

The Uyghur Movement China's Insurgency in Xinjiang

**A Monograph
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Abstract

THE UYGHUR MOVEMENT: CHINA'S INSURGENCY IN XINJIANG by MAJ Shawn M. Patrick, USA, 52 pages.

In 742, a predominantly Turko-Mongolian steppe nomadic tribe known today as the Uyghurs migrated eastward from eastern Turkey towards the oases of modern-day Xinjiang province of China; they have remained there for the last 1,268 years. Throughout this time, this population has endured the hardships of political, economic, cultural, ethnic, and religious persecution ranging from nomadic tribal disputes to unrelenting and brutal aggression from the Chinese government. The purpose of this monograph is to analyze the impacts of Chinese persecution on the Uyghur population in order to determine the potential Chinese policy provides for Al Qaeda-like terrorist organizations to influence, or establish a foothold within, Xinjiang. By analyzing previous Uyghur uprisings and current Chinese policy using the models of insurgency as prescribed by David Galula and Bard E. O'Neill, this monograph seeks to test the author's hypotheses: Chinese persecution of the Uyghur population will create a Uyghur insurgency; and focused persecution is providing the means for establishment of regional ties to external global ideological organizations like Al Qaeda. This monograph concludes that the current U.S. led global war on terrorism has provided China with the requisite freedom to act against the Uyghurs without repercussion and has enabled the emergence of Al Qaeda and its satellite organizations in Central Asia, therefore providing a direct link between this organization and radicalized Uyghur youth.

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*“The culture and identity of the Uyghur people of Xinjiang have been shaped by geographic, cultural, and historic interactions with China and surrounding civilizations since the seventh century CE. By the twentieth century, Uyghur identity has evolved in such a way that the Uyghurs can neither acculturate comfortably into China, as Beijing would like, nor effectively resist the Chinese state, as Uyghur nationalists and militants would like.”*¹

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Chinese and central Asian history is rife with religious and territorial conflict. As early as 742, Uyghurs have been documented as occupying modern-day Xinjiang province and, as such, have long been the focal point for political, social, and economic persecution by the Chinese government.² Of significant importance are three separate periods of Uyghur³ uprisings in response to Chinese policies and military action designed to crush the expansion of Islam: the 1846 Moslem rebellion during the Qing Dynasty; the Uyghur rebellions of 1931-1934 and 1940-1949 resulting in two separate installments of the East Turkistan Republic (1933-1934, and 1944-1949 respectively);⁴ and the most recent occurring between 1990 and 1998. Drawn into focus is a minority population that has claimed cultural, ethnic, and religious affiliation with the northwest region of modern day Xinjiang province, where the practice of the Islamic religion and participation in government are taboo in and amongst an ethnically dominant Han Chinese population and predominantly atheist society.

Although each uprising is unique regarding the environmental conditions that existed pre- and post-rebellion, the overarching premise of incompatible religious and political preference has

¹ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 299.

² Owen Lattimore, *Sinkiang: Pivot of Asia*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 122.

³ Within the translated texts and between multiple authors there are many different spellings: Uighur, Uyghur, Uyghar, and Uighar. This author will use the spelling Uyghur throughout the text. All other spellings utilized by cited authors will appear as originally written in order to maintain the integrity of the cited work.

⁴ S. Frederick Starr, “Introduction,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 13.

been at the center of the problem. As such, the world has focused upon central Asia, specifically Xinjiang province, as a potential testing ground for the expansion and proliferation of radical extremism in response to the purported violation of humanitarian rights, which includes: denial of free practice of religion; denial of participation in politics; and persecution of a population solely based upon religion. Although political and religious persecution is not a new problem in China, or central Asia for that matter, recent events within Xinjiang have managed to compound the problem. Examples include: the identification of potential links between the Uyghur population and Al Qaeda; the declaration and international recognition of the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) as a terrorist organization by China and the United States and the influence it exerts in the Uyghur occupied region of Xinjiang Province (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region); linking of Uyghur participation in international events, including reported training of Uyghur fighters in Pakistani terrorist camps, and the capturing of Uyghur fighters in Afghanistan and Iraq; and vicious engagements between Uyghurs and Chinese military and police resulting in urban Xinjiang. Although it is difficult to determine fact from fiction regarding information transmitted from China, it is difficult to ignore the significance of this population and their potential involvement or influence by radical extremism, thus providing an environment conducive for proliferation of a global ideology.

METHODOLOGY

The primary question this monograph seeks to answer is what are the impacts of Chinese persecution on the Uyghurs and is Chinese policy providing the potential for Al Qaeda-like terrorist organizations to influence, or establish a foothold within, Xinjiang. Additionally, this monograph will seek to answer the following questions: What are the political objectives of the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement

(ETIM)?; What are the Chinese political objectives in response?; and are the regional challenges of Xinjiang Province indicators of Al Qaeda's intent of global ideological proliferation?⁵

Insurgencies pose a significant threat to regional balance of power and, if enabled from an ideology that is globally resourced, can have impacts of global proportion. Although the intentions of the Chinese government may be questionable regarding the declaration of the ETLO as an international terrorist organization, the threat of insurgency, whether it is a completely new cause with new tactics or the reinvigoration of a pre-established ideology, remains the most difficult to predict and most costly to quell. In response, this monograph will analyze current literature, information, and reports regarding the region and will assist in examining the hypotheses. Therefore, this monograph will focus on the following topics: the cultural, historical, and religious genesis of the Uyghurs in China and the influence of geography on the political and cultural development of Xinjiang, the impact of the 1979 Soviet-Afghanistan war and the initiation of purported ties to terrorism, Al Qaeda's ideology and the appeal it brings to central Asia, and the environmental conditions represented in previous uprisings as a means for understanding current environmental conditions as related to Uyghur disposition and desires.

For the purposes of this monograph, the definitions of insurgency and terrorism will conform to those provided by Joint Publication 1-02 thus stating: insurgency is, "An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed

⁵ Daniel G. Cox, "The Struggle Against Global Insurgency", Joint Forces Quarterly, 1st Quarter, 2010, 139. In his article, Dr. Cox posits, "Al Qaeda appears to be using terrorism as an early-stage tactic to draw attention to its insurgent cause and to separate the people in multiple nation-states from the counterinsurgents just the way Galula predicted. It also shows the characteristics of being what O'Neill describes as a traditionalist insurgency attempting to rail against global forces and return at least the Muslim world to a mythologized caliphate emphasizing traditional, fundamental Islam. Finally, al Qaeda appears to be perpetrating a successful Dune insurgency, transitioning nimbly between short periods of territorial presence and then seemingly disappearing until it becomes evident that it has set up shop elsewhere, perhaps even in multiple locations... Instability provides a perfect environment for al Qaeda to step into. Groups with sometimes legitimate secessionist demands provide potential allies, because poverty and human rights abuses provide causes that al Qaeda organizers can latch on to and use to leverage popular support for their larger global cause."

conflict,”⁶ and terrorism as, “The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”⁷ These definitions are referenced throughout the monograph in order to test the author’s hypotheses that Chinese persecution of the Uyghur population will create a Uyghur insurgency, and that persecution of said population is providing the means for establishment of regional ties to external organizations like Al Qaeda in order to influence the Uyghur movement towards insurgency. Additionally, this monograph will utilize JP 3-24, FM 3-24, and the counterinsurgency writings of David Galula and Bard O’Neill as foundation for comparison and analysis of the conditions present in Xinjiang. Whether the activity in Xinjiang is a small percentage of a population using acts of isolated terrorism for conveyance of dissatisfaction with Chinese policy in the region, is an indication of a latent or incipient insurgency, or as a means for establishing further autonomy, or movement towards secession, is still to be determined. However, one aspect of the situation is clear; the political, diplomatic, and economic influences from internal and external actors within the region will greatly influence China’s domestic policy, the means in which it enforces it, and subsequent aggravation or dissolution of malignant perception within a potentially alienated population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current problem in the Xinjiang Province of China, hereafter referred to as Xinjiang for brevity, is very real from the perspectives of the Chinese government and the populations that inhabit it. However, this is the only point of agreement between them, as the genesis and nature of the problem is viewed from radically divergent viewpoints. On one pole of the argument is the Chinese government whose primary concern is regional stability in central Asia. Via this

⁶ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, HQDA, 2009. 268.

⁷ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, HQDA, 2009, 550.

mechanism, the government intends to modernize its economy and the society that it supports⁸ in order to control terrorism and the expansion of radical Islamic extremism within its borders. In response, the government regulates Islamic religious activity within its borders and closely monitors the activity of Uyghurs and external Islamic influences within Xinjiang.⁹ Further discussion and analysis of China's foreign and domestic policies within Xinjiang will be addressed in a later section of this monograph. At the other pole of the argument are the Uyghurs, whose perception of the problem is failure of the Chinese government to recognize their right to autonomy and independence. Furthermore, Uyghurs also accuse the same of supporting and proliferating religious and ethnic bigotry with the intent to subdue or eliminate Uyghur ethnicity.¹⁰ In short, the Uyghurs are demanding their right to self-determination. Who is right, and upon what grounds do they make their argument? No matter the perspective one chooses to view the problem, whether argued from a cultural, historical, geographical, ethnic, religious, or even a combination of the aforementioned, the genesis of the problem is nonetheless difficult to establish and the solution exponentially more difficult to realize. Political conflict between China's government and Xinjiang is not a new problem. As Owen Lattimore discusses,

⁸ S. Frederick Starr, "Introduction," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 19. "...the prime motivating force is Beijing's own drive to transform the Chinese economy and society rather than more narrow concerns that are specific to Xinjiang. In each case, too, the government's own program for change has generated what might be called its own social antibodies in the form of frustrations over barriers to economic and social advancement, strengthened ethnic identities among non-Han peoples, strivings for self-rule or independence, demands for control over historic territories being degraded by primitive forms of development, and calls for religious assertiveness."

⁹ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 341. "Indeed, from the regime's point of view there can be no "good Islam" in Xinjiang unless it is focused strictly on the narrowest details of religious practice. Least of all can it allow any searching inquiry into the place of a world religion in defining local community life and the values of its members."

¹⁰ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 335.

