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Uyghurs: Chinesization, Violence and the Future

A R M Imtiyaz*

This study examines ethnic tensions and conflict in China's conflict-ridden Xinjiang region where Uyghurs, who share distinct traits such as language, culture, and religion, claim geographical domination. The major thesis of this study is that Chinesization of Xinjiang region by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has fueled ethnic conflict and violence. The study attempts to understand violence of both parties. Each party's violence or violent attitudes against the other increases the sense of distrust between them. This paper also discusses some fundamental historical factors that play a role in understanding Xinjiang's ethnic violence. It finally suggests solutions to the protracted ethno-political conflict—partition or power sharing.

Introduction

In July 2009, China's oil-rich and ethnically-sensitive far-western Chinese province of Xinjiang experienced violence between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Media reported that more than 100 people were killed and 800 injured from the disturbance which broke out in the provincial capital, Urumqi. The disturbances occurred after a year of rising tensions between the dominant Han Chinese authorities and the Uyghur ethnic minority—the historical ethnic majority in Xinjiang—who say they have been socially and economically marginalized by Beijing's policies that introduce Chinesization of the region. On August 4, 2008, four days before the start of the Beijing Olympics, two ethnic Uyghurs drove a stolen dump truck into a group of some 70 Chinese border police in the town of Kashi in Xinjiang, killing at least 16 of the officers. The attackers carried knives and home-made explosive devices and had also written manifestos in which they expressed their commitment to jihad in Xinjiang.[1]

When violence broke out in Xinjiang, people living outside China had one simple question: "Why do Uyghurs rebel?" Ethnic riots do not occur in vain. There are several scholarly explanations to understand ethnic violence.[2] Of these, one explanation is politicization of ethnic distinctions by major political parties that fuels ethnic violence

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1 Stratfor Global Intelligence (n.d.), "China: Signs of a Looser Militancy in Xinjiang", available at http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/120989/analysis/china_signs_looser _militancy_xinjiang. Retrieved on March 11, 2010; and Stratfor Global Intelligence (n.d.), "China and the Enduring Uyghurs", available at http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/china_and_ enduring_Uyghurs. Retrieved on December 23, 2010.

2 T R Gurr and Harff Barbara (1994), *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Westview Press, Oxford.

and conflict.[3] The July 5 violence was the most brutal act of violence against the protesters since Tiananmen Square unrest some 20 years ago. China's state-controlled media and ruling communist party officials identified those Uyghurs who had taken part in the riots against the Han Chinese as "terrorists", and accused the exiled groups, including the World Uyghur Congress, of fomenting violence.[4] But the questions are: Why have some young Uyghurs, a minority group comprising roughly half the population of Xinjiang province, lost trust in the state and its institutions?[5] What causes have contributed to the anti-Chinese campaign—both violent and non-violent—by young Uyghurs? It is clearly difficult to rationalize human actions and motivations. Instead, there are many factors that can lead to tensions between groups of people in divided societies. This paper will first review many of these complicated factors, and then focus on how the politicization of ethnic tensions has triggered violence and tragedy in the Xinjiang province.

Theoretical Frameworks

The primordialist approach offers one simple yet powerful explanation about ethno-political conflict. For primordialists, ethnic identity is inborn and, therefore, immutable[6] as both culturally-acquired aspects (language, culture, and religion) and genetically-determined characteristics (pigmentation and physiognomy) in shaping ethnic identity. Primordialism's socio-biological strand claims that ethnicity, tied to kinship, promotes a convergence of interests between individuals and their kin group's collective goals. Consequently, even racism and ethnocentrism can be viewed as extreme forms of nepotistic behavior driven by feelings of propinquity and consanguinity. Primordialists thus note nationalism as a natural phenomenon.

In contrast, the constructivist theory views ethnic identities as a product of human actions and choices, arguing that they are constructed and transmitted, not genetically inherited, from the past.[6] Max Weber was one theorist who stressed the social origin of ethnic identity. Weber viewed each ethnic group as a "human group" whose belief in a common ancestry (whether or not based in genetic reality) leads to the formation of a community, concluding that ethnic identity is not primarily a genetic phenomenon, but rather a result of circumstances and political environment.[7]

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3 A R M Imtiyaz and B Stavis (2008), "Ethno-Political Conflict in Sri Lanka", *The Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 135-152.

4 Peter Foster (July 6, 2009), "China Riots: Death Toll from Xinjiang Unrest Rises", available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/5754804/China-riots-death-toll-from-Xinjiang-unrest-rises.html. Retrieved on March 9, 2010.

5 Uyghuramerican (n.d.), "Introduction to East Turkistan", available at http://www.uyghuramerican.org/categories/About-Uyghurs/. Retrieved on December 12, 2009. The Chinese government estimates that some 40% Han Chinese, totaling nearly 7.5 million of a total population of 18 million, now live in the province.

6 R Taras and R Ganguly (2002), *Understanding Ethnic Conflict: The International Dimension*, Priscilla McGeehon, New York.

7 *Ibid.*

Constructivists believe that nationalism is an 18th-century European phenomenon and an ideological creation. Various constructivists have suggested that the desire to build armies and improve military capabilities, the failure of industrialization to create a homogeneous cultural structure and market, and the development of standardized communication systems all made it possible to imagine and invent communities.[8] The imagined, arrogated and ascribed national character, facilitating the nation-building process, consequently promoted nationalism in Europe.

While nationalism led to stronger, more integrated states in Europe, the process involved multiple wars over several generations as well as forced displacement and several genocides of millions of people. Will the construction of nationalism in today's developing nations inevitably lead to the same tragic fate? Is Han Chinese violence against the minorities, particularly the Uyghurs, a reflection of European history and a harbinger of the future for the third world?

Other scholars emphasize the pre-modern or pre-colonial roots of the ethno-political conflict in Xinjiang. Predominantly, Uyghur kingdom, later known as East Turkestan, existed before it was annexed by the China's Tang Dynasty in the 9th century. The people of East Turkestan, hosting Turkic ethnicities such as Uyghurs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tadjiks, held little unified nationalistic identity. Identity in the region was heavily "oasis-based", that is, identity focused on the city, town and village level.[9] For our purpose below, by Eastern Turkestan, we shall identify the region inhabited by the Uyghurs, which now goes under the name of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in the northeastern part of People's Republic of China. In contrast, the Western Turkestan comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan that became independent after the collapse of the Soviet era in 1991.

