

WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS

2016 Report on
Human Rights Violations
in East Turkestan
(Events of 2015)

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The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is an international organization that represents the collective interests of the Uyghur people in both East Turkestan and abroad. The principle objective of the WUC is to promote democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people and use peaceful, nonviolent and democratic means to determine their future. Acting as the sole legitimate organization of the Uyghur people in both East Turkestan and abroad, WUC endeavors to set out a course for the peaceful settlement of the East Turkestan Question through dialogue and negotiation.

The WUC supports a nonviolent and peaceful opposition movement against Chinese occupation of East Turkestan and an unconditional adherence to internationally recognized human rights standards as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It adheres to the principles of democratic pluralism and rejects totalitarianism, religious intolerance and terrorism as an instrument of policy.

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN EAST TURKESTAN:

2016 Report on Human Rights Violations & the Uyghur Community in East Turkestan (Events of 2015)

April 2016



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2015 continued the downward spiral in human rights protections for the Uyghur community living in East Turkestan (officially the *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* of China) and abroad. Despite continued efforts from rights groups around the world working to bring to light issues that remain purposely obscured and largely overlooked by the international community, many of the rights that Uyghurs once held – one year ago, five years ago or ten years ago – are gradually being eroded.

The importance of the protection of human rights has been trending downward under China's current leader, Xi Jinping. In 2015, China's strategy has moved from mere rhetoric to passing concrete legislation that will certainly have the effect of limiting the rights of the Uyghur community in particular. We have seen this in the passage of China's *National Security Law* and the *Anti-Terrorism Act* over the past year, as well as the introduction of the *Overseas NGO Management Law*, which passed its second reading in May 2015, and the *Network Security Law*, which was first introduced for public comment in July. Many of these laws have been touted as responses to increased insecurity and violence, but do very little to recognize underlying issues that have persisted for decades and have given rise to real tension.

By now, it cannot be more clear that open dissent is not tolerated by the state. Although demonstrations and protests had been met by deadly force beginning in the 1990s, collective action by Uyghurs in East Turkestan continued in the years following. Even until 2014, media reports suggested that small demonstrations continued, and were met with the same heavy resistance. It is now more clear that the consequences of any form of open resistance may be severe and result in unjustifiably long prison sentences, or in other cases, extrajudicial killing at the hands of security forces. Because police and security forces are almost never held to account over the death of civilians, they rarely exercise restraint in their use of force.

The result of these measures is a worsening climate of fear and helplessness. The Chinese Communist Party continues to abuse the entire Uyghur population of East Turkestan under the guise of "stability maintenance" or "counter-terrorism". It must be noted that although a miniscule fraction of the Uyghur population living in the region has turned to violence in response to China's heavy-handed policies, it in no way legitimizes broad and dangerous generalizations or collective punishment. Rather than stabilizing the situation and restoring an amicable relationship between the Uyghur and Han people, such sledgehammer policies serve only to deepen resentment between the groups as well as between Uyghurs and the state.

Major human rights issues permeating the Uyghur community in East Turkestan picked up where they left off in 2014. Increased restrictions on religious practice continued as mosque-goes were monitored, religious teachers tightly controlled by authorities and prohibitions on religious expression led to many arrests. Continued economic disparities between the Uyghur and Han populations went unaddressed and China's economic development plans have not yet made any explicit effort to address the underlying problem. Efforts to curb violence were also stepped up with the passage of counter-terror legislation that will openly allow for further discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. These restrictions, when seen collectively, are also reflected in the rise in Uyghur asylum cases seen throughout the previous years.

The current report looks to provide a comprehensive picture of the conditions in which the Uyghur community in East Turkestan and abroad are currently faced with, particularly human rights abuses that come at the hands of the Chinese government through policy decisions. Those with the most significant

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focus here are measures associated with counter-terrorism, religious freedom, state surveillance and freedom of movement, and the rights of asylum seekers fleeing East Turkestan as a direct result. The report aims to address those issues in depth and provide the necessary historical context for a well-rounded understanding of the situation. Additionally, the purpose of the report will be to provide a resource for the international community to better respond to rights abuses that are too often ignored and purposely obscured by Chinese officials.

ANTI-TERROR MEASURES:

Violence and terrorism continued to threaten the peace, security and stability of countless states and communities across the globe in 2015, prompting governments to respond. Accordingly, terrorist acts should not be taken lightly and deserve prompt and effective measures to counter the threat which they pose. Despite legitimate and informed counter-terror methods taken by those interested in reducing violence, the terrorist threat has also been taken as a unique opportunity to quell legitimate domestic opposition under its guise. Although China is not unique in this approach, the impact of this strategy on the Uyghur community in East Turkestan and abroad has been significant.

The discourse of terror in China has been very much a recent development since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. Although there was occasional mention of the threat of terrorism in the 1990's, Uyghur protests in East Turkestan throughout the decade and the violence that often ensued was not framed by the state in such a way. Language that reflected responses to *crime*, *hooligans* and *gangs* was consistently present in state media reports.¹ A much different picture was painted just a month later, however, as the Chinese government hurriedly began drawing tenuous links between violence in the region and global terror networks.²

The government has been employing counter-terror measures as a justification for the suppression of Uyghur rights across the board. China's ostensible campaign against the "three evil forces" (terrorism, religious extremism and separatism) has explicitly served to draw a direct line from fundamental aspects of Uyghur culture to terrorist activities. The result has been a broad criminalization of Uyghur life as the community itself becomes increasingly, and erroneously, synonymous with the international terror threat. The primary source of information drawn from the region remains Chinese state media – information that is then reproduced for Western audiences despite a clear lack of critical examination.

A notorious example has been China's insistence of the involvement of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in all violence sparked in the region. The first mention of the group came shortly following 9/11 in a White Paper released by the government that made clear links between actors in East Turkestan and international terror networks. The claims have not stood up to close scrutiny, however, as few, if any, members of the academic community were even aware of the existence of the group prior to China's statements on the subject.³ Since then, the ETIM has served as the exemplification of, and scapegoat for, the scourge of terrorism in the region.

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Rhetoric of the War on Terror has been used by China to both justify oppressive policies and to attempt to integrate themselves with major powers fighting that supposed war. This strategy has been a significant fait accompli on the part of the Chinese as many continue to reduce the conflict to a clash between violent terrorists and the state, disregarding the overwhelming majority of Uyghur citizens that find themselves in the middle. Such a strategy continues to permeate the everyday lives of all Uyghurs.

