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**CHINA: THE UIGHUR SITUATION FROM INDEPENDENCE
FOR THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS
TO THE POST 11 SEPTEMBER ERA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3
2	The Development of Uighur National Identity (1991-2001)	3
2.1	The Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan Situation	3
2.2	The Development of a Political Framework Throughout the Uighur Diaspora	10
3	The Chinese Reaction	16
4	The 11 September 2001 Attacks and Their Impact on Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan	21
5	Conclusion	26

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1 Introduction¹

Since 1949 the People's Republic of China, with the land borders it inherited from the imperialist Manchu Qing dynasty, has faced endemic unrest from the Uighur² people, the inhabitants of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan³ region in the northeast of the country. Since the beginning of the 1990s Uighur resistance against what it sees as Chinese domination has taken various forms. Though the decade saw an increase in acts of violence, the Uighurs have mostly used "sub-political" means of resistance. In tandem with these forms of resistance there has also been a strengthening of feelings of a national Uighur identity, stimulated by both external and internal factors. The Uighur diaspora outside China has begun to organize and increasingly ensured that the voice of these people is heard by international opinion. Beijing, which refuses to acknowledge that the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan problem is largely the result of its own political choices, responds in two different ways to what it sees as a "separatist" problem caused by "external influences". Firstly, she has increased repression at home and established cooperative policies with Central Asian neighbours in order to fight against the Uighur "separatist" threat. Secondly, in parallel with this security based approach, China has taken a series of measures designed to win over the Uighur population by increasing economic prosperity. This policy has not achieved the expected results. However, in the context of the fight against terrorism launched by Washington in October 2001, Beijing has recently found a new pretext to justify repressive measures in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. The strategic penetration of the US into Central Asia could further strengthen Chinese resolve to suppress the Uighur demands.

After a brief analysis of the development of Uighur national identity between 1991 and 2001 and of the political framework of organizations within the Uighur diaspora, we concentrate on Chinese reactions during the 1990s to the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan situation and then on its policies towards Uighur "separatism" since the events of 11 September 2001.

2 The Development of Uighur National Identity (1991-2001)

2.1 The Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan Situation

If an internal Chinese study published in 1993 and made available on the Internet by organizations of the Uighur diaspora is to be believed, the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan region has been the scene of ceaseless separatist unrest caused by a "small number of individuals backed by foreign forces" since 1949.⁴ The study is particularly critical of the activities of the

¹ See Gladney, D. C., *China: Prospects for the Uighur People in the Chinese Nation State: History, Cultural Survival, and the Future*, Writenet for UNHCR/CDR, October 1999

² Spelling varies: Uighur, Uyghur, Uygur. Likewise the forms Turkistan/Turkestan are both in use. In this text Uighur and Turkistan have been used, except in names of organizations and in quotations.

³ The geographical description of the Chinese administrative region known as Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu poses a problem. From Beijing's view point, the expression "Xinjiang" (which means "new frontier" in Chinese) is acceptable. For Uighur organizations within the diaspora, the geographical name for this region should be "Eastern Turkistan" or "Uighuristan". The semantic question alone is sufficient illustration of the conflict which exists between China and Uighur nationalists. In order to retain both approaches, we have chosen to use the expression Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan throughout this report, which follows the example set by some articles in the special edition of the magazine: *Inner Asia*, vol. 2, n°2, 2000, which was devoted to this problem.

⁴ Zhang, Y., *Anti-Separatism Struggle and Its Historical Lessons since the Liberation of Xinjiang*, in Li Ze, Dong Sheng, Fu Wen, Kou Qingping, *Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism Study*, August 1993, <http://www.taklamakan.org/erkin/Chinese/trans1.htm> (accessed May 2002)

Eastern Turkistan People's Party (Sarki Türkistan Halk Partisi) which was reportedly founded in February 1963 with Soviet support, subsequently extending its activities throughout the region. For some nationalist Uighur writers this party has allegedly been active since the 1950s. It has apparently been the driving force behind uprisings in the region since that time and reportedly still is today.⁵ According to Beijing, despite its efforts to eliminate the influence of this political movement, members of this party reportedly re-launched its "separatist" activities in the early 1990s. It was also from 1989 onwards that the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (Sarki Türkistan Islam Partisi)⁶ was reportedly created, the party which - according to the study mentioned above - was responsible for the Baren rebellion of April 1990.⁷ However, according to Uighur nationalist writers, this party has also existed since the 1950s.⁸

The 1993 Chinese document is in stark contrast to the media's silence on the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan question until the beginning of the 1990s. For decades Beijing has denied facing such problems in this region. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, official Chinese media have referred to violent actions carried out by "separatists" in Xinjiang, who are always portrayed as being few in number and manipulated by "foreign forces". Between 1990 and 2001, the Chinese authorities have claimed they have been responsible for 200 incidents which have led to 162 deaths, including officials and religious personnel. There were reportedly 440 people injured during the same period.⁹ It is however possible that the Chinese press' references to "separatist" actions since the beginning of the 1990s have been designed to serve internal political needs, rather than because of a real internal or external threat. Gladney recalled that "by highlighting separatist threats and external intervention, China can divert attention away from its own domestic instabilities..."¹⁰ As a general rule, it is rarely possible to independently corroborate information published in the Chinese media about "separatist" activities. So it must be read with caution as it is not out of the question that the information has been manipulated.

It is currently very difficult to accurately assess the internal situation in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan as research in the region is restricted. In the 1990s, field research carried out by Western ethnologists indicated that national identity was growing in importance throughout much of the Uighur population. In the 1980s, the troubles which shook the region were not solely political in nature; the region's economic difficulties had been the driving force behind some incidents, the confrontation at Aksu which claimed hundreds of victims in April 1980 being one example.¹¹ In the following decade, there were several references on various

⁵ Kumul, A., Le 'séparatisme' ouïgour au XX^e siècle: histoire et actualité, *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, n°25, January-June 1998, p. 85

⁶ Report on the Quelling of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Baren Township, *Xinjiang Ribao* in *FBIS-CHI-90-118*, 19 June 1990

⁷ See Kostrzewa, T.K., *Separatist Nationalism in Xinjiang*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Notre-Dame, Indiana, 1996, pp. 192-5

⁸ Kumul

⁹ For details of the attacks and activities attributed to the Uighur separatist movements see the People's Republic of China, Information Office of the State Council, 'East Turkistan' Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity, 21 January 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Jan/25582.htm> (accessed May 2002)

¹⁰ Gladney, *China: Prospects for the Uighur People ...*, p. 12

¹¹ Mc Millen, D. H., The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps: A Han Organization in the Non-Han Region, *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No 6, July 1981, p. 87

occasions¹² to the idea of “Eastern Turkistan” independence or the creation of “Uighuristan”. Some armed incidents occurred in the region. The most serious, setting the Uighur against either the security forces or the Chinese army, took place in Baren in April 1990, Khotan in July 1995 and Yining (Kuldja) in February 1997. From the information available, it seems these events were more like riots than well-organized and planned revolts. They did however reveal the growing inter-ethnic tension in the area throughout the 1990s. On each occasion, repression from Beijing was particularly harsh. Between 1997 and 1999, Amnesty International recorded: “210 death sentences and 190 executions, mostly of Uighurs convicted of subversive or terrorist activities after unfair and often summary trials. The ratio of death sentences to the population is several times higher in the XUAR than elsewhere in China”.¹³ Since the last events in Yining (Kuldja), there have been no major armed incidents in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. However, the relative calm has not stopped Beijing from pursuing its policy of preventive repression using the principle of: “active offensive, and cracking down on outcrops, to gain the initiative by striking first”, to use the words of Wang Lequan.¹⁴

However, the fact that there has been no large scale uprising does not mean that the Uighurs of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan accept Chinese authority. Some Uighurs may accept it either out of their own self-interest or despite their interests when faced with the severe repression meted out from Beijing.¹⁵ Many adopt non-violent means of resistance. They may for example challenge the domineering Chinese political rhetoric towards the Uighur through dissident cultural activities. In the context of the People’s Republic of China, the Uighurs use popular songs, jokes, satire, clothes, humour and even poetry¹⁶ as a means of rejecting Chinese dominance. These “sub-political” means of resistance may not attract as much media attention as armed conflict, but they are doubtless well adapted in the regional context of extreme repression and are more much more significant than the actions attributed to the “separatists”. They indicate that Beijing’s political plan for Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan has failed. Despite more than 50 years in the area, Chinese power is still seen by most of the Uighur population as illegitimate and oppressive.¹⁷ The policy of preventive repression with its aim of breaking the developing Uighur national identity has not produced the desired results. In the opinion of some Chinese writers it has been counter-productive, simply

¹² See list of incidents drawn up by Joanne Smith in Smith, J., *Changing Uyghur Identities in Xinjiang in the 1990s*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, March 1999, Appendix I, pp. i-xvi

¹³ See Amnesty International, *China: Gross Human Rights Violations in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Must Stop*, London, 12 April 1999 (press release), <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/ASA17/025/1999> (accessed May 2002)

¹⁴ According to Xinjiang Secretary Wang Lequan’s Speech on 80th Anniversary of CPC, *Xinjiang Ribao* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0721*, 30 June 2001

¹⁵ See Amnesty International, *China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, London, April 1999. Beijing claims that those who organized the events of Yining (Kuldja) were captured in February 1999 and executed on 15 October 2001. See *Unveiling the Terrorist Nature of ‘East Tujue’ Elements*, *People’s Daily Online*, 16 November 2001, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200111/16/eng20011116_84659.html (accessed May 2002)

¹⁶ Such an incident caused an uproar in Xinjiang. On 1 January 2002 following a concert at the Xinjiang People’s Hall, a Uighur called Tursunjan Amat dared to recite a poem he had written which was considered to be “separatist”. This incident was vigorously condemned by the authorities. See *China: Xinjiang Government Chairman on Incident of Reciting Anti-government Poem*, *Xinjiang People’s Broadcasting Station* [Urumqi], in *BBC Monitoring Service*, 13 January 2002. The fate of Tursunjan Amat is not known.