In Sri Lanka, Tamil and Sinhalese kingdoms existed long before the Portuguese captured the island in 1505, and the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms fought to extend their boundaries in ancient Sri Lanka.[10] Conflicts between the Mende and Temne in Sierra Leone similarly predated colonialism. The Maronities and Druze in what is now Lebanon fought long before the arrival of the Ottomans, and the Acholi and Langi clashed intermittently in pre-colonial Uganda.[11] The old hostilities still play significant roles in influencing the current stage of these ethno-political conflicts, thus hindering the process of nation-building.

The Colonial History theorists contend that the contemporary pattern of ethnic relations have been largely shaped by its colonial history. The colonial process created

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[8] B R Posen (1993), "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Powers", *International Security,* Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 80-124.

[9] J R Rudelson (1997), *Oasis Identities*, Columbia University Press, New York.

[10] S Arasaratnam (1964), *Ceylon*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

[11] N M Kasfir (1972), "Cultural Sub-Nationalism in Uganda", in V A Olorunsola (Ed.), *The Politics of Cultural Sub-Nationalism in Africa,* p. 10, Anchor Books, Garden City, New York.

borders, which included or divided ethnic groups and defined the demographic mixture of the colonies that eventually became countries. Colonialism's divide-and-rule policies, census taking, and promotion of ethnic identities—all enhanced (and sometimes even created) the cultural and ethnic distinctions in colonial societies, although these processes by themselves can hardly account for the nationalistic conflict unleashed in the post-colonial areas.[12]

Problems arose when colonial rulers favored and allied themselves with a particular group, often a minority, to help in colonial administration.[13] A minority, after all, could be more trusted to ally with an outside power. The minority might preferentially receive education and then share in political and economic power. When independence came, such a group found itself in a precarious position, as the majority group sought to gain political and economic power. When the majority groups seize power from the former administrators and marginalize the minority group politically and economically, then the minority might either struggle for power or for secession.[14]

Unlike traditional homelands of some ethnic groups in Asian and African countries that have experienced ethnic disharmony and tensions, China's Xinjiang region did not confront external intervention. However, there is a strong perception among the youth of Uyghurs to perceive mainland Chinese rulers as external aggressors.

The modernization theory maintains that when colonies became independent countries, modern values would spread and indigenous inhabitants would be less influenced by traditional ethnic or religious loyalties. In this theory, greater political and economic interaction among people, coupled with widespread education and mass communication networks, would break down parochial identities of ethnic and religious groups and replace them with loyalty to larger communities, as witnessed in Malaysia, or emerging pan-African or a future Asian community.

However, political developments of the 1980s and 1990s in both the post-colonial and the Western worlds have clashed with this prediction. In China, ethnic loyalty was strengthened, not weakened, by China's nation-building efforts that were led by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Zedong, and the modernization of society. In 1949, after the Chinese Nationalists (Kuomintang) lost the civil war in China, East Turkestan's (Uyghur) rulers did not agree to form a confederate relation within Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China. However, a plane crash, alleged

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[12] A D Smith (1979), "Towards a Theory of Ethnic Separatism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 21-37.

[13] In India, where the Muslims were a minority and yet the ruling class, they were sidelined by the British Raj, which found the majority Hindus to collaborate with it. So, while the minorities in general are the ones that are usually the underclass in a society, which seem to welcome the change in administration, a generalization is not always correct, as we see with the British Raj in India, where the majority Hindus were the underclass during the Muslim-ruled Mughal Empire.

[14] M Robert and H Wolpe (1970), "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism: A Theoretical Perspective", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 1112-1130.

to have been plotted by Mao, killed most of the East Turkestan Republic's supreme leadership. Soon after the crash, General Wang Zhen quickly marched on East Turkestan through the deserts, suppressing anti-invasion uprisings. The remaining East Turkestan Republic leadership that fell under Secretary Saipidin Eziz quickly surrendered. Mao turned East Turkestan Republic into the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, imposing its Republican forces to join the People's Liberation Army and named Saipidin Eziz as the region's first CCP governor. Many East Turkestan Republican loyalists fled into exile to Turkey and Western countries, while many others remained inside and staged anti-CCP ruling activities aimed at regaining their independence.

As Ted Robert Gurr pointed out, ethnic leadership provided strong networks that form the basis for political mobilization.[15] Rising competition in the Xinjiang region to dominate economic and political resources, particularly between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese, essentially diminished the chance for a common national identity to develop, especially as Han Chinese leaders established regulations and laws that grossly favored the majority Han Chinese.

In May 2002, Western media reported a massive book-burning rally in the Xinjiang city of Kashgar. Chinese officials claimed that the books promoted separatism and threatened stability, but reliable Uyghur sources maintain that the books were learned works on history and culture of their people. In the same month, Xinjiang University, the largest in the region, instituted a new policy eliminating all instruction in the Uyghur language. Since 2004, Uyghur-language schools at the secondary and elementary level have also been steadily merged with Chinese-language schools, effectively eliminating the use of Uyghur as a medium of instruction. In some cities, the use of the Uyghur language has already been entirely eliminated from the schools. These policies constitute a serious bar to Uyghur linguistic preservation and the right of Uyghurs to receive education in their own language.[16]

China's behavior toward the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang province supports the prediction of Karl W Deutsch[17] who believed that social mobilization could generate ethnic conflict between different groups that compete for limited economic and political opportunities.

Some recent scholars have elaborated on this theme. John R Bowen[18] notes that people began to see themselves as members of vast ethnic groups only during the modern period of colonization and state-building. Rogers Brubaker also suggests that

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15 T R Gurr (1993), *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC.

16 World Movement for Democracy (n.d.), What's Being Done on Enhancing the Political Participation of Minority Peoples? Profile: The Uyghur Community in China World Movement for Democracy, available at http://www.wmd.org/wbdo/wbdominority/uyghur.html. Retrieved on March 22, 2010.

17 K W Deutsch (1953), *Nationalism and Social Communication*, MIT Press, Cambridge.

18 J R Bowen (1996), "The Myth of Global Ethnic Conflict", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 3-14.

conflict between different ethnic groups arises because of the increase in competition for the domination of the modern politics.[19] The expanded role and power of the state intensifies elite competition and contributes to conflict between ethnic groups.

