

China's Uyghur Problem

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In recent years, China's relations with major countries in the Islamic world have become increasingly complex and problematic. This is especially true of China's ties with Turkey, where a sizeable Uyghur minority resides, and where historical, linguistic, religious and cultural links have conditioned the fortunes of what Yitzhak Shichor has called the "ethno-diplomacy in Sino-Uyghur relations."¹

Of late, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, neighboring Kazakhstan, and other Muslim countries have openly been displaying sympathy for their coreligionists in Xinjiang [the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region]. That has precipitated Chinese discontent, which could lead to an overhaul of, and a deterioration in, its carefully cultivated relations with the Islamic world. Teyyip Erdogan, the fiery prime minister of Turkey, who in Davos in early 2009 accused Israel's president, Shimon Peres, of "genocide" against the Palestinians in Gaza² and then callously stalked out of the panel, had another "temper tantrum," this time venting his rage against the Chinese. He accused them of genocide for the killing of 200 people, most of them Han, during riots in June and July 2009, insisting that there was "no point of interpreting this otherwise."³ For Erdogan, who carries the terrible moral burden of the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians by Turkey during World War I, hurling the same accusation against others, despite the staggering numerical disproportion, may perhaps alleviate his own guilt. Much like Holocaust deniers who accuse Israel of having become the "Nazis" of our time or of committing genocide against the Palestinians, Erdogan's rhetoric can perhaps be dismissed as displaced aggression. This is to compensate for the failings of his own country, which continues to launch attacks against the Kurds in both Turkish and Iraqi territory and to deny them their civil rights and independence.

In its harsh condemnation, Turkey stood out as an exception, certainly compared to other governments, including Washington, which responded cautiously and did not rush to censure the Chinese as would have been expected. Under the heading "Turkey, another Axis of Evil?" a Chinese writer lashed out at Turkey for its

harsh position on China. He cited Erdogan's talk to a group of foreign ministers from the Gulf area visiting Istanbul, in which the prime minister said, "We have always looked to our Uyghur brothers, with whom we have historical and cultural ties." He noted that Erdogan promised that as a member of the UN Security Council for 2009–11, his country would raise the issue there. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu emphasized that Turkey had concerns about developments in the Uyghur Autonomous Region, and "cannot remain silent in the face of what is happening there," echoing what Erdogan had said about Gaza half a year earlier. Turkey's trade unions and business associations went even further—urging a countrywide boycott of Chinese products, an escalation that would transform the row from a diplomatic struggle to a commercial one, echoing what other Islamic countries had done to Denmark during the "Cartoon Crisis" in 2005. Consequently, an atmosphere was created in which Ankara permitted (and even encouraged) anti-Chinese demonstrations by Uyghur groups dwelling in Turkey. This, in spite of earlier demonstrations of Chinese support for Turkey, as in 2003, when Beijing roundly condemned the acts of terror that had rocked Turkey. This time, Turkey was taken to task for supporting the "separatist and terrorist thugs of Xinjiang, thus raising Chinese indignation."⁴

The Xinjiang Conundrum

Ever since the annexation of the Xinjiang province to China in the 1880s as the "new border," that vast area has been growing increasingly important on the level of strategy, energy, minority issues, security and international policy levels in the purview of China. Geographically, the entire area is known as East Turkestan, namely, the country of the Turks. Under the late Qing Dynasty, Xinjiang became one of the Republic's provinces, though it was granted some degree of cultural autonomy, unlike the five Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. Thus, while the fall of the USSR precipitated the independence of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, Xinjiang, with its Uyghur Muslim population, remained part of China. Moreover, in Xinjiang, a calculated plan to settle Han Chinese (the predominant ethnic group in China) in order to strengthen the Chinese foothold of the state has brought the Han–Uyghur demographic balance to parity, thus engendering the bitterness of the indigenous Muslim population, which feels uprooted and discarded.

The combination of this complicated political situation, involving foreign relations with neighboring countries and the rise of Islam worldwide, the transformation of Xinjiang into a strategic area for the Chinese nuclear and space program, Xinjiang's common border with Russia, and the potential development of petroleum and gas fields there, has turned this province into a most crucial one for the People's Republic of China (PRC). The recent eruptions of violence between Han and

Uyghur in Urumqi, the province's capital, are but the tip of the iceberg of the usually well-concealed malaise that brews under the surface, under the guise of harmony between the peoples of China.