¹⁷ See Bovingdon, G., *The Not-so-silent Majority: Uyghur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang*, *Modern China*, vol. 28, No 1, January 2002, pp. 39-78

deepening the divide between the Uighurs and the central authority and thoroughly exposing its limitations. For example, Wang Lixiong, author of a recent study on the region, noted: “Repression cannot crush the hatred felt by the Uighurs. The authorities must rapidly change their policy to eliminate the hatred and prevent the development of large-scale terrorism. Otherwise, Xinjiang could become another Chechnya within two or three years.”¹⁸

Within Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan the process of creating a common national Uighur identity progressed throughout the 1990s alongside the notion of “sub-political” resistance. The evolving process which is not yet complete must first overcome the Uighurs’ characteristic parochialism. Traditionally, individuals from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan identified themselves with the oasis they came from. F. Grenard noted this at the end of the nineteenth century and it was again observed by Justin Rudelson at the end of the 1980s. According to the field research carried out by Rudelson, this parochialism, which is intensified by the physical isolation of the oases and by various cultural influences on Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan throughout history, was still very noticeable during the period of his study.¹⁹ The intellectual Uighur nationalists interviewed by Kostrzewa in 1995 rejected Rudelson’s thesis that parochialism still existed²⁰ and G. Bovingdon stated that its importance had been reduced by the development of education in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan.²¹ New field research carried out in the mid-1990s by a British ethnographer, Joanne Smith, showed how the fragmentation of Uighur identity, linked to the “oasis identity” described by Rudelson, was tending to become less important as the sense of belonging to a common national Uighur identity strengthened in opposition to the Han (name given to the ethnic Chinese). According to Smith, the ethnic barrier between Han and Uighur has grown during the 1990s, helping a common national identity to develop across all Uighurs - regardless of their oasis of origin.²² The creation of a national identity within the Uighur population in the region should be seen as an evolving process which is not yet complete. Some of those interviewed by Joanne Smith in her field work think the Uighurs are still in a transition phase. The Uighurs in the region are still divided, notably along generational lines. Joanne Smith however showed that the younger generations of Uighurs were more engaged with nationalist ideas than their elders which seems to indicate that such ideas are set to become stronger in the future.²³

During the 1990s various factors came together to quicken the formation of a national Uighur identity in the region. They included external factors as well as others stemming from the internal Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan dynamic. The main external factor is without doubt the changes in the international scene during the early 1990s. Key international issues having a substantial impact on the fast developing Uighur identity were the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the creation of new states as multi-ethnic structures exploded (Yugoslavia), growth in ethno-nationalist movements and the independence of the Central Asian states.

¹⁸ Wang Lixiong in *Une Tchétchénie chinoise?*, *Courrier International*, No 591, 28 February 2002, p. 33

¹⁹ Rudelson, J. J., *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China’s Silk Road*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997

²⁰ Kostrzewa, p. 197 note 305

²¹ Bovingdon, G., *From Qumulluq to Uyghur: The Role of Education in the Development of a Pan-Uyghur Identity*, *Journal of Central Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No 1, Autumn/Winter, 1998, pp. 19-29

²² See Smith, J., *Making Culture Matter: Symbolic, Spatial, and Social Boundaries between Uyghurs and Han Chinese*, *Asian Ethnicity*, September 2002 (fc)

²³ Smith, J., *Four Generations of Uyghurs: The Shift towards Ethno-political Ideologies among Xinjiang’s Youth*, *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No 2, 2000, pp. 206-14

Given the physical proximity of Central Asia and Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and the cultural links between the Uighur and other inhabitants of the region, the creation of independent states for the Kazak, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen and Kyrgyz peoples resonated strongly with the Uighur people whether in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan or outside China. The events significantly raised the hopes among the Uighur, but by the second half of the 1990s disillusionment was taking over. Given that the People's Republic of China had assumed the colonial heritage of the Manchu Qing dynasty, many Uighur people felt they were the last remaining colonized people in Central Asia. By 1992 the Chinese authorities had realized that the independence of the Central Asian republics posed a threat to regional "stability".²⁴ As Abdulahat Abdurixit, President of the Xinjiang Autonomous Regional Government, conceded recently:

...following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, those separatist forces quickly intensified their activities and wanted independence like the former republics of the Soviet Union. In order to achieve their separatist goal, a small number of extremists rushed into danger and started a series of sabotage activities, including explosions, assassinations, and other terrorist activities.²⁵

However, the international context does not explain everything. The endogenous factors, that is those arising from the internal dynamic of the region, included the "awakening" of the national consciousness. This was started in the 1980s, in the context of increased liberalization introduced by Deng Xiaoping, by some Uighur intellectuals writing historical works.²⁶ It is particularly worth recalling the uproar created by Turghun Almas' work, *The Uighurs*, which was published in 1989 in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, banned within one week and then published again in 1992 in Kazakstan by the Uighur diaspora based there.²⁷ Turghun Almas was arrested and, in the early 1990s, his paper was severely criticized by the Chinese authorities.²⁸ This alternative vision of history, contrary to Beijing's, provided a reference point for Uighur nationalists. Rudelson remarked that although Uighur writers had pursued a nationalist tone, the various versions of Uighur identity which came through in their work tended to rekindle the historical rivalry between the oases.²⁹ Smith's observations appears to contextualize this thesis. Uighur intellectuals such as Abdurehim Ötkür or Hevir Timur have also used literature, notably historical novels, as a means of communicating national Uighur identity.³⁰

²⁴ Agence France Presse [Hong Kong], Official Says Xinjiang Situation 'Unstable', in *FBIS-CHI-92-054*, 18 March 1992

²⁵ Xinjiang Government Head Supports Opposing Terrorism, Separatism, *Ta Kung Pao* in *BBC Monitoring Service*, 9 October 2001

²⁶ See Chapter 6 in Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, pp. 143-65

²⁷ Turghun Almas is also author of *Une brève histoire des Hun (Xiongnu)* and *La littérature des Ouïgours*. For details of his denunciation by the Chinese authorities see Warikoo, K., Ethnic Religious Resurgence in Xinjiang, *Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, No 4, Winter 1995-1996, p. 35 and Amnesty International, *PRC - Secret Violence: Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang*, London, November 1992, p. 10

²⁸ See Gu, Bao, 'Weiwuerren' de zuozhe weizao lishi, guchui fenlie zhuyi sixiangde shizhi' (Fabricated history and the essence of separatist thinking advocated by the author of "The Uighurs"), *Xinjiang Daxue Xuebao*, Vol. 19, No 1, 1991, pp. 31-44 and Zhou, Weizhou, Guanyu Weiwuerzu zuyuan wenti [The origin of Uighur nationality], *Xiyu Yanjiu*, No 2, 1991, pp. 15-28

²⁹ Rudelson, J. J., The Uighurs in the Future of Central Asia, *Central Asia Monitor*, No 6, 1993

³⁰ Tanridagli, G., Le roman historique, véhicule du nationalisme ouïgour, *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, No 25, January – June 1998, pp. 115-37