Politicization of Ethnic Relations and Chinesization

Given the numerous cleavages and tensions in ethnically divided societies, the factor that influences most as to whether and how communal violence breaks out is the way that the political system deals with the tensions. Do political leaders aggravate the tensions until they explode in violence? Do they recruit people to instigate acts of violence and then condone and protect them? Or do they seek non-violent resolution of problems and ensure that proponents and initiators of violence are punished?

In many cases, elite political leaders believe they can win support and strengthen their positions by mobilizing along ethnic cleavages. They anticipate that appeals to ethnicity are particularly effective in expanding or broadening their power base. Sometimes leaders, therefore, exploit ethnic tensions in (electoral) politics, and sometimes they encourage followers to use crude violence—pogroms or ethnic cleansing. This process frequently results in the polarization of the political system into ethnic divisions and a possible breakdown into violence. Marginalized minorities may suffer, emigrate, or fight back with the weapons of the weak—terrorism and/or guerrilla activities. Elites manipulate ethnic identities in their quest for power[20], and these processes can either deliberately or unexpectedly trigger ethnic conflict.[21] This paper emphasizes the manner in which the CCP and its communist politicians have politicized ethnic relations and aggravated tensions, leading to serious violence in the Xinjiang region.

Historical processes related to nation-building efforts often give rise to tensions and conflicts between different ethnic groups, but it is often the political leaderships which provide the sparks that ignite the violence. They often do so deliberately, because they believe they can strengthen their personal political positions within their own ethnic communities. These dynamics are clear from a review of Xinjiang's ethnic violence.

The politicization of ethnic differences by Chinesizing the region began in the early 20th century in the form of violently occupying Uyghur-dominated Xinjiang region. The kingdom of the Uyghurs, called East Turkestan, had existed prior to the 20th century. All the inhabitants of Xinjiang have been overwhelmingly Uyghurs, who are Muslims, sharing their linguistic and cultural bonds with Central Asia.

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[19] R Brubaker (1996), *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[20] P R Brass (1985), *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA.

[21] P R Brass (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Since the 1950s, successive Chinese political leaderships systematically formulated policies and carefully implemented actions to socio-economically as well as politically de-empower the Uygurs in Xinjiang. Such policies and actions can be defined as Chinesization. The Chinesization primarily is twofold: settlements and language.

The state policies to settle the Han Chinese in the Xinjiang region efficiently "increased from nearly 300,000 in 1953 to nearly 6 million in 1990, in addition to more than one-half million demobilized soldiers in the Production and Construction Corps."[22] Today, the Han Chinese population makes up 41% of Xinjiang's total population, from what was only 6% in the early 1950s.[23] This increase was made possible "as a result of state-sponsored population transfers from other parts of China."

A second massive Chinesization in the form of systematic colonization took place in the 1990s. The CCP offered an attractive economic incentive program called the "Big Development of the Northwest" to the poor Han Chinese to transfer them from the underdeveloped areas of the country. The CCP's calculated attempts brought success. It brought between one and two million new settlers, Han Chinese, to Xinjiang.[24] The CCP's westward movement and economic development came together with a combination of massive subsidies, oil exploitation and rapid urbanization. But the Uyghurs were systematically denied opportunities to be a part of the rising program. The state's policies aggravated the indigenous Uyghurs against the Han Chinese settlers.

The language policy adopted since the 1950s by the Chinese CCP denied the basic rights for Uyghurs to continue their education in their own language. Uyghurs were being forced to continue education (from primary to university level) in, what they consider, a foreign language—Mandarin.

Most countries are committed to language policies, which may be overt, covert, or a combination of both. Political establishment decides the language policy depending on its own and/or people's need. The constitution of the United States does not declare an overt language policy. In Sri Lanka, in contrast, successive Sinhalese political parties actively supported the Sinhala. Only Language Act in 1956 made Sinhala the *only* official language in state and public affairs and sharply discriminated against Tamil speakers. In China, the language policies have been both overt and covert.

The founders of the People Republic of China somehow implemented integrationist language policies that were not aimed at progressively imposing standard Chinese

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[22] A M Dwyer (2005), *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*, East-West Center, Washington.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

to non-Han Chinese populations in the Xinjiang region. In other words, it allowed local languages to be used though the state did not allocate any resource to develop the languages of the minorities. However, the integrationist nature of the language policies confronted severe challenges during the period of Cultural Revolution (1966-1977). The CCP shut the door for the Uyghurs to practice and develop Uyghur language, and vigorously insitutionalized the standard Chinese, known as Putonghua among the Uyghurs.

Since 1978, the CCP has been systematically promoting Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) in the Xinjiang region. The instruction in Uyghur has been systematically reduced in most of the schools, if not all schools, in the region. The education commission that was formed in 1987, directed by the CCP, stipulated how to implement bilingual education in the region.[25]

But it is quite evident that the major goal of such bilingualism was to help Uyghur pupils to learn Standard Chinese language, and not the other way round for the migrant Han settlers to the region. The current trend in the Xinjiang region is the overwhelming dominance of the Chinese language at all levels of instruction. The policies of the CCP compel Uyghur parents to send their children to *Chinese-language-only* schools in the region. Some direct witnesses suggest that the Uyghurs who are fluent in the Chinese language speak and act like Han Chinese, and are ignoring their traditional language and culture—a matter of genuine concern to the older generations of the Uyghurs.[26] Furthermore, to add insult to injury, in the Xinjiang region, the state prescribes Uyghurs to what versions of the Quran to use.[27] The CCP also makes it mandatory for Imams to attend political education camps that are run by state authorities.

Furthermore, to strengthen the Chinesization, the institutions controlled by the CCP strictly implemented China's one-child policy in the region,[28] dominated by the Uyghurs whose religious faith, according to some orthodox interpretations and understanding, strongly discourages Muslims to practice birth control.[29] However,

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[25] W Weidong (1992), "The Conditions and Experience of Chinese-Language: Primary, Secondary and Territory Education in Xinjiang", in Chinese Academy of Social Science Nationalities Institute and National Committee on Nationalist Affairs (Eds.), *Issues in the Use and Development of Chinese Minority Language and Scripts*, pp. 246-251, China Tibetan Studies Publishing, Beijing.

[26] Interview with (New York, USA-based) Uyghurs on January 10, 2010.