“Sinkiang [Xinjiang] has lain within the political horizon of China for more than two thousand years, but only intermittently has it been under Chinese influence, control, or sovereignty. In periods when China's foreign wars and foreign trade were concerned with the land frontier, Sinkiang was a key sector of the frontier. In the nineteenth century, when China was dominated by foreign influences in the coastal treaty ports, Sinkiang faded in importance except when it was the scene of Moslem rebellions. It is now coming back into importance because the whole frontier zone between China and the Soviet Union has become one of the frontiers which determine the political balance of the world.”¹¹

Lattimore’s discussion of China and its role in central Asia focuses on Soviet influence in Xinjiang and China’s domestic and foreign policies in response throughout the 1950s. His writings are as relevant and applicable to modern-day Xinjiang as they were sixty years ago, as former Soviet federation states and other central Asian border states continue to complicate matters within this province.

Modern writings of China, particularly Xinjiang, focus on the influence of Islam and radical extremism as affecting the social and political balance within Central Asia. Boris Rumer and colleagues address the implications of the spread of Islamic regimes across central Asia and the issues associated with, “an Islamic caliphate that stretched from Afghanistan to the Caspian,”¹² yet however difficult the problem is to define, the aforementioned authors nor their direct subjects of interview classified the problem as an insurgency but rather as focused points of terrorism for the purposes of establishing an independent Islamic state. In contrast, Martin L. Wayne classifies China’s war on terrorism within Xinjiang as an insurgency thus, “The insurgency in Xinjiang is fundamentally indigenous with connections to the global jihad and al Qaeda.”¹³ Wayne’s assertion is supported by Rohan Gunaratna whose analysis of al Qaeda and the expansion of radical extremism, “...fueled the simmering insurgency for an independent

¹¹ Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia*, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 5.

¹² Boris Rumer, “In Search for Stability in Central Asia,” *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, (Armonk, NY, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 3.

¹³ Martin L. Wayne, “Fighting Terrorism: China’s Bottom-up Approach,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 11. Wayne goes on to say, “These connections were made overwhelmingly in order to target and fight against China rather than fight in the global jihad itself.”

Uighuristan. Until October 2001 Al Qaeda camps also trained Uighurs, to fight not the Russians but the Chinese Communist rulers of the Muslim-majority province of Xinjiang.”¹⁴ Although there are differing perspectives among the authors regarding the environmental conditions present in Xinjiang, all seem to agree upon two points: first, the impetus for modern Uyghur desire for independence and autonomy stems directly from the gaining of independence by former Soviet controlled central Asian states;¹⁵ second, that the 1990 Baren uprising is the point at which radical extremism and Islam collided and thus producing a cultural and political commitment to the establishment of an independent Islamic state and separatists’ intent to utilize any means necessary to achieve it.¹⁶ Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of Uyghur separatists demanding a separate and independent Xinjiang, it is important to note that their desires are fueled by the independence gained by former Soviet states as the Soviet Empire crumbled; a point upon which they will routinely return to as a means for keeping the flame of secession burning and as a beacon upon which to orient their deep seated hatred for the Chinese government.

¹⁴ Rohan Gunaratna, “Asia: al Qaeda’s New Theater,” *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 229.

¹⁵ Sean R. Roberts, “A ‘Land of Borderlands,’” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 229. “After the fall of the Soviet Union, these possibilities increasingly included the idea of establishing an independent Uyghur nation-state...the independence of the former Soviet Central Asian states brought new hope that this desire would be fulfilled.”

¹⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, “Asia: al Qaeda’s New Theater,” *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 230. Gunaratna states, “Uighur discontent rumbled on for many years but the acknowledged turning point was the Baren uprising of 1990, when Afghan-trained Islamists set up loudspeakers in mosques in the villages of Baren and Turand and broadcast speeches praising jihad.” This marked the first time that Xinjiang/Uyghur separatism was addressed in terms of jihad.

The Uyghur People: Cultural and Religious Origins

*Unlike the Hui, the Uyghurs are distinct from the Han not only in religion but also in language, culture, and historical experience. Their identity has been forged especially through close geographic and cultural proximity to Central Asia. Thus, it is not Islam alone but rather a complex of identity components, of which Islam is one, that strengthens many Uyghurs' desire for independence from Han control and domination.*¹⁷

Of primary significance, Uyghur faith and religious origins do not hail from the Han Chinese Muslim foundation, and although they are unified through Islam, political and religious divergence between the Han Chinese and the Uyghur populations has created conditions of extreme volatility. The Uyghurs have been documented in numerous historical records of Central Asia as occupying modern-day Xinjiang as early as 744 A.D, where, upon consolidation with eight other Basmil and Karlukh nomadic tribes, effectively defeated the Second Turkic Khanate under Koli Beile's rule.¹⁸ Described as a fun-loving and carefree people who enjoy music, dancing, and food, this population of predominantly Turko-Mongolian steppe nomads entered northwest China as Manichaeans whom embraced Buddhism, tolerated Christianity in urban areas, but fundamentally opposed Islam.¹⁹ However, between the ninth and twelfth centuries Xinjiang was divided into separate regions, each of which with its own ruler, religion and culture, therefore producing a dispersion of Uyghurs along three separate axes, or branches. The first branch consisting of approximately thirteen tribes moved southeast beyond the current "Great Wall" and subsequently disappeared from historical record; the second branch moved to modern-day Gannan Yugur Autonomous Country and was predominantly assimilated into Chinese culture; and the third branch fled towards the oases which line the Taklimakan desert, whom of which are the focus of this study. It was, however, through this tribal separation and subsequent

¹⁷ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 339.

¹⁸ Dru C. Gladney, "The Ethnogenesis of the Uighur," *Central Asian Survey*, (Vol. 9, No. 1, 1990), 6.

¹⁹ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, "Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 40.

crystallization of cultural practice within the region that the impetus for western Islam to influence eastern culture was produced.

In response to this new dispersion of Uyghur tribes within the region, “The Uyghur state lay in the northeast, controlling the northern Tarim cities east of Kucha as well as Beshbaliq; the Karakhanids were to the west; and the southeastern Tarim was ruled, together with Qinghai and parts of the Gansu Corridor, by a Tibetan state known as the Tangut. It was the Karakhanids who linked the western Tarim basin to the Islamic world of Transoxiana and parts west, and under their rule the Turks and much of Xinjiang's population and therefore came to embrace Islam. The conversion of the Turks to Islam was an event of world-historical significance, for the Karakhanids went on to destroy the Samanid dynasty (1000 A.D.) and assume control of firmly Muslim Transoxiana; they would be only the first of a series of Turkic ruling dynasties in Central Asia and the Middle East.”²⁰ However, it is important to note that the modern definition of “Uyghur” and the cultural and religious context upon which it is founded does not correspond to, or represent, the pre-modern definition of the same. In fact, as Dru C. Gladney states, “with the arrival of Islam, the people identified as the Uighur fade from the historical record.”²¹ As such, from approximately the 11th through the 17th Century, historical records and area studies predominantly do not contain nor refer to the Uyghurs as they were originally known due to their deliberate transcendence towards local geographic-based identity. As such, it was not until the emergence of the Sheng Shicai and the influence of the USSR in 1933 that the term Uyghur re-emerged. According to Linda Benson, Sheng issued a formal decree that the name Uighur was to be used for all Turks whom had settled within the region.²²

²⁰ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century,” In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 42.

²¹ Dru C. Gladney, “The Ethnogenesis of the Uighur,” *Central Asian Survey*, (Vol. 9, No. 1, 1990), 9.

Furthermore, cultural and religious influence within the region has been a product of unique geography, “as it has created a situation where each of Xinjiang's oases feels particular cultural influences emanating from its closest cross border neighbors. As a result, areas in Xinjiang's northeast, such as Urumchi, Turpan, and Hami, have historically had close ties with China proper, but the rest of the region has not. Instead, in Xinjiang's west and south, cultural influences have mostly flowed back and forth between Xinjiang and Muslim regions that lie beyond the borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in what is today Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.”²³

The *challenges* present in modern day Xinjiang are many,²⁴ most notably is its wide diversity of geographic and geologic features, as Xinjiang is one of the most geographically isolated locations of the world. For centuries, the unique geography of Xinjiang has provided natural barriers to, and in many instances assistance for, cultural, social, economic, religious, and political influence within the region. Prior to expansion of inter-continental trade and establishment of the Silk Road trans-continental trade route, Xinjiang provided limited intra-regional influence within Central Asia. However, beginning in 139 BC when Chinese explorer Zhang Qian pioneered the world-famous Silk Road in order to foster Chinese trade with the Western Regions,²⁵ Xinjiang has since served as the intersection at which all of these elements

²² Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 31.

²³ Sean R. Roberts, “A ‘Land of Borderlands,’” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 217.

²⁴ For the purposes of this section, the distinction between the definitions *challenge* and *problem* is made with the intent of maintaining objectivity regarding the topic(s) of research prior to analysis of the data presented. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, the following definitions apply: *Problem*: a question raised for inquiry, consideration, or solution; *Challenge*: to arouse or stimulate especially by presenting with difficulties.

²⁵ <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/silk-road/history/>: From 139 BC to 129 BC, Zhang Qian set out on his journey to the Western Regions twice, pioneering the world-famous Silk Road. Several successful wars against the Huns were commanded by Wei Qing and Huo Qubing (famous generals in Han Dynasty), which removed obstacles along this trade road. In 60 BC, Han Dynasty established the Protectorate of the

have interacted thus producing a dynamic of inter- and intra-cultural engagement beyond that which Central Asia had previously experienced.

Located in the northwest outreaches of China, “Today's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the largest of China's political units, covers an area of 1.6 million square kilometers, one-sixth of China's total area and three times the size of France. Xinjiang is bounded on the northeast by Mongolia, on the north by Russia, on the west by Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and on the south by Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. To the east and south, Xinjiang borders on the Chinese regions and provinces of Tibet, Qinghai, and Gansu.”²⁶ Geographically, Xinjiang is a basin. Within its borders are three separate basins bounded by mountain ranges: First, the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang is bordered by the Quruq Mountains on the east. Within this basin lies the Taklimakan Desert, a “327,000-square-kilometer...mostly uninhabitable and impassible arid waste of shifting sand dunes-now of interest for its oil deposits;”²⁷ Second, the Turpan Basin, also referred to as the “Depression,” which contains the world’s second lowest elevation at 154 meters below sea-level. “East of Turpan, the flat, cobbly desert continues past Hami and southeast between the slopes of the Tian , Shan and Altun Shan ranges, defining what is known as the Gansu or Hexi Corridor; this in turn runs into the Gobi Desert. The Turpan basin also communicates with northern Xinjiang via a break in the Tian Shan range where today the city of Urumchi is located;”²⁸ Third, the Zungharian basin in northern Xinjiang which also contains a

Western Regions in Wulei (near now Luntai) to supervise this northwest area, which greatly protected the trade along this time-honored route.