Aside from the work of nationalist intellectuals, Beijing's policy towards Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan has also had a major influence on the creation of a national Uighur identity.³¹ Uighur people have produced a long list of complaints against Beijing. For example, they reject the Chinese authorities' birth control policy, and they criticize the choice of Lop Nor as China's nuclear test site. The Uighur see the influx of Han people into the region as a threat. Since 1949 Beijing's policy to firmly integrate ethnic minorities who inhabit the China's border areas by encouraging the immigration of Han people has been keenly applied in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan.³² As Gladney noted the Han population increased by 2,500% between 1940 and 1982. The last population census across the whole of China carried out in November 2000 again showed a significant increase in the number of Han in the Autonomous Region. The Region itself has officially estimated that there are 7.4977 million Han, which constitutes 40.61% of the total population of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. Compared to the 1990 census, the Han population has grown by 1.8023 million, which represents a growth of 31.64% in ten years.³³ The number of "floating people" who visit the region to look for work or to take seasonal jobs must also be added to these official figures. The real number of Han in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan is therefore difficult to assess, but it is definitely higher than the official statistics indicate. The Han are currently mostly concentrated in the north, so the south of the region remains predominantly Uighur. The Han are spread out along an east-west axis running from Hami to Urumqi then on to Karamay with lines off towards Aksu and Korla. Han immigration effectively follows the communication routes, around the railway lines. With the development of a rail infrastructure towards the south of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan,³⁴ Han migrants are increasingly penetrating right into the heart of the Uighur populated zone and this is likely to increase tension between the two populations. Becquelin has also noted in his field research that even the Han who have long been resident in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan complain that the influx of new immigrants is threatening their *modus vivendi* with their Uighur neighbours.³⁵

Besides the continuous influx of Han, the Uighur also protest against the economic disparities they feel they suffer.³⁶ They criticize what they perceive as the exploitation of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan's natural resources (oil and minerals) for the sole benefit of the Han.³⁷ On this particular issue, some writers recall that contrary to the Uighur perception, the Autonomous Region costs China very dearly.³⁸ For example, Abdulahat Abdurixit stated in October 2001 that 60% of local costs and 80% of funds for developing the infrastructure are provided by central government.³⁹ This problem has recurred throughout history. At the time

³¹ Rudelson, J., Uighur 'Separatism': China's Policies in Xinjiang Fuel Dissent, *The Analyst*, 16 February 2000

³² Becquelin, N., Xinjiang in the Nineties, *The China Journal*, No 44, July 2000, pp. 74 ff

³³ Xinjiang's Population Statistics Reveals Increase in Number of Han, *Xinjiang Ribao* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0517*, 2 April 2001

³⁴ Ingram, R., A New 'Shining' Kashgar, *The Analyst*, 6 June 2001

³⁵ Becquelin, p. 85

³⁶ Mackerras, C., Xinjiang at the Turn of the Century: The Causes of Separatism, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No 3, 2001, pp. 299-300

³⁷ Field study by Joanne Smith in Smith, *Changing Uyghur Identities*

³⁸ Sautman, B., Is Xinjiang an Internal Colony?, *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No 2, 2000, pp. 239-71

³⁹ Xinjiang Government Head ...

of the Manchu Empire, this region was never financially self-sufficient.⁴⁰ Apart from the question of exploitation of the region's natural resources, the Uighur also complain that they face discrimination in terms of work opportunities.⁴¹ There are reportedly few Uighur workers in the oil industry in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, for example.⁴² But according to some observers, including B. Sautman, this tends to relate to factors such as the low levels of education among the Uighur people rather than an established pattern of discrimination.⁴³ The question remains open.

In general terms, the Uighur denounce "Great Han Nationalism" (*Da Han zhuyi*) particularly as demonstrated by the new Han immigrants to Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan.⁴⁴ They also complain about the condescending attitude and feelings of superiority the Han generally have towards them. This situation is not peculiar to the Uighur. Relations between the Chinese ethnic minorities and the Han follow family lines. This "familyism" to use T rence Billeter's phrase,⁴⁵ follows a hierarchical model where the ethnic minorities take the place of a "younger brother", which in traditional Chinese culture means they play a subservient role and are under the authority of the "older brother" represented collectively by the Han.⁴⁶ The unequal relation between the minorities and the Han is intrinsic to contemporary Chinese society. "Familyism" goes beyond the negative prejudice whereby the Han considered the Uighur less "civilized" and spills over into the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan political field where real power is held by the Han.⁴⁷ The Communist Party structure duplicates the Autonomous Region's administrative structure at every level. In this power hierarchy, the Party always has the last word and Party leaders at every level are always Han. The Uighur are only ever second in the chain of command within the "autonomous" region of Xinjiang. Even though the situation has improved a little, the minorities remain underrepresented within regional Party hierarchy.⁴⁸ In fact, the autonomous status of "Xinjiang"⁴⁹ exists only on paper and this is criticized by many Uighur people including officials who would like to see it exist in practice. Generally, the "sinization" of the region, especially through the

⁴⁰ Millward, J.A., *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 241-5

⁴¹ Gilley, B., Uighurs Need Not Apply, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 August 2001

⁴² Sautman, B., Yan, H., China's Ethnic Minorities: From Self-determination to Self-representation, quoted in Human Rights in China, Implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the People's Republic of China, New York, 26 July 2001, p. 27, http://gb.hrichina.org/old_site/reports/CERD2001WEB.htm (accessed May 2002)

⁴³ Sautman, Is Xinjiang an Internal ...

⁴⁴ Smith, Changing Uyghur Identities, pp. 245-8

⁴⁵ Discussion with T. Billeter, December 2001

⁴⁶ Billeter, J.-F., La civilisation chinoise, in Poirier, Jean (ed), *Encyclop die de la Pl iade: Histoire des moeurs, Tome III, Th mes et syst mes culturels*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991, pp. 864-931

⁴⁷ Bovington, The Not-so-silent Majority, p. 57

⁴⁸ Mackerras, p. 290. According to Wang Lequan, in Xinjiang in 2000, there were 331,500 cadres who were from the ethnic minorities, that is 50.8% of the total number of cadres in the region. He does not specify which ethnic minorities were represented. See, Xinjiang Secretary Wang Lequan's Speech ...

⁴⁹ See People's Republic of China, Information Office of the State Council, *White Paper on National Minorities Policy and its Practice in China*, Beijing, 27 September 1999, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/english/199909/28/enc_19990928001023_Indepth.html (accessed May 2002)

increasing use of Mandarin (for example in the field of education,⁵⁰ and in the work place) and the progressive marginalization of the Uighur language is also perceived as a threat to the survival of Uighur identity and culture.⁵¹ Finally, the various restrictions imposed by the Chinese authorities on religious freedom in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan is seen as a direct attack on their identity. Religious education is banned for people below the age of 18. Mosques and religious staff must all be registered. Any new religious building also requires authorization. Religious publications are controlled particularly severely by the authorities. The Xinjiang People's Publication House appears to be the only publishing house with the authority to publish Muslim literature in the region.⁵² Pilgrimage to Mecca is restricted to around 2,000 people and those permitted to undertake the *hajj* are effectively chosen by the Islamic Association of China. Most of them are Hui (who are ethnic Chinese but Muslim) rather than Turkic-speaking. Yet, for the Uighur being Muslim is an integral part of the cultural identity. One Uighur person interviewed by C. Mackerras summarized his view as follows: "I am Muslim because I am Uighur."⁵³ This link between ethnic awareness and Islam means that any restriction on Islam is seen as an attack on Uighur identity. Wang Lixiong says for example, that "the Uighur often say: '99% of what they do is good, but the last percent comprises stifling our religion which amounts to annihilating us. Who could accept that?'"⁵⁴ The combination of these factors, coupled with the total restriction on any political activities, the lack of space to express oneself and the continuous repression, has led to a strengthening of national Uighur identity in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan in the 1990s.

2.2 The Development of a Political Framework Throughout the Uighur Diaspora

Since the beginning of the 1990s, during the process in which a shared national Uighur identity in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan was developing, the various communities living abroad within the Uighur diaspora were also becoming organized and increasingly politicized. The majority of the Uighur population lives in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, but there are established Uighur communities beyond the Chinese frontiers. Among the Uighur diaspora the largest group outside China is in Central Asia, in particular in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In the same region, there are also Uighur in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Beyond Central Asia, at the time when the Chinese Communist Party seized power in 1949, the Uighurs were established in the border area of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, in Pakistan, Kashmir, India and Afghanistan. From 1952, some chose to go to Turkey. Today, Western Europe, in particular Germany and the Scandinavian countries, Australia, Canada and the US also have small Uighur communities. Since the 1930s, some Uighurs, often those who are well-off, have settled in Saudi Arabia. This community of several thousand people plays an important role in the diaspora by financing the activities of Uighur organizations outside China.