Historically, Chinese Islam has been prone to unrest whenever Chinese pressure grew untenable, or the promise of secession/autonomy loomed on the horizon. In connection with the Afghan War, Muslims in Baren⁵ advocating a "free East Turkestan" staged a fierce five-day revolt in April 1990. Chinese authorities later discovered that the *mujabideen* of Afghanistan had supplied the Baren rebels with arms.⁶

In November 1993, turmoil broke out in twelve counties and cities of Xinjiang. There were attempts to take over government offices or sack them. In some instances, homemade incendiary bombs were thrown, and gunmen shot government troops who were attempting to thwart rebel attacks against government stores. This was a clear escalation of the Xinjiang unrest, and demonstrated that the level of acrimony against the central government had by far transcended a mere local channeling of bitterness or frustration into social disturbance. The PRC's policy of openness to the Islamic world may have contributed to Islamic separatist aspirations, due to the fact that the twelve Muslim ethnic groups of Xinjiang regard Turkey, not China, as their spiritual home.⁷ The Chinese were placed in a situation of having to choose between placating their Muslim citizens and Islamic countries or losing control of their minority population. This so alarmed the Chinese that Prime Minister Li Peng himself delivered a warning against "foreigners and divisive forces that infiltrate by hoisting national banners and donning religious garments."⁸

China claims that al-Qa'ida has trained members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which is classified as a terrorist group by the US and the UN. The group took its name from the short-lived Republic of East Turkestan that was declared in Xinjiang at the end of World War II, then crushed by the PRC in 1949. Moreover, China has persuaded Pakistan and Kazakhstan to hand over captured militants, a policy that may have fueled the Taliban fundamentalist rage now gripping Pakistan. The Chinese security apparatus has also created a pervasive system of informers and has deployed new units of anti-terrorist police to patrol mosques and markets in the trouble-prone cities of Xinjiang.⁹ But the iron-fisted security policy has apparently backfired. Western journalists have exposed a society segregated by religion and ethnicity, divided by reciprocal distrust and living in separate sections of tightly policed cities, notably Urumqi.

Again in 2007, there was evidence that while the severe oppression did crush opposition, it failed to win the loyalty of the Uyghur population. Beijing's aim was

to prevent Muslims from slipping away to join militants in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Consequently, Chinese anti-terrorist units attacked a training camp in the mountains around Kashgar, where the Silk Route winds into the Karakoram and Pakistan, killing eighteen men. The clash was hailed by the state media, which called it a “blow to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.”

The escalation of violence in Kashgar came despite economic efforts by the government to increase the Uyghurs’ standard of living, which the Uyghurs sensed they were paying for with the loss of their identity. Their children must undergo compulsory Chinese education, while their own fabled literature, poetry and music are fading into the folkloristic background. China is pouring billions into modernizing Kashgaria, even while importing thousands of Han to populate the area.

Because of efforts to develop relations with Muslim oil-producing countries, Beijing has been very careful not to appear to be oppressing its Muslim minorities. In July 2009, another incident, involving rumors of the rape of two Han women, precipitated rioting, resulting in hundreds of dead and thousands of lives derailed. President Hu Jintao was forced to return from the G-8 Summit in L’Aquila in an attempt to quash the unrest. Chinese authorities, in the perilous situation of facing an impending general outburst, tried to maintain order between Han and Uyghur, regardless of who was to blame for the incitement. As the Uyghur protest escalated, the riots turned violent, and the event reverberated throughout the world as “breaking news.” Paradoxically, although more Han were killed than Uyghurs, the latter were depicted as the oppressed underdogs and were treated as such by the media.

The Uyghurs feel that the survival of their culture is threatened by the Chinese, as Beijing announced that it would tear down the old city of Kashgar—the Uyghur cultural hub—and replace it with a new city. They are also concerned about the limits imposed on the use of the Uyghur language in schools and the fact that Muslim state officials are being encouraged to abandon the Ramadan fast. These measures are construed in Uyghur eyes as governmental oppression and as methods of erasing Muslim culture from their midst.