²⁶ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 29.

²⁷ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 30.

²⁸ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 31.

desert, "...the Zungharian environment is less harsh than that of the Tarim basin. Its steppes and mountain slopes have traditionally supported nomadic herdsman and permanent camps of nomad empires."²⁹

Historically, access to Xinjiang has been, and currently remains, relatively limited. Given the extreme elevations of the mountain ranges that encompass all but the eastern boundary of modern-day Xinjiang, intra-regional travel is predominantly limited to six roads that connect Xinjiang to international border countries as well as China proper. In the Zungharian Basin, one single road connects Kyrgyzstan to Xinjiang west of the town of Qoqek; in the southeast portion of the Tarim Basin, access to China is available via single road or railroad through the town of Kumul; to the south, highway G-315 connects Xinjiang to China, as does highway G-314 to Pakistan through the town of Pidakkesh; to the west of the Tarim Basin in the Ili region of Xinjiang, access to Kazakhstan is achieved west of the town of Ili Kazak, as is access to Kyrgyzstan via highway S-212.³⁰ Additionally, inter-state travel is limited to the ring-roads which follow the contours of the basins in which each is encompassed; therefore travel beyond the current transportation infrastructure is predominantly non-existent unless on foot. As such, inter- and intra-state interactions have been historically limited given the great distances and extreme terrain one must traverse in order to gain access to specific locations within the region. This is not to imply that Xinjiang, whether pre- or post-modern, has been without rule or influence from internal and external actors, nor does it signify cultural, political, or economic isolation. It does however illustrate the unique nature of the challenges that geography has

²⁹ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, "Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 32.

³⁰ Information regarding modern road infrastructure obtained from Google Maps via internet access at: http://maps.google.com/maps?q=China&utm_campaign=en&utm_medium=ha&utm_source=en-ha-na-us-sk-gm&utm_term=china%20map

presented and the influence it has had on regional actors and the means each have utilized for multilateral engagement.

As described by James Millward, “The mountains, basins, steppes, and oases that characterize Xinjiang's geography have exercised an important influence on the region's history. Most notable has been the tendency for outside powers, and particularly nomadic peoples based north of the Tian Shan, to exercise direct or indirect control of the oases of the Tarim basin and Turpan area.”³¹ Furthermore, the vastness of this region is mitigated by the natural migratory routes dictated by extreme environmental variance, high-elevation mountain ranges with few trafficable passes and large lowland deserts, therefore focusing inter-regional movement and human inhabitation within its borders along east-west oriented oases south of the Tian Shan.

Over the centuries, the Uyghur language has remained relatively unchanged, with only minor dialectic changes. In addition to the spoken language, written Uyghur utilizes Arabic script that, as described by Owen Lattimore is no more suited to it than it is to other Turkic languages.³² Yet, this sedentary, predominantly agrarian society has drastically struggled for solidification, and recognition, of an identity almost 1,300 years in the making; An identity that has been forged among the socio-political, economic, religious, and cultural strife generated from the geographic extremes representative of Xinjiang to the limited regional interaction with external actors including Russia, Mongolia, and in some cases China proper.

³¹ James A. Millward and Peter C. Perdue, “Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the Late Nineteenth Century,” In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 32.

³² Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia*, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 126. Lattimore states, “Uighur is written with the Arabic script, which is no more suited to it than it is to other Turkic languages. So far there has not arisen any significant movement, comparable to that in Turkey under Kemal Ataturk or to that developed in the Soviet Union in the '20's and '30's, for the adoption of a script based on either the Latin or the Cyrillic alphabet.”

Previous Uprisings

In order to understand clearly the current cultural and political disposition of the Uyghurs, it is necessary to analyze the historical foundations upon which this population bases its argument for autonomy and, within some Uyghur circles, aspirations of secession. This section of the monograph will analyze three such incidents, each of which will illustrate an increasingly brutal and unrelenting Chinese socio-political system within Xinjiang and provide the reader with a clear understanding of the Uyghur's plight and their desire for the betterment of the environment in which they live. Through each of these case studies, emphasis is placed upon Uyghur desires to retain control over their right to freely practice religion, the right to equal representation under the law, and retain their ability to protect their culture and ethnicity as they have defined it. Lastly, each will provide a historical example of the hardships the Uyghur population has endured under Chinese rule as a means for determining whether a burgeoning insurgency will result under the direction of regional or global ideologies or purely due to internal Uyghur desires for change.

Establishment of the First East Turkestan Republic

On the heels of a series of bloody rebellions against the Qing Dynasty in the late 19th Century, which were fueled by Qing policy of Cultural division and ethnic separation designed to prevent the development of alliances within the northwest region of China, Chinese military intervention under the leadership of General Zuo Zongtang effectively defeated the Turkic rebels.³³ In 1884, the Chinese Empire incorporated the province and renamed Xinjiang. Nevertheless, in order to effectively manage social unrest and balance the influence of Russian intervention and heated Sino-Russian rivalry in the region, the Qing appointed a Chinese military governor to provide oversight of this sensitive, yet strategic region. In addition to this appointment, the Qing established military outposts within Xinjiang and Gansu in order to afford

³³ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 24.

the military governor the power requisite for controlling the region and its diverse assemblage of culture, religion, and ethnicity.

However, due to the geographic isolation and long distances requisite for travel and direct intervention within the region, provincial governors of the Qing Dynasty often exercised power over the province as matters of preference and personal gain, therefore providing the impetus for rebellion and revolution; a cause from which the people of Xinjiang have not deviated. In 1928, the governor of Xinjiang, Yang Cengxin, was assassinated, thus bringing his deputy, Jin Shuren, into power. Recognizing that there was now a void in the provincial leadership within Xinjiang, General Sheng Shicai departed Chiang Kai-Shek's staff in Nanjing and headed to Xinjiang to serve as Jin's deputy. However, Jin did not possess the same ability to control the province as completely as Yang, therefore further driving a wedge between the government and the population. Under Jin's rule, corruption worsened and the economy further degraded. In one account, it was reported that Jin had increased military presence within the province, added to the ranks of the secret police, and appointed many members of his immediate family to prominent positions of government yet could not subdue the will of the populace. The results of these actions were a series of insurrections that culminated in the establishment of the first East Turkestan Republic in 1933.³⁴

As Jin's deputy, Shicai was charged for quelling these insurrections and regaining control over Xinjiang. In direct response to the reinstatement of Qing mandated Sinicization,³⁵ levying hefty taxes upon non-Han Chinese and conversely providing a two-year tax hiatus for migrant Hans, provision of land, seed and farmland to Han-Chinese at the expense of Uyghur farmers;

³⁴ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 26.

³⁵ According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, updated in 2009, Sinicization means to make Chinese in character or to change or modify by Chinese influence.

compensation that included government provision of non-arable land on the outer edges of the desert, and strict regulation of religious activity within the province, Moslems in the town of Hami, Kazaks in particular but accompanied by Uyghurs, Tungans, and other Turkic ethnicities, initiated a violent struggle to retain their cultural and religious independence. Sheng, understanding the gravity of the situation and the strategic implications associated with failure to control this volatile region was assisted by military forces from the Soviet Union and the Chinese nationalist forces to quell the insurrection. Having easily quelled the 1931 Kazak rebellion in Hami with this assemblage of military force Sheng solidified his position within Jin's governorship for the next two years. From 1931 to 1933, Sheng, with continued assistance from Soviet forces, continued to hold off Uyghur and Tungan besiegers, arrested, and executed thousands of people in order to establish complete control over the province. On April 12, 1933, in response to waning confidence in his abilities, Jin was deposed from office in a coup organized by repatriated northeastern Chinese and White Russians whom named Sheng as his successor.³⁶

During this same timeframe, although Sheng had made partial alliances with small pockets of Uyghur resistance factions throughout the region, rebellions of the same order were being generated within other portions of Xinjiang. In the latter half of 1932, Tungans and Uyghurs joined forces and marched on the city of Kashgar. Approximately eight months later in July of 1933, under the auspice of proliferating traditional jadidist³⁷ ideals throughout the region,

³⁶ David D. Wang, "Xinjiang: The Land, the People and the Past," *Under the Soviet Shadow: The Yining Incident – Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 45.

³⁷ <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1060543.html> - "Jadid" is the Arabic word for "new," but Jadidism was a drive for cultural and social renewal among Muslims in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century. Historians have taken the term "Jadidism" from *usul-i jadid*, meaning a "new method" of teaching in schools, yet Jadidism's significance extended far beyond education. In the part of today's Central Asia that was known administratively as Turkestan under the Russian tsars, Jadidism briefly became one of the most remarkable currents of thought in a wide-ranging debate over culture and society among the region's Muslims. At the heart of the Jadid project was a new method of teaching to replace the existing practice in *maktabs*, as primary schools in Central Asia were known in the late 19th century. At that time, the *maktab* existed to transmit knowledge and proper behavior, but not to inculcate understanding. Students memorized passages of the Koran in Arabic, but did not learn Arabic and could not understand what they were reciting.

a local member of the Islamic ‘ulama named Muhemmed Imin Bughra, his two brothers, and an internationally traveled publisher named Sabit Damolla established the Kashgar Affairs Office of the Khotan Government.³⁸ Having informally established a break-away government in a remote region of China with a less than organized defense force and minimal resources, struggles for power and control within Kashgar ensued. Uyghurs, Tungans, and Kyrgyz peoples alike fought to claim control of the government. However, after many bloody encounters and multiple attempts to lay siege on Kashgar, Sabit Damolla officially announced the foundation of the Eastern Turkestan Republic (ETR) on November 12, 1933. Included in this announcement was the outlining of a constitution that would provide for governance in accordance with shari’a law, yet accommodate modern education, libraries, public health, tax reform, debt relief, economic growth and a form of democratic republic.³⁹ The newly established government even went so far as to mint its own coins, yet immediately began to spiral downward towards failure as rampant inflation plagued the fledgling government, and disunity among competing factions and lack of international recognition undermined its resolve.

By this time, having further developed a relationship with the Soviet Union and predicting growing resistance from the Tungans and Chinese nationalist troops, Sheng requested further Soviet military assistance. Understanding that Xinjiang was an important partner for the Soviet Union and the threat of Japanese influence or annexation of Xinjiang would threaten Soviet security, it quickly moved to provide the assistance Sheng requested. In January 1934, Joseph Stalin deployed two brigades of Soviet troops with air support and chemical bombs, thus

Persian and Turkic texts in the Arabic script functioned as mnemonic aids for students who could "read" passages they had already memorized, but were not functionally literate, for they could not read unfamiliar texts even in languages they knew from birth.