⁵⁰ Enver Can summed up the dilemma faced by Uighur people in Xinjiang in the following way: "If an Uighur has not acquired a good level of achievement in Chinese, he will have enormous difficulties finding work. But, if he goes to a Chinese school, he has become assimilated!", quoted in Ilaria, M. S., *Assimilation forcée dans le Xinjiang chinois*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2002

⁵¹ Smith, J., *Changing Uyghur Identities*, pp. 248ff

⁵² See Amnesty International, *Religious Repression in China*, London, July 1996

⁵³ Mackerras, p. 296

⁵⁴ Wang Lixiong in *Une Tchétchénie chinoise...* ; on the situation of Islam in China, see Alles, E., *Confucius, Allah et Mao: L'islam en Chine*, in *L'islam en Asie du Caucase à la Chine*, Paris: La Documentation française, 2001, pp. 207-39 and Alles, E., Cherif-Chebbi, L., Halfon, H., *L'islam chinois, unité et fragmentation*, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, No 115, July–September 2001, pp. 15-46

Numerically, the most important Uighur communities outside China are still in Central Asia. It is difficult to estimate accurately how many Uighurs there are in this part of the world. The Soviet census of 1989 estimated it at 263,000, but Uighur organizations believe the real figure to be much higher, reportedly between 800,000 and 1,000, 000, possible even higher, for this whole area.⁵⁵ In Kazakstan, the figures vary between 185,000 and 500,000, in Kyrgyzstan between 45,000 and 100,000 and in Turkmenistan between 5,000 and 20,000.⁵⁶ Uzbekistan is a separate case because many Uighur have become assimilated and declare themselves to be Uzbeks. The official figure for the Uighur population is 36,000 but there are many Uighurs who have become Uzbeks in the Ferghana valley, both on the Uzbek (Andijan) and Kyrgyz (Osh) sides. Uighur organizations state there are 200,000 Uighurs living in Uzbekistan.⁵⁷ The largest Uighur community is therefore in Kazakstan where the Uighurs have retained a strong identity by preserving their language and traditions as well as by practising endogamy.⁵⁸ The Uighur live in the districts of Panfilov (Taldikorgan region), Chilik, Embeklik-Kazak and in the Almaty region. In Kyrgyzstan, the Uighur constitute the fifth largest ethnic group in the country after the Kyrgyz, the Uzbek, the Russians and the Hui.⁵⁹ The Uighur population there live primarily around the capital Bishkek (in the districts of Tokildash, Lebedev and Alamidin), and in the regions of Chui, Jalalabad and Karakol.⁶⁰ In the Osh and Jalalabad regions many Uighurs declared themselves to be Uzbek during the Soviet era. In Turkmenistan, the Uighurs are concentrated around the town of Bairaam-Ali.

There are many Uighur political and cultural organizations in Central Asia. In Kazakstan, there is the Uighuristan Freedom Association (Uygurstan Azatlik Teskilat) which was led by Ashir Vahidi, former head of the Eastern Turkistan army who sought refuge there in 1955. In 1995, however, Vahidi was the victim of an assassination attempt and this forced him to leave politics. He died in January 1998. The organization publishes *Uygurstan* in Arabic script. It has 7,000 members and a central committee of 30 people. The National Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkistan (Sarki Türkistan Sepeli Milli Birlik Inkilap) led by Yusup Beg Mushlisi also functions in Kazakstan. This movement publishes *Dogu Türkistan' in Sesi* (Voice of Eastern Turkistan). Although the organization is well publicized, it is actually only a small action committee. Kazakstan has a pyramidal network of Uighur cultural centres, a national centre in Almaty as well as regional centres. In January 1992 a federation of Uighur cultural centres across four Central Asian Republics, the International Union of Uighur Peoples, was formed, but it had to reorganize itself on a national basis following a law in Kazakstan which in December 1995 made cross-border associations illegal. There is also a network of schools which teach in Uighur, though they lack resources. In 1986, an Institute of Uighur Studies was formed to promote the study of Uighur history, language and literature. This Institute which had 90 researchers and 8 different sections was absorbed into the Institute for Eastern Studies in 1996. With regard to the press, there is an Uighur newspaper *Uygur Avazi* (Voice of the Uighur) in Kazakstan together with its

⁵⁵ Meeting with representatives of the Uighur diaspora in Brussels, October 2001

⁵⁶ Besson, F.-J., Les Ouïghours en Asie Centrale, *Lettre de l'Asie Centrale*, No 5, 1996, pp. 5-6

⁵⁷ East Turkistan Information Centre, Report on Situation with Human Rights of Uygurs in Uzbekistan, Munich, 2 April 2002, http://uygur.org/enorg/h_rights/report_uzbekistan_april_2002.html (accessed May 2002)

⁵⁸ Olson, J.S., *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of China*, London: Aldwych Press, 1998, p. 346

⁵⁹ The Hui are called Dungans in Central Asia. Ethnically they are Chinese and they follow Islam.

⁶⁰ According to the East Turkistan Information Centre and Bishkek Human Rights Organization, Brief Report on the Situation with Human Rights of Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan, Munich, 16 February 2002, http://uygur.org/enorg/h_rights/report_kyrgyzstan_february_16_2002.html (accessed May 2002)

supplement, *Yeni Hayat*, (New Life) in Arabic script. The Uighur community in Kazakhstan is politically very active. According to one writer, the Uighurs of Kazakhstan see themselves as “the vanguard of the Uighur nationalist movement for sovereignty in China”.⁶¹

In Kyrgyzstan there has been a Department of Uighur Studies at the State University of Kyrgyzstan since 1996. There are also monthly television programmes and weekly radio broadcasts in Uighur. As far as associations are concerned, the main Uighur political organization in Kyrgyzstan is the Kyrgyzstan Uighur Unity (Ittipak) Association which publishes the *Ittipak* (Union) newsletter. This organization was established in 1989 and has 10 branches across the country. In Bishkek there is also the Human Rights Committee headed by Tursun Islam and an Uighur Cultural Society which has its main office at the People’s Academy in Bishkek.⁶² In Uzbekistan, there was a Uighur cultural centre in Tashkent but this is now closed. Its President, Emin Usman was arrested in March 2001 and died in detention. The Uighur-language television programme *Umid* along with the Uighur radio programmes on Uzbek radio have been abolished. There is no Uighur newspaper published in Uzbekistan apparently because the Uzbek government has never granted a licence.⁶³ In Turkmenistan the Baïram-Ali Uighur cultural centre has also been closed.

Beyond this inner circle of political and cultural organizations based in Central Asia, other organizations have emerged in the émigré Uighur communities. The Uighur community in Turkey numbers around 10,000 people and in 1961 came together to form the Association of Eastern Turkistan émigrés. Turkey is also home to the Eastern Turkistan Foundation (Dogu Turkistan Vakfi) founded in 1978 and led by Mehmet Riza Bekin. Since 1984 the Foundation has published a quarterly report in Turkish called *Dogu Turkistan Sesi* (Voice of Eastern Turkistan). The Uighur Association of Kayseri (Dogu Turkistan Kultur ve Dayanisma Dernegi Yayini-Kayseri) publishes *Gökbayrak* in Turkish on a quarterly basis. There are also some newspapers in Uighur (Arabic script) which appear more erratically, such as *Sherqy Turkestan* (Eastern Turkistan) and *Dogu Turkistan Gençleri* (Young People of Eastern Turkistan) founded in 1994. Finally, there are the Eastern Turkistan Cultural and Solidarity Association and the Eastern Turkistan Solidarity Association. Turkey has seven Uighur organizations in all.⁶⁴

Since the 1960s, some Uighur families from Turkey have moved to Germany. In 1990, the Uighur community in Munich, comprising some 50 people, organized themselves and founded the East Turkistan Union in Europe. Since 1992 it has gained strength from those migrating from Eastern Turkistan. There are now some 200 Uighurs living in Munich. In order to inform international opinion about the Eastern Turkistan problem, the Union published the English-language *Eastern Turkistan Information Bulletin* between 1991 and 1996. All editions of the bulletin are available on-line on the Internet.⁶⁵ This has proved to be one of the most efficient means of communication used by any of the organizations of the Uighur diaspora to inform public opinion on the situation of the Uighur people of

⁶¹ Roberts, S.R., The Uighurs of the Kazakhstan Borderlands: Migration and the Nation, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 26, No 3, 1998, p. 520

⁶² East Turkistan Information Centre and Bishkek Human Rights Organization

⁶³ East Turkistan Information Centre, Report on Situation...

