated uprisings against the Chinese annexation of Xinjiang.[132]

Historically, the Uyghurs have been Xinjiang's most dominant majority. Qutlug Belga established their first empire in Karakorum in A.D. 744 when the neighboring Tang dynasty was facing the An Lushan rebellion in 755. Following an imperial request for Uyghur assistance, the rebellion ended in the Tang's favor, which generated friendly relations and thus bilateral trade between the two kingdoms. The Uyghurs' rule ended at the hands of the emerging Kyrgyz in 840, by which time the Uyghurs first arrived in the region. By 1017, the region was under Uyghur control, and remained so until conquered by the Mongols who then remained until the arrival of Islam. The new religion spread in the region and by the sixteenth century most of the population was converted.[133] Imperial China's aspirations for expansion created a need for security especially on the country's north-

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[130] Ibid., 82. For a discussion of the Uyghur connection to Turkey, see Gladney, "Nations Transgressing Nation-States"; and "Extremist Groups in Turkey Analyzed," *The Pesticides Register* (CBNB, USA) August 23, 1998.

[131] In Israeli's words, based on al-Shawkani's Nayl al-Awtar, "The Hanafi *madhahab* [School of Law], which prevailed in China, laid down three conditions under any of which a Muslim territory reverts to *dar-al-harb*: (1) if the law of the unbelievers is enforced; (2) if it becomes separated from *dar-al-Islam* by non-Muslim territory; or (3) if no believer or *dhimmi* (protégé of Islam) could safely reside in the territory." See Israeli, "Muslims in China," 292. Most Muslims in Xinjiang are Sunnis, but there are two Shiite groups: Tajiks in Kashgar (Ismailis) and a small community of Uyghurs in Yarkand (Twelvers). See Michael Dillon, "Muslims in Post-Mao China," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1996): 42.

[132] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, 115-20.

[133] Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 16-18. For further reading on the Uyghur history, from a Uyghur viewpoint, see Eastern Turkestan Union in Europe, "Brief History of the Uyghurs," at <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1730/buh.htm> (September

western borders. When the Qing dynasty annexed present-day Xinjiang in 1759, the security problem might have become less of a worry for China, but the local population—being different in terms of religion, ethnicity, and history from the Han "invaders"—had a different opinion: they, especially the Uyghurs, persistently challenged Chinese authority. The religious identity of the region's Muslims dominated their lives under the Qing who considered the population either Turkic or Muslim; the Uyghur identity, therefore, almost disappeared. According to Dillon, "Chinese influence in the region goes back to at least the tenth century, but Chinese power was only consolidated in the eighteenth century, the name Xinjiang (New Frontier) being used first in 1768."[134] Forbes, however, rejects widely accepted understanding of Xinjiang as a single entity and returns to the original divisions of Uyghuristan (Kumul Turfan area) and Altishahr (Tarim Basin and Zhungaria, including the Ili valley) given their pre-Qing disunity and stresses that Altishahr was home to constant discontent.[135] By the nineteenth century, the Xinjiang Muslims (joined by the Huis) had repeatedly risen against their oppressive Qing rulers. Rebellions in 1815, 1825, 1830, 1847, and 1857 paved the way for the rising of Yakub Beg as a military leader who founded his conservative Islamic rule in Xinjiang between 1866 and 1877.

Following the 1911 Revolution, Xinjiang remained generally peaceful until 1928 (despite attempts at secession from Republican China), yet at the price of the region's economic and intellectual stagnation. By 1928, Xinjiang became the scene of regular Muslim rebellions and unsuccessful Chinese attempts to end these uprisings. One such rebellion began in 1931 in Hami, and although not secessionist in nature, spread into the south. In 1932-33, a successful rebellion led to the establishment of the short-lived Turkish-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (1933-34). Its radical lead-

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16, 1999); and Erkin Alptekin, "The Uighurs," at <http://www.taklamakan.org/erkin/alptekin.htm> (September 16, 1999).

[134]Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict," 80.

