

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

JULY / AUGUST 2002



American Primacy

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The Palestinian H-Bomb

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Suicide bombing, once the tool of religious fanatics, has won wide acceptance among Palestinians as a legitimate weapon. Neither retaliation nor a fence will stop the bloodshed. Only deploying Palestinian hopes of independence can do that.

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In the wake of September 11, China has launched its own “war on terror” against Uighur separatists in Xinjiang. But Beijing is employing the wrong strategy; the way to improve the situation is by addressing the Uighurs’ legitimate grievances.

The Corporate Key *George C. Lodge* 13

Past attempts to combat global poverty have failed for a simple reason: they have not attacked the problem at its roots. It is therefore time for a new approach, a global corporate alliance that brings business know-how and the profit motive into play.

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If America’s current global predominance does not constitute unipolarity, then nothing ever will. And despite what many have argued, no serious attempts by others to balance U.S. power are likely for the foreseeable future. The sources of American strength are so varied and so durable that the country now enjoys more freedom in its foreign policy choices than has any other power in modern history. But just because the United States can bully others does not mean it should. If it wants to be loved as well as feared, the policy answers are not difficult to find.

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The articles in Foreign Affairs do not represent any consensus of beliefs. We do not expect that readers will sympathize with all the sentiments they find here, for some of our writers will flatly disagree with others; but we hold that while keeping clear of mere vagaries Foreign Affairs can do more to inform American public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent ideas than it can by identifying itself with one school. We do not accept responsibility for the views expressed in any article, signed or unsigned, that appears in these pages. What we do accept is the responsibility for giving them a chance to appear.

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After September 11, the world risks being squeezed between a new Scylla and Charybdis. On one side, America is tempted to launch a dangerous, unilateral mission of robust intervention. But the alternative—resignation to fresh terrorist attacks and oblivion to the security threats posed by globalization—is no better.
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complicated such struggles can be, and how inadequate purely repressive approaches are in dealing with them.

BEG TO DIFFER

China's Qing dynasty completed its annexation of what is now Xinjiang in 1759, and the region's first demand for independence can be traced to an uprising by a local chieftain named Yakub Beg in 1865. He fought fierce battles against the armies of the Chinese court and even managed to secure, in return for trade concessions, diplomatic recognition from tsarist Russia and the United Kingdom. Although finally defeated in 1877, Beg's campaign set a precedent by calling for Uighur independence based on appeals to religion and ethnicity.

With the end of China's imperial era, the Uighurs (in combination with other local Muslim groups) twice briefly achieved statehood. From 1931 to 1934, and again from 1944 to 1949, separate regimes calling themselves the Eastern Turkestan Republic were set up in Xinjiang. The first, which started in the city of Hami, was crushed by a local warlord representing the government of the erstwhile Republic of China. The second, which centered on the districts of Ili, Altai, and Chugachak, was pressured into integrating with the People's Republic of China shortly after the latter's formation. For the next four decades, Xinjiang's Communist rulers kept the lid on ethnic separatism in the region through iron-fisted control. But for many Uighurs the aspiration for a country of their own never went away.

Today the million-strong Uighur emigre community provides support for several separatist political organizations. Located across the globe, these organiza-

tions are not all radical; indeed, many do not advocate violence at all. The Washington, D.C.-based Eastern Turkestan National Freedom Center, for instance, lobbies members of Congress on behalf of the Uighur cause and publishes books and tapes on pan-Turkic nationalism for circulation inside Xinjiang. Meanwhile, the leader of the Europe-based Eastern Turkestan Union, Erkin AlpTekin, prefers to organize conferences and work with Tibetan emigre groups seeking autonomy for their own homeland. In truth, whether or not they support the use of violent methods, the Xinjiang separatist groups both at home and abroad are too small, dispersed, and faceless to constitute a threat to Chinese control over the region. Beijing fears them nevertheless, because the mere possibility that they may cause disruption creates an impression of social instability in Xinjiang and dampens foreign investment.