⁶⁴ Warikoo, p. 36

⁶⁵ See *Eastern Turkestan Information Bulletin*, Vol. 1, N°1, May 1990 to Vol. 6, No 1-2, February 1996, <http://www.taklamakan.org/etib/> (accessed May 2002)

Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and to establish contact between the various Uighur communities spread across the world and to mobilize them. During the second half of the 1990s, the use of the Internet by Uighur organizations grew enormously. There are ever more sites concerned with the Uighur question available on the Internet. The Union created the Eastern Turkistan Information Centre which has its own website (<http://www.uygur.org>). This Centre makes available numerous publications in Uighur, Turkish or English, notably the Internet newsletter called *World Uyghur Network News* which has appeared since June 1996. The World Uyghur Youth Congress has applied for registration in Germany. In Sweden there is the East Turkestan Association which brings together Uighurs from across the whole country and in Belgium there exists both the Belgium Uyghur Association and the Uyghur Youth Union. In 2001, there were some 400 Uighur families, originally from Kazakstan who sought asylum in Brussels. In Canada, there is the Canadian Uyghur Association. Australia, which has a community of around 250 Uighur, is home to the Australian Turkestan Association which was created on the initiative of the writer Ahmet Igamberdi. Since September 2000, the activities of the Uyghur American Association have increased. They distribute information widely about Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan mostly via their web site (www.uyghuramerican.org) and they inform US opinion on the situation in China via their Uyghur Information Agency (www.uyghurinfo.org). The International Taklamakan Human Rights Association which was created in 1996 also operates from the US and distributes information on Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan (www.taklamakan.org). The Uyghur Human Rights Coalition (UHRC) was also set up in the US with the aim of informing US opinion about human rights violations perpetrated in the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan region. It disseminates information via its website (www.uyghurs.org). Finally, there are Uighur associations in England (Uyghur Youth Union UK), in the Netherlands (Uyghur House) and in Russia (Uyghur Association).

At the beginning of the 1990s the structures linking the Uighur communities living in their respective host countries gradually formalized into associations before re-grouping into a transnational structure.⁶⁶ The creation of structures has been very important. Before, there was no coordination between the three components of the Uighur population (the Uighur of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, the communities in Central Asia and those in the West), each with their different experiences. It was not until the Central Asian republics became independent and Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan began to open up economically in 1992 that the components could re-establish contact. This new beginning, coupled with other events such as the vigorous growth in communication, movement of people and circulation of information, the disappearance of the East/West divide, the arrival of new waves of immigrants from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan (especially students) and the increasing repression in China, increased awareness across the whole Uighur population of their common identity. The first Eastern Turkistan National Assembly (*kurultai*) met in Istanbul in 1992. For the first time, it brought together the Uighur diaspora from Central Asia and the West. In addition to this first contact, other events also had an impact. The death in 1995 of Yusuf Isa Alptekin, the uncontested leader of the diaspora, and the subsequent mourning, were perceived as a “national event”⁶⁷ by the Uighur of the diaspora. The growing awareness of a common identity across the diaspora also gradually strengthened in response to repression from Beijing, especially their reaction to events in Yining (Kuldja) in February 1997.

⁶⁶ Besson, F-J, Les Ouïgours hors du Turkestan oriental: de l'exil à la formation d'une diaspora, *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, No 25, January-June 1998, pp. 161-92

⁶⁷ Besson, Les Ouïgours hors du Turkestan oriental ..., p. 175

The Uighur associations have progressively assumed the role of representing the Uighur people in the international arena. But the interconnected tasks of finding a unifying message to reflect this increasing sense of identity and of organizing the Uighur diaspora politically are difficult ones. Some important stages were passed during the 1990s. At a time when the Eastern Turkistan issue was being largely ignored, the associations played an important role in informing international public opinion. The Kuldja riots were covered by the world media because the Uighur associations of Central Asia provided information to journalists who had no access to Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. Since the mid 1990s, there has been an increasing number of articles in the international press and in academic publications, NGO reports and academic seminars dedicated to the Eastern Turkistan question. It was this role of representing the Uighur people which gradually brought the associations together to attempt a common message on the issue. This made it necessary to set up a transnational body ensuring the message be transmitted to international public opinion. So, on 16 October 1999, following a unanimous decision reached at the Second Eastern Turkistan National Assembly (*kurultai*), the East Turkestan (Uighuristan) National Congress was established. The Congress has its headquarter in Munich and comprises 15 elected members; its current President is Enver Can. This international organization incorporates 16 associations of the Uighur diaspora (associations in Australia, Central Asia, Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Canada and the US). The East Turkestan (Uighuristan) National Congress presents itself as the sole legitimate body representing the voice and interests of the people of Eastern Turkistan. Its mission is defined by three objectives:

- a. to pursue, by legal and peaceful means, the right to self-determination for the nation and people of East Turkestan as provided under United Nations instruments;
- b. to speak for the people of East Turkestan who have been silenced by state-sponsored violence and policies that hold the interests of the people of East Turkestan second to the Chinese Communist Party;
- c. to represent East Turkestan as the only legitimate voice of the people and nation of East Turkestan.⁶⁸

The Congress proposes to provide the link to enable the Uighur people of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan to be heard. Its President, Enver Can, for example spoke in the name of the Uighur of Eastern Turkistan at the April 2002 United Nations Commission on Human Rights' annual session in Geneva. The Congress has also set itself the goal of denouncing human rights violations perpetrated by the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and to respond to the national aspirations of the "people of Eastern Turkistan" by eventually obtaining full independence for Eastern Turkistan. The East Turkestan (Uyghuristan) National Congress distributes information about the situation in Eastern Turkistan in German, English, Russian and Uighur through its internet site (www.eastturkistan.com). It has also been publishing the *Uighur Affairs Survey* magazine in English since September 2001. In October 2001, despite many problems and the difficult context, it organized a conference at the European Parliament together with the Transnational Radical Party entitled The Situation in Eastern Turkistan after Half a Century of Communist Chinese Occupation. Even though the international press had become more subdued, this event did have great symbolic importance because the meeting took place in the buildings of the new Brussels Parliament. It marked another step in the process of growing awareness of the Uighur problem within the

⁶⁸ See <http://www.eastturkistan.com>

international community. For the diaspora, it was important because the recognition that the East Turkestan (Uyghuristan) National Congress was representative of the people and had some legitimacy marked a further step along their path towards becoming politically organized and conveying a structured message. Beijing was very critical of this European initiative.⁶⁹ As Olivier Dupois, the co-organizer of the Conference, said, they had faced enormous pressure from China when organizing the meeting. The pressure was the strongest yet, stronger even than when the Parliament invited Tibetan exiles to speak, which gives an indication of the level of anxiety in the Chinese capital concerning the risks of internationalizing the Eastern Turkistan question.⁷⁰

Given that the Congress is speaking in the name of Uighur people from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, one might well wonder if they have been able to establish efficient communication links with the Uighur population in China. Communications are still very difficult as the control from Beijing has intensified. At the meeting in Brussels for example there was only one Uighur from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan who attended. Also, as far as their political message is concerned, the Congress is still waiting to make its mark. Some very important issues have not yet been discussed in depth by representatives of the diaspora. For example, the organization's name includes both the term "Eastern Turkistan" and "Uighuristan" even though these two names arise from different, even contradictory, political agendas. The former reflects a political construct which includes the different populations currently living in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, that is not only the Uighurs but also the Kazaks, the Mongols and the Hui. The second name, "Uighuristan" is etymologically the land of the "Uighurs". In that case, what would be happen to the region's other populations? One Uighur intellectual who originated from Kazakstan could only give the author a vague reply when posed this question.⁷¹ There is another element. Despite the fact that the organizations of the Uighur diaspora have come together under the umbrella of the East Turkestan (Uyghuristan) National Congress, the Uighur communities in the West and the larger number based in Central Asia do not seem to share the same views about which means to employ to achieve independence for Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. One Kazak newspaper reported:

Uighur movements based in Central Asia are in favour of taking a radical path for achieving independence, while representatives of organizations in European countries describe themselves as pro-Western secular nationalists, who see a solution to the problem in cooperation with Chinese democrats opposing the Beijing regime.⁷²

The Congress President, Enver Can, does not have the unanimous support of all the different communities. Some Uighurs think he lacks charisma (it is obviously difficult to compare him to the Dalai Lama) and that it would have been more judicious to choose Erkin Alptekin, a more experienced leader.⁷³ Finally, the small size of the Uighur communities in Western countries prevents them having sufficient influence to ensure that the governments in their

⁶⁹ Reuters, China Blasts Euro Parliament over Separatist Meeting, 19 October 2001

⁷⁰ Meeting with Olivier Dupuis

⁷¹ However, for a discussion of the two terms, see Vahidi, A., Eastern Turkistan or Uyghuristan, <http://www.taklamakan.org/erkin/Byuyghur/vahidi.htm> (accessed May 2002)

⁷² Uighur Movement Lacks Coordination, Unity, *Vremya Po* in *BBC Monitoring Service*, 7 April 2002

⁷³ See Besson, *Les Ouïgours hors du Turkestan oriental...*, pp. 183-6, for more about the delicate question of selecting a leader for the Uighur community following the death of Isa Yusuf Alptekin

host countries raise the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan problem in the context of their discussions with Beijing. The lobbying opportunities are limited by the numeric weakness of the communities in the US and Western Europe. Despite these weaknesses, the Uighur diaspora has over the past ten years been able to organize and coordinate its actions in support of a national project for Eastern Turkistan. The unification of the political message is underway. It has the resources required to start acting on the international scene in the name of the Uighur population of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. It can ensure the Uighur voice is heard on the international scene by keeping public opinion and Western and Islamic governments informed and by working with human rights organizations. The Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan question is increasingly less sidelined by the media. The national feeling within the diaspora has certainly grown stronger during the past ten years, but the various components will have to agree on a common strategy towards Beijing. The path towards achieving the nationalist aspirations of the Uighur will be long and strewn with obstacles. It is not at all certain that their aspirations will eventually be achieved despite the hopes of the communities within the diaspora.