[135]Andrew D.W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang, 1911-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 229-34.

ership was clearly anti-Han, which added to the movement's direct spiritual succession to the anti-Soviet rule of Yakub Beg.[136] In 1933 the republicans crushed an attempt to establish an East Turkestan Republic, causing Muslim rebellion against their rule until direct Soviet military intervention ended the attempt in 1934 and, again, in 1937. Afterwards, Xinjiang was run as a police state following the Soviet model, yet minor rebellions continued to take place. Following Chiang Kai-shek's break with the Soviets in 1943, a rebellion took place in Ili which, Forbes suggests, had possibly been supported by Moscow in order to force the republicans into restoring privileges previously granted to Russia in the region. The rebellion led to the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic (1945-49) in Kulja, and forced a peace negotiation between the Muslim rebels and Chiang Kai-shek based on Muslim demands for democracy and freedom, thus evicting the Han Chinese from Xinjiang. This rebellion is "generally represented by both the CCP and by its partisans in the West as a true 'war of liberation' attained (or only partly so) by elements of Islamic fundamentalism and Turkic nationalism."[137] According to Dillon, "This administration is considered to be the last legitimate government of Xinjiang by many of the Uyghur separatists of the 1990s."[138]

The troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) enforced communist rule in Xinjiang in 1949 and the CCP managed to eliminate Soviet influence altogether. In 1955, Beijing declared the area as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with accelerated Han migration soon changing the region's demographic structure.[139] This was followed by the imposition of a new Chinese policy regarding Islam, an approach that contained the same pattern of inconsistency as has been discussed in section one. After the Great Leap Forward of 1958 this policy, Dillon explains, was not as sensitive to the local feelings as was so in the early 1950s.[140] One of the

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[136]Ibid.

[137]Ibid., 233.

[138]Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict," 81.

[139]Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims*, 229-34; and Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," 272-73.

[140]Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict," 82.

most significant features of this approach was the major Han Chinese influx into Xinjiang, which Benson and Svanberg describe as "one of the most dramatic demographic shifts in twentieth-century China ··· [the Han were] only approximately 5 percent of the population before 1949, by the 1990s they constituted nearly 40 percent of the total."[141] After the unprecedented oppression of the Cultural Revolution was replaced by a more reconciliatory attitude, the CCP leadership became divided in its policies toward Xinjiang. Dillon observed that

> ··· in the early 1980s, ··· Hu Yaobang, shortly to become CCP General Secretary, proposed a reform programme which recommended genuine autonomy, economic policies suited to local needs, ··· the revival of cultural, educational and scientific projects and the phased transfer to the interior of Han officials. In the modified form, these proposals were adopted for use in Xinjiang by the CCP Central Committee Secretariat in July. Hu considered that Xinjiang was less of a problem than Tibet as there were no religious leaders or governments in exile comparable to the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala and no independence movement with overseas support. This was not strictly true although the émigré Uyghur leadership under Isa Yusuf Alptekin in Istanbul never had the international profile of the Dalai Lama. The reformist policies were abandoned after conflict in the central leadership between Wang Zhen, the former Xinjiang military commander, and Hu Yaobang, who was purged in 1987···[142]

The "truth" was to be admitted in 1988 by then head of the Regional Party Advisory Commission, Wang Enmao, who said that Xinjiang is threatened by "elements coming from outside to conduct acts of sabotage and separation." According to Barnett, Wang was referring to the East Turkestan National Salvation Committee, the East Turkestan Popular Revolutionary Front, and the World Islamic Alliance.[143]

Xinjiang's Islamist Militancy

This history of the Xinjiang Muslims' struggle for independence

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[141]Benson and Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads*, 23. In this context, noteworthy is that—as of June 1999—there have been discussions between the Chinese government and the World Bank for a loan of US$160 million for financing the "China Western Poverty Reduction Project." The project involves the immigration of tens of thousands of Chinese peasants to Tibet. See "China: Beijing Awaits Crucial World Bank Decision on Loan," *Inter Press Service*, June 24, 1999.

[142]Dillon, "Ethnic, Religious, and Political Conflict," 82.

[143]Barnett, *China's Far West*, 375.

reveals why Beijing is sensitive to any rise of nationalism in minority-populated regions; the case of Xinjiang is an excellent example. The same history also explains why the Uyghurs are determined to regain the right to self-determination in what they hold to be their homeland. This ongoing struggle has exacerbated Beijing's problems in Xinjiang partly as a result of the CCP's oppressive policies against Islam that continue to provoke Muslims into violent resistance. Since practicing Muslim faith was hindered as a result of these policies, whereby "the state has failed to protect their freedom ··· [and] if Islam in China was no longer a workable way of life, then China could be said to have fallen under the definition of *Dar-al-Harb*."[144] Based on this, the persistence with which Muslims in Xinjiang rose up against Chinese oppression reveals that Muslims living in a *dar-al-harb* are no longer obliged to respect the laws and regulations in force and are justified in rising up against the state. From a Uyghur standpoint, Beijing's oppression of Muslims earned the regime the status of *dar-al-harb*, therefore necessitating the declaration of jihad against its rule in Xinjiang. In support of this argument, one researcher has concluded that,

