

CRIMINALIZING ETHNICITY: POLITICAL REPRESSION IN XINJIANG

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This summary of a new report by HRIC and Human Rights Watch examines how the Chinese government has used international campaigns against terrorism as a pretext to crack down on any expression by members of the Muslim minority of Xinjiang to assert their ethnic character or promote an independent state.

Since the attacks against American targets on September 11, 2001, the Chinese government has been conducting a comprehensive propaganda campaign, aimed at both domestic and international audiences, to label all Uighur opposition as linked to international terrorists networks. Beijing has long equated independent religious activities and political dissent with “separatism”—a statutory crime against State Security under China’s criminal law—but never before has it explicitly linked all dissenting voices in Xinjiang with terrorism. This new approach contrasts sharply with the consistent position of the Chinese authorities prior to September 11, which was to play down the seriousness of ethnic strife in Xinjiang.

In the past few years, numerous campaigns to “rectify social order” have led to widespread arbitrary arrests, closure of places of worship, crackdowns on traditional religious activities, prohibition of personal religious practices in state-controlled institutions (such as administrative offices, schools, and enterprises), and the sentencing of thousands of people to harsh prison terms or death after grossly unfair and often summary judicial processes. Xinjiang remains the only province in China where execution of political prisoners is common. According to Amnesty International, more than 200 people were executed since 1997 in the past five years under stringent State Security laws.¹

The U.S. launch of an international war on terrorism presented the Chinese government with an opportunity to change its strategy on Xinjiang, and possibly gain wider support for its activities there. After years of denying any tension existed, the Chinese government suddenly initiated an active diplomatic

and propaganda campaign against “East Turkestan terrorist forces,” a label now applied to any Uighur suspected of “separatist” or “terrorist” activities. On October 10, 2001, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi declared that “efforts to fight against East Turkestan terrorist forces should become a part of the international efforts and should also win support and understanding.”

In its efforts to win support, the government released a number of documents describing the alleged activities of Uighur terrorists groups in China, as well as an elaborate defense of its human rights record in Xinjiang. This was accompanied by an all-out diplomatic campaign aimed at the international community in general, and China’s immediate neighbors in Central Asia and the Asian subcontinent in particular.² The issuing of three official reports in January 2002, May 2003 and December 2003 marked an offensive characterized by three waves of intensive propaganda.

The first offensive: identifying “East Turkistan terrorist forces”

The first act of this campaign was the publication in January 2002 of a document describing the activities of alleged “East Turkestan” Uighur terrorist organizations (East Turkestan being the name by which many Uighurs prefer to refer to their homeland).³ The document asserted that “East Turkestan terrorist forces” had conducted “a campaign of bombing and assassinations” consisting of more than 200 incidents resulting in 162 deaths and 440 people injured, the most recent incident taking place in 1998.⁴ This was the first time the Chinese authorities provided specifics about violence in Xinjiang. The document also asserted that Uighur organizations had received training and funding from Pakistan and Afghanistan, including direct financing from Osama Bin Laden himself.

While the presence of Chinese Uighurs in Pakistan and Afghanistan (including some among the Taliban forces), as well as isolated bombing incidents, had been established as fact for some time, it was quite another matter to prove the Chinese government’s assertion that all Uighur opposition to Chinese domination, including non-violent resistance, was connected to international radical-Islamic terrorism.⁵

The report was therefore greeted with skepticism by Xin-



A Uighur youth tries to dodge a security guard in Kashgar. Photo: Reuters

jiang analysts, who pointed to the absence of any independent confirmation of the Chinese government's claims, the lack of evidence that these groups even continued to exist given that the last recorded incident was in 1998, and the glaringly opportunistic timing of the disclosure.⁶ Analysts also questioned the categorization of all pro-independence groups under the label of "East Turkestan," irrespective of their political engagement. To choose that particular appellation to label terrorist groups, analysts stressed, was to equate irredentists and non-violent advocates of independence with Islamic terrorist organizations.

In the panic following 9/11, however, the U.S. government, keen to enroll China's support in its efforts against Islamic terrorism, agreed to cosponsor the inclusion of a little-known Uighur organization, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), on the UN list of terrorist organizations linked to Al-Qaeda and subject to asset freezing.