Just one day following the appalling terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, Chinese state media reported that they had concluded a lengthy anti-terror campaign against Uyghur militants – a campaign

that reportedly took the lives of at least eleven women and children of the twenty-eight that were killed.⁴ Although the campaign was in response to attacks perpetrated by a group of Uyghurs on a mine in Aksu, which left over 40 dead, its response is clearly outside of accepted legal norms and remains a vastly disproportionate use of force. Two days later, on November 15, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Li rightfully condemned the attacks, but only before appealing to the international community to acknowledge that China faces an equivalent threat. Despite steady Chinese efforts, no credible links have ever been made between violence that has erupted in East Turkestan and international criminal or terror networks.

China introduced early drafts of anti-terrorism legislation as far back as November 2014, drawing serious concern from the international community, with its final draft being passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) on 27 December 2015 – the *People's Republic of China Anti-Terrorism Act*.⁵ Chief among the concerns have been the incredibly broad and vague language of its definition of terrorism and terrorist activities, effectively reserving the power to implicate large swaths of the Uyghur community in terrorist acts.

The conflation of religious “extremism” and terrorism is also a worrying trend that has been further reinforced by the legislation.⁶ Any religious activity that takes place outside state-sanctioned mosques is already deemed illegal in East Turkestan, compounding the risk that Uyghurs may be arraigned on terrorism charges for religious practice that falls well within legal international human rights norms. The Act also implicates those who, “forc[e] others to participate in religious activities”,⁷ making it clear that parents wishing to provide any kind of religious instruction to their children akin to terrorists.

The legislation, however, includes a clause that ostensibly protects persecution based on religious beliefs or ethnic customs, stating that, “In counter-terrorism work, we should respect citizens’ freedom of religious belief and ethnic customs, prohibiting any work based on geographical, ethnic, religious and other grounds for discriminatory practices”.⁸ Despite this constructive language, such passing mention of human rights merely pays lip service to international legal standards – as is the case in much of Chapter Two of the Constitution of the PRC that enumerates many of the fundamental rights expected in any democratic country, though rendered meaningless without effective enforcement mechanisms.

Article 2 states that other states should not “...provide asylum to any terrorist activities or the granting of refugee status”. The troubling aspect of this passage is its implications when coupled with the already broad and malleable language in the rest of the Act that could allow persecuted Uyghurs seeking asylum to be capriciously returned to China to face unwarranted trial. Such was the case on 8 July 2015, when 109 Uyghurs – who had been held in immigration detention facilities in Bangkok, Thailand, after fleeing East Turkestan – were returned to China in clear violation of the UN Refugee Convention.⁹ The group included women and children and drew the ire of the international community including European Union foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini.¹⁰ The article will inevitably open the door even further for the denial of these internationally recognized rights.

States are required to take appropriate measures to ensure that counter-terror operations are carried out strictly in line with relevant international human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law. China’s criminal justice system already lacks even the most basic protections for detainees including the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to prompt legal representation, the ability of detainees to be informed of their charges as well the ability for the detained to be brought before a court

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for impartial trial. The denial of these rights has been compounded by widespread discrimination purely on the basis of Uyghurs' ethnic make-up.

Numerous UN Security Council Resolutions have stressed the importance of recognizing these rights, not simply for the sake of the rights themselves, but also in consideration of the effectiveness of the policies. Security Council Resolution 1456 (2003) underscored these imperatives, recognizing that, "States must ensure that any measure taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, and should adopt such measures in accordance with international law".¹¹ A key aspect of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy,¹² adopted in 2006, was to reiterate that development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The absence of one renders the others meaningless in the context of a legitimate and concerted effort to promote security alongside the fundamental rights of citizens.

Underlying all of these concerns is China's political system, one in which the control of information and the lack of toleration for dissent are critical. The state is therefore not held to such a high standard of accountability, which in turn dissolves many of the constraints imposed in most democratic systems. As a direct consequence, the state is able to conduct counter-terror campaigns with far more leeway in allowing civilian casualties, have the enhanced ability to aggressively target minority groups, and are better able to conceal the true nature and consequences of their actions.¹³ Although authoritarian states typically have a wider range of tools at their disposal, some of these approaches are also prone to backfire as terrorists typically look to provoke their target governments into using excessive force in retaliation. The acceptance of the use of brutality on the part of the state may then further embolden those looking to commit violence against the state or to recruit others into the same business, however reprehensible.

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STATE SURVEILLANCE & FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:

2015 was also an extraordinary year in terms of China's purported need for more extensive surveillance programs. Prior to 2015, China had already employed the use such programs, known collectively to many as the *Great Firewall of China*, designed to keep tabs on individuals and groups ostensibly threatening state interests and to prevent the free flow of content and communications. Its comprehensive use of Deep Packet Inspection systems, able to monitor and censor network traffic claimed to be harmful to state interests, effectively leaves Chinese citizens in the dark on issues ranging from the discussion of religion to human rights and the pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989.¹⁴

Despite surveillance provisions already present in the Anti-Terrorism Act, passed in December, China also passed its National Security Law¹⁵ on 1 July 2015, that enumerates extensive and ambiguous powers now legally available to the state. The legislation further constructs a framework in which all potential interests of the government may now be viewed within the context of national security, declaring broadly that cyberspace, outer space, the ocean depths and the polar region to be within such interests. A senior official at the National People's Congress even went so far as to say that the National Security Law would, "not leave any room for disputes, compromises or interference" when protecting its core interests.¹⁶

The Anti-Terrorism Act obliges telecommunications companies to provide requested information to Chinese authorities in cases involving what is broadly defined as terrorist activities.¹⁷ According to the legislation, all telecommunication and internet service providers would also be obligated to store user data within its borders, potentially for future use by the government. The aforementioned legislation has also been buttressed by the more narrow scope of the draft Network Security Law¹⁸ that was introduced for public comment on 6 July 2015, and will likely pass in mid-2016. A statement made in April 2015

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suggested that security networks would also be set up to cover all grassroots communities as well as the use of more surveillance cameras.¹⁹

The new legislation will likely further monitor and restrict the movement of Uyghurs from within East Turkestan and within China more generally. Many Uyghurs and Tibetans have recently been placed on a security blacklist from hotels in major Chinese cities.²⁰ As soon as those on the blacklist attempt to book rooms, they are registered by the security system and the police are immediately alerted. Hotel managers have been quoted as saying that as soon as a Uyghur or Tibetan ID card is presented, the police are required to pay a visit, regardless of their background or if they are present on the security blacklist itself.