³⁸ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 76.

³⁹ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 78.

crushing the resistance in the town of Urumchi and driving the rebels southeast. Congruently, the Tungan Army, under control of the Guomindang, sacked old Kashgar and slaughtered as many as 4,500 Uyghur civilians.⁴⁰ Yet, according to Millward and Tursun, it was the subterfuge of the Tungsans, not the direct intervention of the Soviet Union or ruthless savagery of Sheng's military, which led to the demise of the first ETR in February of 1934. Yet, although doomed for failure from its inception, the establishment of the ETR represents a significant change in the socio-political aspirations of a historically repressed culture within China that stood together for a better future. It was the bold actions of a brave few men driven by a desire for a better life and fueled by a long history of Han-Chinese repression that united a people to stand against the injustices of Chinese rule over Xinjiang; an ideal that will, in the not so distant future, unify a traditionally disassociated and uncoordinated aggregate of cultures and drive them towards a second attempt at establishing the East Turkestan Republic.

The Inter-ETR Years: 1934-1944

Following the failure of the ETR and having established a firm political and military foothold in Xinjiang, Sheng proceeded to establish a greater relationship with the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1934 and lasting until the early months of 1942, Sheng and the Soviet Union established a mutually supporting alliance that enabled Sheng to further consolidate power and exert control over Xinjiang while providing the Soviets the requisite security to buffer Japanese expansion Central Asia. Sheng wanted power and the Soviets wanted to keep imperialistic forces from gaining greater control and influence in Central Asia; both received what they wanted. In response to gaining largely unfettered access to Xinjiang's wealth of natural resources and large-scale trade, the Soviets provided Sheng with political, economic, and military support to his government, including the establishment of Soviet military posts throughout the province. Sheng,

⁴⁰ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 79.

now wielding exorbitant power, began to tighten the noose he had placed around the necks of the non-Han Chinese within the province and ramped up violence as a means to achieve pacification of potential rebels. Having earned the reputation as an iron-fisted military leader and Stalinist at heart, he relentlessly pursued the non-Han ethnicities that had instigated the Moslem rebellion of 1933, where his ultimate intent was to drive all from the province or kill them before they fled. One such account detailed the manner in which Sheng controlled Kazak violence where, “Sheng forced a group of Kazaks to leave Xinjiang by promising them he would return the severed head of one of their revered ancestors if they would leave the Altai.”⁴¹ Another such example of the barbarous atrocities Sheng’s regime heaved upon the masses was the lawless application of the special police program and the jailing system it employed. Upon gaining complete control over the province, Sheng proceeded to expand exponentially the capacity and capabilities of the special police in order to monitor and control rebellious intentions of non-Han Chinese. In many instances, Sheng’s special police would sweep through a village and arrest and imprison everyone within it that could be regarded as committing or being suspected of planning or committing any act outside of the accepted social norms. Once imprisoned, regardless of innocence, all were subjected to vicious and brutal torture; many dying during torture and many others being executed once the torture was complete. In fact, during his reign of terror it is estimated that Sheng killed between 80,000 and 100,000 people.⁴² Although these are just two examples in a multiplicity of brutal and horrific means employed by Sheng’s regime, it illustrates the mentality of the man and the organizational hatred he proliferated, and the exploitative policies being administered within Xinjiang’s borders during this timeframe; these atrocities combined with the accumulative effect of continued of the economy, unrelenting religious and political

⁴¹ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 27.

⁴² Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia*, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 67.

discrimination, and large scale corruption at all levels would fuel the aspirations of an oppressed population and push it towards the breaking point of organized rebellion.

In 1941, having operated freely to do what he pleased within Xinjiang as a result of the security provided by his alignment with the Soviet Union, Sheng became increasingly aggravated by the amount of control the Soviets had imposed upon him over the years. For every Soviet ruble provided to Sheng and every weapon carried by a Soviet soldier in support of his regime, Sheng was slowly losing ability to control the region. In many instances, he was required to appeal to Soviet political and economic counsel prior to proceeding with plans within the region therefore subduing his aspirations versus emboldening his actions. As such, he became increasingly suspicious, to the point of paranoia, of Soviet intentions. Therefore, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 Sheng took the opportunity to establish secret contact with the Guomindang (GMD) in an attempt to slowly loosen the Soviet grip on Xinjiang and reestablish Chinese control over the province.⁴³ Having to focus more attention on Adolf Hitler than on Xinjiang, Sheng instituted an anti-Soviet mentality within the province and severed all trade agreements between the two in mid-1942. Through this action, the Soviet Union lost access to the vast resources it required and the people of Xinjiang lost their livelihood; it "... dealt the region a terrible blow, cutting off both supply of manufactured goods and demand for Xinjiang's agricultural, pastoral, and extractive products...China could not fill the gap."⁴⁴ Ultimately, this would provide the catalyst for the Ili rebellion of 1944.

⁴³ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999) 55. "In Sheng Shicai's eyes, the GMD's efforts would be no more than a gesture, while the Soviets' ambitions could not be deferred only by deceitful means. So, he decided to rid Xinjiang of Soviet influence by making use of the Chinese government."

⁴⁴ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 82.

The Ili Rebellion and Establishment of the Second East Turkestan Republic

From 1942 to 1943, having re-aligned with the Chinese Nationalist government (GMD) Sheng's rule over Xinjiang became increasingly oppressive therefore sparking small-scale rebellions throughout the province. From the Soviet perspective, these small-scale rebellions were the perfect stage to reestablish the ties with the region it had once enjoyed. After having been officially rejected and forcefully driven out of China by the GMD and with waning militaristic and political influence in the region, the Soviet Union sought alliance with Kazak rebel forces that had been conducting small-scale attacks against Sheng's forces throughout the province since 1940; attacks which Sheng himself and his successor Wu Zhongxin considered nothing more than a nuisance created by a small population of "bandits." However in October 1944, having understood the conspiratorial nature of Sheng's position and his lust for unbridled power within the region, Chiang Kai-shek offered him a position in the GMD government that he simply could not refuse and subsequently named Wu Zhongxin as his successor. Upon assumption of duties as the newly appointed governor of Xinjiang, Wu continued the string of violence and oppression Sheng had been known for. As rumors of increased violence and brutality continued to circulate throughout the international channels, the U.S. consulate of Urumqi received a report stating, "It is reported vaguely that there exists political uneasiness among the Xinjiang population... that a sort of guerrilla warfare has been in progress in the Altai region... for over a year."⁴⁵ As the GMD government began to reestablish control over the province, the population again suffered heavily. Having already endured heavy persecution and oppression under Sheng and the Soviet umbrella, it again saw an exponential increase in Han-Chinese migration into the province Wu, as he further expanded the Xinjiang colonization program designed to re-settle an additional one million Hans in the province. Additionally, all Turkic peoples were replaced by ethnic Chinese in all positions of administration and heavy taxes

⁴⁵ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 42.

were levied against non-Han Chinese in order to finance the 100,000-man standing army now stationed throughout the province. Wu then took his policy one-step further as a means to widen the gap between Han and non-Han Chinese by publicly announcing in his first public speech, “that all non-Han peoples throughout the former territory of the Qing Empire were originally racially Chinese and that such categories as “Uyghur,” “Kazak,” and “Kyrgyz” did not exist.”⁴⁶

As a means to finalize the transition from Soviet to GMD control and revamp the poor performing economic system within the province, the GMD attempted to replace the existing Xinjiang monetary system with newly minted Xinjiang dollars. However, being focused on a rapid transition to this new currency it failed to monitor closely the quantity being produced, therefore grossly increasing inflation and temporarily crippling an already fragile and failing economic system. Further yet, now that non-Han money was virtually worthless and greater taxes were being levied against the Uyghur masses, tradesmen and entrepreneurs wishing to maintain their livelihood were forced to pay exorbitant fees for foreign travel and trade permits in order to conduct business with long-time trading partners in the Soviet Union.⁴⁷ To this point, the Uyghurs had faced cultural extinction through forced Sinicization of the region from the Qing Empire to the current GMD regime, endured brutal political, cultural, and religious oppression, have had their livelihoods removed, and were forced to pay exorbitant taxes and fees in order to survive; this would be the final straw.

As Wu began to bring in GMD military forces into the region, the small bands of Kazak rebels that Sheng and Wu were unconcerned about continued to conduct raids against an unorganized and improperly prepared military system. From 1943 to mid-1944, military forces under Sheng totaled approximately 34,000, most of which were garrisoned in the towns of Hotan,

⁴⁶ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 82.

⁴⁷ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 82.

Kashi, Aksu, and Kuqa along Xinjiang's southern border; most of which were focused on fighting the Kazak rebels near Ashan.⁴⁸ As GMD military forces were relocated to Xinjiang to fill in the gaps created in the military ranks created by Sheng's removal, soldiers arriving in Yining were untrained, unprepared, and unaware of the seriousness of the situation in the province; most importantly, they were unfamiliar with the area and unaware of the disposition of the populace.

As this was occurring, the Soviets regained contact with Kazak rebel leaders and began to create an environment conducive for a successful rebellion. With the worst of the German-Soviet war behind them, the Soviets focused their efforts on influencing those whom had Marxist-Leninist ideals. One of those men was Delihan Sugurbayoglu. Delihan, familiar in the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, trained in military skills, and educated in revolutionary theory,⁴⁹ was identified by the Soviets as an influential pro-Soviet Moslem leader and would later become the Kazak rebellion force leader in Ashan. Covert Soviet influence fueled the growing resistance as it provided the requisite resources for building a guerrilla force competent enough to sustain itself against the growing GMD military structure in Xinjiang. It assisted in the production and distribution of rebel propaganda urging local Uyghurs to rise up against the oppressive Chinese government and fight for the rights of Moslems in Xinjiang, provided training and resources on Soviet soil, and sent political and military advisors to assist rebel leaders in Xinjiang. In one account of October 1943 upon his return to Xinjiang from the Soviet Union, Delilhan was accompanied by twelve Soviet advisors, whom assisted him in establishing the Ashan Provincial Government in Burqin, Qinghe County with approximately 2,288 rebel forces standing behind him.⁵⁰ With this as but one example of the power the rebels were gaining, the Soviets had spurred

⁴⁸ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 121.