The U.S. State Department immediately came under heavy criticism from the international community for taking at face value the information provided to them by the Chinese government. Although American officials affirmed that they had "independent evidence," their press release quoted word for word the January 2002 document issued by the Chinese government, even mistakenly attributing all the terrorist incidents solely to ETIM.⁷ The "independent evidence" quoted by the State Department appears to have originated from the arrest a

few weeks earlier of a group of Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan who were allegedly planning an attack on the U.S. embassy.⁸

In their rush to find corroborative evidence, U.S. officials seem never to have questioned the reports from Kyrgyz authorities, who had a track record of trumping up bogus terrorism charges against dissenters. Nor, it appears, was there any attempt to ascertain whether the "independent evidence" cited originated with the Chinese intelligence service. Doubts about the legitimacy of these claims lingered after Kyrgyzstan obligingly deported to China two persons alleged to be ETIM members who had "plotted to attack the U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan as well as other U.S. interests abroad."⁹

The U.S. State Department has subsequently indicated unease over the episode, and declined to support China's request in December 2003 to list another Uighur organization, the East Turkestan Liberation Organization.¹⁰

The U.S.-sponsored listing of ETIM helped to legitimize renewed crackdowns on Uighur separatist activities.

Nevertheless, the U.S.-sponsored listing of ETIM immediately turned into a major element of the Chinese government's intensive propaganda both domestically and overseas, helping to legitimize renewed crackdowns on Uighur separatist activities. China has included a direct reference to the U.S. decision to include ETIM in the UN list of Al-Qaeda-related terrorist organizations in every single official speech, article and news report on the subject, as well as domestic references to demonstrate that the U.S. was siding with China on this issue.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, the official propaganda has avoided mentioning the caveats with which the U.S. government qualified the listing—namely that the economic and social aspirations of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang had to be addressed.

In December 2002, the Chinese government's White Paper on National Defense included an entire section identifying terrorism as a top security issue, specifically stating that Xinjiang's "'East Turkestan' terrorist forces [were] a serious threat to the security of the lives and property of the people of all China's ethnic groups." In contrast, China's previous White Paper on defense, published in 2000, had made only four scattered and general references to terrorism.

While Beijing's about-face helped legitimize its crackdown in Xinjiang and raised *prima facie* suspicions against pro-independence organizations, it also increased interest in the international media regarding the plight of the Uighurs. This, in turn, gave rise to scores of news reports on the harsh repression in Xinjiang, including the renewed strike-hard campaign launched at "separatists, religious extremists and terrorist forces" immediately after September 11, and the cultural subjugation and socio-economic disparities imposed along ethnic lines.

The second offensive: the White Paper

In response to this negative image and repeated criticism from the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Information Office of China's State Council released a new White Paper¹² on the

History and Development of Xinjiang in May 2003.¹³ In addition to presenting an official historiography of the region (stating that “Since the Western Han Dynasty [Xinjiang] has been an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation”), the White Paper asserted that the rights of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang were “fully protected” and that “the right to freedom of religious belief for various ethnic groups [was] fully respected.”¹⁴ Further statements included, “All ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages,” and, “[R]egardless of ethnic status, race, sex or religious belief,” ethnic minorities “have the right to vote and stand for election.”¹⁵

The White Paper developed a number of specifics to support these claims, essentially referring to selected clauses in laws and regulations that guarantee these rights, as well as pointing to the large number of places of worship, the role played by ethnic minorities in the administration of religion and in the drafting of religious policies, and the allocation of “specialized funds for the maintenance and repair of the key mosques.” But the White Paper failed to address central issues of socio-economic discrimination, cultural eradication and violent repression of peaceful dissenters repeatedly raised by the international community, including various bodies of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Instead, the White Paper blamed such concerns on terrorist “East Turkistan forces”:

After the September 11 incident (. . .) the “East Turkistan” forces once again have raised the banner of “human rights,” “freedom of religion” and “interests of ethnic minorities,” and fabricated claims that “the Chinese government is using every opportunity to oppress ethnic minorities,” to mislead the public and deceive world opinion in order to escape blows dealt by the international struggle against terrorism.¹⁶

The publication of the White Paper gave rise to a second flood of propaganda, with hundreds of related news items released in Chinese, English and other languages through official news agencies and newspapers over the following weeks.¹⁷ Even more to the point for Uighurs, however, were the joint “anti-terrorism exercises” that China conducted in August 2003 with Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations, and which were intensely broadcasted in Xinjiang.¹⁸