The Chinese government has alleged that "more than a thousand" Xinjiang separatists have received terrorist training in Afghanistan and claims to have arrested a hundred foreign-trained terrorists who have made their way back to Xinjiang. But only one Uighur separatist organization, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah, appears conclusively to have operated in Afghanistan. Its identity was exposed when its putative leader, Alerkan Abula, was executed by the Chinese authorities in January 2001. Other groups, such as the East Turkestan Opposition Party, the Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan, the Organization for Turkestan Freedom, and the Organization for the Liberation of Uighurstan, have links to small guerrilla cells based in the oasis towns of Xinjiang's Taklimakan Desert.

Chinas “War on Terror”

September 11 and Uighur Separatism

Chien-peng Chung

In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States, China has launched its own “war on terror.” Beijing now labels as terrorists those who are fighting for an independent state in the northwestern province of Xinjiang, which the separatists call “Eastern Turkestan.” The government considers these activists part of a network of international Islamic terror, with funding from the Middle East, training in Pakistan, and combat experience in Chechnya and Afghanistan.

In fact, separatist violence in Xinjiang is neither new nor driven primarily by outsiders. The region’s Uighurs, most of whom practice Sufi Islam and speak a Turkic language, have long had their national ambitions frustrated by Beijing. The latest wave of Uighur separatism has been inspired not by Osama bin Laden but by the unraveling of the Soviet Union, as militants seek to emulate the independence gained by some Muslim communities in Central Asia. For a decade now, Xinjiang has been rocked by demonstrations, bombings, and political assassinations. According to a recent government report,

Uighur separatists were responsible for 200 attacks between 1990 and 2001, causing 162 deaths and injuring more than 440 people. In the largest single incident, in 1997, as many as 100 people may have been killed during a pro-independence uprising in the town of Ili, with the government and the separatists blaming each other for the fatalities. These incidents have occurred despite the best efforts of the Chinese authorities to suppress them. As part of their continuing “strike hard” campaign against crime, for example, Chinese police recently reported the arrest of 166 separatist “terrorists” and other “major criminals” in a series of raids carried out in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital.

The separatists have accused the regime of resorting to arbitrary arrest, torture, detention without public trial, and summary execution. The Chinese government, meanwhile, has alleged that members of a shadowy “Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement” have obtained funds and training from al Qaeda. As the security environment in Xinjiang grows increasingly tense, the conflict shows just how

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The Chinese government has tried to equate America's fight against Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda with its own battle against the separatists of Xinjiang. Beijing is signaling to Washington that it wants a free hand in dealing with what it perceives to be foreign-sponsored terrorists on its soil, just as the United States is doing at home and abroad. The Bush administration, however, has been reluctant to equate the fight against "terrorists with global reach" with domestic crackdowns against separatists in China and elsewhere. Rather, Washington has made it clear to the Chinese that nonviolent separatist activities cannot be classified as terrorism.

The problem is that some of the Xinjiang activists do in fact use violence to achieve their goals. Distinguishing between genuine counterterrorism and the repression of minority rights can thus be difficult, as can be determining which acts of terrorism are "international" and which



are purely domestic. Foreign-backed militant separatism, a not uncommon phenomenon of which Uighur activism is an example, poses intellectual and legal problems as well as practical ones. Clear guidelines are needed to determine when political refugees can be extradited or punished for supporting separatism from beyond a country's borders, for example,

The guerrillas have raided government laboratories and warehouses for explosive materials and manufactured various types of bombs. The Turkey-based Organization for Turkestan Freedom, for example, claimed responsibility for the bombing of a bus in Beijing on March 7, 1997, injuring 30 people. The Chinese government also suspects this organization of attacks on the Chinese embassy in Ankara and the Chinese consulate in Istanbul that same year.

Despite the separatists' efforts, China is unlikely to relinquish control of the province. With 18 million people, Xinjiang produces one-third of China's cotton, and explorations in the Tarim Basin have revealed the country's largest oil and gas reserves. The region borders Mongolia, Russia, several Central Asian republics, Pakistan, and India, making it a useful springboard for projecting Chinese influence abroad. And Beijing realizes that acquiescing to Uighur demands will only embolden separatists in Tibet and Taiwan.