> any Muslim uprising ··· had to be sanctioned as a *jihad* in order to be permitted. Second, any leader of a rebellion had to be a religious figure, or be backed by religious authorities, in order to possess the inherent authority to declare *jihad*. Third, any *jihad* could be declared only and solely on the premise that it had a political goal in mind. In brief, a Muslim uprising in China would be, in theory, a *jihad*, led by an *imam* or *imam*-supported figure for the purpose of establishing an Islamic polity. But in practice, due to the wide range of possible definitions and interpretations of *jihad*, actual hostilities could go on without their being termed *jihad*, or *jihad* could be said to exist even if no hostile acts were actually being conducted.[145]

Although this version of "Chinese jihad" might not be similar in origins and notions to those upheld by other Islamists in, for example, the Middle East, this analysis fits the status quo in Xinjiang. Uyghur Islamists claim that their movement has "more than one million supporters ··· and that 27 secret organizations are active in China."[146]

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[144]Israeli, "Muslims in China," 295.

[145]Ibid., 296.

[146]"In the Northwest, Islam Raises its Head," *Inter Press Service*, May 14, 1996.

For over a century, the Xinjiang Muslim resistance to Beijing's authority has been mounting. During the last decade in particular, the opposition turned into a more organized armed violence, with sympathy—and perhaps support—from Islamists in Central Asia and beyond. Beijing's fears that Uyghur militants are receiving external support resulted in a move in which, in 1996, PLA intelligence has stepped up surveillance of Muslim groups and moved to fortify the borders and prevent arms smuggling from sympathetic groups in neighboring Central Asian countries.[147] These fears are not altogether unfounded since Xinjiang's Islamist militants are allegedly being trained in Taliban-run camps in Afghanistan as they step up their struggle for independence from Beijing.[148] Such preventive measures appear to have been somewhat successfully implemented since the Uyghur militants began to search for weapons locally: note the August 1998 militant raid on the Guma district ammunition depot and the attack on the Kargilik county police station (both near Kashgar)[149] and other armed confrontations between Uyghur Islamist militants and the Chinese police—such as those reported to have taken place in February 1999 involving some three hundred Uyghur militants.[150] Given the tight control over cross-border movement, however, speculations that Uyghur militants are receiving logistical help from abroad are difficult to substantiate.

China's Role in the Afghanistan War

China's role in the Afghanistan war intensified the complexity of Beijing's problems in dealing with the Uyghur Muslim separatists. Following the advice of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security advisor, the United States decided to export "a composite ideology of nationalism and Islam to the Muslim-majority Central Asian states and Soviet republics with a view to destroying the Soviet order."[151] Saudi Arabia helped fund

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[147]"Resurgence of Separatism in West Puts Beijing on Guard," ibid., June 6, 1996.

[148]"Taliban Trains Muslim Separatists for Terrorism in China," *The Sunday Telegraph*, October 4, 1998.

[149]*South China Morning Post*, August 16, 1998.

[150]"Separatists, Policy Clash in China's Xinjiang," Kyodo, February 17, 1999.

[151]Hiro, "The Cost of an Afghan 'Victory'."

the Mujahedin in line with Riyadh's policy of backing anti-leftist forces.[152] Pakistan was keen on establishing a popular base for Zia ul-Haq's rule by inducting Islam into politics; giving aid to exiled Afghani fundamentalist leaders in Pakistan; acting as a "cashier" for American aid to Mujahedin; and using its territory, mainly Peshawar, as a staging post and a training base for Mujahedin en route to battle.

China had its reasons for becoming involved long before joining the anti-Soviet coalition.[153] Following the 1960s Sino-Soviet border skirmishes, Beijing agreed with Tehran to jointly "undertake covert war in Afghanistan, apparently independent of CIA plans,"[154] but the Islamic revolution brought the Shah down and the Sino-Iranian plan to an end. China then permitted the construction of two U.S. electronic intelligence posts in Xinjiang for eavesdropping on Soviet Central Asia—much to the discontent of Xinjiang's Muslims—to replace America's Tracksman 1 and 2 (lost to Iran's revolutionaries).[155] Washington was convinced this Sino-American cooperation marked the beginning of a "growing convergence of views ··· on the outrageous and brutal invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union" toward which each side would "take appropriate steps on its own."[156] Beijing appears to have taken well to its own role. Pakistani intelligence sources stated that "the greatest amounts of arms and ammunition were purchased from China, and they proved completely reliable and discreet, providing [free] weapons as aid, as well as for sale."[157]

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[152]U.S. aid to the Mujahedin was "matched dollar for dollar by that from Saudi Arabia." See Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 10. For a discussion of Saudi Arabia's involvement in Afghanistan, see Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, "Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Conflict in Afghanistan," in Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn?* 117-34.

