

China's Xinjiang Problem and Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan emerged as an independent state in 1947 & has always been beset with innumerable problems – particularly the security problems. We joined SEATO & CENTO mainly because of our security concerns. In spite of the fact that these pacts were US sponsored & were meant to ensure the containment of Communism (& by implication were equally opposed to both China & Soviet Union). Still China has been more appreciative of our constraints. Since then Pak-China relations have remained pretty stable & reliable. Of late Xinjiang province, a Muslim population area has emerged a serious irritant in our relations. This province claims that Muslims never been an integral part of Chinese cultural & community and as such are legitimately entitled to independence. China is apprehensive for the fact that Pakistan – at least some sections of its population – are sympathetic to Muslims' struggle for a separate homeland. In this article, we have tried to touch upon some of the sensitive issues involved in this problem. Our main objective is to understand this issue.

Keywords: Xinjiang Province, Pak-China relations, China, Pakistan

Introduction

The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is a largely Muslim populated area (about 21 millions) in the northwest of China. In area, it is the largest province in China covering about one-sixth of China's total area. The Xinjiang is home of 47 ethnic groups, the larger ones include: the Uighur, Han, Kazak, Hui, Mongolian, Kirgiz, Xibe, Tajik, Uzbek, Manchu, Daur, Tatar and Russian, most of them of Central Asian kinship.¹ The most populous ethnic group is the Uighur, after which the XUAR is named. The Uighurs are Turkic ethnically and culturally, and mostly Sunni Muslims. It is one of China's five autonomous regions for ethnic minorities. Economically, it is backward than the interior and western provinces of China.²

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The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region has 5,500 km of international borders. It holds important position at the crossroads of 8 states: Russia, Central Asia (bordering the independent republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), Mongolia, the Indian sub-continent (sharing common borders with India, Pakistan and Afghanistan), Tibet, and China proper. This geo-strategic position which made Xinjiang a crucial passageway for the Silk Road in the distant past and a stake in the "Great Game" between the Russian, British and Chinese empires, now even more sensitive amidst regional tensions. Standing high on the list includes: a territorial dispute with India (which declared in 1998 that its nuclear armaments were pointed at the PRC); the Pakistani-Indian conflict over neighbouring Kashmir; the never-ending war in Afghanistan; the volatile situation in the Ferghana Valley (where a mixture of ethnic groups are divided between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan); and the precarious situation within Tajikistan (torn by a civil war until 1996). It also lies at the cultural crossroads between the Islamic world, the Middle East and the Han Chinese heartland.

The crucial importance of Xinjiang has also been reinforced by the discovery of large oil deposits in its Tarim Basin, indicating that Xinjiang will become a major supplier for China's ever-growing energy needs.³ More importantly, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the vast energy supplies of the former Soviet Central Asian republics are becoming a focus of geopolitical attention as regional and extra-regional states seek to secure access to new sources of oil. These factors combine to make the outcome of the separatist struggle in Xinjiang of growing international strategic importance and will influence developments in the region.

Another cause of importance of Xinjiang for China is nuclear testing: areas of low population where military manoeuvres and nuclear testing are conducted. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) maintains large ground and air forces and most of its nuclear ballistic missiles in Xinjiang. China's nuclear weapons tests are also conducted at Lop Nor in Xinjiang's Taklamakan desert. China has conducted some 45 nuclear test explosions at Lop Nor since 1964; the last two occurred in 1996. The environmental devastation, atmospheric pollution and groundwater contamination caused by these tests is a major factor contributing to local hostility to the Chinese presence. Serious environmental pollution as a result of 20 years testing of nuclear weapons in the Turfan-Kuerla region and contamination of Lake Bositeng (China's third largest lake) has become yet another cause for indigenous resentment and protest against Chinese authority.⁴

Xinjiang is also of major importance to China for population resettlement. In 1949, about 0.29 million Han Chinese lived in Xinjiang, but since then some six million have immigrated to the province.

Finally, Xinjiang provides China with a unique potential to assert its influence in Central Asia and the Middle East. The China's regional authority is greatly enhanced by its position as a Central Asian power and China sees the breakup of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to expand China's Central Asian leadership. Xinjiang ethnic, family and religious ties with the surrounding states are all regarded as vehicles to this end.

Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) consolidation of its rule in Xinjiang has been "an attempt...to turn the region into an internal colony for three reasons: to reduce the historic vulnerability of its borderlands, to avert emboldening the separatist movements in Tibet and Taiwan by agreeing to Uighur demands for greater autonomy, and to monopolize Xinjiang's rich natural resources."⁵

History

Xinjiang was included in the territory of China in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24).⁶ After that there were subsequent gaps in Chinese authority, centuries during which the region became culturally intertwined with the Middle East and in which non-Chinese kingdoms flourished.⁷ In 8th century the area was controlled by Arabs as a result of the Chinese defeat by Arab forces at Talas River near Samarkand in 751 AD. In 13th and 14th centuries, Xinjiang was controlled by Mongols. Chinese finally gained control of Xinjiang when the territory was Conquered and integrated into the Chinese state in the 1750s. China ruled it until 1862 amidst more than forty major local revolts. A major Turkic uprising then drove the Chinese out and the region partially gained independence. This, however, was the period during which Tsarist Russian expansion into Central Asia was perceived as threatening to British colonial interests in India. In what is known as "The Great Game", the British sought to check Russian ambitions through a series of alliances and military assistance to friendly powers. Because they were concerned that Russia would move into East Turkestan (Xinjiang), the British financed the Manchu (Chinese) dynasty's re-conquest of East Turkestan in 1876. East Turkestan was named Xinjiang and formally annexed to the Manchu Empire in 1884. Xinjiang became a province of China in 1884, fixing a firm western border with Russia.⁸ The Xinjiang region was not initially colonized or settled but was maintained as a strategic frontier zone, with up to 20,000 Manchu (Chinese) banner garrisons, at a huge annual cost. The largely Muslim inhabitants kept

their own religious leaders who were bound by salaries and titles to the Manchu state (China).⁹

Xinjiang's relations with Beijing have been fractious ever since. The reason is simple: the native population of Xinjiang has no cultural, ethnic, linguistic or religious connection with China which, in essence, is a "foreign" occupying power. In fact, the very name "Xinjiang" meaning "New Frontier", emphasizes the region's place at the periphery of the Han Chinese Empire.

After the dissolution of the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1912 A.D) the Republic of China gradually saw the country dissolving into Japanese-occupied territories and warlord-occupied territories, including Xinjiang. In 1933, Uighurs established the short-lived Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan and again in 1944 Uighur leaders set up an independent state called the East Turkestan Republic, ruled by an autonomous military governor who nervously sought aid and sponsorship first from the Soviet Russia and then from the Nationalist Party of China, before ultimately surrendering to the Communists in Xinjiang in September 1949.¹⁰

Xinjiang after 1949

Although China was initially declared a multinational state in 1949, the Communist Party's policy of 1957 opposed "local nationalism" among ethnic minorities and clamped down on religions.¹¹ A decade later, the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) caused even greater injustices against ethnic minorities. Religion was especially suppressed, so were ethnic languages, cultural foods and dresses. The Uighur in Xinjiang, like other Muslim minorities throughout China, saw their religious texts and mosques destroyed, their religious leaders persecuted, individual adherents punished and ancient religious sites desecrated.¹² The Mao era of Cultural Revolution was particularly hard for all religious groups in China, especially the Muslims. After Deng Xiao Ping (1975-83) took power, the situation improved rapidly for the Muslims and there was a return to religious tolerance. With the more open policies adopted during the late 1970s and the early 1990s, restrictions on minorities and religions began to loosen. Mosques were rebuilt or reopened and greater interaction between China's Muslims and the wider Islamic community was permitted. Chinese Muslim participation in the annual Haj pilgrimage to Makkah grew steadily from the mid-1980s, exposing many ordinary people to international Islamic thought and political developments. Similarly, foreign Muslims were allowed to visit Islamic sites in China, creating a greater awareness of the wider Muslim community.