The government has also invested a great deal in the region. As part of a grand scheme to develop China's western areas, Beijing plans to spend more than 100 billion yuan (\$12 billion) on 70 major projects in Xinjiang over the next five years, mostly to improve infrastructure. The government has recently completed a railway linking the remote western city of Kashgar to the rest of Xinjiang. And the regime is considering proposals for using foreign investment to build oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia across the Taklimakan Desert.

DEFINING MOMENT

The U.S. action in Afghanistan presented a dilemma for the Uighurs. On the streets of Urumqi, Kashgar, and other cities in Xinjiang, opinions both for and against

the U.S. antiterrorist effort could be heard. Many Uighurs expressed sympathy for their Taliban friends and fellow Muslims across the border in Afghanistan, who had provided sanctuary, arms, and training to Xinjiang separatist fighters over the years. Yet the Uighurs also had positive feelings toward the United States, which had occasionally spoken out against Beijing's violations of their rights.

The September 11 attacks and the subsequent crisis also created a dilemma for China. They offered an opportunity for the government to reframe its battle with the Uighur separatists as part of a larger international struggle against terrorism. But the Afghan campaign raised other, less comfortable issues as well. As a result the Chinese response to the U.S. war on terror has been muted. China supported two UN Security Council resolutions that condemned global terrorism in general terms, but since then Beijing has remained notably silent, a reflection of its ambivalence.

On the one hand, China sees the U.S. fight against al Qaeda as helping to safeguard the authority and effectiveness of national governments. On the other, it worries about the legal and diplomatic repercussions of sanctioning such a clear violation of state sovereignty as the invasion of Afghanistan. It was fortunate for China that no UN resolution seeking to ratify the legality of the U.S.-led military campaign was introduced. A vote against such a resolution would have been seen by Washington as an unfriendly gesture, but a vote for could have set a precedent legitimizing the sort of intrusive foreign military interventions that China has generally opposed. And abstaining would have made the Chinese government look weak and indecisive in the fight against global terrorism.

Chien-ficng Chung

or when international law justifies the use of force against citizens who receive weapons, funding, and training from abroad. Otherwise, precedents might accumulate suggesting it is acceptable for some governments to go after foreign sources of terrorism, but not for others.

WHITHER THE UIGHURS?

What Beijing needs to recognize is that its own policies are the root causes of Uighur resentment. Rather than trying to stamp out the problem through force and repression alone, the Chinese government should instead do what it can to improve the conditions that fuel separatist feelings.

The government's call to develop the west has accelerated migration by Han Chinese into Xinjiang, thereby exacerbating tensions. In 1949, the region was almost 90 percent Uighur; today, that figure has dropped to 45-50 percent. Many Uighurs do not speak Mandarin Chinese, which is usually the prerequisite for any good-paying job or government position, and few are as well educated as the immigrants. As a result, the Han dominate commerce in Xinjiang's urban areas and are frequently seen by the locals as having the regions best jobs in the government, the Communist Party, and the military. The Han also usually live in newer neighborhoods and go to informally segregated schools.

Rather than allowing the flow of immigration into Xinjiang to remain unchecked, the Chinese regime should regulate it so that immigrants do not compete unnecessarily with the locals for jobs, schools, or state services. Beijing should encourage public-sector corporations, oil companies, and government

agencies to increase their hiring of ethnic minorities. Quotas for Uighur admission into colleges and government positions should also be expanded and enforced. The government must also allocate funds fairly among Han and Uighur neighborhoods. Cleaning up the area around China's nuclear test site at Lop Nor in the Taklimakan Desert, where soil and groundwater pollution are causing birth defects and health problems among the local inhabitants, would be another important step.

Furthermore, as guaranteed in the Chinese constitution, the government must uphold religious freedom. Muslim Uighurs who openly practice their faith complain of harassment by the authorities. The regime must respect Muslim customs and allow the free functioning of mosques and religious schools, interfering only if they are found to be educating or harboring militants. Political changes are required as well: less gerrymandering in favor of Han Chinese among Xinjiang's administrative units, more proportionate ethnic representation in party and government structures, and more devolution of power from Beijing to the region.

Hunting down terrorists is only a partial solution to the violence in Xinjiang. Unless China listens to the Uighurs and treats them better, its troubled western region is unlikely to be calmed any time soon.[^]