[153]The author is grateful to Dr. Eric Watkins for pointing out possibly the earliest mention of China's involvement in the Afghanistan war: "*Pravda* Says U.S. and China Financing Rebels," *The Times*, December 31, 1979.

[154]Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 68.

[155]Ibid., 69. China's military supplies to the Afghan resistance are estimated to be of an annual value of US$200 million. See Fazal-ur-Rahman, "Pakistan's Relations with China," *Strategic Studies* 19, no. 4/20, no. 1 (Winter & Spring 1998): 72.

[156]Harold Brown, the U.S. secretary of defense in the Carter administration, in a Beijing news conference in January 1980 following talks with Chinese top officials; transcript of the conference released by the Pentagon on January 9, 1980, cited in Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 65.

[157]Brigadier Mohammad Youssef of the Pakistani Intelligence, quoted in ibid., 74.

According to Cooley, the Second Department—China's military intelligence department of the PLA—was in charge the Mujahedin's military training.[158] By 1985, these operations included the training of Uyghur fighters in Xinjiang and three hundred advisors and instructors at camps in Pakistan. In 1985, China opened more camps on Chinese territory, near Kashgar and Hotan, in Xinjiang.[159] By and large, Beijing's supply of weapons to the Mujahedin, according to Harris, had been particularly helpful to the resistance; this aid was estimated at US$400 million between 1980 and 1985, and was comprised of surface-to-air missiles and light, portable weapons suitable to guerrilla warfare, weapons whose parts and ammunition are often interchangeable with captured Soviet weapons.[160] Possible is that Beijing's role in supporting the Mujahedin has made Beijing more likely to use Muslim and Uyghur/Kazakh/Kyrgyz members of China's own armed forces given cultural and religious empathy with the Mujahedin and other local people. Even as early as the late 1970s, however, there must surely have been some concern about the possible divided loyalties of the Uyghurs, which is a question future research should address.[161]

Like their counterparts in Washington and the capitals of the other players-states in Afghanistan, Chinese officials must have celebrated their success in trapping the Russian bear. Amidst merry cheers, they all appear not to have realized immediately that in the rush to stop the Soviets, they also had set the genie free: jihad-hardened warriors were jobless, armed,

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[158]Under its veteran U.S.-trained PLA intelligence officer, Major General Xiong Guangkai, and former Chinese military attaché in London, Colonel Li Ning. Ibid., 73. Extremely important to note is that Cooley's point about China's PLA involvement in the war is based on reports that are extremely difficult to substantiate. Such reports, nevertheless, cannot be disregarded altogether in the light of the various ways, suggested in the literature, in which China has been involved in aiding the Mujahedin.

[159]Based on his interview with Brigadier Youssef, Cooley is convinced this was the case. See Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 75. Beijing, however, has rejected "allegations" to this effect by Kabul, which accused China of allowing its territory to be used as "the main center for organization of Afghan resistance." See Lilian Craig Harris, "China's Support for People's War in the 1980s," in *China and the Third World: Champion or Challenger?* ed. Lilian Craig Harris and Robert L. Worden (Mass.: Auburn House, 1986), 133.

[160]Harris, "China's Support for People's War," 132.

[161]The author acknowledges gratefully the point made here by Dr. Michael Dillon during conversations in Durham in September 1999.

well-informed, well-trained, and ready for action—yet not welcome at home. By the time the West started to have a taste of what "terrorists on the loose" could do, forcing the genie back into the lamp was no longer an option.[162]