This opening resulted in more minorities speaking out against what were seen as discriminatory economic, religious, and political practices. Very quickly, these openings generated renewed affinity with Islam in Xinjiang and created an intellectual climate conducive to thoughts of separatism and autonomy. Sensing a threat to its power, the Chinese government responded by restricting contacts between its Turkic Muslims and visitors from the Middle East. By the early 1990s, mosque construction and renovation was severely curtailed, public broadcasting of sermons outside mosques was banned, religious education was forbidden, only religious material published by the state Religious Affairs Bureau was allowed, religious activists were removed from state positions and Haj pilgrimages were tightly controlled and limited to participants over 50 years of age. The first serious outbreaks of violence directed at the Chinese authorities occurred in response to the imposition of these restrictive measures and reflected the local communities' anger and frustration at Beijing's about-turn on greater religious freedom. China feared that instability in Xinjiang could bring instability to Tibet, inner Mongolia and Taiwan.

Xinjiang Uprising

The problem's root causes are a complex mix of history, ethnicity, and religion fueled by poverty, unemployment, social disparities, and political grievances.¹³

The April 1990 armed uprising in Baren marked the start of an increase in Uighur Muslim violence in Xinjiang. Uighurs want a separate state, or to maintain cultural distinction within an autonomous relationship with China. The violent outbreaks in Xinjiang occur sporadically, with Uighur groups claiming responsibility. The Uighurs have a history of long grievances against the Chinese government. The uprising in Xinjiang province can largely be attributed to the following:

China Policies

Since 1949, there has been unrest within Xinjiang, but this issue is not monolithic. There are serious divides and multiple fault-lines within Xinjiang on social, economic and radical lines. The primary problem in Xinjiang is ethnic; the Uighurs who form the majority in Xinjiang claim that historically they were never a part of the Chinese kingdom. What really hurts the Uighurs is their discriminatory treatment by the rest of China in matters of culture, religion and language. The Uighurs complain against the state of China for mistreating them, affecting their future. They also complain against the rest of Chinese society for treating them as second class citizens. In any given ethnic situation, some perceptions

are genuine and the rest perceived. Whether genuine or perceived, there are serious grievances among the Uighurs against the Chinese state, relating primarily to the ethnic question.

- i). Religious Repression: The increase in Muslim unrest in Xinjiang is a function of the resentment that has grown as the community's aspirations for greater autonomy based on the combination of national identity and religious revivalism. The Islamic revival is not primarily an ideological reawakening; instead, the reduced interaction with the cultural heritage of the Islamic world made the religious element an important new focus of anti-Chinese unity.

Discriminatory policies favouring the Han Chinese over the locals in access to jobs, education, health care and other services, combined with Beijing's insensitivity to traditional cultural and religious way of life in Xinjiang, have compounded Muslim resentment at being treated as second-class citizens in their homeland. For example, the Communists banned the traditional Arabic script that had been used in the region for more than a thousand years and destroyed thousands of historical books.¹⁴ In order to take advantage of economic opportunities, the native population is required to learn Chinese. The cultural, linguistic and religious distance between the two peoples is not closing and social interaction remains negligible. China's integration policies are particularly offensive to traditional values. For example, financial rewards are given to Han Chinese who inter-marries with Muslim ethnics but any offspring are registered only as Chinese.

Anti-Chinese unrest in Xinjiang stems therefore from the twin assaults of cultural/ religious repression and demographic manipulation.¹⁵ Beijing's rigorous attempts to assimilate the Uighurs through the repression of religion, assembly and language, as well as through the systematic introduction of Han Chinese immigrants into the region, have stimulated deep-rooted anti-régime sentiment. Therefore, it is of little surprise that there have been periodical uprisings against Chinese domination.

- ii). Economic Discrimination, Develop West Policy and Han Inter Immigration: China in recent years, has been attempting to develop Xinjiang as a gateway to the Western world; as a part of this objective, there have been efforts to create special economic zones and build cities of international standards. This strategy has resulted in two serious economic imbalances: first, as is

happening in the rest of China, there is a rural-urban migration factor. For example, Kashgar today attracts a large number of migrants from rural Xinjiang. Second, economic investments in Xinjiang have also attracted large scale Han migration from the rest of China into this region. The Uighurs, like the Tibetans, complain that the Han migration into their region is a deliberate strategy of the Chinese government to change the ethnic composition of their homeland.¹⁶