3 The Chinese Reaction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese authorities have portrayed the Uighur “separatists” as the biggest danger they face in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. In a study looking at the twentieth century history of Xinjiang, Zhu Peimin stated that the most serious threats to the region’s stability were the separatist aims of ethnic minorities (*minzu fenlie zhuyi*) and the role of illegal religious movements (*feifa zongjiao huodong*).⁷⁴ However, Beijing refuses to see these developments as the product of essentially internal factors, considering them to be mainly externally derived. Beijing does not deny that Uighur “separatism” has historical roots, but it sees it more as a tool manipulated by powers hostile to China. Zhu Peimin has alleged that in the 1990s “anti-Chinese Western forces” (*xifang fan hua shili*) - that is primarily the US - have used the problem of religion and of the minorities to try to “westernize” China, to “divide” and “weaken” it.⁷⁵ From the Chinese perspective, the problem of Uighur “separatism” is inextricably linked with the international scene. As long ago as 1997 Chinese government sources effectively accused the CIA of playing an important role in destabilizing the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.⁷⁶ NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999 further reinforced Beijing’s anxieties. The Chinese authorities fear that one day Washington will use the pretext of humanitarian concerns, with reference to the question of Tibet or Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, to take military action against China. In this context, one Chinese writer stated:

Once the time is ripe, it will not be impossible for Xinjiang’s national separatists, assisted by domestic and international hostile forces, to counter the local and central governments and seek support from the international community, just as

⁷⁴ Zhu, Peimin, *Ershi Shiji Xinjiang shi yanjiu* (Studies of twentieth century Xinjiang history), Wulumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000, p. 406. However, as N. Becquelin has stated, the renaissance of Islam in Xinjiang should not be seen “as a source of unrest but rather as a vehicle for the expression of increased social and political frustrations”, Becquelin, p. 89

⁷⁵ According to Zhu Peimin’s comments on a speech by Jiang Zemin in Xinjiang in August 1998 in Zhu, Peimin, p. 410. The same idea was developed by Wang Lequan in Liu, X., Wang, Y., Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional CPC Committee Wang Lequan: Press On the Opportune Moment Brought About through the Large-scale Development of the West, *Liaowang* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0710*, 25 June 2001

⁷⁶ See PRC Reportedly Links CIA, Xinjiang Separatists to Bombing, *Hong Kong Ming Pao* in *FBIS-CHI-97-223*, 11 August 1997

the Albanian separatists in Kosovo, Yugoslavia. At that time, we cannot rule out the possibility that the US-led NATO military bloc will act against China in one way or another, including using military means, under the pretext of safeguarding the human rights of minority ethnic groups.⁷⁷

In general terms, the Chinese authorities, which are totally committed to retaining their territorial sovereignty, see the protection of human rights (*rendao zhuyi*), as a political instrument which primarily serves the interests of US hegemony (*baquan zhuyi*).⁷⁸

To counter the “separatist” threat from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, Beijing has adopted a two-pronged approach. While reinforcing security measures, she has also chosen to develop the economy of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan to try to gain the support of the ethnic minorities in the Autonomous Region. As far as the security measures are concerned, since 1996 the Chinese authorities have decided to intensify the *yanda* (“strike hard”) campaign in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. Document No 7, adopted by the 19 March 1996 meeting of the Central Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP, set out a catalogue of measures to be undertaken by Beijing to fight against “separatism”.⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch noted that this document covered:

ten major issues ranging from intensified controls over religious activity to the need for wholesale reinforcement of military and security preparedness to collaboration with China’s neighbours The document suggested a range of counter strategies, beginning with the transfer to Xinjiang of large numbers of ‘reliable’ Party cadres from China proper to replace indigenous cadres, especially in villages where the latter adhere to religious beliefs. ‘Rule of law’ was emphasized as an antidote to ‘the infiltration and sabotaging activities of foreign religious powers’. Specific measures included: curbs on ‘all illegal religious activities ... [and] the building of new mosques’; speedy replacement of supporters of separatism and of mosque leaders who are not ‘loyalists’; a crackdown on illegal underground religious schools, kung-fu schools, and Koran study meetings; identification of and tight control over underground religious students; and training of a new generation of ‘patriotic’ ethnic religious leaders.⁸⁰

Since 1996 this campaign has been systematically pursued. An internal document issued in April 2001 stated that the “separatist” question of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan must be settled in two years which seemed to predict a hardening of coercive measures.⁸¹ In April 2002, 25

⁷⁷ Ai, Yu, Kosovo Crisis and Stability in China’s Tibet and Xinjiang, *Ta Kung Pao* in *FBIS-CHI-1999-0624*, 2 June 1999

⁷⁸ For more information about human rights see Seymour, J.D., Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Relations, in Kim, S. S. (ed.) *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, pp. 217-38

⁷⁹ See this text in *Record of the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Maintenance of Stability in Xinjiang*, Document (1996) No 7, uyghuramerican.org/Documents/no7.html (accessed May 2002)

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Xinjiang, China’s Restive Northwest*, New York, November 2000

⁸¹ Stated by Marie Holzman at Conference Organized by the East Turkestan National Congress (ETNC) in Collaboration with the Transnational Radical Party (TRP), Brussels, 17 October 2001. See Xinjiang Steps Up Cracking Down on Separatists, *Zhongguo Xinwen She* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0411*, 11 April 2001 and Agence France Presse, AFP Cites Paper: PRC’s Xinjiang Anti-crime Campaign Targets Muslim Separatists, *FBIS-CHI-2001-0427*, 27 April 2001

political activists were reportedly arrested in Kachgar for plotting to establish an “Eastern Turkistan Republic”. In its annual report on the human rights situation in China, the US State Department said the following about Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan:

Minority activists continued to be targets of the police. As part of the nationwide ‘strike hard’ campaign, ‘splittists’ or separatists have been singled out. Xinjiang official Abulahat Abdurixit told the Xinjiang Legal newspaper in April that authorities in Xinjiang would use the “strike hard” campaign to strike at Muslim separatists and illegal religious activities. As part of the campaign, local courts in Xinjiang have meted out death sentences or long prison terms to a number of persons accused of separatist activity.⁸²

At the beginning of 2001 hundreds of cadres were sent to villages inhabited by the Uighur to carry out investigations on the “separatist” activities and on “illegal religious activities”.⁸³ According to Wang Lequan, it was designed to strengthen the Party presence right down to village level. In 2001, there were already 5,400 party cadres working in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. For the future they will speed up the training of Han cadres working in southern Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and start training more.⁸⁴ During 2001, Beijing also strengthened its control of religious activities in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan by launching a “patriotic” political and religious training programme for Islamic religious staff in the Autonomous Region. In 2001, 8,000 religious figures reportedly followed the training programme, supervised by the Chinese Communist Party in collaboration with the Islamic Association of China. It was the largest training programme targeted at religious personnel in the region since 1949.⁸⁵ During the summer of 2001 an ideological education campaign was also launched with the aim of countering separatism.⁸⁶ As far as military action is concerned, the People’s Liberation Army carried out several days’ military exercises in the region of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan in August 2001. More than 50,000 soldiers were deployed in the Autonomous Region; this was the biggest military manoeuvre ever carried out in the area.⁸⁷ The aim of the manoeuvres was to send a clear message to any Uighurs tempted by “separatism”.

Alongside this vigorous action taken with regard to internal security, Beijing also decided to develop its relations with the Central Asian republics to prevent any possibility of support for the Uighur “separatists” from these new states. Point 8 of Document No 7 of 1996 spoke of the need to take preventive action with regard to Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan to prevent their offering support to the Uighurs.⁸⁸ In this way, Beijing combined internal measures of

⁸² United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2001: China*, Washington, 4 March 2002

⁸³ Details in Dillon, M., Chinese Cadres Attempt to Win Hearts and Minds in Xinjiang, *The Analyst*, 25 April 2001

⁸⁴ Liu, X., Wang, Y.