[27] R Gunaratna and K G Pereire (2006), "An Al-Qaeda Associate Group Operating in China?", *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 55-61.

[28] China's one-child family policy, which was first announced in 1979, has remained in place despite the extraordinary political and social changes that have occurred over the past two decades. The policy introduced by Deng Xiopoing "limits couples to one child. Fines, pressures to abort a pregnancy, and even forced sterilization accompanied second or subsequent pregnancies". See, M Rosenberg (2011), *China's One Child Policy*, March 2, available at http://geography.about.com/od/populationgeography/a/onechild.htm. Retrieved on March 18, 2011.

[29] K F Akbar (n.d.), *Family Planning and Islam: A Review*, available at http://muslim-canada.org/family.htm. Retrieved on March 18, 2010.

such one-child, family planning policy does not apply to any ethnic Han couple relocating to Xinjiang. According to George (1998)[30], "China's strict one-child policy has been waived for Han Chinese willing to move to Xinjiang; they are allowed to have two children with a fringe benefit which encourages further immigration ..." George further points out, "...there has been a systematic policy to reduce the Muslim heritage of Xinjiang. Anti-Chinese unrest in Xinjiang therefore stems from the twin assaults of cultural/religious repression and demographic manipulation. Beijing's rigorous attempts to assimilate the Uyghurs through the repression of religion, assembly and language, as well as through the systematic introduction of Han Chinese immigrants into the region, have fomented deep-rooted anti-regime sentiments. It is of little surprise that there have been periodical uprisings against Chinese domination." Not surprisingly, such incentives have altered the demographic mix significantly diluting Uyghur population. Moreover, the US State Department report on China in 1998 states that the migration of ethnic Han in recent decades has caused the Han-Uyghur ratio in the capital of Urumqi to shift from 20 to 80, to 80 to 20.[31]

Uyghurs have viewed this policy as an attack on their religious practices and as part of a wider political agenda by the CCP, which is aimed at weakening the Uyghur control over the region.

The reason for all of these policies was to Chinesize the region. Chinesization naturally created an environment of distrust between the Uyghurs and the Han Chinese, while eroding Uyghur faith in the system. Conversely, violence accompanied these culturally-biased policies. The communal riots of 1997 and 2009—in which Uyghurs were killed, maimed, robbed and rendered homeless—were brutal, and set the stage for Uyghur-retaliation and efforts towards secession.

In the Ghulja (Yining) riots of 1997, approximately 50 people were killed or injured when security forces opened fire on Uyghur protesters. On February 5, some 200 Uyghurs, led by a few ideologically motivated youngsters, staged a silent protest demonstration at Urumchi. Reports suggest that "they were protesting against the closure of independent religious schools, the banning of 'meshreps' (a traditional form of social gathering), the closure of a local Uyghur football league and high rates of unemployment among Uyghurs."[32]

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[30] P George (Spring 1998), "Islamic Unrest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", Commentary No. 73, available at http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/pblctns/cmmntr/cm73-eng.asp. Retrieved on January 15, 2010.

[31] US Department of State, Washington DC (February 1999), "China Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998", retrieved on March 8, 2011, from the US Department of State website, http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/china.html

[32] Dofollownet (n.d.), "Stop Human Rights Violations Against Uyghurs in China", available at http://www.dofollownet.com/World/Stop_human_rights_violations_against_ Uyghurs_in_China. Retrieved on March 11, 2010.

They were assaulted, even stoned, by Han Chinese mobs, hired by the local CCP leaders. Rioting then spread throughout the city and many Uyghurs were assaulted and the shops belonging to the Uyghurs were looted.[33] It was reported that the Han Chinese dominated security forces detained many sympathizers and organizers of the Uyghur rights; they were tortured and some were "put to death". The security forces blamed and arrested the protesters because the CCP believed that the demonstrators were both religious fundamentalists and separatists, and thus attempting to establish an Islamic state in Xinjiang.[34] However, as is known, the central leadership of the CCP was determined to target what it considered to be the separatist movement and its so-called Islamist ideology. Apparently, the statement of Jiang Zemin, the former President of China and the general secretary of the CCP, explains the CCP's strategy: "The tree may prefer calm, but the wind will not subside. It will be a long-term task to fight separatism.[35]"

Resistance and Islamization

Ethnic violence can occur at any time in any society where identities and relations are deeply politicized. Ethnic groups do not need broader logical reasons to hate each other and nor do they expect wider socioeconomic reasons to justify killing others. All they need is simple politico-socio conditions in which they can justify the basic reasons to shed the blood of others. The violence that erupted in 2009 suggests such severity in dealing with ethnic identities and symbols.

The July 2009 riots in Urmuqi took place several days after a violent incident in Shaoguan, Guangdong. Some 200,000 young Uyghurs (many of whom do not speak the local language) were sent to Guangdong since early 2008 as part of a program to alleviate labor shortages there.[36]

According to the state media, a disgruntled former worker (Han Chinese) disseminated rumors in late June that two Han women had been raped by six Uyghur men, although police later said they found no evidence to support the allegation.[37] Uyghurs maintain the attacks started after the night shift at around 12.30 a.m., June 26, when Han mobs stormed into Uyghur dormitories and started indiscriminate and unprovoked beatings. Amateur videos posted online showed brutal attacks, and Han chasing Uyghurs through the dorm floors.[38] The outsiders brought in machetes and

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[33] Interview, January 10, 2010, *op. cit.*

[34] Dwyer (2005), *op. cit.*

[35] BBC (n.d.), "Jiang Says Hard Work Still Needed to Counter Separatism", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/63005.stm. Retrieved on January 12, 2007.

[36] Rebiya Kadeer (July 8, 2009), "The Real Story of the Uighur Riots: Heavy-Handed Police Tactics by the Chinese Turned a Peaceful Assembly into a Bloodbath", *Wall Street Journal*, available at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124701252209109027.html. Retrieved on March 9, 2011.

[37] BBC (June 30, 2009), "Man Held Over China Ethnic Clash", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8125693.stm. Retrieved on March 21, 2010.