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It must be noted that China has been very active in enrolling the support of its Central Asian neighbors in the crackdown against Uighur ethno-nationalist aspirations, and is the driving force behind the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional security body composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Under pressure from Beijing, these Central Asian countries have effec-

tively silenced independent Uighur organizations on their soil and occasionally repatriate refugees wanted by China—some of whom have been executed upon their return. Beijing has also pressured Pakistan and Nepal for the repatriation of refugees. In January 2002, Nepal forcibly repatriated three Uighurs who had been granted refugee status by the UNHCR

Relentless Repression

Since 1996, the Chinese authorities have conducted a dozen Xinjiang-wide campaigns against “illegal religious activities,” “separatism,” or “terrorist forces.” Each one of these campaigns has led to the arrest of hundreds of people, often sentenced in accordance with the “two basics” principle, which aims to streamline the judicial process by requiring only “basic truth” and “basic evidence” to sentence a defendant.

- 1996 First “Strike Hard” campaign specifically targeting “splittism and illegal religious activities.”
- 1997 Crushing of the Yining uprising. A general “Rectification of Social Order” campaign is launched.
- 1998 “People’s war” against separatists follows Jiang Zemin’s inspection of Xinjiang.
- 1999 “Special 100 Days Strike Hard” and “General Campaign against Terrorism”
- 2000 “Focused Rectification of Religious Places” campaign, “Dine, Live and Work Together” campaign (designed to “grasp evidence and destroy the pro-independence elements who have engaged in terrorist activities”).
- 2001 Two-year “Strike Hard” campaign launched, lasting until June 2002.
 - After September 11, “Strike Hard, High Pressure” campaign is launched against “separatists, religious extremists and terrorist forces.”
- 2002 Senior officials announce that the crackdown against “terrorists” will continue. “Political Reeducation” campaigns directed at Imams and religious personnel.
 - January 2002: First report on “East Turkestan Terrorist Forces.”
- 2003 “Most extensive training undertaken by Xinjiang for religious figures since the founding of the PRC” according to Xinjiang’s Party Secretary.
 - March 2003: China issues White Paper on Xinjiang
 - December 2003: China issues list of East Turkestan groups and individuals.
- 2004 Announcement that “Strike Hard, High Pressure” campaign against “separatism, religious extremism and terrorist forces” is to be extended indefinitely.

and were awaiting relocation to a third country.¹⁹ One of them, Shaheer Ali, was executed under separatism charges shortly thereafter, leaving behind testimony of torture in Chinese jails.²⁰ Since then, Amnesty has issued an urgent appeal on behalf of the two other Uighurs, whose fate remains unknown.²¹

China has also directed its campaign for repatriation of Chinese Uighurs at the U.S., which has been detaining 11 Chinese Uighurs reportedly caught fighting alongside Taliban forces in Afghanistan. Following reports in December 2003 that the U.S. was about to release the Uighurs without charge, and was considering handing them over to China,²² Human Rights Watch immediately raised profound concerns over Chinese authorities' track record of swiftly executing repatriated "separatists."²³

The third offensive: rehash

It was at this time that the Chinese government released a second report listing "East Turkestan terrorist groups and individuals" as the latest wave in its propaganda offensive designed to legitimize its policies in Xinjiang and enlist the support of the international community. The document, issued by the Ministry of Public Security, listed four "Eastern Turkistan" terrorist organizations and 11 individual members of these groups, and called for international support to stop their activities, including a request for Interpol to issue arrest warrants.²⁴

The report was essentially a rehash of the one published in January 2002, but this time focusing only on four organizations: the two clandestine groups China had previously asked the U.S. to list at the UN (ETIM and ETLO) and two other legally registered organizations, the East Turkestan Informa-

Tohti Tunyaz

The Chinese government has long drawn connections between legally defined crimes and ideas expressed in publications as a tactic to silence independent voices. A case in point is the Uighur historian Tohti Tunyaz, who was sentenced in March 1999 to 11 years in prison under State Security charges.