⁴⁹ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 99.

an underground movement into a full-fledged insurgency as Kazak and Uyghur rebels throughout the province were conducting attacks against GMD military and para-military forces alike. As detailed in a report from the U.S. Consulate of Dihua in July 1944,

“...the Kazak revolt has now spread into the area along the Soviet Border west of the Altai and even into the Tacheng district and Soviet and Mongul assistance continue to be given without any plausible excuse of border infringement... No Chinese Army that can be brought up here in the near future can possibly hope to stand up against the fighting force of the Kazaks once it is fully organized and backed with Mongul technical assistance and Soviet Advice.”⁵¹

By October 1944, just one month prior to the Ili uprising, Kazak, Uyghur, and White Russian rebel forces had facilitated uprisings in the districts of Ili, Altay and Tarbagatay, and along the Xinjiang’s border regions with the Soviet Union, Mongolia, and China. Having gained momentum through increased recruitment and steady Soviet support, the time had come to make a second attempt at establishing the East Turkestan Republic.

In the early hours of November 7, 1944 approximately 500 Kazak, Uyghur, and White Russian rebels initiated an attack on the Nationalist Air Force Headquarters located in Yining; supporting them were an additional 4,500 rebels who were focused on isolating and destroying GMD military and para-military resistance throughout the town. According to eyewitness reports, the signal for the attack came directly from the Soviet Consulate whereby Soviet machine-gun positions fired the first rounds.⁵² At the time of the attack, GMD military forces garrisoned in Yining totaled approximately 10,000⁵³, most of which were dispersed along checkpoints along the border and on the outskirts of town. Intense fighting between the rebels and GMD defense forces ensued during the next three days. Reports from Yining indicated that

⁵⁰ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 122.

⁵¹ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 123.

⁵² Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 45.

⁵³ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 44.

upon initiation of the attack in Yining, Russian forces immediately moved across the border and established checkpoints and blocking positions around the city in support the rebels; one such account had reported that Soviet uniformed soldiers as well as armored vehicles had engaged in battles along side of the rebels during the Yining Rebellion.⁵⁴ With reported Soviet Assistance, the rebel forces had isolated GMD resistance to three strong points within Yining: the military barracks at Airambek east of the city; the Guiwang Temple near the airport; and the air force training field in the city.⁵⁵ Having isolated or defeated GMD defense forces in Yining, in the afternoon of November 12, 1944, exactly eleven years after the establishment of the First East Turkestan Republic, a regionally renowned Islamic scholar and teacher named Ali Han Tore stepped forth as its leader and officially announced the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic. Accompanying his declaration was a handbill detailing fourteen separate nationalistic demands, most of which focused on righting the oppressive wrongs committed by the Chinese during Sheng's reign.

From November 1944 to late January 1945, ETR defense forces viciously fought to maintain control of Yining. Having to contend with the GMD garrisons within Yining as well as reinforcements sent from Suiding, Huocheng, and Huiyuan, control of the city was tenuous at best. Command and control issues continued to plague the ETR as it once had during the establishment of the first ETR, and maintaining integrity across the ranks of Kazak, Uyghur, Mongul, and White Russians that manned the ranks was near impossible. Compounding this difficult situation was the fact that very few, if any, of these warriors had any sort of tactical training or strategic education, and no amount of courage and determination could mitigate it. Had it not been for the direct assistance, or intervention some would argue, by the Soviet Union

⁵⁴ David D. Wang, *The Yining Incident: Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Sha Tin, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1999), 128.

⁵⁵ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 45.

the Ili Rebellion would have failed as quickly and as miserably as the first attempt had in 1934. Nonetheless, Soviet assistance in the rebellion enabled the establishment of the ETR in 1944, and provided the political, economic, and military backing requisite for maintaining it until its collapse in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party took over. Yet, from January to September 1945, rebel and GMD forces brutally fought throughout the province. During this timeframe, ETR forces totaling approximately 500,000 controlled over ten separate districts in Xinjiang and had effectively defeated the GMD and seized control of the towns of Yining, Huiyuan, Sungshukou, Santai, and Jinghe, whereby killing approximately 30,000 GMD nationalist troops along the way.⁵⁶ Having expanded its control of the region, the ETR fought southeast toward Urumqi. Upon reaching the Manas River in late September 1945, ETR and GMD forces stared across the river at each other in anticipation of the next bloody battle. Having appealed to the international community for quick resolution of the Ili affair, including the United States, Chiang Kai-shek ordered an immediate diplomatic assessment conducted of the situation; included in the diplomatic solution at Chiang's disgust was the Soviet Union who would serve as the international spokesperson for the ETR. Included in their message to be relayed through the Soviet Union was a message stating, "...the people of the three districts [Ili, Altay and Tarbagatay] 'had no desire to separate from China, that they desired autonomy for the districts where the rebel regimes had been set up and that the reason for the revolt had been past oppression.'"⁵⁷

Upon issuance of this statement, the leaders of the ETR and GMD commanders arranged for a temporary ceasefire line of which followed the Manas River. Having understood that the force of the ETR was too great to deal with militarily, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to a series of

⁵⁶ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 52.

⁵⁷ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 54.

meetings between the GMD and the self-proclaimed leaders of the ETR to hear their demands. In the early morning hours of October 12, 1945, three representatives from the ETR emerged along the west bank of the Manas River in preparation for negotiations with GMD designated representatives and GMD appointed governor of Xinjiang in Urumqi.⁵⁸ Although points upon which the ETR argued for are not germane to the focus of this monograph it is important to note that over the course of the next sixteen months, ETR and GMD leaders reached officially recognized agreements regarding the legitimacy and relevancy of ETR demands; a point which will fuel future desires for Uyghur autonomy long after the Second ETR is dissolved in 1949 by the CCP.

The Baren Incident - 1990

The final period of active rebellion that will be addressed began in the town of Baren on April 5, 1990. Having been concerned with the expansion of Islam and radical extremism in Xinjiang since the beginning of the Soviet-Afghanistan war in 1979, China used this as the premier event to expand its “Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure”⁵⁹ policy in order to tighten its political and militaristic grip on the expansion of Islam and drive active Islamic rebellions from the province. Although reports of the incident vary greatly, Chinese sources have determined that the uprising was initiated and led by the Free Turkestan Movement under the leadership of Abdul Kasim.⁶⁰ Using the oppressive and brutal nature of Chinese politics and its relentless pursuit of Islam as fuel for the rebellion, Kasim reportedly assembled a force of approximately

⁵⁸ Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1990), 55.

⁵⁹ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 316. “Instead of seeing Islam as a channel through which local Uyghurs are able to express social and political frustrations in a variety of areas, the government [Chinese] chooses to perceive it as the cause of those frustrations, which in turn gives rise to actions that further exacerbate the situation.”

⁶⁰ Dru C. Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 390.

200 men armed with advanced weaponry and initiated attacks against para-military forces throughout the city; Accompanying reports indicate that the weaponry they carried and precise synchronization of attacks could be attributed to direct involvement of an Afghan militia.⁶¹ Supporting Kasim's efforts were reportedly Afghan-trained Islamists that had set up loudspeakers in mosques in the villages of Baren and Turand whom were broadcasting speeches praising jihad for the purposes of encouraging local Moslems to rise up against Chinese oppression and work toward establishing a free and independent Islamic state.⁶² In response, Chinese military and para-military forces quickly unleashed a storm of unprecedented brutality over the course of three days that resulted in the deaths of seven Chinese forces⁶³ approximately 3,000 Uyghurs.⁶⁴ Contrasting the Chinese account of this incident, Uyghur claims indicate that the Baren incident was a case of blatant disregard for the truth and human rights. As per the Uyghur perspective, the incident in Baren began as a peaceful protest by a small assembly of Uyghur students at a mosque focusing on Chinese religious persecution. Which of these accounts of the incident is accurate is difficult to determine, however, according to a report published by the U.S. State Department in August 2002, the Baren incident was the genesis of global jihadist ideological influence upon Xinjiang's Uyghur population. As the report explains, upon direct observation of the unrelenting brutality and uncompromising Chinese desire to quickly deal with Uyghur resistance in Xinjiang, the instigators of the Baren uprising fled Xinjiang into Pakistan and founded the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM); an organization whose primary intent was to conduct "holy war" in

⁶¹ Martin L. Wayne, "The Changing Use of Force in Society," *China's War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 81.

⁶² Rohan Gunaratna, "Asia: al Qaeda's New Theater," *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 230.

⁶³ Martin L. Wayne, "The Changing Use of Force in Society," *China's War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 81.

⁶⁴ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 316.

Central Asia against Chinese invaders. Included in the State Department report was evidence of potential links to Al Qaeda; an organization with purported close ties to Osama bin Laden that was identified as a primary weapons supplier for Islamic extremism in Xinjiang.⁶⁵ One year later the U.S. state department published the *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*, therefore clearly identifying the ETIM as the known organization in Xinjiang with direct links to Al Qaeda.⁶⁶

From 1990 to until September 11, 2001 the Chinese government claims the Uyghur resistance has totaled over 200 separate attacks resulting in the deaths of approximately 160 people and injuring over 440.⁶⁷ Included in its estimate, an upwards of 10,000 Uyghurs have traveled to Pakistan for religious schooling and “military training,” including over 1,000 having trained at Taliban camps with the intent of returning to Xinjiang to participate in the separatist movement.⁶⁸ Although it is quite difficult to determine the accuracy or truth of many of these claims, specifically addressing Uyghur attendance of Taliban training camps, the sporadic nature and low-level violence that had been promulgated by Uyghur separatists appears to be fairly accurate from Chinese accounts as only a few incidents have been written about. Of particular note were a series of uncoordinated and relatively unsuccessful bombings targeting civilian infrastructure from 1992 to 1993; the results of which were far from spectacular. Casualty counts during this string of events were low and fatalities almost non-existent with most of the bombs being located and defused prior to striking their intended targets. As such, estimations culled from various Chinese and international reporting sources seemed to indicate that casualties during

⁶⁵ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 318.

⁶⁶ Martin L. Wayne, “Insurgency in Xinjiang,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 44.

⁶⁷ Martin L. Wayne, “Insurgency in Xinjiang,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 42.

⁶⁸ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, “Islam in Xinjiang,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 342.

this period of reported Uyghur unrest totaled less than 100 and fatalities below 20. The only other incidents of noteworthy status were the Urumqi bus bombings of 1997, where three separate bombs detonated in near-simultaneous Al-Qaeda fashion.⁶⁹ This event in particular demonstrated an expertise in planning and tactics of which had not been previously observed in Xinjiang, therefore solidifying in the minds of Chinese authorities that Uyghur resistance had become more than just a local phenomenon.