[38] K E McLaughlin (n.d.), "Fear Grips Shaoguan's Uyghurs", available at http://www.feer.com/politics/2009/july58/Fear-Grips-Shaoguans-Uyghurs. Retrieved on January 12, 2010.

killed many Uyghurs. A few hundred Uyghurs were injured in the mob attack. Initially, according to the official account, only two Uyghur co-workers were killed by the Han Chinese people, "although eye-witness accounts and interviews reported by foreign press suggest that the number of deaths was up to 18 Uyghurs."[39] Armed police reaction was understandably slow. With the CCP's ability to stop protests even before they get started, this was a very slow response, which in effect meant the party approved the beating of Uyghurs.[40]

On July 5, 2009, the Uyghurs in Urumqi, who perceived the Shaoguan incident as an anti-Uyghur violent mobilization by the Han Chinese settlers, blessed either directly or indirectly by the CCP, organized a peaceful street demonstration to voice their discontent and to demand a full government investigation. The reports suggest that the security forces used excessive force against Uyghur protesters including beatings, use of tear gas and shooting directly into the crowd of protesters, killing at least 140 people and injuring another 816.[41] Moreover, some reports suggest that thousands of angry Han Chinese armed with poles, meat cleavers and other makeshift weapons stormed Uyghur neighborhoods.[42]

Some Uyghurs had reacted to state violence with violence against the Han Chinese whom they consider illegal settlers.[43] Wu Nong, a CCP member in Xinjiang maintains that the Uyghurs damaged "more than 260 vehicles... and more than 200 shops and houses."[44] But Uyghur groups insisted that the peaceful Uyghurs "had fallen victims to state violence, with police firing indiscriminately on protesters in Urumqi."[45]

According to Rebiya Kadeer, the exiled leader of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which was blamed by the CCP for coordinating and instigating the riots over the Internet, "the fact that Uyghurs were holding Chinese national flags speaks volumes for the nature of this peaceful protest and for what they were demanding—civil rights and equal justice under the law. They are not 'outlaws' as accused by the Chinese authorities."[46]

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[39] Oiwan Lam (July 6, 2009), "China: Urumqi Mass Incident and Beyond", available at http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/07/06/china-urumqi-mass-incident-and-beyond/print/. Retrieved on March 11, 2010.

[40] The Chinese government's long-term nationalistic propaganda aimed at giving the Uyghurs a bad name has resulted in most Han Chinese viewing Uyghurs as suicide bombers, splittists and terrorists.

[41] BBC (July 6, 2009), "Scores Killed in China Protests", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8135203.stm. Retrieved on March 11, 2010.

[42] Asia Observer (n.d.), "PRC and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", available at http://www.asiaobserver.com/component/option,com_ fireboard/Itemid,453/id,12654/catid,7/func,fb_pdf/ Retrieved on March 7, 2010.

[43] Interview with Uyghur Muslim undergraduate students over the phone, May 10 and 12, 2010.

[44] BBC (July 6, 2009), *op. cit.*

[45] Xinhuanet (July 6, 2009), "Civilians and Armed Police Officer Killed in NW China Violence", available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/06/content_11658819.htm. Retrieved on February 13, 2010.

[46] Uyghurcongress (July 6, 2009), "WUC Condemns China's Brutal Crackdown of a Peaceful Protest in Urumchi City", available at http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?p=966. Retrieved on March 12, 2010.

It is worth noting here that neither the CCP ruling elites nor the state institutions openly condemned or took any meaningful immediate measures to prevent the violence against the Uyghur civilians in Urumqi. Instead, the CCP mainly targeted Uyghurs, and the CCP-influenced Urumqi Intermediate People's Court sentenced six, on September 15, 2009, to death, and six more people were convicted of murder, arson and other violent crimes during ethnic violence.[47]

A total of 21 people were convicted in October 2009. On November 9, nine men, which included eight Uyghurs and one Han, were executed of crimes including murder and arson, according to the state-owned China News Service.[48] By February 2010, the number of death sentences issued had increased to 26, including at least one Han and one female Uyghur.[49]

Subsequent to the Urumqi riot incident, on July 10 the city authorities closed all mosques "for public safety", saying it was too dangerous to have large gatherings and that holding *Jumu'ah*, traditional Friday prayers, could reignite tensions.[50] Published reports suggest that large crowds of Uyghurs gathered for prayer anyway, and the police decided to let two mosques open to avoid having an "incident". After prayers at the White Mosque, several hundred people demonstrated over people detained after the riot, but were dispersed by riot police, with five or six people arrested.[51]

It is quite evident that the violence and ethnocentric policies of the CCP and its institutions have contributed to the growth of Uyghur nationalism in Xinjiang. In other words, the Chinesization and systematic violence against the Uyghurs and their culture have further pushed the indigenous people of the Xinjiang to think *Xinjiang ren* (a person of Xinjiang),[52] and strengthened their ethno-religious identity that is based on language and Islamic faith.[53]

Despite the fact that the CCP did not like to seek a solution that is based on granting political autonomy or federal formula to ease ethnic tensions in Xinjiang, some Uyghurs, such as exiled Uyghur leaders and their organizations like the WYC, remain committed to finding a comprehensive political solution to the ethnic conflict.[54]

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[47] Asia Observer (n.d.), *op. cit.*

[48] BBC (November 9, 2009), "Nine Executed Over Xinjiang Riots", available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8350360.stm. Retrieved on March 25, 2010.

[49] Jia Cui (December 5, 2009), "Riot Woman Sentenced to Death for Killing", *China Daily*, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2009-12/05/content_9122992.htm. Retrieved on March 21, 2010.

[50] Euronews (October 7, 2009), "Urumqi Mosques Closed for Friday Prayers", available at http://www.euronews.net/2009/07/10/urumqi-mosques-closed-for-friday-prayers/. Retrieved on March 24, 2010.

[51] C Buckley (July 10, 2009), "Chinese Police Break Up Uighur Protest After Prayers", available at http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5691HI20090710. Retrieved on October 17, 2009.

[52] In June 1988, some 300 students marched in Urumqi with slogans: "Drive out the Han!" and "Oppose Han migration to Xinjiang."

[53] Interview with some diaspora Uyghurs in Canada, February 23, 2010.

[54] Kadeer (July 8, 2009), *op. cit.*

It is also evident that the Uyghurs tried peaceful protests which soon degenerated into violence. With the underlying grievances being unattended, the stage was set for some Uyghur youths to adopt violence against state and the Han Chinese. This background helps us to understand the birth of violent Uyghur separatist movements towards the end of the 1990s.