China is also in the process of establishing a national population database linked to ID information and credit records of all its citizens. The database will likely feed into a larger surveillance system that will include other measures like the outfitting of transport hubs and other public spaces with facial recognition equipment. It is clear that such power in the hands of the state will inevitably be manipulated to track dissidents or activists.²¹

Surveillance has also increasingly been assigned to ordinary citizens, Party members and students. Uyghur students at Xinjiang University in Urumqi are now faced with the prospect of anonymous student informers who have been instructed to report to ‘political guides’ about discordant political or religious views among the Uyghur student population.²² Discussions and debates that veer into political or religious territory have been meticulously recorded in classrooms, dormitories and other locations throughout the university by informers.

Informers are increasingly being drawn from the Uyghur student population as a more effective means of infiltrating the group. These students then submit compiled reports to ‘political guides’ who reportedly operate in every department of the university and are directly supervised by the Communist Party’s university branch. The informers benefit from the program as they are provided special recommendations from the Party upon their return to their home prefecture or to their potential employers.

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Not only have Uyghurs in China been targeted, but Chinese officials have increasingly been locking their gaze on Uyghur human rights activists and media outlets abroad. Reports of harassment, intimidation and threats were widespread in 2015 as the government continued to lock up family members and associates of Uyghur activists.

Two brothers of Radio Free Asia reporter, Shohret Hoshur – who focuses his journalistic work specifically on East Turkestan – were detained and put on trial in August, 2014. Rexim and Shawket Hoshur were both charged with “endangering state security” and “leaking state secrets” following a telephone conversation between the two and Shohret in the US, complaining about the arrest of a forth brother, Tudaxun Hoshur, who was detained two months earlier and remains in prison.²³ No verdict was issued regarding Rexim and Shawket, however, and the brothers were released unexpectedly on 30 December 2015, amid pressure from Western governments.²⁴

In addition to the close surveillance performed by the state, Chinese authorities have also pressured Uyghurs abroad to spy on members of the Uyghur community or those involved in activism. Spying within the Uyghur community has been reported in the UK, Sweden and Germany – the latter of which resulted

in charges being filed against a 62-year-old Chinese man in a Munich court for sending information he had gathered to the Chinese intelligence service regarding the activity of Uyghurs.

In one case in particular, Erkin Kurban, an ethnic Uyghur from East Turkestan who had emigrated to Canada in 1999, returned to the region in 2013 in order to see members of his family who he had not visited in 13 years. Shortly after his arrival, he was summoned by the local police and questioned at length for 10 hours about his activities in Canada and the US. The interrogators eventually urged him to begin to send reports on the activities of his fellow Uyghur exiles upon his return, particularly about the activity of WUC president, Rebiya Kadeer.²⁵

A more recent phenomenon has been the rigorous inspection of the contents of smartphones held by Uyghurs. The contents of their phones have been examined thoroughly for signs of, “extremist or religious texts and videos.” It was reported that smartphone searches notably increased following the attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, and continued into early 2016.²⁶ In addition to roadblocks and checkpoints, local police in Hotan prefecture had even set up a special group designed to check the phones once a week since May, 2015.

Service cutoffs were also reported by Uyghur residents via text, that stated that the government had decided to stop service for “17 social media platforms”, including Wechat (Weixing) and QQ, popular among both Chinese and Uyghur residents. The notice also stated that the platforms were shut down in order to “clean” religious content and other material deemed extremist from the platforms and maintain stability in the Hotan region. Any content that merely hints at separatism or unsanctioned religious activity can have the user arrested on terrorism charges. Authorities detained two young people in Lengger village, Hotan prefecture, who “illegally” tried to access websites to view religious content. As a result, police sent the high school students to a political education camp for a period of 100 days in an ostensible effort to ensure that they understood what constitutes “extremist ideas” from the state, and to, “learn the Communist Party’s ethnic harmony rules and policy on religion.”

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The confiscation and strict regulation of passports – issues dealt with by the Tibetan community for years – has developed into a more significant problem in East Turkestan. Issuance of passports has provided the state considerable power over the ability for Uyghurs to travel outside the country. In a report published by Human Rights Watch,²⁷ the rights group demonstrated that since 2002 there has effectively been a two tier passport system serving its citizens. The first, the report argues, is available to those living in areas largely populated by the country’s ethnic Chinese majority, while the second is made available to those in areas populated overwhelmingly by the country’s minorities. The report goes on to explain that “...residents of areas with slow-track processing are subjected to extremely long delays, often lasting several years, before passports are issued, or are routinely denied passports for no valid reason”.

Official documents have shown that the restrictions were initially designed to prevent Uyghurs, Tibetan Buddhists and Hui Muslims from religiously motivated travel, but state media has stated that citizens are able to apply through state-sanctioned tour groups, rather than travelling independently. Research has also found a pattern of the denial of the right of Uyghurs to renew or obtain passports dating back to 2006.²⁸ The 2007 Passport Law of the People's Republic of China clearly outlines the circumstances in which passports may be denied or confiscated, yet blanket confiscations from one ethnic group in particular is clearly not within the ambit of the law.²⁹

Moreover, the outright confiscation of passports was witnessed in May, 2015, as residents in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture were asked on 30 April 2015, to hand in their passports by May 15, or

have the documents canceled by the entry and exit office of the Public Security Bureau.³⁰ The prefecture has a population of roughly three million, of whom 65 percent are members of Muslim minorities. In response, Nick Bequelin, East Asia Director at Amnesty International, stated that, “These restrictions are deeply problematic [...] reinforcing the sentiment of alienation of ethnic Uyghurs, and fueling the feeling of being second-class citizens, suspect in eyes of the state simply because of their ethnicity”.³¹

ASYLUM SEEKERS:

The internationally recognized rights of asylum seekers have been consistently flouted by the Chinese government for decades, and 2015 was no exception. Throughout the year, there have been ongoing concerns that hundreds of Uyghurs who had fled East Turkestan to South East Asia found themselves in a very precarious position. These fears were affirmed on 8 July 2015, when 109 Uyghur refugees were returned to China from an immigration detention facility in Bangkok, Thailand, despite widespread condemnation from the international community. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) had reportedly been given assurances by Thai authorities that those in detention would be safe from persecution, as the group made it plainly clear that they did not want to be deported. Although it was reported that the Thai government sent a delegation to China in order to check on the state of those returned, there has been no official report or statement concerning the state of the group or their whereabouts.³²