Tunyaz was a post-graduate student in Japan at the time of his arrest. Born in 1959, he was raised in Baicheen County in Aksu Prefecture and graduated from the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing in 1984. He moved with his family to Japan in 1994, and began working toward his PhD at the Department of Oriental History at the Graduate School of Humanities at the University of Tokyo, specializing in the history of Chinese policy towards members of minority groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1998, he returned to Xinjiang for a month to collect material for his thesis, focusing on pre-1949 Xinjiang history and the East Turkestan Republic, an independent republic that controlled the Western part of Xinjiang before the establishment of the PRC.

A few weeks into his trip, on February 6, 1998, Tunyaz was arrested by the Urumqi State Security Bureau, and in April 1998 the Chinese authorities charged him with "stealing state secrets" and "inciting national disunity," the latter charge alleging plans to publish a historical book entitled, *The Inside Story of the Silk Road*.

On March 10, 1999, the Court of First Instance in Urumqi sentenced Tunyaz to five years' imprisonment for the crime of stealing State secrets and seven years' imprisonment for the crime of inciting separatism, consolidating the sentence into 11 years in prison and 2 years' deprivation of political rights. Tunyaz immediately appealed his sentence to the High Court in Urumqi, which dismissed the appeal in March 2000.

Following examination of the case and correspondence with the Chinese government, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in May 2001 that "the allegations that the data might affect the unity of the People's Republic of China have in no way been proved," and rendered an opinion that Tunyaz' detention was "arbitrary in nature."¹ The Working Group further stated:

"Mr. Tohti Tunyaz cannot be sentenced merely for writing a research paper, which, even if it were published, lay within his right to exercise the freedoms of thought, expression and opinion which are enjoyed by everyone and which can by no means be regarded as reprehensible if exercised through peaceful means, as they were in this case."²

Despite numerous efforts by the international community, Tohti Tunyaz remains detained at Urumqi Prison No.3—a strong signal to minority scholars and writers that historical subjects diverging from official history remain off-limits.

1. UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, "Opinion No. 7/2001 (People's Republic of China): Communication addressed to the Government on 26 April 2000 concerning Tohti Tunyaz," United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Document No. E/CN.4/2002/77/Add.1, 11 December 2001.
2. UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, "Opinion No. 7/2001 (People's Republic of China): Communication addressed to the Government on 26 April 2000 concerning Tohti Tunyaz," United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Document No. E/CN.4/2002/77/Add.1, 11 December 2001.

tion Center (ETIC), based in Munich, and the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC), an umbrella organization uniting various exiled Uyghur organizations from around the world, including in Central Asia, Turkey, Australia, the U.S. and Europe. Both groups advocate non-violent and democratic change and have been documenting human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Amnesty characterized the move by Chinese authorities as, “Lumping together peaceful acts of protest with acts of ‘terrorism,’” and denounced “a clear attempt by the Chinese authorities to whip up international support for its efforts to brutally suppress all forms of dissent in Xinjiang.”²⁵ In replies to questions from the media about the East Turkestan Information Center, the government spokesman said that this organization was “advocating independence” on its Web site, implying that this qualified it as a terrorist group.

As with the previous offensives, the report was accompanied by a three-week flood of articles from government news outlets in Chinese and foreign languages. The timing of the report, which did not present any obviously new information, may have been intended to force the hand of U.S. authorities regarding the fate of the Uyghur detainees in Guantanamo. Although this result has not been achieved to date, the report ensured that China continued to control the spin on Xinjiang issues, as news agencies around the world reproduced the official Xinhua News Agency dispatch with little or no outside perspective.

Beijing’s media blitz not only won the Chinese government greater room to maneuver on the international scene and a convenient excuse to brush off human rights concerns, but also, and more importantly, it helped neighboring countries justify their collaboration with China on the Uyghur issue. In the mist of the propaganda wave organized around the Public Security report, it was revealed that the alleged leader of ETIM, Hasan Mahsum, had been killed in a military assault in Pakistan.²⁶

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All the same, it seems that Interpol is unlikely to issue warrants against the individuals listed by China as members of ETIC and WUYC, as both groups are legally registered organizations with no obvious connection to terrorism, and the Chinese authorities themselves acknowledge that no significant terrorist act has taken place in Xinjiang for half a decade. In March 2002, the Chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region declared, “In the past five years, (. . .) there haven’t been any more terrorist incidents that have affected the overall situation.” Such official statements seem to directly contradict Beijing’s claims that the individuals named in the Public Security list present a major threat.²⁵

Non-violent groups become terrorists

By conflating violent and non-violent groups under the same label after September 11, Beijing has gained significant international acceptance for its portrayal of Uyghur strife as inspired by and linked to international Islamic terrorism. In Xinjiang itself, the authorities have gone much further. Virtually every “expression of dissatisfaction” with the government is immediately associated with “separatist ideology,” which is associated in turn with actions conducted by “terrorist forces.”