In an attempt to close the gap in income and wealth terms between the rapidly growing eastern coastal provinces and the western China, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 1999 launched the Western Development Campaign, popularly known as "Go West!" At the same time, China announced to "seize an historic opportunity", launching an ambitious policy to "open up Xinjiang to the world" by setting up economic zones, expanding border trade and pouring massive investment into infrastructure and capital construction in the province. Promoting Han In-migration, the increased economic activity and improved transport routes enabled Beijing to speed up the immigration of ethnic Han in a strategy that is called "mixing sand" (chan shazi). Even though this new settlement, both urban and rural, has been encouraged by a series of carefully planned measures, any large influx of settlers is bound to generate conflict.¹⁷ The China Communist Party (CCP) has also actively encouraged Han settlement in Xinjiang as part of the Production and Construction Corps (PCC), paramilitary farms consisting, primarily, of demobilized troops.¹⁸

Although China officially denies any significant increase and official statistics do not show any major rise, yet it is obvious that fresh waves of Han migrants have been pouring into Urumqi (Xinjiang Capital) and every other city. Construction work, restaurant employment, hawking and a wide array of jobs are taken up by people coming in from other parts of China.¹⁹

China for plundering Xinjiang natural resources such as oil and many minerals, and to upsetting the demographic balance, encourages Han immigration. Consequently, the share of the Hans in Xinjiang's population has grown dramatically from about 6 percent in 1949 to about 42 percent today. Enjoying affirmative action, Hans occupy not only the crucial positions in the region's administration, politics and military, but also have better and easier access to its economic benefits, while Uighurs are systematically discriminated against.²⁰

In what is perhaps the ultimate attempt at ethnic dilution, China's strict one-child policy has been waived for Han Chinese willing to move to Xinjiang; they are allowed to have two children, a benefit which encourages further immigration. In effect, there has been a systematic policy to reduce the Muslim heritage of Xinjiang. As a result of the increase in Han settlers in Xinjiang employed by the PCC or otherwise, the region has gone from 76% Uighurs in 1949 to 45% Uighurs today. The increase in Han settlement has been a major source of friction in Uighur-Chinese relations.

Change in population structure of Uighur and Han in Xinjiang (1949- 2012) (Figures in millions)

Year	Total Population	Uighur	Han	Other ethnic groups, Kazaks Huis, Kyrgez etc
1949	4.33	3.29	0.29	0.73
Percentage	100	76	6.7	17.3
1953	4.78	3.61	0.33	0.90
%	100	75.42	6.9	17.7
1964	7.44	4.02	2.45	0.95
%	100	54	33	13
1982	13.16	5.99	5.32	1.86
%	100	45.5	40.5	14
1990	15.16	7.19	5.7	2.3
%	100	47.5	37.6	15
1997	17.18	8.02	6.6	2.6
%	100	46.7	38.4	15
2000	18.46	8.35	7.49	2.7
%	100	46.1	39.2	14.7
2002	19.05	8.69	7.96	2.4
%	100	45.6	39.9	14.5
2010	21.3	10.05	8.4	2.85
%	100	45.2	40.1	14.7
2012	21.8	10.4	8.7	2.8
%	100	45	41	14

Sources: Colin Mackerras, *Xinjiang at the Turn of the Century: the Causes of Separatism*, *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2001, pp. 289-303.

- iii). Strike Hard Policy: Following the mass protests and violent riots of April 1990 in Baren Township, there were further Uighur

demonstrations and disturbances in various cities including Yining, Khotan and Aksu in the mid 1990s.²¹ This was followed by the Chinese government response: the initiation of a “strike hard” campaign against crime throughout China in 1996 which made Uighurs and separatists in Xinjiang a key target. After the forceful suppression of a Uighur demonstration in the city of Yining in February 1997, there were several days of serious unrest. A renewed national “strike hard” campaign against crime was initiated in April 2001 and has never formally been brought to a close. China’s official statement on “East Turkistan Terrorists,” published in January 2002, listed several groups allegedly responsible for violence, including the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), the Islamic Reformist Party “Shock Brigade,” the East Turkistan Islamic Party, the East Turkistan Opposition Party, the East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah, the Uighur Liberation Organization (ULO), the Islamic Holy Warriors, and the East Turkistan International Committee. These criminal suppressions, despite decreasing unrest, increase the violence further.