Some Uyghurs have adopted violence. There are several reasons why groups resort to violence. One reason is the absence of healthy moderate political groups. Uyghurs did not have active political moderates to voice their grievances within and beyond the borders. The CCP's vehement opposition to any moderate political voices that embraced the Uyghur nationalism also encouraged some to embrace violence. The fact is that there were and are violent Uyghur extremists.

The idea of reestablishment of East Turkestan in the Xinjiang region, the traditional homeland of Uyghurs, became popular among Uyghurs in the 1990s, and some insurgent movements actively worked toward the final goals. These groups claim that they are a product of the CCP's violence and chauvinism, and hold the belief that Uyghurs will not win any justice from the CCP, the political institution, dominated by the Han Chinese polity.[55] Many ordinary Uyghurs began to share similar sentiments after they became targets of the Han Chinese-dominated CCP.

From 1995 to 2000, the violent activities by the Uyghur separatists reached their peak, marked by frequent attacks by militants in Xinjiang and equally intensified security countermeasures by Beijing. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Governor Abdulahat Abdurishit (Abdurixit), in March 1999, confirmed the trend and claimed that "there had been 'thousands' of explosions, assassinations, and other incidents... around the same time, internal party documents claimed 380 fatalities from serious incidents in 1998 alone and 100 victims from 27 incidents in the first months of 1999."[56]

In 1997 and 1998, the region experienced another wave of attack by the violent separatists—on buses, police stations, military installations, prisons and political leaders—although no attack killed more than a handful of people.[57] On February 5, 1997, after two days of protests in Ghulja (known as Yining in Chinese), a city in northwestern Xinjiang, during which the Uyghur protesters had marched shouting "*Allahu Akbar*, meaning, God is great" and "independence for Xinjiang" the demonstrations were crushed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The protests were sparked by the execution of 30 Uyghur independence activists, as well as the crackdown on attempts to revive elements of traditional Uyghur culture, including

[55] *Interview,* February 23, 2010, *op. cit.*

[56] J Millward (2004), *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment, Policy Studies 6*, The East-West Center Washington, Washington DC.

[57] R L Parry (August 5, 2008), "Chinese Separatists Blamed for Police Grenade Massacre", available at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4460397.ece. Retrieved on March 12, 2010.

traditional gatherings known as *meshrep,* a traditional Uyghur and Central Asian autumn harvest festival.[58] According to Amnesty International, hundreds, if not thousands, of people were killed or seriously injured in the Ghulja crackdown. According to Rebiya Kadeer, the exiled Uyghur leader, some 8,000 Uyghurs had "disappeared without a trace" ever since the crackdown.[59]

In August 2008, just four days before the Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government alleged that two Uyghurs had attacked a group of police officers while they were jogging near the western city of Kashgar. According to the report, "At about 8 a.m., a lorry drove straight into the group, scattering the unarmed patrolmen before crashing into a power cable mast. The attackers jumped out and threw a pair of homemade bombs into the group before attacking the survivors with knives."[60] Eyewitness accounts, however, have disputed the government allegation.[61]

Furthermore, the conditions in Xinjiang absorbed the attention of some Islamic transnational movements. In other words, the state and its institutions' policies toward Uyghurs in China provided some excuses for Muslim transnational movements, such as Al Qaeda, to exploit the situation for its own advantage. Al Qaeda, in a response to July 2009 violence against the Uyghurs, who are Muslim by religious identity, called on the Uyghurs to "prepare for jihad in the name of God" and expel the Beijing "thugs" from Xinjiang.[62] The studies suggest that transnational Islamic movements' reference to the local conflicts involving Muslims often help internationalize such conflicts, and in some cases they take over the conflict for their own politics.[63] The presence of transnational Islamic militants both in Afghanistan and Iraq are notable cases.

In all these cases, the CCP reacted strongly against the Uyghur violent separatists and transnational Islamic movements. One important trend of violence in deeply

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[58] Amnesty (n.d.), "China: Remember the Gulja Massacre? China's Crackdown on Peaceful Protesters", available at http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/002/2007/en/dom-ASA170022007en.html. Retrieved on November 18, 2010.

[59] A l Jazeera (February 6, 2007), "Protest Marks Xinjiang 'Massacre'", available at http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2007/02/20085251383512763.html. Retrieved on March 3, 2010.

[60] Parry (August 5, 2008), *op. cit.* In September 2008, the *New York Times* reported that three tourists who witnessed the events from a nearby hotel disputed central details of the official story. According to the eyewitnesses, no explosions were heard and the attackers appeared to be machete-wielding police officers attacking other uniformed men.

[61] Edward Wong (September 29, 2008), "Doubt Arises in Account of an Attack in China", *New York Times,* available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/29/world/asia/29iht-29kashgar.16544817.html?_r=2. Retrieved on May 12, 2010.

[62] Dan Murphy (October 8, 2009), "Al Qaeda Urges Uighur Jihad in China. So What?", available at http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2009/1008/al-qaeda-urges-uighur-jihad-in-china-so-what. Retrieved on February 9, 2010.

[63] J C Liow (2006), *Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines,* East-West Center, Washington DC.

divided societies is that one party's actual or perceived violence or threatening activities could thrust the other party or parties, particularly the directly affected group, to either adopt violence or react violently. Also, groups can be motivated by violent means when they have control over particular territories. In other words, violence becomes an easy choice when affected groups are separated into defensible territories in their predominant or politically and militarily-controlled areas. Studies on Xinjiang suggest that violence and the violent nature of the CCP's policies effectively marginalized the Uyghurs who claim Xinjiang as their traditional homeland, and thus Uyghurs lost the trust in the system controlled by the CCP.[64]

The emergence of violent separatism in Xinjiang not only threatened the lives of the Han Chinese settlers, but also posed a grave threat to the CCP's legitimacy over the region and Uyghurs, who refuse to see themselves as Zhingguo ren—persons of China.[65]

The result is further militarization of the Xinjiang region and establishment of aggressive global network against the violent Xinjiang separatists. In the mid-1990s, there were frequent security searches and low-level operations named the "Strike Hard" campaigns by the Chinese security forces, aimed at arresting known, suspected or potential violent separatists—a pattern that would be repeated well into the next decade. Many of the Uyghurs were caught up in these security campaigns. These operations did not make life easier for many innocent Uyghurs. Such operations effectively contributed to radicalizing some innocent Uyghurs toward reestablishing East Turkestan. The CCP, on the other hand, was pleased with the outcomes of such operations because it was able to apprehend some leading violent separatists, including Mahsum, one of the top-level separatists who later fled China.[66] Though the Chinese security forces scored some firm successes in containing the violent separatist movement through its security operations, reports argue that the CCP was not successful in preventing some extremist elements from fleeing the region to Afghanistan where they established the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and established some working contacts with transnational Islamist militants.[67]

In the post-9/11 period, the CCP leadership fundamentally gained two key successes on Xinjiang's ethnic front: (1) it successfully associated the violent separatist struggle for self-determination as terrorism both to its Chinese people and global audience; and (2) pressuring the US to view the ETIM as a part of its terrorist enemies in its war against terrorism.