To sum up, the resurgence of Islamist militants in Xinjiang at present is a continuation of a history of Uyghur struggle. Some of the reasons for the increasing violence in Xinjiang can be linked to Beijing's inconsistent policy toward Islam and mistreatment of Muslims. Much of the escalating violence, nevertheless, can be attributed to the impact of China's role in the Afghanistan war whereby Chinese support for the Mujahedin may have facilitated contact between militants in and out of Xinjiang. This is a possibility that cannot be easily left out given the indications that Uyghurs have been receiving help from Afghan veterans (contact between the two was likely to have been first made during the jihad in Afghanistan). Beijing's problems in Xinjiang are felt by its Central Asian neighbors, themselves not immune from the militant Islamist resurgence at the hands of Muslims with whom the Uyghurs can identify in terms of ethnicity and religion. China's economic interests; concerns for promoting more active trade, oil, and other links with Central Asia; as well as aspirations for assuming a key regional role given the vacuum caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, led Beijing to strive to develop Xinjiang and open the area to cross-regional access. This, in turn, created a flow of goods and merchants but also channeled a stream of ideologies, people, books, arms, and drugs. Drugs are particularly causing serious concerns in Central Asia —a region where five to seven million people became addicted during the 1980s; Central Asia itself also became a major drug-trafficking route from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Europe, and is now growing its own drugs.[163] Beijing thus has to consider all these factors when designing a Central Asian policy.

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[162]Huband described the situation in *Warriors of the Prophet*, 4.

[163]Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, 219. See also U.S. General Accounting Office, "Drug Control."

China's Current Policy

To understand China's current policy toward the Muslim population in Xinjiang as well as the policy toward its Central Asian neighbors over the Islamist issue, important is to see Xinjiang's increasing value for all these players. As such, Xinjiang includes over five thousand kilometers of strategic borderland with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan,[164] while also posing a source of wealth yet to be tapped and a hotbed of religio-ethnic problems of which only part has unfolded. The proposed Commonwealth of Southwest and Central Asian States is a case in point: projected by the Pakistan Central Asia Friendship Society, the Commonwealth constitutes a proposed political structure with economic targets. One aspect of the proposal is the inclusion (in addition to Iran, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Pakistan) of Xinjiang which is "not only an intriguing idea but a practical necessity, if the transportation arteries are to remain open between Central Asia and Pakistan."[165] The lack of religio-ethnic borders between Xinjiang's Muslims and those of Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan reflects the ease with which current militant Islamist activities in the region can complicate the Xinjiang situation further. The strong Muslim and other ethnic identities of Xinjiang's separatists place considerable pressures on China's policy toward its Muslim population in general and toward the Islamist elements in particular. Equal pressure can be felt in China's policies toward its Central Asian neighbors given the Islamist problem.

Central Asian regimes, whose countries' democratic structures have yet to emerge, appear not to have learnt yet from the Soviet and Chinese mistakes in dealing with their Muslim populations.[166] Important is for these

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[164]Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, 221.

[165]Malik, "New Relationships," 254.

[166]It has been argued that "the main form of development of civil society has been the tremendous religious revival throughout the area." See United States Institute of Peace, "Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia," 9. For a discussion of the post-USSR state of affairs in Central Asia, see V.F. Piacentini, "The Disintegration of the Soviet Empire: Problems of National and Collective Security in Central Asia," *Islamic Studies* 33, no. 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1994): 281-316.

regimes to realize that "the emergence of Islamist political movements in Central Asia, which are strongly bolstered by the growing influence of 'non-official' *mullahs* among both rural and urban populations, must mean that Islam is on the political agenda in Central Asia."[167] Instead, economic considerations appear to be influencing their policies toward their Muslim populations. In 1996, for instance, Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan formed the "Shanghai Five," by signing a treaty that commits them "to uphold current borders and to clamp down on separatist groups operating on their territory."[168] In April 1998, the arrest of a number of Uyghur exiles from China by Kyrgyz police immediately preceded President Askar Akayev's visit to Beijing, where extensive trade deals were signed.[169] In August 1999, closing a two-day summit for the "Shanghai Five," Kyrgyz President Akayev said that the former Soviet Central Asian republics welcomed a more active regional role for Moscow and Beijing.[170] During the same week, air strikes were launched against Islamist positions in Kyrgyzstan in an attempt to free their foreign hostages.[171] In an important development, China took part in the Conference for Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, hosted by Kazakhstan in mid-September 1999.[172] Coinciding with repeated explosions in Moscow that were strongly suspected to have been the work of Islamist Chechens, the conference took place amidst strong calls for cooperation against terrorism, particularly from Moscow. The immediate positive response from the United States to the call is a cause for concern, to which Watkins draws attention: "Now, it seems, cooperation against terrorism is the universal cry.

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[167]Mikhail Konarovsky, "Russia and the Muslim States of Central Asia and Afghanistan," in *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State: Case-Studies of Muslims in Thirteen Countries*, ed. Hussin Mutalib and Taj ul-Islam Hashmi (London: Macmillan, 1996), 236.

[168]"Russia, China, [Central] Asian States Eye Closer Links," Reuters, August 25, 1999.