On September 11, 2001, as the world held its breath while watching the terrorist attacks unfold on U.S. soil in near real-time, China saw opportunity. Having dealt with the real threat of violent extremism on their own soil for the last eleven years and periodically addressing separatist and anti-Chinese rebellions for generations, China quickly seized the opportunity to garner U.S. support for directly addressing the perceived woes within their own borders. As the U.S. scrambled its resources to deal with the chaos generated by a brazen attack on its own soil and stepped forward from the cloud of debris and confusion and announced a global war on terrorism, China quickly signed on as a supporter and steward of this global endeavor.⁷⁰ Since that time, Chinese policy in the region has focused on containing Uyghur aspirations for secession and limiting influence and support from external sources.

⁶⁹ Martin L. Wayne, "Insurgency in Xinjiang," *China's War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 43.

⁷⁰ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," In *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 316. "The war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan significantly broadened China's Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure campaign in Xinjiang. The Chinese government linked the U.S. war on terrorism with its own antiterrorism campaign in Xinjiang and signed on to assist the war effort. In August 2002, it announced that there were eight Uyghur terrorist forces operating in Xinjiang and throughout China. Judging by their names-the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah, the Islamic Reformist Party "Shock Brigade," and the Islamic Holy Warriors- five have some religious connections. Three others-the Eastern Turkistan - International Movement, the Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization, and the Uyghur Liberation Organization-appear to have a more secular character. "

The 1979 Soviet-Afghanistan War – Links to Terrorism?

Upon entrance of Soviet forces into the much-maligned country of Afghanistan, China and the U.S. joined forces to wage indirect war against a mutual enemy. Having previously established diplomatic ties with one another and both concerned about strategic security in the Middle East and central Asia, the U.S. CIA and Chinese authorities initiated an insurgency against the Soviet Union that would later return to haunt the Chinese on their own soil. Chinese military historian Yitzhak Shichor writes of the affair:

“At an estimated \$100 million a year, the Chinese delivered small arms, assault rifles, mines, antitank and antiaircraft guns, rocket launchers, and 107mm rockets by ship to Karachi. Xinjiang was also used as a base for training Afghan Mujahidin to fight the Soviet Union. With some 300 military advisers already at training facilities in Pakistan, in February 1985 the PLA opened additional training camps near Kashgar and Khotan in Xinjiang where Afghan rebels were introduced to the use of Chinese weapons, explosives, combat tactics, propaganda techniques, and espionage.”⁷¹

In addition to training Afghan rebels to fight the Soviets, China also included their own population of Uyghur Moslems as a means to defend Chinese borderlands from Soviet invasion or threat of influence. Having dealt with the tight grip of Soviet political, economic, and militaristic influence in Xinjiang for generations, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided an excellent opportunity for Chinese defense forces to use a perceived expendable population to defend their homeland while subduing or eliminating previously developed pro-Soviet feelings within it. However, the Chinese failed to consider potential impacts it may have on future engagements with the Uyghurs and the influence their newly acquired skills may have on Uyghur tactics and intentions upon returning home to Xinjiang; “the fallout of which would return victorious *jihadis* to Xinjiang, where some of them fueled the simmering insurgency for an independent Uiguristan.”⁷²

⁷¹ Yitzhak Shichor, “The Great Wall of Steel: Military and Strategy,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 148.

⁷² Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 229.

However, beginning in the early 1990s and following through to present day, China began to recognize that suspected Uyghur attacks against the government were gaining in sophistication and precision within its borders, therefore determining that it now faced the same tactics it had once trained Afghan Mujahidin and Uyghur rebels to use against the Soviet giant in Afghanistan. Upon adopting and supporting the U.S.'s Global War on Terrorism in 2001, China focused its efforts on containing the expansion of Islam and removing would-be violators of Chinese national law within its borders. Contained in this effort were two strategies: the first being a relentless pursuit of would be violators and immediate provision of brutal and unrelenting militaristic response to open protest or displayed acts of violence; the second to facilitate increased Han-Chinese migration into neighboring countries as a means to squeeze out radical Islam and quell further proliferation of the Islamic faith in the region. Within its own borders, Han-migration into Xinjiang has served as an ever-present beacon upon which to orient Uyghur discontent towards China; attempting Sinicization of China's neighbors only fuels Islamist intentions of assisting Xinjiang in becoming an independent Islamic state.⁷³

Xinjiang's link to Al Qaeda continues to be the focal point of Chinese political and military action within the region. The allure of Al Qaeda's Islamic ideology and the influence this organization wields on a global scale provides hope for the local rebel or insurgent he attempts to bring about change in his sphere of influence. In addition to the ideology it attempts to proliferate, Al Qaeda enjoys ease of recruitment as it possesses a relatively large supply of funds from satellite organizations around the globe. With this, Al Qaeda has raised the profile of the Islamist threat and increased the likelihood of long-term conflict in all regions in which it operates or influences.⁷⁴ While it is likely that Al Qaeda has already established an initial

⁷³ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 231.

⁷⁴ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 17.

foothold in Xinjiang and is attempting to tap into an already volatile environment, it is difficult to determine to what extent its influence will permeate the populace given China's swift and unrelenting pursuit of Islamic radicalism. However, based upon recent suicide attacks and bombings targeting the government and political infrastructure, it is safe to surmise that the determination of the Chinese Moslem remains unchanged and will most likely involve Al Qaeda style tactics and training well into the future. If the Soviet-Afghan war has taught China anything about human nature and its resilience to change, the most important lesson is that which has yet to be learned; properly identifying the genesis of Uyghur dissatisfaction with Chinese rule without bias and developing a rich understanding of the environment from whence it developed prior to prescribing a call to action.

Global ideologies and Uyghur Jihadists

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was an historic and monumental time in the rise of Islam in Central Asia. As the Soviet infidels forcefully entered into the Muslim heartlands of Afghanistan the Islamic revolution was afoot, therefore generating a force and ideology that would later expel it from the very land it was attempting to tame. As Soviet operations in the harsh environments of Afghanistan slowly and painstakingly strove towards pacification of a historically untamable land, local Afghans united in Islam and bound only by the Koran, harshly resisted the Soviet oppressor. With the momentum generated by the Iranian Revolution⁷⁵ and realizing the benefits of the Islamic revolution, the activities against the Soviet communists spurred the establishment of over one hundred separate contemporary Islamist movements throughout the Middle East, Asia, Africa, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Western Europe.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The Iranian revolution was the first example of Muslims setting aside their tribal differences and uniting towards a commonly recognized goal. However, the tribal tensions inherent in the Sunni/Shi'ia separation in Islam are ever prevalent and continue to tear at the religious fabric of Muslim society. For a brief discussion detailing the differences between them, visit <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm>.

⁷⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 4.

Seeing opportunity in the capacity of an ideology to combat directly a larger, superior military and political force, the modern-day organization of Al Qaeda emerged as the first global terrorist organization of the twenty-first century. After nine years of direct observation of the Soviet-Afghanistan war, a Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue named Abdullah Azzam published in a 1987 edition of the *Al-Jihad* journal of Afghan Arabs the foundational tenets of the modern-day terrorist organization Al Qaeda. Focusing on the principles upon which Islam is founded, Azzam states,

“It must jump into the fire of the toughest tests and into the waves of fierce trials. The training leadership shares with them the testing march, the sweat and the blood. The leadership must be like the motherly warmth of a hen whose chicks grow under its wings, throughout the long period of hatching and training. This vanguard had to abstain from cheap worldly pleasures and must bear its distinct stamp of abstinence and frugality. In the like manner it must be endowed with firm belief and trust in the ideology, instilled with a lot of hope for its victory. There must be a strong determination and insistence to continue the march no matter how long it takes. Travel provision is among the most important terms on this march. The provision consists of a meditation, patience, and prayer. Loyalty and devotion. They must be aware of the existence of anti-Islam machinations all over the world.”⁷⁷

As detailed in Azzam’s statement, the strength of Al Qaeda rests upon the Islamic foundations and relentless pursuit of religious purism; a call for jihad. However, the call to jihad is a point of contention between jihadists and analysts alike, as most interpret it as a declaration of “holy war.” According to Gunaratna this is far from the truth. As he translates and interprets the writings of Ibn Haibban, the principle aims of jihad are to remove oppression and injustice; to establish justice [in accordance with shari’a law], well-being and prosperity; and to eliminate barriers to the spread of truth.⁷⁸ Yet, Azzam and his deputy at the time, Osama bin Laden, had machinations of developing Al Qaeda into a global terrorist organization under the premise of jihad in its purist sense. The Islamic revolution represented a perfect opportunity to unite the followers of Islam in a global effort to achieve Islamic fundamentalism through terrorism. Understanding that the

⁷⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 5.

⁷⁸ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 112.

survival of Al Qaeda relied heavily upon proliferation of ideology from the underground, Azzam and bin Laden developed Al Qaeda from the underground; as a secretive organization that remains in the shadows of its many satellite organizations as a means for evading detection and instilling fear in the unsuspecting. Through its vast communications and financial networks, Al Qaeda continues to maintain the shroud of secrecy it has struggled long to maintain and proliferates an ideology that many radical extremists and secessionists find alluring.

Recognizing the increasing influence of Al Qaeda and other splinter terrorist organizations, China quickly supported the U.S. led global war on terrorism as a means to combat the spreading threat of radical extremism within Xinjiang. As the U.S. began to flow combat troops into Afghanistan, China instituted its “Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure” policy in order to combat radical extremism and secessionist intentions of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang. U.S. combat operations quickly eradicated Al Qaeda primary operations bases. However, based upon its decentralized command and control system and multiplicity of support networks, underground satellite organizations continued to recruit, equip, and train terrorists within other countries within the Middle East and Central Asia.