To account for the lack of specific activity conducted by these alleged “terrorist forces” over the past few years, the Chinese authorities simply argue that “separatist thought” is the new approach followed by the same terrorist organizations that previously used violent tactics. This allows a dissenting writer or a non-violent group advocating minority rights to be tarred with the terrorist brush. The alleged link between terrorist organizations and the ideological content of publications surfaced as early as March 2002 in an article by the vice-director of the office of the Xinjiang People’s Congress:

“Xinjiang independence elements have changed their combat tactics since the September 11 incident,” he declared. “They have focused on attacking China on the ideological front instead of using their former frequent practice of engaging in violent terrorist operations.”²⁶

The vice-director charged that those using “literary means” and “arts and literature” to “distort historical facts” were the same people responsible for “violent terrorist operations” in the past. He accused them of “taking advantage of art and literature to tout the products of opposition to the people and to the masses and of advocating ethnic splittist thinking.”²⁷

Reports in the local media indicate that increased official sensitivity following September 11 has translated into an extensive campaign of repression on the cultural front.

A specific incident provided the necessary impetus: On January 1, 2002, a Uyghur poet named Tursunjan Emet recited an alleged “anti-government” poem at the end of a concert at the Xinjiang People’s Hall in Urumqi. A few days later, a circular issued by the government stated, “The poem that was written and recited by Aimaiti [Tursunjan Emet], a jobless man, at the end of the concert has caused an adverse impact on society.”²⁸ On January 11 the Party committee of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region held a meeting, during which they classified the case as a “crime in the area of the ideological front against the ethnic separatists.”²⁹

The Chairman of the Xinjiang provincial government immediately called for an investigation, vowing to purge all who “openly advocate separatism using the name of art,” and urged cadres to use “politics” as the only standard in judging artistic and literary work.³⁰

Literature becomes sabotage

According to accounts published in the official media, in February 2002 the Xinjiang Party Secretary “presented in detail all forms of infiltration and sabotage carried out in the ideological sphere by ethnic separatist forces inside and outside of the coun-



Photo: Reuters

try over the past few years.”The authorities were urged to crack down on “separatist techniques” that included many modes of expression universally recognized as fundamental rights and freedoms: “news media,” “literature works,” “arts performance” and “distributing . . . leaflets, letters and posters.”³³

The list of targeted activities detailed by the Party Secretary include the following:

1. Using all sorts of news media to propagate separatist thought (*sixiang*);
2. Using periodicals, works of literature and art performances; presenting the subject in satires or allegories that give free reign to and disseminate dissatisfaction (*buman qingxu*) and propagate separatist thought;
3. Illegally printing reactionary books and periodicals; distributing or posting reactionary leaflets, letters and posters; spreading rumors to confuse the people; instilling the public with separatist sentiment;
4. Using audio and video recordings, such as audio tapes, CDs or VCDs to incite religious fanaticism and promote “holy war”;
5. Forging alliances with outside separatist and enemy forces, making use of broadcasts, the Internet and other means to intensify campaigns of reactionary propaganda and infiltration of ideas into public opinion;
6. Using popular cultural activities (*minjian wenhua huodong*) to make the masses receptive to reactionary propaganda encouraging opposition.”³⁴

From the wording of the document, it is clear that the Xinjiang authorities equate any expression of dissatisfaction (*buman qingxu*), even metaphorical or ironical, with separatist thought (*fenlie sixiang*). The term “spreading rumors” (*zaoyao*) used in the article is the same as that used in criminal law: “incitement to subvert the political power of the state and overthrow the socialist system by means of spreading rumors, slander or other means” (Article 105), which calls for punishment of up to life imprisonment.

The signal that the speech conveyed was that in respect of ethnic issues, “expression of dissatisfaction” in works of art was liable to criminal punishment. The characterization of the aforementioned activities by the terms “sabotage” and “infiltration” reinforces the charge that they are equivalent to violent action.