[169]"The Lack of Democracy Breeds Rebellion in Central Asia," *The Times*, July 20, 1998.

[170]See note 168 above.

[171]"Kyrgyzstan Declares State of Emergency, Mobilisation" and "Kyrgyzstan Launches Operation to Rescue Japanese Hostages: Diplomat," Agence France-Presse, August 26, 1999.

[172]Hosted by Kazakhstan, the conference also included Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority. See Eric Watkins, "U.S. Must Not Ignore Rights of Russia's Minorities as Washington, Moscow Join Forces Against Terrorists," *Bridge News*, at <http://www.bridge.com/> (September 16, 1999).

While right to respond swiftly and positively to the fight against terrorism, Washington, however, must remain alert. The United States must not allow its justifiable concerns over terrorism to be exploited by less scrupulous regimes' intent on suppressing the legitimate political aspirations of long suffering ethnic minorities."[173]

China fears it could lose the huge, strategic, and rich Xinjiang to the Uyghurs who have turned their guns against Beijing's rule. For this, China has itself to blame: starting in the late 1970s, the central government's policies in Xinjiang favored Islam. In the 1980s, Beijing reversed those policies when the regime became involved in supporting the Mujahedin in their war against the Soviets. An example of this can be seen in Beijing's sudden announcement in 1992 that China would invest US$370 million in some forty projects in the long-neglected Xinjiang, in an attempt to develop the area and reduce Islamist splittist tendencies. Therefore, China's support for Islam in Xinjiang rose and fell with its support for the Mujahedin in Afghanistan.[174] This support was a political ploy that continues to backfire; the status quo in Xinjiang testifies to the size of the problem Beijing is suffering as a result.

Having examined China's policy toward its Muslim population, important is to highlight that such policy, based on the Soviet model, constituted a twofold offensive against Islam. The policy—which has been admitted as a failure by the Chinese leadership—pivoted on "official persecution of believers and Islamic institutions, and the inundation of Muslim regions with Han Chinese as a means of ensuring Peking's control while at the same time encouraging the assimilation of natives to Chinese culture."[175] In keeping with Beijing's largely inconsistent pattern, however, the policy since 1981 emphasized freedom of religion and gradual resettlement of the Han migrants away from Muslim areas. This new emphasis reflected an attempt to pacify the increasingly dissatisfied Muslims in Xinjiang where a considerable effort had heretofore been exerted to amalgamate

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[173]Ibid.

[174]The author acknowledges gratefully the suggestion offered here by Dr. Eric Watkins during long conversations in London and Durham in August 1999.

[175]Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, 38.

ethnic Hans into the Muslim community. The date is of particular significance as it coincides with China's involvement in supporting the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, which explains why Beijing reversed its policy.

Whether Beijing will continue to apply its current "strike-hard" policy in Xinjiang, particularly considering the rapidly changing scene next door, is uncertain. There are indications that the plight of Muslims in Central Asia is not over, and that their governments have yet to learn how to deal with them.[176] This is all the more so since China has direct interests in maintaining the same level of tight control to pacify Muslims in Xinjiang, whose increasing separatist activities are influenced by Central Asian Muslims and jihad veterans on both sides of the Xinjiang border. Pacifying Xinjiang is a task in which Beijing's policies have so far failed to accomplish due to the closure of legitimate channels for expressing grievances which are leading Xinjiang's ordinary people, even those with no political aspirations, to resort to violence as a means of expressing their discontent.[177] Beijing needs to be ready for any new such developments in the region.

The blowback of the Afghanistan jihad carries an important lesson; as Cooley reminds us, "when you decide to go to war against your main enemy, take a good, long look at the people you chose as your friends, allies, or mercenary fighters ··· to see whether ··· [they] already have unsheathed their knives—and are pointing them at your own back."[178] Debatable is whether China has learnt its lesson after Afghanistan. In the view of another commentator,

> Beijing has been employing repressive policies in Xinjiang for decades, and experience has shown that the more extreme those policies, the worse the separatist problem becomes. But somehow China's leaders have avoided drawing the obvious lessons, and have instead looked outside China for an explanation of

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[176]This is evident from recent Sino-Central Asian talks, which centered on China's feelings of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan containing bases for groups supporting the Uyghurs' separatist movement in Xinjiang. See "Jiang Set to Meet with Russian, Central Asian Leaders," Kyodo, July 26, 1999.

[177]Victoria Conner, "Summitry Can't Pacify Xinjiang," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, August 25, 1999.