International Factors

- i). China’s helping of Mujahideen against USSR in Afghanistan: The Afghanistan war (1979-89) should not be underestimated in terms of the impact it had on Islamic youth from Algeria to Kashmir. As an ideological event, the Afghan conflict clearly had a powerful effect on those who now seek to create an Islamic state in East Turkistan. A number of Xinjiang Muslims are known to have fought alongside the Mujahideen in Afghanistan together with other committed revolutionaries from a number of Islamic states. China also helped Mujahideen in Afghanistan by pouring arms, training and some fighters into the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the central plank of China’s foreign policy was to oppose Soviet hegemony.²² During the 1980s, this policy drove China to throw in its lot with an American supported war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. The result turned out to be entirely contrary to China’s interests. China was thus forced to lie in a bed that it had itself helped to make.

Chinese government trained and armed Uighurs in conjunction with Pakistan as part of the successful anti-Soviet efforts. The price China paid for allowing the Uighurs to

participate in a jihad was a “renewed and spreading revolt of the Uighurs.”²³ Many Uighurs who fought alongside the mujahideen returned to Xinjiang, in spite of the Chinese government's efforts to thwart them. Subsequently, they joined the nationalist movement there, often violently agitating for independence.

Certainly, radical Islamic international contacts were consolidated in Afghanistan and the end of that conflict has created a pool of well-trained, religiously motivated fighters and a vast amount of surplus weapons. There is a virtually uncontrollable trade in weapons from Afghanistan to the border regions of Pakistan, Kashmir, Tajikistan and to criminal elements elsewhere in the region. Smuggling of all kinds of illegal imports is common throughout the area and centuries-old tribal connections make it unreasonable to dismiss the influence of "outsiders" in the Xinjiang conflict.

Thus, several factors such as the cross-border linkages established by the Uighurs through access provided by the Karakoram highway, China's tacit consent to expanded Uighur travel and economic links with region through Reform Era policies, and China's explicit consent in supporting anti-Soviet operations, all prompted the radicalization of a portion of Xinjiang's Uighurs.

- ii). Disintegration of USSR and independence of Central Asian States: The emergence of the post-Soviet Central Asian states in 1991 constituted a watershed in China's policies toward Xinjiang, the historically troubled Chinese province that belongs geographically and ethnically to Central Asia. Economic and security issues, both domestic and transnational, have become increasingly intertwined as the Chinese government has looked for ways to ensure stability and territorial assimilation at the same time.²⁴

With the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Chinese leadership was presented simultaneously with risks and opportunities. The retreat of China's long-time rival, Russia, offered new opportunities for China to gain influence in Central Asia, a region previously out of reach and rich in energy resources. China launched ambitious policies towards the Central Asian states to gain access to key energy resources and cheap raw materials and conquer new markets for its products. But China's main concern was to prevent renewed rebellion in Xinjiang against China,²⁵ especially

given the volatility of the new geopolitical environment. The revival of Islamic identity throughout Central Asia has contributed directly to the growth of anti-régime hostility in Xinjiang and raised concern in Beijing that religious nationalism poses the greatest threat to the stability of China. Official statements repeatedly refer to the danger of "splittism" along religious lines and it is clear that the government was not prepared to tolerate greater ethno-religious autonomy at the risk of jeopardizing the control of the Communist Party. The separatist elements in Xinjiang were encouraged by the independence of Central Asian States to struggle for their own independence from China.

Some scholars claimed impetus behind the more violent forms of resistance was the independence of Central Asia. "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."²⁶

- iii). External Powers Involvement: Chinese officials have frequently blamed outside forces for their troubles in Xinjiang, and have warned against United States and CIA involvement. China is the main competing power of US in Asia. So US always tries to create troubles for China in one shape or another by supporting Tibetan separatism or Xinjiang separatism to serve her strategic interests in the region.²⁷

Xinjiang after 9/11

In the US led war on terror, China has seized the opportunity to justify its repression of pro-independence activities in Xinjiang by framing the conflict in that region as just one more front of the global war on terror.

China has been quick to capitalize on the war against terrorism to justify renewing its brutal "Strike Hard" campaign. On January 21, 2002, the Information Office of the State Council issued a report stating that "terrorist forces from Xinjiang jeopardized . . . social stability in China, and even threatened the security and stability of related countries and regions."²⁸ An extension of this position has been China's allegation that the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, a small separatist group within Xinjiang, is a terrorist group having strong ties with the al-Qaeda.