China does not seem to understand the dynamics of how the “affirmative action” they pursue in Xinjiang, with its huge economic investment meant to enhance the welfare of the minorities, can engender what they may regard as ungrateful, rebellious conduct on their part. This will not change as long as the majority–minority relationship between the main actors persists. Either the regime is strictly uncompromising and unforgiving, or, when it begins to compromise, it triggers a process that brings about its own demise. This is how the Soviet Union and the

regimes of the Eastern Bloc collapsed. Deng Xiaoping's reforms and the pleasures of a rising standard of living are set off by the ethnic tensions between Han and Uyghur.

The importance of Xinjiang, together with the fact that it shares sensitive borders with four countries, obviously make that remote heartland a focus of world interest; therefore, it is difficult for the world to regard that province and its affairs as a domestic Chinese problem, and China is unfavorably judged for its behavior and castigated for its policies. Those that presume to "understand" China's positions jump to the conclusion that "China's fears are no excuse for its punitive and often violent suppression of the Uyghurs,"¹⁰ as if they would be better able to handle the same situation were they faced with it. In that respect, it is much like the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. To be sure, when the USA, Britain, Russia, Turkey and others are confronted with similar situations, they behave no better than China.

Uyghurs are not interested in their homeland's importance to China. For them, the government's discriminatory policies, which do not permit them to cultivate their separate identity, are the key issues. After 9/11 and the worldwide scare of Muslim terrorism, the repression of Uyghurs intensified; many of their leaders were jailed, accused of having connections with foreign Muslim terrorists. Draconian sentences have been meted out to any group or individual convicted of terrorism, religious radicalism, or separatism. Nevertheless, no muftis in the Islamic world have yet found the time to issue any *fatwa* against China.¹¹

Turkish attitudes to China have been especially affected by the unrest in Xinjiang. Turkey once had an open-door policy toward its Uyghur brethren, the Turkic ethnic minority, members of which began arriving in waves from China in the late 1930s. In 1952, for instance, when several thousand Uyghurs fled China's Communist regime for Pakistan, the Turkish government stepped in and brought 1,850 people overland to Turkey. The new arrivals were settled in specially built housing—in a district called the New Quarter—in the city of Kayseri in central Anatolia, and were given jobs and citizenship. Such a welcome, however, is unimaginable today. Even though public sympathy still runs deep for the long-suffering Uyghur population of what many Turks refer to as East Turkestan, Ankara has become increasingly wary of antagonizing Beijing. Just recently, President Abdullah Gül visited China and oversaw the signing of \$1.5 billion in Turkey–China business contracts. After the recent violence in Urumqi, one Turkish minister called for a boycott of Chinese goods, but that was quickly retracted; Prime Minister Erdogan, who, in a characteristic outburst of anger labeled events there "tantamount to genocide," has had to control his temper. The row was soon smoothed over by apologetic foreign ministry officials.¹²

China's plight in the face of the danger of increasing international Muslim protest was dramatized by its apologetic response to the Maghribi al-Qa'ida (AQIM) threat to take revenge on China for the death of forty-six Muslim Uyghurs in Urumqi during the Xinjiang riots. Of course, no mention was made in that threat, as in its threats against Israel or the US, of the deaths it had caused (in this case 136 Han Chinese who perished in those riots, according to the official report) or of the outrages perpetrated by the Muslims that brought about those deaths. Threats were also made of retaliation against the large numbers of Chinese who are employed in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁵ The Muslims were urged "to chop off their heads in their work places or in their homes, to tell them that the time of enslaving Muslims has gone." This was the first time that any al-Qa'ida group had threatened China and its interests so directly and so boldly. In fact, in June 2009, an al-Qa'ida branch in North Africa was reported to have ambushed an Algerian security team that protected a Chinese construction project. In that attack, as many as twenty-four guards were killed. Increased communication on the internet among active jihadists indicates that information is being sought about Chinese interests in the Muslim world in order to target them, thus avenging the perceived injustices in Xinjiang.¹⁴