In addition, the fact that “popular cultural activities” are denounced as being used by “separatists” to propagate their ideas is clearly aimed at deterring people from engaging in activities that promote the history, culture or tradition of a specific ethnic group. Ethnic minority individuals and Uighur organizations abroad have frequently complained about this official attitude, but prior to this official pronouncement the suppression of popular culture was only corroborated by circumstantial evidence, not stated explicitly as high-level Party policy.

Cultural obliteration

The crackdown was quick to come. By March 2002 the

authorities had announced the closing of dozens of state-controlled publications. A government official said the move was dictated by the “poor quality” of some of the publications involved, and denied that the decision was politically motivated. Uighur organizations abroad, however, denounced the move as an attempt to block dissenting voices in the official media, and an Urumqi official contacted by AFP admitted that 52 out of 118 publications would be closed down because of the sensitive nature of their content.³⁵

Three months later, in June, the authorities proceeded with a massive public book burning in Kashgar, where it was reported that “tens of thousands” of books were destroyed. The government-owned Kashgar Uyghur Publishing House reportedly burned 128 copies of *A Brief History of the Huns and Ancient Literature*, which officials viewed as fomenting separatism. It also burned copies of *Ancient Uyghur Craftsmanship*, published in Kashgar in 1988. The book documented centuries-old techniques of papermaking, candle-making, carpentry, carpet and silk-weaving. Its opening inscriptions included verses from the Koran.

According to the *Kashgar Daily*, the Kashgar Uighur Publishing House also censored more than 330 books and halted publication of other volumes deemed “problematic.”³⁶ Similar books were confiscated from Xinhua bookshops and school and college libraries across the prefecture. Eyewitnesses reported that books collected from the No. 1 Secondary School in Kashgar City were dumped in a pile and burned.³⁷

The Kashgar book burning incident is not an isolate case. Repeated campaigns to “wipe out pornography and strike at political publications” (*saohuang jizheng*) have been punctuated with public burning of “illegal publications.” Destroyed with pornography were items seized by Customs or published in violation of copyright, historical and literary books, as well as religious publications on Islam. In this way, the authorities can claim they are only enforcing the law and are not targeting critical or cultural works by Xinjiang’s ethnic minorities.

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For many Uighurs, these campaigns represent an attempt by the authorities to effectively obliterate Uighur culture. Indeed, in view of the string of recent decisions in 2002 to accelerate the shift to all-Chinese education—with the introduction of Chinese from Primary Three and the decision to teach all courses at Xinjiang University in Chinese—some scholars have argued that the language policy as currently implemented “implicitly categorizes the Uyghur language as disloyal.”³⁸

There is certainly a view among officials that minority languages are inferior to Chinese, and that this justifies shifting the education system increasingly towards Chinese. One explanation given for the March 2002 decision to introduce Chinese as the medium of instruction from Primary Three upward was the need to “improve the quality of ethnic minorities”:

“The languages of the minority nationalities have very small capacities and do not contain many of the expressions in modern science and technology, which makes education in these concepts impossible,” explained Xinjiang’s Party Secretary. “This is out of step with the 21st Century.”³⁹

In light of the situation described above, an incident in February 2004 when seven Uighurs from an elite Xinjiang acrobatic troupe sought asylum in Canada after performing there is hardly surprising. The episode is reminiscent of the heyday of Soviet repression, when artists and dancers escaped from their political minders to seek refuge in the West. As one of the acrobats declared to the Canadian press, “We performed for the government and they used us to create this image of ethnic unity. We didn’t have a choice. We had no right to oppose.”⁴⁰

Like many authoritarian governments around the world, Beijing has used the specter of terrorism in the aftermath of September 11 as a convenient pretext to silence opposition and dissent. By conflating violent and non-violent groups under the appellation of “East Turkestan terrorist forces,” the Chinese authorities are sowing the seeds of an ethnic resentment so profound as to jeopardize the very stability they claim to defend.