[178]Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 241.

> the growth of separatism. Only when Beijing shifts its attention inward from diplomacy to its own abusive policies can it begin to solve the problem.[179]

Will Beijing get the message? The answer to this question may well be wrapped in the rapidly unfolding situation in Xinjiang *and* Central Asia where Islamism appears to be center stage as the world watches for the next move.

Conclusion: Future Directions

China, like the United States and its allies, taught the Mujahedin sophisticated skills of modern warfare and guerrilla war techniques, and equipped them to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. American taxpayers, Arab oil sheikhs, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, Usama Bin Laden, and the profits of drug lords all financed the "holy" war. With the mission accomplished, the mentors saw Islamist militancy spread from China and Chechnya to Algeria and Egypt.[180] No longer a secret is that much of the terrorism threatening the post-communist world is partly a result of the role played in Afghanistan by the United States and the other actors. Living under a cloud of terrorism, the West is now facing the potential for Islam to replace communism as the next foe. Innocent lives lost in terrorist attacks from Moscow to New York, the murder of American allies (like Egypt's Anwar el-Sadat) and U.S. diplomats in Africa, the anti-U.S. attacks by the hard-to-catch Usama Bin Laden, and the danger posed to Beijing's rule in Xinjiang are all examples.

Beijing's policies have been "containing" Islamist separatism in Xinjiang using repression, torture, exile, and mass executions while modern-

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[179]See note 177 above. According to Warikoo, "The use of arms and ammunition and the involvement of foreign subversives from Turkey, Afghanistan (Mujahedin), Pakistan and [Uyghur] groups in Central Asian states, whose activists have been working in Xinjiang to propagate pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic views, has lent an extraneous dimension to the renascent domestic Muslim resentment against the Han Chinese." See Warikoo, "Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang," 279.

[180]For a discussion of Islamism in Algeria, see Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet*, 46-72; for a discussion of Islamism in Egypt, see ibid., 73-93.

izing the region. The central government has admitted, however, that these policies might fail to put down separatism in Xinjiang and has accepted that economic development will not necessarily mean that the separatists will give up their activities.[181] Although the separatists in Xinjiang do not seem to threaten the legitimacy of the Beijing regime yet, there are two possible future scenarios in Xinjiang. The first is that the Chinese government may continue to apply its hard-line policies against separatists. This could lead to complications as the new generations of Xinjiang Muslims inherit a bitter tradition of "fighting" their Chinese oppressors for an independent territory of their own; such a fight would not only have a nationalist character, but a strong Islamist tinge as well. This outcome could pose a more serious challenge to the legitimacy of Beijing's rule in Xinjiang, where oppressive policies could prove more inadequate as time goes by. Given Xinjiang's importance to both Beijing and the separatists, there are enough reasons for the "fight" to continue. Beijing would fiercely resist any possibility of a triumphant secession from China, especially given the recent negative examples of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.[182]

The second scenario is that, in time, Beijing could seek to minimize the negative impact of separatism on the future of China's economic aspirations in Xinjiang by adopting new ruling mechanisms. This may or may not involve a more autonomous status in which Xinjiang's Muslims enjoy a self-rule that takes into consideration their religious and ethnic identities. This is an option Beijing might find itself forced to consider; a precedent has already been set in the case of Hong Kong where—at least in theory—the region is treated differently from China proper, again, for economic reasons. However, conceivable is that Beijing may not consider this option until the central leadership accepts the idea of addressing the Xinjiang problem by accepting the rights of Uyghurs and other Muslims rather than viewing them simply as "troublemaking separatists." The longer the time before Beijing accepts this, the more Muslim and Chinese blood will be shed. Beijing's own interest is therefore to realize the importance of ad-

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[181]"Beijing Rattled by Separatists," *The Times*, March 13, 1998.
[182]Harris, "Xinjiang," 112.

dressing the problem of Xinjiang's separatism differently, given the impact this dispute is having on China's internal stability and Xinjiang's economic prosperity, and therefore on China and the rest of Central Asia.

Given the chance, and with aid and arms from abroad, the escalating violence in Xinjiang could create a critical situation in which Beijing might be forced to deal with a civil war between the millions of Han Chinese who cohabit with the Muslims and Islamist separatists in Xinjiang. Should this assumption become a reality, one immediate repercussion would be China's lack of access to Xinjiang's oil, which could force the country into dependency on the Muslim Middle East—a difficult situation given the PRC's policy toward Muslims which, naturally, Middle Eastern governments find unacceptable. In the meantime, any tension in Xinjiang—which threatens the region's security as a transport corridor—would have a negative impact on Central Asia with serious ramifications for the West's lucrative interests in the massive hydrocarbon reserves of the region. The anxiety shown by the West in regard to reaching a peaceful settlement in the Middle East had among its obvious reasons concern for the stability and security in the region that houses some of the West's, and China's, most needed energy supplies. The massive supplies in Central Asia and the Caspian region are indeed worth similar concerns.