The deportation came after months of deliberations and pressure to ensure that a number of Uyghur groups, who had fled around the same time to both Thailand and Malaysia, would not have their rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention contravened. It was reported on 13 March 2014 that a group of 62 Uyghurs were arrested by Malaysian border control personnel while attempting to cross into Thailand on the northern border. Around the same time, another 200 were found in a human smuggling camp in southern Thailand and were transported to an immigration detention facility in Bangkok. Additionally, another group of 155 Uyghurs were found crammed into two tiny apartment units in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 1 October 2014, and were subsequently transported to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport Immigration Detention Depot.³³

109 Uyghur refugees were returned to China from an immigration detention facility in Bangkok, Thailand, despite widespread condemnation from the international community.

The July deportations came on the heels of Turkey’s acceptance of 173 Uyghurs from the same facility in Bangkok, suggesting that the move may have been in direct response to that action. This approach also indicates the likely intention of the Thai government to appease both the international community and their call to observe international law on the one hand, and heavy pressure from China – a major economic partner – on the other. The ostensible justification given by the Chinese government was that the group was made up of “illegal immigrants” who should therefore be rightfully returned to China in the meantime. As of early 2016, a group of around 50 Uyghurs remain in the Thai facility waiting to have citizenships verified.

The situation over the last two years is by no means remarkable. Uyghur asylum seekers have been forcibly deported from states with strong trade and diplomatic ties to China for many years.

The situation over the last two years is by no means remarkable. Uyghur asylum seekers have been forcibly deported from states with strong trade and diplomatic ties to China for many years. In December 2009, 20 were returned to China from Cambodia, another 5 from Pakistan and 11 from Malaysia in August 2011, and another six again from Malaysia in what Human Rights Watch called a “grave violation of international law” in 2013. In addition, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Burma, and Nepal have also extradited Uyghurs to China and since 2001 at least 289 Uyghurs have been forcibly deported.³⁴

The act of forcibly repatriating individuals or groups who make it clear about their desire not to be returned to their home country is a clear infringement of well-established international law. The non-refoulement principle spelled out in the 1951 Refugee Convention – to which China is a state party – requires that states do not allow for the forcible return of refugees or asylum-seekers to territories where their “life or freedom would be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, member of a particular social group, or political opinion”. Consequences of this kind of treatment have included arbitrary arrest and detention, abuse, and typically involves dubious criminal charges levelled against those who are returned. The Chinese government has repeatedly called such escapees criminals and all those who are to be returned will most certainly be treated in such a manner.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:

Religious freedom for the Uyghur community has long been under threat from China’s highly restrictive policies. The government continues to maintain firm control over all religious activities among Uyghurs, effectively limiting religious practice to those above 18 and within state-sanctioned mosques – mosques that have been dwindling in number in recent years. The mosques that remain are diligently monitored by Chinese authorities. Imams and other religious leaders are selected by the state and their own teaching and publications are tightly controlled.³⁵ The net result of these regulations has been the effective criminalization of Islam practiced outside these state-controlled mosques.

There has also been a steady increase in the conflation of quotidian religious practice with extremism, which will do nothing to eliminate violence, and will only provide the state with nearly unlimited powers to arbitrarily detain members of the Uyghur community at will. This notion has been reinforced by China’s stated “three evil forces” – terrorism, religious extremism and separatism – in which the state looks to paint all religious practice as verging on extremism, and then violence. There has been a concerted effort to link quotidian religion practice to that of extremism and fundamentalism, creating a climate of fear towards Uyghur Muslims in general.

The government continues to maintain firm control over all religious activities among Uyghurs. The net result of these regulations has been the effective criminalization of Islam practiced outside state-controlled mosques.

As a result, Chinese officials have been able to effectively capitalize on negative Western attitudes towards what may be seen as violence perpetrated in the name of Islam, despite tenuous links made to the motivation of that violence. Unjustified violence perpetrated by a tiny minority of the Uyghur community in East Turkestan reflects a clear dissatisfaction with the deteriorating conditions in which Uyghurs are forced to live, and certainly not a turn to religious extremism – as has been suggested by those wishing to demonize a community of millions for the actions of a few. Religious freedom has been an obvious target, and casualty, in light of global forces that have converged against Islam more generally.

Despite this, in a White Paper released by the Information Office of the State Council on 24 September 2015, entitled, *Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang*, it is alleged that, “Judicial organs in the autonomous region have always upheld the principles that everyone is equal before the law and any crime shall be punished; they strictly distinguish commonplace criminal offenses from violent and terrorist crimes and handled them accordingly to firmly maintain social equality and justice”.³⁶ Much of the White Paper goes on to praise the work of the regional authorities in maintaining ethnic harmony, but fails to touch on the divisive and discriminatory legislation that directly targets the whole of the Uyghur community.

The result of the state’s approach to religion, and Islam in particular, has been the emergence of countless individual cases of discrimination and outright repression. In March 2015, UN Special

Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and of Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, cited “disturbing stories” that he had heard regarding Uyghur Muslims living in East Turkestan and argued that such treatment is “a major problem”.³⁷

Additional cases mounted throughout 2015 as in one instance, on March 28, a Uyghur man from Kashgar was sentenced to six years in prison for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for refusing to trim his long beard. His wife was also handed a two year sentence for her alleged role.³⁸ Periodic and scattered attempts at banning Islamic dress, including headscarves for women, and crescent shaped beards worn by a group of men. The latter of which carried a punishment of between one and three years for “religious extremism” after the men had attended what the authorities called “unsanctioned Islamic sessions”.³⁹

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Chinese authorities have also reportedly ordered restaurants and supermarkets in Laskuy township to sell both cigarettes and alcohol along with “eye-catching” displays, or risk having their businesses shut down.⁴⁰ A total of 22 traditional Uyghur Muslim names have also been banned for children, with authorities threatening to deny their right to attend school if the policy is not followed. In one instance, a Uyghur woman was confronted by police at her home and informed that she must change the name of her daughter, *Muslima*, because it has now been officially forbidden.⁴¹ The policy is linked with China’s general drive to prohibit children from engaging in religious activities as those under 18 remain unable to receive any kind of religious instruction.