As early as November 2001, U.S. intelligence reports in conjunction with various intelligence agencies around the globe indicate that the influence of Al Qaeda is one of the primary destabilizing forces within Central Asia. As U.S. combat troops removed the primary operations and communications networks within Afghanistan, other Al Qaeda influenced organizations continued to proliferate its ideology. One of particular note is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); a transnational organization originating from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, whose primary recruiting base is from dissidents of Central Asia’s major ethnic groups, including Chechens and Dagistanis from the Caucasus region, and Uyghurs from

Xinjiang.⁷⁹ Illustrative of Al Qaeda's tight grip on radical extremists in the former Soviet controlled countries, the U.S. and China have acknowledged over seventy-eight countries that have direct ties with this violent organization; Included in the list of affected countries, some of which with the greatest potential for terrorist activity are the countries directly bordering Xinjiang. By all indications, the IMU is continuing to gain in strength. As the Chinese quickly entered into the global war on terrorism, it believed that U.S. action in Afghanistan would eliminate the IMU as an influence on separatist and radical extremist intentions of its Uyghur population. Using the global war on terrorism as the impetus for quelling these intentions, China quickly moved large numbers of military forces into Xinjiang to reinforce its borders with the international community and rout out Uyghur separatists, terrorists, and extremists. Understanding that many of its Uyghur population received training in IMU sponsored training camps in Afghanistan, China now had the proper forum for dealing with terrorism within its borders without direct violation of human rights laws. Solidifying IMU influence on Chinese Uyghurs, Moheyuddin Kabir of the Tajikistan IRP was quoted as saying, "The Uighurs in Xinjiang are waging their own jihad against Beijing... if the IMU is successful, more Uighurs will find support and sanctuary with Namangani [the leader/founder of the IMU]."⁸⁰ This is a clear indication of the environmental forces at play within Central Asia. Not only are organizations within the Uyghur population looking for external support for their cause, but also organizations such as Al Qaeda and the IMU are looking to capitalize on Uyghur discontent with China. With the rise of the IMU and continued influence of a global terrorist ideology, "Al Qaeda has raised the profile of the Islamist threat and increased the likelihood of long-term

⁷⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

⁸⁰ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 2002), 204.

conflict with the west.”⁸¹ Until the U.S. withdraws combat troops from Afghanistan and ceases support to global anti-terrorism campaigns, the influence of Al Qaeda and its satellite organizations will continue to be an ever-increasing threat to U.S. strategic success in this endeavor.

China and Current Policy in Xinjiang

*“The preservation of stability and public order in China, even if at the expense of other rights, seems generally acceptable to the population. So China’s policies aimed at suppressing politically motivated violence have not been constrained either by the public or lawyers demanding protection of individual or civil rights. Viewing Terrorists as criminals bent on destabilizing society leads most Chinese citizens to be predisposed to cooperating in ferreting out terrorists.”*⁸²

China does not distinguish between separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism, and furthermore, has a long history of intolerance to any of the above. As such, Chinese law states that any activity associated with separatism, terrorism, or religious extremism are direct violations of national law, whereby, “perpetrators of politically motivated violence have usually been caught quickly and dealt with summarily.”⁸³ As Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman attest,

*“In post-1949 China, state controls on Islam and official hostility to religion in general have altered the condition of the 'ulama in Uyghur society. Islam is branded a reactionary ideology and feudal throwback, at best a backward aspect of human society doomed to wither with progress and the advance of science. Atheism is proclaimed as public doctrine, and Han Chinese culture as the most advanced of all cultures. This means that Islam and its religious professionals must perforce be regarded as inferior to, or at least less enlightened than, secular intellectuals, and Uyghurs as a group must strive to catch up with the progressive Han.”*⁸⁴

⁸¹ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (New York, The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2003), 17.

⁸² Suzanne Ogden, “Inoculation Against Terrorism in China,” In *Democratic Development and Political Terrorism: The Global Perspective*, edited by William Crotty, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 245.

⁸³ Suzanne Ogden, “Inoculation Against Terrorism in China,” In *Democratic Development and Political Terrorism: The Global Perspective*, edited by William Crotty, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 245.

⁸⁴ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, “Islam in Xinjiang,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 332.

Remarkably though, freedom of religion is protected by Chinese constitution. There are many mosques throughout the region and Uyghurs and other Muslims participate in pilgrimages to Mecca. Yet, the Chinese government routinely rounds-up “suspected” Uyghur terrorist or secessionist sympathizers under the premise of being “too religious.”⁸⁵ As added measure, through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its participating members, China has also enlisted the assistance of the regional international community to assist in quelling Uyghur separatist activity. Furthermore, although the idea of establishing a Muslim state has not held much popularity among the majority of Uyghurs, interest in the idea has only increased with recent Chinese policies that serve to regulate the practice of Islam in the region.⁸⁶ In addition to close religious regulation, China closely monitors migrant, immigrant, and foreign residents within its borders as a means to control the potential for political or religious dissidence and continues to encourage, and in some cases subsidize, Han migration into Xinjiang; a point of contention that is not likely to be resolved within the near future. If Chinese military activity within Xinjiang over the last year is any indication of commitment to quelling an insurgency, then Al Qaeda and Uyghur extremists/separatists have an increasingly hostile environment from which to operate. Conversely, it is clear, however, that China has latched on to the U.S. led global war on terrorism as a means to operate outside of the confines of human rights regarding Uyghur activity in Xinjiang, and, as such, has avoided international ridicule by labeling these activities as operations oriented towards terrorist activity.

⁸⁵ Dru C. Gladney, “Xinjiang,” In *Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism*, edited by Derek S. Reveron and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, (New York, Routledge, 2006), 231.

⁸⁶ Sean R. Roberts, “A ‘Land of Borderlands,’” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 230.

Analysis

What have been the primary causes of rebellion in Xinjiang? Predominantly, the primary cause for Uyghur rebellion has been Chinese misrule over Xinjiang. However, many underlying causes have incited rebellion. Prior to the Moslem rebellion of 1944, the severing of trade between Xinjiang and the Soviet Union coupled with Soviet political and military influence provided the requisite impetus for rebellion against the Chinese government. Prior to the establishment of the First East Turkestan, the primary cause of rebellion again focused on Chinese misrule, focusing specifically on Chinese sponsored Han-Chinese migration and political corruption. This fact also rings true for the 1990 Baren uprising. What is abundantly clear throughout this case study is Chinese discontent with ethnic and religious diversity within its borders, and the incongruent means it is willing to employ to address Uyghur discontent. An example of this is the July 5, 2009 protests in Urumqi that resulted in the arrest of over twenty-five student-protestors that incited a two-day string of Uyghur violence directed at Han-Chinese residents regarding the relentless beating of a Uyghur factory worker; seven of which were sentenced to fifteen years in prison. While this is an example of petty criminal activity, Chinese punitive action was exaggerated since the perpetrators were Uyghur and because their actions could be categorized as terrorism under Chinese national law.

Is Chinese persecution of the Uyghur population pushing it towards secession or insurgency, and is it enabling terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda to establish insurgency operations in Xinjiang? This question will be analyzed using the writings of David Galula, Bard O'Neill, FM 3-24, and JP 3-24 regarding insurgency and terrorism. Galula states that the primary cause of insurgency is, "revolutionary situations that might have exploded into spontaneous revolutions but bred instead a group of leaders who then proceeded to organize and conduct the

insurgencies.”⁸⁷ According to Galula, the prerequisites for insurgency include: a cause; relative weakness of the counter-insurgent; proper geography; and external support. O’Neill expands upon this by stating, “Legitimacy and illegitimacy are terms used to determine whether existing aspects of politics are considered moral or immoral...by the population or selected elements thereof.”⁸⁸ Included in his analysis, O’Neill posits that insurgencies are predominantly proliferated by the nature of the current political system. Each of these points will be addressed in the following pages.

1. **Cause.** Is there a relevant cause in Xinjiang that could push the Uyghurs towards insurgency in Xinjiang? Uyghur discontent for Chinese authority in Xinjiang has been a point of contention since 742 when the nomadic Turks migrated eastward towards the steppes of Xinjiang. Ever since, the population known today as Uyghurs had endured repeated oppression and unrelenting brutality from the Chinese government. Although very little documentation exists regarding a divergent viewpoint of Uyghur intentions in Xinjiang, Chinese authorities remain firm in their belief that Uyghur separatism is the primary impetus for terrorism within the province, not Chinese policy. Congruently, increased Chinese subsidized Han-Chinese migration and degraded Uyghur political and social status has further aggravated an already fragile environment. Although Chinese policy has enabled expansion of Xinjiang’s economy, failure to invest and develop diverse education and social support programs has provided for a degradation of living conditions for the Uyghurs. As such, modern-day Uyghurs do indeed have a cause for development of an insurgency.

2. **Weakness of the counter-insurgent.** The Chinese government is well known for its ability to control/contain insurgencies. The primary focus of Chinese authorities is stability. As

⁸⁷ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 1964), 17.

⁸⁸ Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, (Washington, D.C., Potomac Books, Inc, 2005), 15.

stated by Martin Wayne, “China strikes with overwhelming force, provides its superiority, and lets diplomacy or civil government take the lead. Domestic unrest in any one hotspot can present existential challenges to the state for there is always the chance that others will perceive a window of state vulnerability and rise on a second front.”⁸⁹ The political and military will of the government is supported by a large percentage of the populace, governmental administrative bureaucracy outside of Xinjiang is sound, and the political infrastructure generally supports the population that it serves. Weakness is not something that the Chinese government is willing to exude, nor is it willing to allow terrorist activities to occur on its soil without extreme repercussions by its political, military, and para-military wings. Therefore, insurgency and terrorism within Xinjiang will not precipitate beyond a regional phenomenon.

3. **Geography.** The physical geography of Xinjiang provides a multiplicity of challenges for the Uyghur people and Chinese government alike. The rugged terrain and vast distances associated with Xinjiang shapes a socio-political environment historically aligned with influences external to Chinese authority. Its vast deserts and widely dispersed population centers provide great challenges for effective central governmental control, and a failing regional economy provide an environment ripe for insurgent influence. Combined with large international borders with countries with known or suspected ties to terrorism and mostly isolated from the rest of Central Asia, Xinjiang’s geography is a textbook example of insurgent-ready terrain. However, China understands the strategic importance of Xinjiang and has instituted governmental and militaristic control measures to mitigate the impact geography has on its ability to quell potential insurgency within its borders.

4. **External Support.** Receipt of external support in Xinjiang has usually been a component of its history. Prior to the establishment of the First and Second East Turkestan Republics, economic and militaristic support from the Soviet Union sustained the Uyghur people.

⁸⁹ Martin L. Wayne, “Insurgency in Xinjiang,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 61.

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, it was the support of the U.S. that sustained the fight against the Mujahidin along its borders. With the establishment of Al Qaeda and its satellite organizations in 1987, moral, political, technical, and financial support for Uyghur jihadists and separatists is coming from sources outside of China. Terrorist attacks conducted by Uyghurs, although relatively rare, smack of the sophistication and precision of Al Qaeda-like and indicate an upward trend in its influence within the region.