After September 11, 2001, China aggressively played the Islamic terrorism card in stigmatizing the Uighur self-determination movement. According to one report, the Chinese claim 1,000 Uighur militants

trained by al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups, and charged that Osama bin Laden himself had offered large sums of money to Uighurs to create an Islamist terrorist campaign in Xinjiang.²⁹ Although the East Turkistan National Congress has explicitly condemned al Qaeda, yet there are few signs that the Uighurs have links with international Islamist terror groups. Open tolerance of minorities declined further in Xinjiang when China felt it was now both internationally permissible to “crack down” on separatists in Xinjiang and nationally more urgent to protect its porous borders from an influx of more violent forms of Islam from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.³⁰

According to the Chinese documentary, Hasan Mahsum found refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after leaving Xinjiang in 1997 and established a “training camp” and began to recruit Uighurs to carry out a jihad in Xinjiang. The Chinese government asserts that: The “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” headed by Hasan Mahsum is supported and directed by bin Laden. Since the formation of the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement”, bin Laden has schemed with the heads of the Central and West Asian terrorist organizations many times to help the “East Turkistan” terrorist forces in Xinjiang launch a “holy war,” with the aim of setting up a theocratic “Islamic State” in Xinjiang.³¹ This document subsequently claims that Mahsum met personally with Osama bin Laden in 1999 and 2001 in Kandahar and Kabul to receive “instructions” and financial assistance without providing any corroborating evidence.³² Many scholars and human rights organizations have condemned China's sweeping generalization of all Uighurs calling for independence as terrorists driven by radical Islam. According to Human Rights Watch, China has sought to “blur the distinctions between terrorism and calls for independence by the ethnic Uighur community . . . in order to enlist international cooperation for its own campaign, begun years earlier, to eliminate 'separatism'.”³³

China Policy to Curb Xinjiang Problem

Chinese policy to address these challenges to its position in Xinjiang since 1990 has been characterized by five major strategies: (1) Re-centralisation of economic decision-making; (2) Han in-migration; (3) Exploitation of Xinjiang's potential energy resources; (4) Greater political and economic links with Central Asia; and (5) Reinforced state control of ethnic minority religious and cultural expression practice.³⁴

The central government's policies on separatists include the use of force in Xinjiang. In August 2001, the Chinese military undertook large-scale exercises in Xinjiang with an imposing parade of military hardware through the center of Kashgar.

Economic incentives, however, may be the largest tool in the central government's policies toward Xinjiang and the Uighurs, especially the Western Development Program's policies. The western regions, more than half of China's vast expanse of land, consist of six provinces and three autonomous regions, including Xinjiang. The Western Development policies were first, an economic development strategy to reduce poverty, and second, an urgent social necessity of Chinese leaders.

Pakistan and Xinjiang Problem

When in 1990s the separatists got momentum in Xinjiang for which China blame al Qaeda and Taliban who were supported by Pakistan at that time, Chinese government shut down its road links with Pakistan, including the legendary Karakorum Highway, curtailed border trade for several months to stop the destabilizing flow of fighters, lodged strong protests with the Pakistani government.³⁵

According to Ahmad Faruqi, "The Chinese closed the highway because they ... wanted to send a strong signal to the government of Pakistan that China would not hesitate to freeze the close ties between the two neighbors if Pakistan did not stop its backing for Islamic militants."³⁶

China blamed that the separatists were trained in Pakistani madrassas, irony, while China herself sent them during the 1980s for help of Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet Union.

With the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, China's fears of the Islamic threat were further compounded as the Taliban, along with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a jihadi group with ties to al-Qaeda, were believed, recruit Uighurs from the vast network of Pakistani madrassas, many of which follow the conservative Deobandi teachings and advocate jihad.³⁷ During the late 1990s, China even covertly attempted to reach out to the Taliban and urge them to stop supporting a Uighur insurgency in China. In one instance, as Chinese pressure on Pakistan and the Taliban grew, at a meeting in Kandahar between the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan and Taliban leader Mullah Muhammed Omar, the Taliban denied that Uighurs were part of their forces.³⁸

China believed to have pressured Pakistan to launch a crack down on Muslim groups it suspects of arming fundamentalists in Xinjiang. The PRC special relationship with Pakistan has not refrained the Chinese government from taking action against Pakistanis in Xinjiang. In late December 2003, 700 Pakistani traders were expelled from Xinjiang. Beijing has also restricted visas for Pakistanis wanting to travel to Xinjiang along the Karakorum Highway and taken measures to

prevent Muslim Uighurs from traveling to Pakistan and Afghanistan to attend Islamic *madrassas* (religious schools).