Bans on the practice of Ramadan for students and government employees picked up again in 2015 with food and water having been provided in the middle of the day. Government officials in some areas were made to swear not to fast or risk losing their jobs. Although there was no outright ban, the practice was generally discouraged among the rest of the Uyghur population with a number of restaurants having been forced to remain open during daylight hours or risk being shut down. Restaurants that remained open would also reportedly get fewer visits from food safety inspectors.⁴²

The construction of new mosques was effectively banned by state authorities and any repair or construction required permission from state authorities – permission that has not been granted in any reported cases.

Since 2001, the construction of new mosques was effectively banned by state authorities and any repair or construction required permission from state authorities – permission that has not been granted in any reported cases. In October 2002, the Xinjiang Party Secretary stated that, “At this time, the places for religious activities throughout the Autonomous Region are adequate to meet the needs of the normal religious activities of religious believers. In principle we should not have to build new places for religious activities”.⁴³ The result has been mosques falling into disrepair across the region, despite Chinese claims that 25,000 remain in regular use. One mosque that has been maintained, however, has been the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, the largest mosque in the country – likely a result of its visibility to tourists and its assumed representation of religious freedom to the international community.⁴⁴

On top of many of these already demanding restrictions, authorities in some areas have taken to crowdsourcing the collection of information about Uyghurs taking part in “illegal religious activities”. A notice posted by the Shayar country government on 14 April 2014, detailed how informants may be entitled to receive a reward for reporting on their fellow residents who exhibit one of 53 proscribed activities. The strategy will likely serve only to further alienate the Uyghur community and sow even greater ethnic divisions that the state has so strongly spoken out against.

The consistent feature that runs through each of these cases is that of a central government in clear opposition to cultural practices falling outside of its approval, with the blatant use of force as the means by which it carries out its proscriptions. Each seemingly insignificant example contributes to China's hostile strategy in the region towards difference, gradually narrowing what is acceptable – and legal – through legislative measures.

CONTINUED RIGHTS VIOLATIONS:

Below are some of the issues that continue to be faced by the Uyghur community in more general terms:

Inadequate Legal Protections:

Basic legal rights, including the right to legal representation, a fair and prompt trial, and due process remain far out of reach for the vast majority of Uyghurs. Even in exceptional cases, like that of Ilham Tohti – whose detention was ruled arbitrary by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention following his initial arrest⁴⁵ – lawyers, if Uyghurs are able to secure them, have been prohibited from meeting with clients for months. There is little evidence suggesting that the thousands of Uyghurs arrested each year on charges relating to illegal religious practice or similar crimes are provided any legal representation whatsoever, despite a superficial legal aid system.

Oftentimes, the justification for denying legal aid involves the state's ostensible concerns that the client may leak state secrets to their lawyers during these sessions. China's amended Criminal Procedure Law stipulates that, "Where a defense lawyer files a request during the period of criminal investigation for a meeting with a criminal suspect in custody who is suspected of compromising national security, terrorist activities, or extraordinarily significant bribery, the meeting shall be subject to the permission of the criminal investigation authority".⁴⁶ This clever loophole effectively allows investigative authorities to deny lawyers access to their clients if they are accused of these broadly defined crimes – crimes that disproportionately affect Uyghurs.

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During the investigation process, detainees are often forced to wait long periods of time until the People's Procuratorate merely approves of the arrest. According to the CPL, detainees can be held up to seven days before approval or disapproval by the People's Procuratorate of an official arrest, or up to an additional 30 days under special circumstances.⁴⁷ Once the arrest has been officially approved, it can then take months, and even years, for authorities to conduct and conclude official investigations in preparation for trial. There are numerous channels within the CPL that allow authorities to push back deadlines and extend the amount of time that suspects remain in detention facilities awaiting their chance for trial.

Harassment of Uyghur Activists:

Crackdowns continued on lawyers and rights defenders throughout China in 2015. Nearly 250 lawyers and activists were arrested in July, 2015, with at least nine being charged with "incitement to subvert state power" and remained in prison in early 2016. Many of those arrested either had ties to, or worked directly for, the prominent Fengrui Law Firm, which has represented a number of prominent clients, including imprisoned Uyghur academic, Ilham Tohti. The campaign came on the heels of the newly introduced Overseas NGO Management Law, which passed its second reading in May, 2015.⁴⁸ It is feared that the law will further degrade the capacity of civil society to work within China's borders as these groups will have to cede further control and oversight to the state.

Harassment and intimidation of Uyghur rights defenders overseas has also been well-documented over the years – beginning with WUC engagement at the UN in Geneva for over a decade. Chinese diplomats and other officials have been known to take photos or film activists on UN grounds, and have even attempted to photograph laptop screens of critics, despite a clear ban on the tactic. Members of the Chinese mission regularly pressure UN staff to deny accreditation to high-profile activists representing Uyghur or Tibetan groups and have also barred many mainland activists from travelling to conferences and other meetings to speak about human rights issues.⁴⁹

Economic Disadvantages:

China consistently touts the fact that East Turkestan is now seeing the most impressive growth in its history. These lofty pronouncements, however, ignore the fact that since the mass migration of Han settlers to the region beginning in the 1950s, disproportionate benefits continue to flow away from the Uyghur population and into the hands of the migrant communities. Knowledge of Mandarin and access to higher education remain the most significant barriers for Uyghur participation in the job market and account for many of the discrepancies that follow.

Firstly, rapidly developing industries in the region, including construction, the energy service sector and resource extraction, tend to exclude much of the Uyghur population in favour of Han Chinese. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a dominant state-controlled organization in charge of construction across the region – among other things – employs upwards of 2.7 million people, though Uyghurs make up only seven percent of its workforce, despite making up nearly half the population of the region.⁵⁰ Likewise, positions in government as well as administrative and managerial jobs are also overwhelmingly filled by the non-Uyghurs, limiting the ability of much of the Uyghur community to move up the pay scale and develop their communities. As a result, despite a dearth of statistical information, an analysis of 2005 census data shows that Uyghur workers in the region, on average, earn 66 percent of what their Han counterparts do.⁵¹

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A second major factor is that much of the Uyghur population remains concentrated in the countryside, while Han migrants continue to inhabit more densely populated areas and city centers. Uyghurs living in rural areas overwhelmingly work in agriculture, but the effects of land degradation, desertification and the seizure of land by the state has made farming increasingly untenable.⁵² This has in turn led to internal migration of Uyghurs largely from south to north and from rural to urban areas, and has resulted in rapid urbanization along with Han Chinese migrants coming from central and eastern China.⁵³ As a result, many Uyghurs who have been forced to move into cities find themselves concentrated in low-level service sector jobs and other low-skilled positions.