5. **Political Environment.** The political environment present in Xinjiang is relatively volatile. The Chinese government continues to propagate Han migration and historical religious persecution. Although normally protected by the constitution, freedom of religion in China remains in the shadow of political control. However, on a positive note, China is attempting to a better relationship with society. Martin Wayne states,

“While the core society does fear an ethnic order, China is working to build a space within society for diverse identities. The Chinese project is patronizing to minority groups, who are idealized into something of a fantasy world, yet it does attempt to bring together diverse nationalities and societies into one country.”

Current policy represents a demonstrated willingness to accommodate minority groups within Chinese society. What is not clear, however, is the foundation upon which this policy is predicated. Does this policy assume that Han-migration has, or will, push Uyghur majority in Xinjiang into the minority? Does it assume that Han-Chinese dominance will subdue Uyghur culture and aspirations for Uyghur autonomy? By all indications, the persistent surveillance and suppression of religion by the Chinese will have the paradoxical effect of strengthening the central role of Islam in Uyghur life, and radical Islamic elements within Xinjiang and abroad will sympathize more with the Uyghur cause as one among many grievances of oppressed Muslims around the world.⁹⁰ Conversely, however, although the propensity for radical Islam to influence the disenfranchised and oppressed is present there is no clear indication that more Uyghurs have

⁹⁰ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, “Islam in Xinjiang,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 344.

or will increasingly gravitate towards it. Whether or not the political environment present in modern-day Xinjiang will precipitate a bourgeois-nationalist insurgency or degrade into an Islamic fundamentalist civil war is yet to be determined.

In addition to analyzing Xinjiang's socio-political environment through the models proposed by Bard O'Neill and David Galula, this monograph also sought to answer questions regarding the political objectives and relative influence on Uyghurs of the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Upon review and analysis of a multitude of primary and secondary sources regarding these specific organizations indicates a lack of coordination and commitment to any specific cause outside of the betterment of socio-political conditions currently endured by the Uyghurs.

Regarding the ETLO, its leader, Mehmet Emin Hazret, claims that his organization has not been, nor does it aspire to, engaged in terroristic activities within or outside of China's borders. In a January 24, 2003 telephone interview with the Uyghur service of Radio Free Asia, Hazret stated that although his organization has not been associated with or involved in terrorism in China, the brutality of the Chinese government against the Uyghurs might have driven some to violence. According to Hazret, "Our principle goal is to achieve independence for East Turkestan by peaceful means... The Chinese people are not our enemies... our problem is with the Chinese government."⁹¹ Information regarding the ETLO tends to indicate that Uyghur resistance is not influenced by this organization. According to Martin Wayne, information regarding the ETLO is difficult to acquire and even more difficult to discern yet seems to indicate that ETLO operations are mostly rooted in organized crime and local corruption more so, if at all, than terrorism and separatism, therefore leading this author to discount it as a viable influence on China's perceived insurgency.

⁹¹ Dru C. Gladney, "Xinjiang," In *Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism*, edited by Derek S. Reveron and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, (New York, Routledge, 2006), 232.

Secondly, the ETIM, aside from the joint U.S./Chinese statement of the ETLO being the only organization with known ties to Al Qaeda and terrorism, “It has not been made clear why the ETIM was singled out, unless it was for the purpose of strengthening Sino-U.S. relations. Calling them ‘scapegoat terrorists,’ the *Oxford Analytica* report concluded that the ETIM was only a ‘dubious threat’ and has been used as an excuse for increased repression.”⁹² Continuing his analysis, Gladney further posits that most analysts and Chinese scholars conclude that the primary reason for China singling out one specific group of Uyghurs as a terrorist organization is that they are Moslems. Yet, according to recent studies by renowned Chinese historian, James Millward, the ETIM has yet to be linked, credibly or publicly, to any large-scale attack.⁹³ Therefore, this author believes that the influence provided by the ETIM is nothing more than a local phenomenon and will remain as such.

Conclusion

This purpose of this monograph was to analyze the impacts of Chinese persecution on the Uyghurs and determine the potential for Al Qaeda-like terrorist organizations to influence, or establish a foothold within, Xinjiang. However, the research requisite for understanding the current environment within Xinjiang transcends the scope of this monograph, therefore providing a gateway for future research regarding insurgencies and the socio-political mechanisms that enable their proliferation. Although the resultant analysis focuses solely upon the Uyghurs, the impacts of Chinese policy and the influence of external actors within Xinjiang can, and does, have impacts of global proportion. The problem in Xinjiang is but one example in a multiplicity of potential scenarios where a complex mixture of cultural, ethnic, religious, social, economic, and political variables within an environment clash, therefore producing the requisite

⁹² Dru C. Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 390.

⁹³ Martin L. Wayne, “Insurgency in Xinjiang,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 44.

vulnerabilities upon which global ideologies such as Al Qaeda prey. What has emerged from Xinjiang is a complex problem that has many unique characteristics, yet a multiplicity of attributes that can be representative of any un-governed or under-governed location on Earth.

From the Chinese perspective, Xinjiang has always been one of China's strategic assets as it has provided security to greater China from the influences and potential security threats from the multitude of nation-states that border Xinjiang. Given its vast expanse and diverse geographic extremes, Xinjiang naturally provides the Chinese government the ability to conduct an economy of force mission within this region. What this produces, however, is an unchecked political license for governmental representatives to rule unjustly over the province that drives the populace to seek refuge in the social, political, and economic security as provided by actors and organizations beyond China's influence. Historically, Chinese policy has focused on cultural purity; the results of which illustrated by Sinisization policies implemented during the Qing dynasty. Within recent history, Sinisization is still a very real aspect of everyday life in Xinjiang as Chinese sponsored Han-Chinese migration continues to decimate the Uyghur ethnic majority in the province. However, coupled with the complexity of global ideological influence within the disenfranchised youth and Chinese exploitation of provincial wealth without reparation, the environment within Xinjiang becomes increasingly more volatile as China presses forward with its current policies. Congruently, the relative wealth of natural resources present in the deserts and mountains of Xinjiang has led the Chinese government to realize that one solution towards relieving its increasing deficit of energy and raw materials lies within this strategic province. Therefore, what is emerging from this complex situation is an environment of social and political extremes that tears at the fibers of Uyghur existence; a struggle that becomes increasingly more difficult to maintain as Chinese aggression becomes increasingly more commonplace.

The broader implications of the Xinjiang problem revolve predominantly around religion. As the plight of Uyghurs continues to escalate under the oppressive hand of the Chinese

government and as the direct influence of the U.S. led global war on terrorism efforts in the Middle East subside, radical extremism will become increasingly more influential amongst the secessionist and jihadist Uyghur conglomerate. This will embolden radical extremist organizations to seek increasing levels of influence in Central Asia and expand the logistical and ideological footprint from which to operate. What the Chinese have failed to realize is the relative power religion wields within a population and the unifying effect that globalization has provided towards fulfilling global ideological aspirations. As Chinese military and para-military wings escalate counter-insurgency efforts within the region, radical extremists will move towards the periphery of Chinese influence, as it has in Uzbekistan, and continue to recruit and train Uyghurs and others seeking refuge in the wealth and security these organizations can provide. What will result is a temporary decline in direct Uyghur contact with these organizations, yet terrorist attacks will increase in Urumqi and other cities within Xinjiang by Uyghurs and others whom desire to incite fear and rein destruction in response to oppressive Chinese rule. Additionally, this will produce a convergent ideological effect between passive aged Uyghurs and rebellious disenfranchised youth; a point that will sever an historical bi-polarity amongst a culture traditionally divided between aspirations of secession and an undying desire for individual survival regardless of cultural, ethnic, or religious identity. Therefore, as the U.S. begins to drawdown its forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, radical extremist activity in Central Asia will expand exponentially thus providing a gateway for expansion of Al Qaeda-like activity in Xinjiang. What the future of Xinjiang and its Uyghur population will be is still open for debate, however, if China is concerned with the Uyghur movement as an insurgency, it has yet to see the full potential its current policies can provide if left on their current track.

The linkage of Al Qaeda to Xinjiang is very much in its infancy as all but two sources studied indicated that there was no discernable connection to between the two. Having termed Central Asia as Al Qaeda's "new theater," Rohan Gunaratna's comprehensive study of Al Qaeda provides but a glimpse into the ideological aspirations of this global organization and the

influences it exerts upon Xinjiang. In addition, Ahmed Rashid has also made a positive connection between Al Qaeda and Xinjiang. In his book, Rashid indicates that the influence of Al Qaeda and its satellite organizations within Central Asia is on the rise as Uyghurs train in terrorist training camps in Uzbekistan and Pakistan participate in direct attacks throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. As such, through recruitment of Uyghurs and others Al Qaeda continues to challenge the sovereignty of nation-states within Central Asia and around the world. Through its ideology and the fanaticism associated with the wealth and power this organization can provide to the oppressed, underprivileged, and underrepresented, recruitment is becoming increasingly easier as this organization continues to spread its poison through word and deed. Thus, future research regarding Uyghur secessionism and radical extremism should focus upon the growing influence Al Qaeda provides from former Soviet controlled nations and the relative ideological impacts this organization has upon the religious and cultural norms of the populations that inhabit their borders.

In closing, how the situation in Xinjiang will play out in the future is yet to be determined. However, three things are clear. First, as was illustrated in the Iranian Revolution, the presence of the United States in the Middle East is providing Al Qaeda the opportunity to capitalize on Muslim dissatisfaction with the apostate invader and is unifying its efforts towards reestablishment of the Caliphate as it targets vulnerable populations seeking external support for their cause. Secondly, Al Qaeda is attempting to establish a firm foothold in Central Asia. As this organization continues to creep eastward from Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and now in northwestern China towards Thailand and the Philippines, it is seeking the disenfranchised and militant Islamic youth within the populations of sovereign nations. Yet, it does not solely see this influence as originating from Central or Southeast Asia. It seeks support and recruitment from all continents and realizes significant results as such, including from within the United States and its allies. Finally, the role of Islam will most likely play an increasing role in the Uyghur nationalist

movement in the future.⁹⁴ Yet, according to Martin Wayne, “Even as links to the global jihad, material and ideational, have been formed by Xinjiang’s insurgency, this insurgency has remained at its core an indigenous phenomenon. Chinese response to this insurgency is the primary reason for such low-level violence.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, “Islam in Xinjiang,” In *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, edited by S. Frederick Starr, (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 344.

⁹⁵ Martin L. Wayne, “Insurgency in Xinjiang,” *China’s War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, (New York, Routledge, 2008), 53.

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