⁸⁵ Guo, L., Li, X., Successful Practice of the Party’s Ethnic and Religious Policies - a Factual Account of Training Classes for Religious Personages in Xinjiang, *Xinhua News Agency Domestic Service in BBC Monitoring Service*, 12 January 2002

⁸⁶ See September 11: The Impact in Xinjiang, *China Review*, Spring 2002, p. 6

⁸⁷ McGregor, R., Chinese Military Parade in Muslim Region, *Financial Times*, 15 August 2001

⁸⁸ Point 8 of the *Record of the Meeting* (Document n° 7) states: “Perform the related diplomatic tasks well. Limit the activities of outside ethnic separatist activities from many sides. Bear in mind the fact that Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the home-bases for the activities of outside separatist forces. Through

repression with its foreign policy. For example, barely two days after the first meeting of the Shanghai Group, which was set up on China's initiative in April 1996, Beijing relaunched its national campaign against crime.⁸⁹ The Shanghai Group, which at first comprised China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in the summer of 2001.⁹⁰ Also that summer, the organization gained an extra member, Uzbekistan. The areas for discussion between the Group's members were progressively extended to include risks linked to separatism, Islamic radicalism and terrorism. Whether in the context of its bilateral links with the Central Asian republics or within the Shanghai Group, the Chinese Government sought the cooperation of these new states in the fight against growing Uighur "separatism". During a visit by Li Peng to Central Asia in 1994, he gained the official support of the new republics. Joint declarations made in the context of the Shanghai Group at the end of summit meetings in Almaty (1998),⁹¹ Bishkek (1999),⁹² Dushanbe (2000)⁹³ and Shanghai (2001)⁹⁴ recalled the undertaking of member states to collaborate in the fight against the threat of "separatism", "terrorism" and "extremism". The Dushanbe declaration also made provision for a centre for the fight against terrorism in Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁵ This intention was reiterated at the time of the Shanghai meeting in the summer of 2001.⁹⁶ The strengthening of military cooperation against what the Chinese press has christened the "three evil forces" – that is terrorism, separatism and religious extremism – was also discussed at this summit.⁹⁷ In the summer of 2001 a further step was taken. The six member states of the SCO agreed the Shanghai Convention on Attacking Terrorism, Splittism and Extremism. According to the newspaper *Jiefangjun Bao*, this new Convention has legal ramifications as it imposes obligations on the parties unlike

diplomacy, urge these countries to limit and weaken the activities of separatist forces inside their border. Take full advantage of our political superiority to further develop the bilateral friendly cooperation with these countries. At the same time, always maintain pressure on them. Considering the ethnic separatism activities outside of the border, carry out all necessary dialogue and struggle. Strengthen the investigation and study outside of the border. Collect the information on related development directions of events, and be especially vigilant against and prevent, by all means, the outside separatist forces from making the so-called "Eastern Turkistan" problem international. Divide the outside separatist forces, win over most of them and alienate the remaining small number and fight against them. Establish homebases in the regions or cities with high Chinese and overseas Chinese populations. Develop several types of propaganda. Make broad and deep friends and limit the separatist activities to the highest degree"

⁸⁹ Renmin Ribao Hails National Campaign against Major Crime, *Xinhua* in *FBIS-CHI-1996-083*, 28 April 1996

⁹⁰ Déclaration créant l'OCS : Organisation de coopération de Shanghai, Shanghai, le 15 juin 2001, in *Documents d'actualité internationale*, No 18, 15 September 2001, pp. 739-40

⁹¹ Point 5 of the joint declaration: Joint Statement of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan on the Almaty Meeting, July 3, 1998, *Xinhua* in *FBIS-CHI-98-184*, 3 July 1998

⁹² Points 5 and 6 of the Bishkek declaration: Bishkek Statement, *Xinhua Domestic Service* in *FBIS-CHI-1999-0826*, 25 August 1999

⁹³ See Réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères de Chine, du Kazakhstan, du Kirghizstan, de Russie et du Tadjikistan, Communiqué conjoint, Douchanbé, 4 juillet 2000, in *Documents d'actualité internationale*, No 18, 15 September 2000, p. 767

⁹⁴ Point 8 of the Shanghai declaration: 'Text' of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Declaration Issued in Shanghai, *Xinhua Domestic Service* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0615*, 15 June 2001

⁹⁵ Stern, D., Central Asia Anti-terrorism Plan, *Financial Times*, 6 July 2000

⁹⁶ Six Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Decide to Battle Three Evil Forces, *Ta Kung Pao* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0615*, 15 June 2001

⁹⁷ Shining Example for Good-neighborly Friendship - Warm Congratulations on Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, *Xinhua Domestic Service* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0615*, 15 June 2001

previous declarations which were purely political statements.⁹⁸ From China's view point, this represents a significant advance. As one observer noted : "the 'Shanghai convention' shows that the signatory states have taken a substantial step forward in cooperation, thus providing a legal guarantee for mounting a unified crackdown on the 'three evil forces'".⁹⁹ In this Convention the term "terrorism" is put first ahead of "separatism". It amounts to putting the emphasis on the "criminal" nature of the problem rather than the "political" one. This treaty was ratified by China extremely quickly.¹⁰⁰ As a result, China has the support of the Central Asian republics in its fight against the rise of a national Uighur identity. These states do not hesitate before extraditing Uighurs to China.¹⁰¹ In addition Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and even Uzbekistan have increased the pressure on the Uighur organizations which exist on their territory.¹⁰² Testimonies from Uighurs in Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan speak of facing increased surveillance, even increased repression, from the Central Asian governments since 1966, the time of the first meeting of the Shanghai Group.¹⁰³ Uighur organizations believe that the Central Asian republics might also turn a blind eye to some Chinese security service operations against Uighurs. For example in May 2001, Dilbirim Samsakova, a member of the Central Committee of the East Turkestan (Uighuristan) National Congress and President of the Nazugum Charity Fund, was killed in unclear circumstances in Kazakstan. Uighur organizations believe that this killing was "politically motivated".¹⁰⁴ They also quote the case of Nighmet Bosakof, President of the Kyrgyzstan Uighur Unity (*ittipak*) Association, who was killed in March 2000, or Ashir Vahidi, who died in 1998 following an attack by unknown persons, as examples of Beijing's policy of intimidation in the Central Asian republics. It is of course very difficult to reach a conclusion about Beijing's involvement in these events. However, some sources claim, without being able to produce evidence, that the fire which destroyed the Tower Market at Bishkek in February 2002, a market where many Uighur traders who come from Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan work, was carried out by the Chinese as a measure of intimidation. It is alleged that the market was targeted because they suspected it provided funds for "separatist" activities.

Alongside the security measures, Beijing has taken steps to encourage the minority populations to collaborate with the Autonomous Region's authorities.¹⁰⁵ The Chinese authorities have also chosen to open up foreign trade for Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan,

⁹⁸ Quoted in Unveiling the Terrorist Nature...

⁹⁹ PRC Academic on 'Three Evil Forces' Threatening Xinjiang's Stability, *Ta Kung Pao* in *FBIS-CHI-2001-0810*, 10 August 2001

¹⁰⁰ Agence France Presse, Chinese Lawmakers Ratify Two Anti-terrorism Accords, 28 October 2001

¹⁰¹ East Turkistan Information Centre, Three Uyghur Political Asylum Seekers Deported from Kazakhstan to China, Munich, 12 February 1999

¹⁰² See Uyghur Liberation Organization, *The Analyst*, 2 August 2000; Peuch, J.-C., Central Asia: Uighurs Say States Yield to Chinese Pressure, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 29 March 2001; Grebenshchikov, I., Kyrgyz Exploit Uighur Minority, *IPWR's Reporting Central Asia*, No 49, 27 April 2001; United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks, Kyrgyzstan: Focus on Uyghur Community Caught in 'Political Games', 2 July 2001; Usaeva, N., Kyrgyzstan: Trial Focuses Attention on Possible Uighur Repression, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 31 August 2001.