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao, just a week after 9/11, maintained that: "China has reasons to ask the United States to give its support

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[64] Parry (2008), *op. cit.*

[65] Informal discussions with some Uyghur youth in Philadephia, November 14, 2009.

[66] Stratfor, *op. cit.*

[67] *Ibid.*

and understanding in the fight against terrorism and separatists."[68] In January 2002, the Chinese government took another step to portray the ETIM as an element within greater Islamist Jihadist terrorist network that hates the West. Foreign ministry spokesman stated that ETIM "has close links with the Osama Bin Laden-controlled Al-Qaida terrorist organization... had once sent people for training with Al-Qaida, then dispatched them back to China for terrorist activities."[69] The Chinese government also alleged that the ETIM leader Mahsum met Osama Bin Laden in 1999 and "received promises of money, and that Bin Laden sent 'scores of terrorists' into China."[70]

The leaders of the ETIM made attempts to distance themselves and their movements from Al-Qaeda agendas and to avoid having the Uyghur movement with the US blacklist. However, on August 27, 2002, the US listed the ETIM as a terrorist organization.[71]

The Chinese government justified all forms of its strategies and military operations against the violent separatists and their Uyghur sympathizers in the name of protecting territorial integrity of the country. But ordinary Uyghurs claim that state violent operations often disproportionately target the innocent Uyghur in the region and thus help to further radicalize the average Uyghurs, providing a fertile ground for recruitment by the Uyghur separatists to fight against the state. Thus in one sense, the Uyghur separatist movement is inspired by the Han Chinese and their CCP, as the violent Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is Sinhalese-inspired.[72] The systematic growth of the separatist movements in Southern Thailand [Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO)—formed in 1968, and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN)—formed in 1960], Southern Philippines [More National Liberation Front (MNLF), formed in 1972], and North-East Sri Lanka (LTTE, formed in 1976) are evidences that when a particular community feels that it is being continuously terrorized by the dominant ethnic/religious or

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[68] H FlorCruz (September 19, 2001), "China's Dilemma in the Fight Against Terrorism", available at www.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/09/19/ret.china.dilemma. Retrieved on February 3, 2010.

[69] F M Spokesman (September 12, 2002), "ETIM a Wholly Terrorist Organization", available at http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxx/sggg/fyrth/t34928.htm. Retrieved on March 12, 2010.

[70] M Forney (n.d.), "One Nation-Divided", *Time*, available at http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/xinjiang/cover.html. Retrieved on March 3, 2010.

[71] Although, according to a report, "ETIM did not originally target US nationals, by late 2002 the US Government reported that there was evidence indicating that ETIM members had been taking steps to plan attacks against US interests and nationals abroad, including the US Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. On May 22, 2002, two suspected ETIM members were deported to China from Kyrgyzstan on the grounds that they were planning terrorist attacks. The Kyrgyz government stated that the two men were planning to target embassies in Bishkek as well as trade centers and public gathering places." See, Global Security (n.d.), Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP), Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), Allah Party [Hizbullah] of East Turkestan, East Turkestan National Revolution Association, available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/etip.htm. Retrieved on February 12, 2010.

[72] Imtiyaz and Stavis (2008), *op. cit.*

political group, many will join a politico-military movement to resist the oppression and violence of the persecutors.[73]

It is worth noting here that the form of ultra-conservative Islamic values, commonly known now as Wahabism, was never, and still is not, a *dominant* trend among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Though the majority of Uyghurs live in villages and struggle to earn decent incomes, they are moderate in their approaches and practices of the religion of Islam. They practice a moderate version of Sunni Islam (following the madhab of Imam Abu Hanifah) that is mixed heavily with Sufism (mostly of Naqshabandi Tariqah) and their world views are secular and inclusive in their contents. However, the continuous and systematic programs of the Chinesization, carefully planned by the CCP, are pushing and motivating a considerable section of the Uyghur community today to more strictly practice Islam, defined and understood as fundamentalism.

In many cases, group leaders or extremist elements of the oppressed society believe that they can win support and strengthen their positions by mobilizing along primordial cleavages. In some cases, they manipulate the sufferings caused by dominant forces. They anticipate that appeals to group identity are particularly effective in expanding their domination. In the Chinese context, the Islamization of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang is the byproduct of the systematic Chinesization.

According to our communications with secular Uyghur young females living in Canada,[74] the number of participants for five-times a day prayer in some mosques in Urumqi have increased noticeably. Also, those who seriously follow Islam are becoming more exclusive in their worldviews, and pressure is being applied on women by men, particularly those who follow Islam strictly, to behave and dress like women described in Islamic sources (e.g., *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*). The growth of veiled Uyghur women, stiff opposition to sell alcoholic products (in public) and night clubs in Urumqi prove this trend.

It is not difficult to understand that the growing Islamization of Uyghurs is a reaction or byproduct of the challenges faced by them in the form of systematic Chinesization, which understandably targets the destruction of their primordial identities in religion, language, culture and way of life, besides the feeling of being unequal or marginalized in their own homeland—Xinjiang. The studies on ethnic identities argue that the masses,[75] particularly the economically weakened sections of identity-based groups, often resort to agendas developed by political or extremist leaders who refuse non-violent alternatives when they perceive that their identities are threatened or would be threatened by dominant groups or the political establishments.

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[73] Gurr and Barbara (1994), *op. cit.*

[74] Interview with some female Uyghurs, June 13, 2010, Canada.

[75] Imtiyaz and Stavis (2008), *op. cit.;* and S J Kaufman (2001), *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Conclusion

There are numerous reasons why ethnic identities can cause serious disharmony and violence in deeply divided polities. It is all too simple (and tragic) for political elites to politicize ethnic identities in a way such as cultural and political occupation and hegemony that converts ethnic tension into violence.