In Yemen, where al-Qa'ida is seeking to topple President Saleh, Chinese interests are also threatened, though no direct and significant link has been detected between the Uyghurs and bin Laden or his organization. That is perhaps why, in spite of the vows of revenge against Beijing, no full-scale jihad has been urged against China. AQIM, which supports a Muslim state in Algeria, resents the highly centralized and absolute control of the Uyghur population of China by a government of "unbelievers," hence its harsh reaction and threats directed at Beijing. AQIM is presumed to be buoyed by the Muslim fighters returning from Iraq who are seeking new jihadi frontlines. But it should be noted that even in moderate Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, some Muslim groups called for a jihad against China, clashing with police outside the Chinese embassy in Jakarta. The anti-Chinese sentiment in the Muslim world has been spreading, hence the absolute necessity for the Hu government to quell the unrest as rapidly as possible.¹⁵

The Islamic Party of Turkestan (IPT), an illegal organization headquartered in the heart of Xinjiang, but operating clandestinely and in concert with Muslims from outside the area, has released an audio statement in the Uyghur language in response to the riots. The recorded voice is that of Sayf Allah [the Sword of Allah], a military commander in the group.¹⁶ He was last seen in a video released in early 2009, entitled "Steadfastness and Preparation for Jihad for the Sake of Allah." The recording, with a still photo in the background, and the statement were posted on jihadist forums in July 2009, the communiqué itself being dated July 7. The

communiqué was released by the Islamic Army of Turkestan, formerly known as the Islamic Army of East Turkestan, a small jihadist Uyghur group, believed to be based, just like the beleaguered al-Qa'ida, in the tribal regions of Western Pakistan. The group threatened China for having quashed the Xinjiang riots, stating that "Allah's cavalry will soon fall upon you... Oh brave *mujabideen*..., kill the Communist Chinese wherever you find them."¹⁷ The wording is strikingly similar, with local adaptations, to al-Qa'ida and Hamas statements about Israel and the West.

Just how far the Uyghur issue reverberates throughout the Islamic world and affects its foreign relations (but also how selective Muslims in the world can be about their outbursts) was demonstrated in a German courtroom in early July, with the murder of a Muslim woman. In that incident, the victim, a thirty-one-year-old pregnant Egyptian, was stabbed to death in a Dresden court by a man she was scheduled to testify against for allegedly calling her a terrorist. When her husband tried to protect her, he was also stabbed by the attacker and then shot by the court's security guard, who had mistaken him for the assailant. This incident sparked outrage throughout the Muslim world and fueled demands for a formal apology from Germany. But while the Muslim world raged about the "headscarf martyr," Marwa al-Sherbini, holding her up as a symbol of persecution, the far more widespread and lethal plight of Chinese Muslims has generally provoked a more moderate reaction. That issue has not generated much interest in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and the news media have given it only sporadic coverage. Even those Muslim writers who were prolific in defending the headscarf martyr had very little to say about Chinese Muslims. However, the Saudi *Arab Times* compared the Uyghur struggle to that of the Palestinians and the Han Chinese to the Jews. It was only when events escalated in Urumqi that the editorial of the Egyptian state-run *Al-Abram* weekly urged the international community (not the Muslim world) to pay attention to the crackdown. But calls on Muslim leaders to condemn that repression remained conspicuously absent.¹⁸

This disparity in coverage of Muslim oppression might seem surprising. But one must remember that to some Arab regimes, the bloody clashes of police with demonstrators are sadly reminiscent of what is happening in their own country. An Egyptian Muslim opposition leader observed, "In both cases they make the same systematic separation of opponents, of Islamic groups, of opposition groups and they arrest many and they kill many... How could they criticize the Chinese? They are in the same boat..." Conversely, he believes that the harsh Turkish criticism of China is possible because Turkey has a democratic system. The US-funded *al-Hurra* network reported that in Jordan, too, there were some signs of protest, as forty Jordanian MPs submitted a letter to the speaker of the Jordanian Parliament, calling on the government to condemn the events in Xinjiang. The Islamic party there asked the government to take a stance on the "practices against

Muslims in Germany and China.” But no formal statement by the government was forthcoming. This remarkable omission can be attributed to the economic and commercial interests that accrue from China’s strong presence in the Muslim world.