Pakistan government always denies its support to Uighur that Pakistan never supported Uighur separatist cause; it has taken increasingly strict measures since the late 1990s to lessen China's fears.³⁹ These have included closing Uighur settlements in Pakistan, arresting and deporting Uighurs, and killing alleged Uighur terrorists. Through the 1990s, as the Chinese government cracked down on the region, Islamabad showed Beijing that although it tolerated the Uighurs' presence on its soil, it was by no means supportive of their cause and placed a greater premium on Pakistan's strategic ties with China than on its religious ties with the Uighurs. On the ground, Uighur settlements and markets in Pakistani cities have been closed. In December 2000, the Pakistani army closed two Uighur community centers called Kashgarabad and Hotanabad that had provided shelter for Uighur immigrants in Pakistan for decades. The earliest reported deportation of Uighur students enrolled in local *madrassas* occurred when 14 students were deported to China in 1997 following the protests in Illi. Chinese authorities claimed that the students were connected with the recent bombings in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Amnesty International stated that the students were "handed over to Chinese authorities without any legal process and reportedly summarily executed on the Chinese side soon after being driven across the border."⁴⁰

On January 6, 1999, the Chinese authorities lodged a protest with the Pakistan Interior Ministry after the arrest of 16 Uighurs in Xinjiang. The Chinese stated that the arrested persons had admitted during interrogation that they had received guerrilla warfare training in camps at Jalalabad in Afghanistan and Landi Kotal in the Pakistani Khyber Agency.⁴¹ A *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) article in November 2003 stated that "a small number of separatist Muslims from Xinjiang have reportedly been trained at Al Qaeda camps in Pakistan."⁴² Pakistani authorities have denied the existence of any such training camp for Uighur separatists. No Pakistani government official has ever met publicly with Uighur leaders or promoted their cause. But the circumstances served to sour Sino- Pakistan relations.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has proven to be a willing ally in China's "war on terror" in order to preserve their all-weather friendship and safeguard its own national interests. In a visit to China's Shaanxi province in 2001, Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf met with the Imam of the Grand Mosque in Xi'an and urged all Chinese Muslims to be patriotic, shun violence, and "work for the good of China." During the same visit, a Chinese state television station quoted

Musharraf as saying to then-Vice President Hu Jintao, "Pakistan will wholeheartedly support China's battle to strike against the East Turkistan terrorist forces."⁴³

In May 2002, Chinese authorities announced that Pakistan had detained Ismail Kader, a major Uighur separatist leader, at a secret meeting in Kashmir.⁴⁴ Most significantly, in December 2003, Pakistani authorities stated that Hasan Mahsum, leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, was shot dead on October 2 during a Pakistani military operation to flush out al-Qaeda elements in its South Waziristan tribal district.⁴⁵

His death made China more secure about its relationship with Pakistan in combating militant Uighurs. Islamabad has also put pressure on religious leaders running madrassas not to accept any Uighurs.⁴⁶

During Musharraf's November 2003 visit to China, he reportedly told President Hu Jintao that Pakistan would never allow anyone, including the terrorist forces of East Turkistan, to use Pakistani territory to carry out anti-China activities.⁴⁷ Pakistan will wholeheartedly support China's battle to strike against the East Turkistan terrorist forces. Both leaders signed the China- Pakistan Joint Declaration calling for bilateral cooperation in numerous areas, including combating separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Pakistan extradition treaty, make Pakistan's current zero tolerance for Uighur militancy abundantly clear. The Pakistani government has never openly friendly posture toward the Uighurs from the earliest stages of Pakistan's relationship with China. No Pakistani government official has ever met publicly with Uighur leaders or promoted their cause.

In June 2005, Pakistan joined as an observer the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a rising, powerful regional alliance that has distinct counter- terrorism mandate.