This study argues that the conflict in Xinjiang is a result of the politicization of ethnic differences in the form of Chinesizaton of Xinjiang by the CCP leaders. What the experience from China suggests is that politicization can occur even in non-democratic countries. Political leaders in non-democratic countries politicize ethnic relations to consolidate their power among dominant ethnic group. One possible consequence is excruciating radicalization of marginalized groups.

Seeing that Uyghurs' legitimate grievances and demands have no value to the CCP regime, and are only met by ruthless state violence, many Uyghurs are going through a gradual but visible transformation—Islamization, while a very small but significantly strong fraction within the community, feeling powerless and frustrated, has sporadically resorted to a campaign of Islamic fundamentalism and asymmetric violence.

The future offers some alternatives for the region to ease ethnic tensions and to win peace. One possibility is that sporadic ethnic war will snowball into pogroms, ethnic cleansing, emigration, and genocide of the Uyghurs, much like what we find elsewhere, e.g., with the Tamils of Sri Lanka[76] and Rohingyas of Myanamar.[77] Violence leads to retaliation and counter-retaliation, as society rides a downward spiral of destruction, and when war becomes a dominant agenda of the parties, there is little room for any future meaningful peace or reconciliation. As Chaim Kaufmann (1997)[78] points out, "war itself destroys the possibilities for ethnic cooperation."

The second alternative is to seek a solution that provides guarantees for security, stability and ethnic peace, which can materialize in ethnically-divided societies through restructuring the state system with power sharing (consociational democracy). Such a peaceful resolution cannot be won by force, but by meaningful negotiations and mutual concessions.

Conflict resolution literature highly recommends power sharing as a feasible solution to guarantee the security and stability of ethnic groups. Arend Lijphart's power-sharing package could help to assure security and stability of the ethnic Uyghurs and the redistribution of power away from the Han Chinese and the CCP's political agenda. His model of consociational democracy consists of two major elements: power sharing and group autonomy. Consociational democracy, according

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[76] Imtiyaz and Stavis (2008), *op. cit.*

[77] H Siddiqui (2008), "The Forgotten Rohingya: Their Struggle for Human Rights in Burma", available at http://www.amazon.com/Forgotten-Rohingya-Struggle-Rights-ebook/dp/B001F0RUE8. Retrieved on February 23, 2010.

[78] C Kaufmann (1997), "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars", in M E Brown *et al.* (Eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, p. 266, MIT Press, Cambridge.

to Lijphart (1977),[79] "denotes the participation of representatives of all significant communal groups in political decision making, especially at the executive level; group autonomy means that these groups have authority to run their own internal affairs..."

Lijphart's recommendations in one way or another have been demanded by the moderate Uyghur leaders since the 1990s. But the introduction of power-sharing democracy requires strict commitments to liberal values and system. The major problem pertaining to the conflict resolution process of power-sharing democracy as an alternative to ease ethnic tensions is the implementation of effective liberal democracy in China or at least a constitutional order in which such choices might genuinely be feasible. Since China is practicing non-liberal political system and values, adopting such an approach (power-sharing democracy) does seem highly improbable. To put the point bluntly, the authorities in China are not akin to those in a democratic state such as India, where conflict resolutions may embrace a power-sharing democracy as a feasible solution in relation to Kashmir.

This ground reality has pushed many Uyghurs, particularly the moderate elements within the Uyghur society, to think that the Chinese communist political elites would not offer any meaningful power-sharing democracy or federal system to them. Thus, the Uyghurs may want the world to recognize their quest for ethnic separation.

There is resistance to power sharing from the CCP, for that reason, the third option is partition. The demand for separation becomes strong when a power-sharing arrangement is not possible or feasible. Partition can reduce the ethnic fear and offer social and political security, as well as stability, to different ethnic groups. The separation of Pakistan from India, Eritrea from Ethiopia, Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) from West Pakistan, and the Greeks from the Turks in Cyprus, all demonstrate that partition can be helpful, even if it is not completely successful in terminating or eliminating violence. Furthermore, the experiences of Kosovo and the partition in 2011 for the Christians in South Sudan further validate the case for partition when ethnic nations refuse to live together.[80] When nations do not want to live in the same polity, partition should not be automatically neglected as a solution. This might be one way to manage the Uyghurs' legitimate demands for political space.

Xinjiang desperately needs inter-ethnic peace because there has already been too much blood shedding. The longer the global community keeps silent on the question of the Uyghurs without adopting any measures to seek justice for them, the stronger the polarizations would happen along ethnic and religious fault-lines, particularly among the poor Uyghurs, who already find them marginalized in all aspects, and the nastier may be the consequences for global peace, because such a global indifference and/or impotence may persuade some Uyghurs to further radicalize

[79] A Lijphart (1977), *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

[80] "South Sudan's Independence Vote Ends", available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12200479. Accessed on December 1, 2011.

along powerful Islamic symbols, further swelling the links, which have hitherto been weak, with transnational Muslim extremists.

Evidences prove that war hardens ethnic identities and relations, and thus progressively weakens the reconciliation between conflicting groups. When it comes to Xinjiang, the road is still wide open for a political solution, which may include either separation or consociation. The latter can be a good model for China. However, as we have discussed earlier, such a power-sharing solution needs at least a constitutional order or framework to succeed. Currently, there is no visible sign of change or political breakthrough within the Chinese communist political system from either below or top to adopt some form of liberalization of its illiberal political system, thus creating the necessary environment for a meaningful dialog and ultimate resolution of ethnic problems. While many experts have assumed that with the emergence of a sizable capitalist group, political liberalization would follow, this hypothesis, in spite of the existence of a fairly healthy middle class in today's China, has been proved to be wrong, at least, for the time being.

Given Beijing's increasing dependence on energy resources and its cherished goal for political stability, it cannot afford a confrontational path with the Uyghurs. Instead, a peaceful resolution of the Uyghur problem would better serve its long-term strategy.

If the options offered here are unheeded, the world, chiefly led by the United Nations, needs to mobilize all possible resources to support separation as a solution to the Uyghurs who predominantly live in the resources-rich Xinjiang. But it may not be that easy either given China's Veto wielding power in the UNSC.

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