The development of China's new Silk Road Economic Belt (or "One Belt, One Road") initiative has also bolstered the Party's claim to be doing all it can to develop the region for the benefit of the Uyghur community. This claim does not stand up to much scrutiny, however, as history has clearly indicated that the bulk of economic benefits have overwhelmingly gone to the Han community. So far, there are few signs indicating that state policy will ensure equitable benefits for all living in the region. The recently signed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project will likely have similar outcomes so long as the state continues to disregard economic grievances voiced by the Uyghur population.

Inequitable benefits from this clear economic transformation of the region will inevitably reinforce tensions between Uyghur and Han groups, despite rising levels of income on the whole. A rising tide can

lift all boats, just as long as all those living in the region are treated equitably and justly in matters of employment.

Social and Cultural Rights:

Many of the policies that have been enacted in recent years play a particular role in China's more broad assimilationist campaign that has lasted for decades. Because religion is so central to the identity of much of the Uyghur community, it has inevitably bore the brunt of state efforts to stifle it. Notwithstanding Chinese Constitutional protections, ensuring, "the right to receive education, the right to use [one's] own spoken and written languages" and "...the right to inherit and carry on the traditional culture of [one's] own ethnic group", education and language policy for ethnic minorities has gradually eroded the capacity for these groups to maintain distinct cultural practices.⁵⁴

For years, education policy in East Turkestan has focused on promoting the use of Mandarin as the primary vehicle for study, largely at the expense of the Uyghur language. In 2000, the Communist Party created the "Xinjiang Class", a program designed to incentivize Uyghur students to attend school in predominately Han populated cities, primarily to learn Mandarin alongside Han students and to promote unity and integration. Critics of the program, however, have pointed to the fact that many of the Uyghur students resisted integration and that the program actually strengthened Uyghur identity.⁵⁵

From an employment standpoint, knowledge of Mandarin has become indispensable for finding adequate work in major cities. As a result, Uyghur parents are increasingly feeling the pressure to enroll their children in schools that do not teach Uyghur as a language, risking further deterioration of their culture. Major subjects at universities are now increasingly taught solely in Mandarin and university enrollment among the Uyghur community is in decline. Official state policy is that of "bilingual education", something that the Chinese Constitution readily accepts, but in practice, the use of the Uyghur language continues to be highly restricted.

Despite China's ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights, which recognizes the right of all to take part in cultural life, among other things, China has showed no signs of ensuring that the Uyghur community is able to do so. Steady encouragement of Han migration to the region, coupled with campaigns like those that promote interethnic marriage with financial incentives, do little to promote harmony. On the contrary, these policies tend to come across as aggressive, state-controlled exercises in order to promote assimilation, rather than benevolent and well-meaning integration.

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Policies that directly push for assimilation on grounds of stability-maintenance misunderstand the root causes of instability and ethnic tensions to begin with. Such a misdiagnosis of the problem will likely ensure that ethnic tensions remain high and that dissatisfaction will continue to mount among members of the Uyghur community. While simultaneously proclaiming its promotion of ethnic harmony on the one hand, while maintaining heavy restrictions against the free expression of one ethnic group in particular, it is difficult to take many of China's vague pronouncements at face value. Many of these statements must be understood for what they are – a signal to the domestic and foreign audiences that China is doing all it can to promote harmony and mutual understanding.

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DEADLY INCIDENTS IN 2016

The following is a detailed list of the *known* deadly incidents involving Uyghurs and Chinese police and security forces. From single incidents involving one or two deaths to violence on a much larger scale, violence continued in East Turkestan in 2015.

JANUARY 12

Six Uyghurs were shot dead when they were allegedly trying to detonate explosives in the business district of Shule county, Kashgar prefecture.⁵⁶ A man carrying a suspicious device was shot and killed when he reportedly attacked police with an axe as they approached.

Another five people, identified as “thugs”,⁵⁷ were also killed when they allegedly tried to detonate the device themselves, “one after the other”, though the account could not be corroborated independently. Whether or not the subsequent five were killed occurred during a separate incident also could not be verified.

JANUARY 18

Two Uyghurs were shot dead while trying to cross the border from China into Vietnam near the border town of Pingxiang, Guanxi province while another man was reported missing after escaping.⁵⁸ State media agency, China News Service, reported that an unspecified number of Uyghurs found themselves in a “conflict” with police near an expressway tollbooth around 20:00 (12:00 GMT).

The agency also reported that police were able to box in the Uyghurs’ vehicle and the suspects “violently resisted arrest” and attacked police with knives. The remaining two were arrested on the spot, though their ultimate fate is unknown at this point.⁵⁹ The deaths come on the heels of numerous cases that follow a similar pattern in Central and South East Asian states that border China.

JANUARY 28

Following an incident at a checkpoint and a subsequent manhunt that lasted over 48 hours, three security officials, two auxiliary police and one security guard were left dead. Three Uyghurs reportedly failed to stop at a checkpoint on January 28, in Keriye county, Hotan prefecture, and allegedly resisted officers’ efforts to detain them.⁶⁰

Mehmet Turdi, head of the Yantaqkol village in Chira county, reported to RFA that three security officials chased them with a truck and subsequently stopped them in a valley where the security personnel tried to detain them. A conflict ensued where the five Chinese personnel were killed with knives. After the stabbing, Omer Abdugheni, 18, and Omer Memet, 17, fled into the village of Yenigkol in Lengger, while the third teenager ran into another village called Layqa.

The first two teenagers were subsequently surrounded by a police team where one boy was killed and the other injured. The third suspect was also captured the following day after taking refuge in a farmer’s storage room. A teacher in Keriye added that he knew the boys and that they likely ignored the checkpoint because they didn’t see police, then fled because they feared harsh treatment by police.