Future Directions

The jihad in Xinjiang could continue for a long time to come. The conflict may not, however, remain within the region's borders, given that other Mujahedin will likely aid their Muslim "brothers" in their war against Chinese oppressors. History repeats itself: Islamists would declare jihad if need be, but they do not necessarily end the war after they win a battle; they carry the jihad banner into other lands they deem in need of liberation of "infidel" rule. The Chechen-Russian rivalry is a case in point. Xinjiang might be another case where other predominantly Muslim parts of China *and* the world could witness a similar, perhaps stronger, resurgence of militant Islam. Militant Islamists not far from the Xinjiang border are proving this, as the Russians are realizing. However, before Islamic resurgence takes up in Xinjiang, China would have paid a hefty price at the hands of the Xinjiang Uyghur Islamists for its past mistreatment of Islam and Mus-

lims and for its current "strike-hard" policy.

Although Beijing has always insisted the issue is an "internal affair," the jihad in Xinjiang poses a serious danger that could expand beyond Xinjiang's border to reflect a growing Uyghur need to draw the world's attention to their struggle. Xinjiang's Uyghur separatists plainly say, "Give us weapons, and we will overturn all of China."[183] Their reasons for taking such a stance are simple: "This is the only chance we have of at least drawing attention to our problems. We are not asking for sympathy."[184] Fifty years ago, the Palestinians opted for what has been described as "international terrorism" to force the world to listen. No one thought then a day would come when they will negotiate a deal with the Israelis to replace war with peace. A problem the size of Xinjiang cannot be kept "at home" for long.

As has been suggested, separatists in Xinjiang appear to be receiving assistance from Islamist militants abroad. Given the relative ease with which "mobile" Mujahedin seem to be roaming, Xinjiang's separatists—many of whom are already stationed abroad—will before long opt for a different approach. The recent Sino-Central Asian efforts to contain the threat of Islamist militancy raise an important set of questions. In the past, the United States with some of its allies and China manipulated the Muslim Mujahedin's defense in *their* war against the Soviets—a move that caused an ongoing blowback effect from which all the ex-players in Afghanistan continue to suffer. These past allies are now attempting to unite with Central Asia's Muslim regimes against the Islamists, many of whom are Afghan veterans. Although the extent to which such proposed cooperation might succeed is yet to unfold, important is to ask whether this could lead to a "war" against Islamist fundamentalist terrorism by way of "containing" this new foe much in the same way efforts were geared toward containing communism. Experience in Afghanistan was part of such containment efforts in which Muslim Mujahedin were exploited. How would the "new foe" be fought and with which "tool"?

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[183]"China's Wild West: Muslim [Uyghurs] Demand Independence," *World Press Review* 44, no. 8 (August 1997): 12.

[184]Ibid.

Future studies of separatism in Xinjiang should elaborate on the interaction between the Mujahedin in Afghanistan and the Uyghur Islamists whose traditional fighting skills, combined with their belief in the cause for which they are fighting, are likely to remain among Beijing's main problems with repercussions for China's regional relations with Central Asia, the Muslim world, and beyond. From a Chinese standpoint, "If minorities in Central Asia can set up a country successfully, minorities in China will believe they can, too."[185] Future research should address the size of infiltration by the Afghan Arabs into Xinjiang, and the extent of outreach by Xinjiang's Muslim separatists toward militant Islamists across the border. On the basis of this, future research should also analyze the "export" of the jihad notion as exemplified by the experiences in Afghanistan and beyond, and the "import" of hard-won jihad techniques into Xinjiang to face what Islamists describe as an "infidel" government, thus one against which arms must be taken up.

In the final analysis, China sowed in Afghanistan what it is now reaping in Xinjiang. The blowback of Operation Cyclone continues to expand and is now taking route on the ancient Silk Road and beyond. If Beijing does not realize that it has so far been "talking" to the Xinjiang Muslim separatists in the wrong language, the consequences will not just be felt by the Middle Kingdom alone.

[185]A Chinese political analyst, quoted in Harris, *China Considers the Middle East*, 269.