For many years now, China has been the major trading partner of Iran and Sudan and an important source of imports to most of the other countries in the region. Iran, which itself was busy quelling dissenters after the controversial presidential elections at exactly the same time as the riots in Xinjiang, also remained relatively quiet. But individual clerics and representatives of Islamic movements have voiced protest.¹⁹ Notably, Iran has been the most vocal Islamic country in criticizing Germany in the wake of the murder of the headscarf martyr. Some 1,500 Iranian women gathered in front of the German embassy in Tehran, chanting “death to the enemies of *hijab*.” Iranian judiciary chief Ayatollah Mahmud Shahoudi called for the German court officials present during the attack to be sued, and the Iranian ambassador to UNESCO complained to that organization’s director about what he called the “desecration of Islamic values in European countries.” President Ahmadinejad called the event “absolute proof of the brutality of the German government.”

However, in other cases, Iran’s reaction to affronts against Muslims has been somewhat subdued. For example, in contrast to Erdogan’s severe reaction to the situation in China, in which he angrily accused the Chinese of “genocide,” Iran’s reaction to events in China was mild—limited to a telephone call by the Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, to his Chinese counterpart. The Iranian denounced the “foreign meddling” aimed at “undermining China’s stability”—thus, implicitly blaming the West for the Xinjiang unrest.²⁰ Iran’s interpretation of these events was certainly calculated to justify its own muted reaction, by shifting the blame from China to the West. But its commercial ties with China do not provide the entire explanation if one takes into account the fact that Germany is Iran’s largest trade partner in Europe, exporting technology and chemicals that may be contributing directly to Iran’s nuclear program.

Part of the explanation is that Iran was busy employing its own baton-wielding *basisj* [paramilitary militia] to quell the demonstrators who questioned the results of the rigged presidential elections. Twenty of the protesters died. Tehran could not react harshly against Chinese police repression while its own security forces were acting in similarly draconian fashion. Some Iranian analysts claimed that in denouncing Germany so vocally, Tehran sought to divert domestic and international attention following the elections. Germany, after all, has been one of the harshest critics of the oppression of Iranian protesters, while China has remained silent on the legality of the elections. This *quid pro quo* had to be expected, for it not only

constituted a response to Germany's criticism, but also portrayed the Western world as "enemies of Islam," and drummed up support for the regime in its own time of crisis. Add to that China's cordial relations with Iran, and the fact that it blocked resolutions at the Security Council to tighten sanctions against it, and a plausible interpretation emerges for the double standard in the way China and Germany were treated by Iran.

The wise old man of China, Deng Xiaoping, who in post-Mao China sounded like a latter-day Confucius, is cited as having said that he was not afraid of the masses speaking up, but of ten thousand horses standing mute. He was referring to the revolutionary sound inherent in the silence of the oppressed millions. Present-day Chinese leaders, who were raised on a strict diet of Deng's wisdom, also understand the danger inherent in the misleadingly silent waves of the oppressed people of Xinjiang and Tibet. The Chinese hope that by devoting vast resources to economic development and buying more silence, they can postpone unrest until after they pass the baton to the next generation.

If so, are we witnessing a major change in the Han-Uyghur relationship, as the old patterns of repression and its zealous concealment are beginning to crack? Contrary to its longstanding practice, the Chinese government quickly publicized the Urumqi riots of 2009, perhaps believing that the images of the rebellion and rampage would arouse massive Han solidarity with its leadership. Consequently, rather than easing the situation, government actions seem to have encouraged anti-Uyghur stereotypes. (Uyghurs were characterized as terrorists, rapists, thugs and thieves.) If this latest eruption of riots is indicative of anything, it is that Beijing is learning that despite preferential treatment and heavy investment in the economy of the region, the Muslims of Xinjiang are not about to be appeased. Quite the contrary, the continuous settlement of the Han Chinese in Xinjiang only raises tensions and fans the fires of discontent, which are apparently even more intense than in Tibet or Mongolia.²²