FEBRUARY 13

On February 13, at least seven were killed and another seven were injured when a young Uyghur man reportedly set off an explosive device. An Information blackout was quickly imposed following the incident ensuring that little information could be independently verified.⁶¹ The bomb was reportedly detonated close to the border with India and Pakistan, in Guma county, Hotan prefecture. Following the incident, it was reported that large groups of riot police arrived in the area and were conducting frequent patrols and guarding larges shops as well as major routes into and out of the area.⁶²

FEBRUARY 16

On February 16, a Uyghur man was reportedly killed in Hotan prefecture when he resisted arrest⁶³. The man was said to have been acting “suspiciously” which prompted the police to stop him and ask him to accompany them to the police station. The man then refused to go with the police, arguing that he was on his way to the fields to meet his family for work and that he would report to them on the following day. It was at this point that police attempted to drag the man away and he allegedly pulled out a knife, which caused one of the officers to fire a single shot.

The victim was said to have been around 40 years old and survived by two children. Witnesses also stated that the man had served a ten year jail term for political reasons and complained to his neighbours that he was never left alone by police. No other specific details, including his name, were released.

FEBRUARY 17

Upwards of 17 were killed in a home following an alleged attack on a group of policemen conducting house to house searches in the town of Yaqaeriq, Bay county, in Aksu prefecture, including four policemen and four innocent bystanders.⁶⁴ Of the 17 who were killed in the incident, 9 were alleged to be part of the group that had initially attacked police.

The incident was reportedly sparked by a raid on a home as part of the state’s increased implementation of house to house searches during 2015, to root out apparent illegal activity. Deputy mayor of the town, Turdahun Tohti, reported that the police chief ordered those in the home to disperse, but was rushed by a group of about 10 men who were reportedly able to take the rifle and handgun from the police chief’s hand. The situation ended with nine alleged Uyghur suspects shot to death by police, four policemen as well as four passersby who were hit by police gunfire.

MARCH 1

A Uyghur woman died while in custody in February 2015, while attempting to flee the country and join her husband in Turkey.⁶⁵ The woman was identified as 32-year-old Tursungul by Radio Free Asia, who was who was reportedly healthy before she was initially taken into custody in an area bordering China’s Guangdong province. After about a month, she was transferred to the police station of her hometown, Shaptol, in Kashgar prefecture’s Peyziwat county.

Tursungul was hoping to be reunited with her husband who had gone ahead to Turkey and traveled to southern China with her 15-year-old daughter and infant son, waiting for their opportunity to cross the border. According to RFA, she died within a week of her transfer to her hometown of Shaptol and her body was later buried in an undisclosed location by police. Authorities told relatives that she had died due to heart failure.

MARCH 5

Chinese police shot dead two women during a raid on a home on the outskirts of Guangzhou.⁶⁶ Chinese sources reported that more than a dozen men were subsequently arrested in the raid on the small village of Xiniujiang.

Just hours following the raid, between nine and thirteen were injured in a knife attack at a train station in the southern city of Guangzhou, Guangdong province, with one suspect being killed by police and another detained.⁶⁷ The two suspects were identified by observers as being Uyghur.⁶⁸ The incident took place just after a mass stabbing took place at a train station in Kunming that left 31 dead and many others injured. It has been alleged that the incidents may have been connected.

MARCH 8

Seven Uyghurs were reportedly shot dead following an attack on a local forces commander, Fan Kezheng, which left the commander along with his wife and uncle as well as a security guard dead.⁶⁹ The attack took place in Tagharchi township, Yarkand county, Kashgar prefecture, in East Turkestan.

The family was returning to their vehicle on their way home from a restaurant when a group of Uyghurs attacked the three. Batur Memet, a security guard, was killed when he approached to help the family. The police chief of Yarkand's Igerchi township, Turap Emet, reported to RFA that police arrived on the scene within ten minutes, killing all seven of the suspects. An additional Uyghur man along with three Han bystanders were also injured in the hail of bullets, as reported by local hospital staff.

No official comment was made by Chinese authorities about the attack and no subsequent information was released detailing the background of the attackers or their motivation.

MARCH 9

Upwards of seven were killed in Hotan prefecture's Purchaqchi township at the Sherbet restaurant as a result of reportedly suspicious activity on the part of a Uyghur group.⁷⁰ Three were killed inside the restaurant and another four were subsequently killed by police outside shortly after the initial incident.

Security chairman of Jumbaza village, near where the incident took place, stated that police were called to the area to investigate alleged suspicious activity and while attempting to search the group, were met with resistance. In the altercation, one officer was killed and two Uyghurs were shot dead on the spot, while another two were arrested. Three others were reportedly missing in the aftermath.

MARCH 12

Four Uyghurs were shot dead while another two were wounded during an apparent knife attack on a group of Chinese citizens outside the Chess Room Casino in Kashgar City, Kashgar prefecture.⁷¹ The attackers allegedly tried to gain access to the casino, but were turned away by security personnel before they met police. Eight bystanders were also said to have been injured in the incident.

The incident, along with a number of other acts of violence, took place during China's annual meeting of the National People's Congress that took place in Beijing from March 3-15. Media reports of instances of violence were tightly controlled throughout the two weeks of the meeting.

APRIL 17

At least two Uyghurs were shot and killed by police near the border with Vietnam while police were reportedly attempting to make arrests near Dongxing city, Guangxi Autonomous Region.⁷² A reportedly unspecified number of "suspected terrorist elements" were allegedly discovered in the area with others being apprehended without incident.

The Uyghurs were described as terrorists, though no further information was provided by authorities with regards to the identity of those killed. Uyghurs have been attempting to flee the country in recent years, so it is likely that the group was looking to escape through Vietnam.

APRIL 19

Six Uyghurs were killed in a police operation aimed at a group of alleged terrorists in Suk village, Lengger township, Keriye county of Hotan prefecture, as two others were also apprehended after initially escaping.⁷³ The six people allegedly were killed when an explosive went off inside the home that was surrounded by police.

Police reported that those inside the home were planning to take part in plots to attack Chinese residents that owned large plots of land in the area. All roads around the home were blocked off and the cell phones of witnesses to the incident were confiscated shortly after.

MAY 11

Six were killed and another four injured following two successive attacks at a security checkpoint station that took place in Hotan county's Lop prefecture.⁷⁴ The first attack occurred at 9 p.m. when the first two police officers and one attacker were killed by an explosion from a bomb that was thrown. The second incident saw two additional attackers detonate explosives that they had attached to their bodies, killing

themselves as well as two police officers and injuring an additional four policemen. Around 200 people were reportedly detained, including relatives of the attackers, following the incident.