Photo: Reuters

1. Amnesty International, "People's Republic of China: No justice for the victims of the 1997 crackdown in Gulja (Yining)," February 4, 2003 [ASA 17/011/2003]
2. Xinjiang, the largest province of China, shares more than 5,000 km of borders with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Tibet.
3. "East Turkistan' Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity," January 21, 2002, issued by the State Council Information Office. English version available at <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/23949.html>.
4. "Combating terrorism, we have no choice," *People's Daily Online*, December 18, 2003
5. So far, only one indiscriminate bomb attack targeting civilians was registered: in February 1997 in Urumqi, two bombs exploded in public buses, causing 9 fatalities and 49 injured.
6. Willy Wo-lap Lam, "Terrorism fight used to target China secessionists," *CNN.com*, October 23, 2001.
7. The scarcity of information on Uighur groups is telling: the 2001 Reports on Patterns of Global Terrorism by the States Department included questionable sources such as the fact that "Several press reports claimed that Uighurs trained and fought with Islamic groups in the former Soviet Union, including Chechnya." 2001
8. "U.S. has Evidence ETIM Plans Attack," *People's Daily Online*, August 30, 2002
9. U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/>
10. China seeks co-op worldwide to fight "East Turkistan" terrorists," *Xinhua*, December 15, 2003. Uighur American Association (UAA), Statement on China's Identification of Uyghur Groups and Individuals as "Terrorist," December 16, 2003, available at http://www.uighuramerican.org/doc/uaa_statement_on_china.htm
11. The embattled State Department claimed that the listing had not boosted the Chinese government's claims because they had "told the Chinese that the listing did not constitute an endorsement to repress minorities."
12. The "White Papers" of the Chinese government summarize the official view of human rights and explicitly aim to refute criticism. The first paper was published two years after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, in November 1991, soon followed by other White Papers on specific issues such as religious freedom, ethnic minorities, Tibet and so on. As scholars have pointed out, "One explicit aim of the White Paper was to refute foreign criticism and present an alternative and more rosy picture of the situation in China." Steven C. Angle, Marina Svensson (ed.) *The Chinese Human Rights Reader: Documents and Commentary, 1900-2000*, M.E. Sharpe: London & Armonk, 1991, p.356.
13. Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China, *White Paper: History and Development of Xinjiang*, May 2003, Beijing.
14. *White Paper: History and Development of Xinjiang*, Section VIII, "Upholding Equality and Unity Among Ethnic Groups, and Freedom of Religious Belief."
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Substantial extracts of the White Paper were published immediately in the *People's Daily* and the *China Daily*.
18. "China flexes military muscle in anti-terror exercises," *AFP*, August 7, 2003.
19. Amnesty International, Urgent Action Appeal: Fear of forcible return, April 22, 2002, [UA 119/02]
20. "Executed Uyghur refugee left torture testimony behind," *Radio Free Asia*, October 23, 2003. Shaheer Ali spoke to RFA's Uyghur Service in May 2001, describing eight months of torture from April to December of 1994 in the Old Market Prison, in Guma (in Chinese, Pishan) County, in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. In several interviews conducted by telephone from Nepal, Shirali described how he was beaten with shackles, shocked in an electric chair, repeatedly kicked unconscious, and then drenched in cold water to revive him for more torture.
21. Amnesty International October 24, 2003, [AI Index: ASA 17/037/2003]
22. "Eleven Turks at Guantanamo base," *UPI*, February 06 2004
23. "U.S.: Don't Send Detainees Back to China," *Human Rights Watch*, November 26, 2003. Amnesty issued a similar appeal, stating that "any Uighurs suspected of "separatist" or "terrorist" activities would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including unfair trials, torture or execution if forcibly returned to China." Amnesty International, "Uighurs held in Guantanamo: Fear of forcible return / Fear of torture / Fear of execution," December 2003 [AI Index: AMR 51/147/2003]
24. "Combating terrorism, we have no choice," *People's Daily Online*, December 18, 2003. The identified "Eastern Turkistan" terrorist organizations were the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and the Eastern Turkistan Information Center (ETIC).
25. Amnesty International, "China: International community must oppose attempt to brand peaceful political activists as 'terrorists'," December 19, 2003 [AI Index: ASA 17/040/2003]
26. "Pakistan confirms its troops killed top Chinese "terrorist," *AFP*, December 23, 2003.
27. *Wen Wei Po* (Internet Version) (Hong Kong), March 13, 2003 [FBIS-CHI-2003-0313, March 18, 2003]. The Xinjiang Chairman also said that "At the moment, there are only an extremely small number of 'East Turkistan' elements left and they will not be able to get anywhere."
28. *China News Agency*, March 13, 2002. [FBIS-CHI-2002-0313, March 25, 2002]
29. *Ibid.*
30. *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), "Pro-separatist artist under watch," January 15, 2002.
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