Today, many claim that among the fifty-six nationalities in China, the Tibetans and Uyghurs, far from being discriminated against, are actually "privileged and overindulged." For example, those groups are exempt from the one-child policy, and benefit from educational and social welfare programs. Paradoxically, these programs did not improve the lot of the minorities but actually stirred the Han to rebel. In an essay published in April 2009, Ma Rong, a professor of sociology at Beijing University, fumed against the current minority policy. He argued that while European and even Imperial Chinese ethnic concepts of nationhood encompassed many ethnic groups within one citizenship, the PRC adopted Soviet laws on this matter, which gave the minorities, in accordance with Leninist ideology, many privileges that ultimately brought about the collapse of the Soviet

Union. Autonomy, like that accorded to the Uyghurs, has politicized group identity and created dissent and separatism, and ultimately barred integration of the minorities into China. Ma Rong proposes a multicultural China with equality for all, perhaps unaware of the dismal failure of multiculturalism in Europe when attempted with the Muslim immigrant minority there.²³

Under strict Communist rule in Beijing, the government exercised control over information, kept its citizens in the dark and prevented the rise of any consciousness about civil rights or any links between its citizens and the outside world. Internet, fax, mobile phones, the abundant flow of information and the relaxation of civil liberties domestically have given minorities, notably the Tibetans and the Uyghurs, the motivation, means, constituency and global support needed to make their words of protest heard across the world, and have accordingly constrained the ability of the Chinese central government to ignore world public opinion and to react to events not to its liking with brute force. Thus, dissidents are demonstrating more spontaneously, knowing that violent repression will stoke further unrest and that the authorities fear world opinion. The instantaneous transmission by the media of any local incident, such as the one in the toy factory in Guangdong that triggered the Urumqi riots in Xinjiang renders the containment of such incidents virtually impossible. They can then become *causes célèbres* within moments. Today, all of China and the rest of the world are aware of the Xinjiang trauma, while in the nineteenth century, the ruling hierarchy and certainly anyone outside the country were hardly aware of the great Muslim rebellions that were taking place.²⁴

Since the resurgence of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism in China in the 1970s, in the post-Cultural Revolution era,²⁵ the government of China has adopted the policy of “two less and one lenient.” This means that in handling Chinese minority criminals, the police should capture less, kill less and be more lenient than toward the Han majority. Under this policy, many complain, the Uyghur can commit crimes with impunity. Many Chinese have witnessed Uyghur thieves beating up Hans in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, while the police stand by, not daring to do anything because of the aforementioned policy. As a result, Hans and Uyghurs have a different perception of the law. The Uyghurs, it is claimed, know that they can maltreat members of the Han Chinese majority without fear of recrimination. If they kill a Han, they will not be sentenced to death. The state is there not only to protect them from the tyranny of the majority, but also to defend them from its punishment. If they commit a crime for which they deserve punishment, they always consider that punishment “persecution,” “racism” or “discrimination.” This would perhaps help explain the larger numbers of Han casualties in the 2009 Xinjiang eruption, and the likely increase in Uyghur criminality. For when no punishment is feared, there is no deterrent to violence.

Consequently, in October 2009, in order to maintain appearances and especially to satisfy the Han who have been complaining about too much leniency, eight Uyghur rioters were sentenced to death with more trials to follow.

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, a mythology is being woven around them, which assures the longevity of their transmission in the future and the perpetuation of their effect on the minds of the growing generations of Uyghurs. It has been claimed by the exiled US-based head of the World Uyghur Congress, Rebiya Kadeer, that 10,000 of her people were killed or detained in the month of July in the ethnic unrest in Urumqi. She appealed to the United Nations to investigate their disappearance and said she was “perplexed” by the muted US response to the violence. (On a visit to Japan, she emphasized that almost 10,000 people “disappeared” in one night on July 5 when authorities cracked down on the unrest in the mainly Muslim region of Xinjiang.) “Where did those people go?” she asked dramatically? “If they died, where did they go?” She said Chinese police opened machine-gun fire on Uyghur people after dark, once the electricity was turned off, and that the following morning large numbers of Uyghur men had gone missing. She cried out in public:

Uyghur people who were there must have been either killed or taken away next morning, the streets were cleaned and the bodies of ethnic Han (Chinese) were left in the streets. I want to urge the international community to dispatch an independent, third-party investigation mission to investigate what happened...If China can confidently say that the Uyghur people are at fault, then open up the area, tell the third-party commission what really happened.