The attackers were identified as Uyghur and appeared between the ages of 18 and 20 and were reportedly from Dol township of Lop county and travelled to the checkpoint by foot. Further details about the identities of the attackers or their motives were not made available.

MAY 25

Two Uyghur men were shot and killed by police following an alleged bomb attack on a police station in Zawa township, Qaraqash county, in Hotan prefecture between midnight and in the early morning of the following day.⁷⁵ Four other men were said to have also been involved in the attack, but were not immediately apprehended – all of whom were described by authorities as between the ages of 20 and 26.

JUNE 10

At least 8 Uyghurs were killed by police in Duwa Township, Guma county, in Hotan prefecture, after receiving word from a local herdsman about a group of men who were “suspiciously gathered” by a riverbed fetching water.⁷⁶ A police officer from the area reported that upwards of 12 may have been killed, but no police were wounded in the incident. Very few details remain about the incident beyond the initial reports, but there was no reported indication that there was any reasonable threat posed by the group or that the group had acted threateningly.

JUNE 17

A Uyghur man was fatally shot by police at a train station after he allegedly tried to attack passengers with a cement block.⁷⁷ On a post on the official microblog of the Xi'an Railway Police, it was reported that the incident took place at around 6am and that the man would succumb to his initial wounds in hospital. Following the initial post on the blog, details about the ethnicity of the men were removed along with photos that had been originally posted.

JUNE 22

At least 18 and as many as 28 people were killed during an alleged attack on a police station in the Tahtakoruk district of Kashgar city, Kashgar prefecture.⁷⁸ The total number of those killed by police remains in dispute, though reports indicate that the number may be as high as 28.⁷⁹

The attack reportedly began after a car sped through a traffic checkpoint without stopping. Two officers were initially killed by the attackers along with another regular police officer, traffic policeman and an auxiliary officer in the immediate aftermath. Following this, a number of additional officers arrived on the scene and subsequently killed 15 people who were said to be terrorists involved in the incident. No substantive information, however, was provided about the identity of all those killed or those purported to be involved in the incident.

JULY 13

State media reported that three Uyghurs were shot and killed and another was injured during a police raid on an apartment in the northwest city of Shenyang. In the official statement, police were allegedly attacked by four people “wearing headgear, holding long knives, and shouting 'holy war' slogans.” Chinese media stated that the four were “terror suspects” and were killed only after warnings were ignored.⁸⁰

Three “accompanying children” were also apprehended as well as a woman from Hotan who was injured in the raid. The statement detailing the events was later removed from the Shenyang public security bureau microblog where it originated without explanation. No follow-up to the incident was reported, nor was any information released to corroborate the terror charge.

SEPTEMBER 18

A number of people were killed and many were wounded in an attack on a coal mine in Aksu prefecture's Tarek township on 18 September 2015, at least five of which were police officers responding to the attack.⁸¹ Reports indicated that the majority of the victims were Han Chinese and included security guards and labourers at the mine.

The Chinese government did not, however, acknowledge the details of the attack, first reported by Radio Free Asia (RFA), until November 21, when they released information regarding the subsequent security operation. Chinese authorities would later report that only 16 were killed and another 18 were wounded, though it remains difficult to verify either account of the incident.

A vast security operation was launched immediately following the incident with sources stating that a large security contingent was visible throughout the county. Residents of the area were also pressed by authorities to participate in the search operation.⁸²

Apart from RFA coverage of the events, very little was known until Chinese authorities revealed that they had killed 28 in the counter-terror operation in the weeks following the attack. Authorities stated that a 56-day campaign of continuous fighting led to the deaths of 28 people, with RFA reporting that among those that were killed throughout the operation, 11 were women and children.⁸³ Though not altogether unusual, more specific details were not provided regarding the security operation nor about the initial attacks themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are a number of recommendations for the WUC to move forward in its campaign to ultimately ensure that the Uyghur people are afforded the rights and freedoms justly deserved. The recommendations are directed towards the Chinese government and the international community, as the latter remains relevant in human rights matters. The international community is made up not only by states, but by a vast collection of organizations working towards greater freedoms and opportunities, especially for dispossessed groups who hold vastly disproportionate power in their own lands. We strive to work together with organizations with these goals in mind.

- Relevant UN bodies must work more closely with Chinese government and encourage and incentivize the adoption of oversight mechanisms to ensure that human rights remain an important component for economic development and counter-terrorism
- UN Human Rights bodies, namely the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, must pay critical attention to the refoulement of Uyghur asylum seekers from China's neighbouring states.
- States that border China must adopt transparent practices with regards to the extradition of asylum seekers.
- The Special Rapporteur on Counter Terrorism and Human Rights should make an effort to make a Country Visit to China in the near future.
- The European Union should develop a multi-lateral approach with regards to human rights dialogue, rather than bilateral relations, which often isolate European states and weaken their negotiating power.
- China must ratify key international human rights treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- China must allow for more transparent reporting of events in East Turkestan
- Channels must be opened that allow for the implementation of a legitimate autonomy law – so that some decision-making power may be handed to the Uyghur people.

Views of the conflict have been particularly polarized between Uyghur and Chinese citizens living in and outside China. China blames the violence on Uyghur separatists, who are charged to be linked with

international terrorist networks, whereas the Uyghur people complain that discrimination, intolerance and restrictions on religion and language rights are some of the primary motivators of anger amongst the population.

The ruling party in China has been effective at playing at these polarized understandings of the situation to ensure that there animosity remains between the Chinese and the Uyghur communities. This achieves two primary objectives. The first is that it ensures that the state is provided the necessary domestic support needed to continue its harsh repression of the Uyghur people as a whole. Secondly, it sends strong signals to the international community about the nature of the situation and provides those with little experience of the conflict a particular context.

If the international community recognizes such a hostile relationship between the people, and not solely the government, they are similarly more likely to see the conflict as one stoked by the people themselves and not principally by state policies or state motivations. Recognizing motivations and root causes will be the crucial first step in resolving the most inherent problems faced in East Turkestan.

Whether or not Chinese authorities already understand this is a different matter altogether. State policy has been consistently in line with a traditional approach that sees dissent merely as unjustifiable disdain for legitimate legal authority. Before any real progress can be made, we must all be able to recognize the source of the present conflict – discriminatory and aggressive state policies that continue to fuel deep resentment among the Uyghur population. Pressuring the Chinese to put a stop to these practices will ultimately temper this antipathy and develop a platform on which long-standing animosities may be reconciled.

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