In 2009-10 riots more than 200 people were killed and the Xinjiang local government had accused Pakistan in that the separatists had received explosives and firearms training in Pakistan-based camps of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement.

Once again China pointed a finger at Pakistan and blamed that those involved in the deadly attack in the northwestern Xinjiang region, were trained across the Pakistani border. The Government of Xinjiang province accused Pakistan for her failure to prevent Uighur radicals from using Pakistan's soil. Although Xinjiang local government accused Pakistan, yet the central government never directly pointed against Pakistan.

Pakistani Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it was confident that the local and central authorities in China would "succeed

in frustrating evil designs of the terrorists, extremists and separatists, who constitute an evil force." It also said that Pakistan would "continue to extend its full cooperation and support" to China against ETIM.

There were two high-profile visits from Pakistan to China; the first one in the middle of August 2011 by new Foreign Minister of Pakistan Hina Rabbani Khar and the second by President Asif Zardari, to assure China of Pakistan's full support. The unrest in Xinjiang is not to alter Sino-Pak relations; there are larger strategic interests for both China and Pakistan to protect.

Conclusion

The existing internal and external challenge of Uighur separatism and Islamic radicalism to Chinese rule in Xinjiang is marginal and manageable. Despite articulated and deliberate attempts by the parties concerned to blow up the situation in Xinjiang, the prospects of the reemergence of an Eastern Turkestan Republic independent from China are, by any standard, practically nonexistent.⁴⁸

Separatist groups are simply too small, scarcely coordinated and dispersed to wage an organized campaign. It has been observed that although there are periodic riots, infrequent bus bombings and frequent fistfights between Uighurs and Hans, resistance against Chinese government control is generally passive.

Separatism will succeed in Xinjiang if central control on Xinjiang becomes loose because of weakening authority of China and since that is not possible in near future, so there is no threat of separatism.

Beijing's hold on Xinjiang is becoming stronger, not weaker, as the region is being further incorporated into China Proper by expanding transportation and communication networks (railroads and highways, optic fiber channels, satellites, and the like); by gas and oil pipelines; by changing the demographic balance; and by an ongoing crackdown campaign against criminals, "separatists," and Islamic "extremists." At the same time, although Uighur separatist organizations and Islamic radicalism are more vocal and visible, they become weaker, not stronger. This is not only because of internal frictions, but also because of the realization that foreign governments, including Islamic, would not support separatism in China. Actually, as the PRC's economic, political and military role in international affairs is growing; the prospects of challenging its territorial integrity become smaller. This is precisely why external support for Uighurs has consistently confined to issues of human rights, hardly ever touching on autonomy, much less on independence. Given these circumstances, the solution to Uighur grievances and to

China's concerns in Xinjiang has to be found somewhere in between complete integration into the PRC and complete independence from it. As a matter of fact, Xinjiang's autonomy has not only been superficial but also discriminatory. One way to overcome this policy, whose negative aspects have been recognized by the Chinese themselves from time to time, is to offer Xinjiang an upgraded autonomy. To achieve the right balance, China needs to reexamine its policies toward the Uighurs and address the long-standing socioeconomic and political roots of Uighur discontent. Beijing's vociferous dismissal of Uighurs' calling for reform, greater autonomy, or even independence as separatists, terrorists, and criminals with ties to al-Qaeda demonstrates a disturbing disregard for the fact that most Uighurs have not affiliated themselves with radical Islam or violently resisted the government. China's draconian policies to combat these "terrorists" may well polarize moderate Uighurs and create the very problem they are aimed at "solving."

Ending this conflict requires more than simply revising CCP policies or granting greater local administrative autonomy to Uighurs.⁴⁹ A genuine resolution to the conflict will only emerge if the CCP recognizes that Uighur discontent is rooted in nationalist sentiment aimed at preserving ethnic identity and territorial integrity, rather than supporting independence and international Islamist violence. While these measures are important, a lasting resolution requires sustained political engagement between moderate Uighur leadership and the CCP. Towards this end, detailed policy prescriptions for relevant local, regional and international actors, while acknowledging the sizable political hurdles that must be faced. Without greater dialogue and support for moderate leaders, extremists will continue to gain support in Xinjiang and abroad, endangering provincial development and further escalating the violence.

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