But Beijing continues to insist that its version of events is correct. Beijing escalates its accusations against Kadeer of being a “criminal” and a “separatist” who instigated the unrest—which the government said left 197 people dead, most of them Han Chinese killed by angry Uyghur mobs. China has said police opened fire to prevent further bloodshed, killing twelve “mobsters,” according to state media reports, and that more than 1,400 people were detained for their involvement in the unrest. Kadeer said she was not involved in fomenting the riots, which came only after Uyghur protests over violent clashes at a factory in southern China, which triggered the June 2009 crisis in the first place. China summoned the Japanese ambassador in Beijing to protest Kadeer’s visit, but the protest was politely rejected, and she traveled to Japan as well as to Australia, which also rejected protests from Beijing.

Who will win this struggle over memory and history? The continued controversy about fact and myth will ensure that the wound will continue to fester. Wang Lequan, the hard-line party secretary of Xinjiang, who is also a member of the

Politburo, said that the erupting violence there had been a “profound lesson learned in blood,” and he vowed to implement “the most resolute and strongest measures to deal with the enemies’ latest attempt at sabotage.”²⁷ If that statement does, indeed, herald another period of repression, then the future for Xinjiang and its Uyghurs is a bleak one indeed.

Notes

- ¹ See Y. Shichor, “Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations,” *Policy Studies* 55, East-West Center, 2009, 1–53.
- ² This is a reference to the 1,300 killed, most of them in battle.
- ³ See Ross Terril, “The Empire Strikes Back,” *Weekly Standard*, July 27, 2009.
- ⁴ Mo Lingjiao, “Turkey, Another Axis of Evil?” *Global Times*, July 10, 2009.
- ⁵ This refers to the Baoan minority of Mongolian origin, which numbers just over 12,000 and is settled in northwest China, or the Tatars of Turkic origin, of whom there are only a handful in Xinjiang.
- ⁶ *Newsweek*, December 9, 1991, p. 29.
- ⁷ Lillian Craig-Harris, *China Considers the Middle East* (London 1993), p. 275.
- ⁸ Xinhua News Agency, February 20, 1990.
- ⁹ Michael Sheridan, “War on Terror Hides Brutal Crackdown on Muslims,” *The Sunday Times*, July 22, 2007.
- ¹⁰ “Uprising in Urumqi,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2009.
- ¹¹ Moises Naim, “Mute Muslims: Why Doesn’t the Islamic World Speak about the Uyghurs?” *Foreign Policy*, July 13, 2009.
- ¹² Pelin Turgut, “Turkey No Longer a Safe Haven for Chinese Uyghurs,” July 27, 2009, www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1912653,00.html
- ¹³ In Algeria alone there are some 50,000 Chinese workers.
- ¹⁴ See Malcolm Moore, *Daily Telegraph*, July 14, 2009. See also Jane Macartney, *Times Online*, July 14, 2009.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Compare to the Izz a-Din al-Qassam brigades, the military arm of Hamas. Those terrorist groups found that differentiation expedient for reasons of denial and self-defense, as they can always accuse their rivals of retaliating against civilians who have nothing to do with terrorism.
- ¹⁷ “Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor,” *MEMRI* Special Dispatch 2450, July 17, 2009.
- ¹⁸ Abigail Hauslohner, “Uyghurs: Middle East Ignores China’s Oppressed Muslims,” *Time*, July 16, 2009.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ *Khaleej Times* (Dubai), July 15, 2009.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² See Terril Ross, *op. cit.*

²³ *Canwest News Service* (Canada), July 29, 2009.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices* (Berkeley, 2003), especially Ch. 2, pp. 54 ff.

²⁶ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/5933478/Uighur-leader-says-10000-killed-or-detained-in-China-unrest.html

²⁷ Peter Foster and Malcolm Moore, "China Arrests 1,400 in Aftermath of Xinjiang Riots: Chinese Police Have Arrested 1,134 Suspects after the Worst Ethnic Violence in Decades Left 156 Dead in the Far Western Province of Xinjiang," *The Daily Telegraph*, July 7, 2009.

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