¹⁰³ Discussions with Uighur representatives from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Brussels, October 2001

¹⁰⁴ Dilbirim Samsakova: Killed in Kazakhstan, *Uighur Affairs Survey*, Vol. 1, No 1, September 2001, p. 5

¹⁰⁵ For information about measures taken to favour ethnic minorities, see Sautman, B., Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 4, No 1-2, Spring/Summer 1998, pp. 86-118

primarily towards Central Asia. The aim is to win the support of the Uighur population through the benefits of this economic liberalization.¹⁰⁶ However, despite its starting as long ago as 1992 and the launching of a very ambitious development plan called “Go West” in 1999, the results remain disappointing, even from the economic point of view.¹⁰⁷ Basically, as Wang Lixiong again noted:

The Beijing authorities think that economic development will suffice to cut off support for separatism and to remove its influence in the region. The idea of the ‘great development of western China’ comes from that attitude. But first and foremost the problem of nationality is political, not economic and to try to solve a political problem through economic measures is in itself an error. The most important thing is respect.¹⁰⁸

The Chinese President has recently decided to continue this chosen policy, despite some observers’ scepticism about the economic results of the “Go West” campaign, because of the political aims behind these massive investments in the western regions of China.¹⁰⁹

4 The 11 September 2001 Attacks and Their Impact on Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan

Beijing has reacted in an extremely pragmatic way to the events of September 2001. Even though the Chinese authorities’ initial response was rather “cold”¹¹⁰ and the popular reaction had an anti-American tone,¹¹¹ Beijing quickly transformed its position and censored any demonstrations of anti-American feelings which were appearing on the Internet.¹¹² China quickly aligned itself with Washington by showing basic solidarity with the US and offering to cooperate with them especially in the context of exchanging information. However the Chinese authorities revealed the purpose of this show of solidarity when it likened the fight against terrorism to its own fight against “separatism”. For example, Zhu Bangzao, spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated at a press conference on 18 September 2001 that “the United States asks for China’s support and assistance in the fight against terrorism. China, by the same token, has reason to ask the United States to give its understanding and support in China’s fight against national splittism and terrorism”.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ For details see Kellner, T., La Chine et la nouvelle Asie centrale. De l’indépendance des républiques centrasiatiques à l’après-11 septembre, *Rapport du GRIP*, Brussels, 2002/1, pp. 16-22, <http://www.ib.be/grip/pub/pub.html#rapports> (accessed May 2002), and Loughlin, P. H., Pannell, C., Growing Economic Links and Regional Development in the Central Asian Republics and Xinjiang, China, *Post-soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 42, No 7, 2001, pp. 469-90

¹⁰⁷ See Teufel Dreyer, J., Ethnicity and Economic Development in Xinjiang, *Inner Asia*, Vol. 2, No 2, 2000, pp. 137-54

¹⁰⁸ Wang Lixiong in “Une Tchétchénie chinoise ?...”

¹⁰⁹ Xinhua, Jiang Calls for Pushing Forward ‘Develop the West’ Campaign, 1 April 2002

¹¹⁰ See Chinese President Expressed Sympathy to Bush, US Government and People for Disastrous Attacks, *The People’s Daily*, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200109/12/eng20010912_79944.html (accessed May 2002)

¹¹¹ Pomfret, J., China Shows a Less-than-warm Response to Disaster in America, *International Herald Tribune*, 14 September 2001

¹¹² Pomfret, J., China Censors Anti-U.S. Reaction, *International Herald Tribune*, 15 September 2001

¹¹³ Foreign Ministry Regular Press Conference by Spokesman Zhu Bangzao, 18 September 2001, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/18183.html> (accessed May 2002)

The situations in Tibet, Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and also Taiwan have all been targeted.¹¹⁴ Zhu Bangzao has stated on several occasions that there should be no “double standards” in the fight against terrorism.¹¹⁵ At the end of September 2001, Beijing strengthened its military presence in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan.¹¹⁶ The frontier with Afghanistan has been closed for security reasons.¹¹⁷ Since the beginning of October 2001, some areas of the Autonomous Region have become inaccessible to foreign journalists.¹¹⁸ On 10 October 2001 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ spokesperson raised the question of the “terrorist forces in Eastern Turkistan” (also called “Eastern Tujue”) by making a link between these forces and international terrorist groups. He stated: “We are opposed to all forms of terrorist activities. Take the East Turkestan terrorist force for example. They not only conduct terrorist acts in China’s Xinjiang, but also have links and collaborate with overseas terrorist groups. They undoubtedly pose a threat to China.”¹¹⁹

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tang Jiaxuan, has also stated that China is a victim of “terrorism” in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan just as Russia is in Chechnya.¹²⁰ By using similar methods to those used by the Russian authorities to deal with the Chechens, the Chinese authorities have launched a negative publicity campaign with the aim of criminalizing Uighur organizations which are now systematically described as “terrorist” organizations.¹²¹ On 12 November, Tang Jiaxuan told the UN Security Council that the Eastern Tujue terrorist forces had been receiving financial support over a long period, but also had the support of the “international terrorist clique”.¹²² On 14 November, Zhu Bangzao also officially linked the Eastern Tujue movement with Osama bin Laden.¹²³ This statement was repeated on 25 November.¹²⁴ On 29 November, there was a text posted on the web site of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was entitled: “Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by ‘Eastern Turkistan’ Organizations and Their Links with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban”.¹²⁵ In this

¹¹⁴ Pomfret, J., China’s Support Comes at a Price, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 September 2001

¹¹⁵ Reuters, Page, J., China Denies Setting Terms for War on Terror, 20 September 2001

¹¹⁶ Bennett, C., Twin Mission for PLA Troops, *South China Morning Post*, 27 September 2001

¹¹⁷ Agence France Presse, China Launches Security Clampdown on Afghan Border Territory, 27 September 2001

¹¹⁸ Foreign Ministry Spokesman Sun Yuxi Gives a Press Conference, 9 October 2001, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/18774.html> (accessed May 2002)

¹¹⁹ Agence France Presse, China Hints Its Muslim Separatists Fair Targets in War on Terror, 10 October 2001 and Foreign Ministry Press Conference by Spokesman Sun Yuxi, 11 October 2001, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/18793.html> (accessed May 2002)

¹²⁰ See Agence France Presse, China Warns War on Terror Should Not Spread to Other Countries, 10 October 2001

¹²¹ Reuters, China Calls for Support against Islamic Separatists, 11 October 2001; Eckholm, E., China Seeks World Support in Fight with Its Muslim Separatists, *The New York Times*, 12 October 2001

¹²² Quoted in Unveiling the Terrorist Nature...

¹²³ Zhu Bangzao Discloses Bloody Cases Created by ‘East Tujue’ Elements at Home and Abroad, *Renmin Ribao*, 16 November 2001, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200111/16/eng20011116_84716.shtml (accessed May 2002)

¹²⁴ ‘East Turkistan’ Terrorism Part of International Terrorism: FM Spokeswoman, *Renmin Ribao*, 23 November 2001, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200111/22/eng20011122_85127.shtml (accessed May 2002)

¹²⁵ Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by ‘Eastern Turkistan’ Organizations and Their Links with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, 20 November 2001, <http://un.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/21751.html> (accessed May 2002)

document, the authorities denounced the activities of 40 Eastern Turkistan organizations which according to Beijing included eight which have recourse to violence.¹²⁶ The links between the Uighur organizations and bin Laden were again discussed in a ten-page document published in January 2002.¹²⁷ In this document, the Chinese authorities criticized the activities of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party and the East Turkistan Opposition Party.¹²⁸ Beijing claims that the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party led by Hasan Mahsum is linked to bin Laden, the Taliban and to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). However, some are sceptical as the document does not claim that any attacks on Chinese territory have been carried out by this group. However, this does not stop the Chinese authorities from directly linking the activities of the Uighur organizations with the international Islamist terrorism gripping Central Asia and being fought by Washington. Hasan Mahsum rejected these allegations made by Beijing when he was interviewed on *Radio Free Asia Uyghur Service* on 22 January 2002.¹²⁹

There are no clear figures for the number of fighters but Beijing alleges that many Uighurs have received military training in Afghanistan. There are also no figures for the number of Uighurs captured in Afghanistan during American operations. The Afghan government was reportedly holding some twenty individuals. With regard to the possible recruitment of Uighurs into the IMU, again there are only rough estimates. A. Rashid seems to think it could be a relatively large number.¹³⁰ According to Western diplomatic sources the number of Uighurs training in Afghanistan with the IMU varied between 200 and 300.¹³¹ It is still difficult to reach a conclusion on this question as there are no corroborated figures. The few indicators currently available suggest that the number of Uighur fighters within the IMU is not very high.¹³² A *New York Times* article from September 2001 spoke of the case of two Uighurs who were captured by the Northern Alliance while fighting against the Taliban forces. The article claimed that the two Uighurs did not appear to have received extensive military training and that they had reportedly joined the ranks of the Taliban militia rather by chance, after they had begun studying in a *madrassa* in Pakistan.¹³³

¹²⁶ The document states that “The ‘Eastern Turkistan’ force has a total of over 40 organizations. They have engaged themselves in terrorist violence to varying degrees, both overtly and covertly. Among these organizations, eight openly advocate violence in their political platforms. They are: ‘Eastern Turkistan Islamic Resistance Movement’ in Turkey; ‘Eastern Turkistan Liberation Organization’, ‘Eastern Turkistan International Committee’, ‘United Committee of Uyghurs Organizations’ in Central Asia, and “Central Asian Uyghur Hezbollah” in Kazakhstan; ‘Turkistan Party’ in Pakistan; ‘Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement’ in Afghanistan; and ‘Eastern Turkistan Youth League’ in Switzerland”, quoted in *Terrorist Activities Perpetrated ...*

¹²⁷ People’s Republic of China, Information Office of State Council, ‘East Turkistan’...

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ He stated, “The East Turkestan Islamic Party hasn’t received any financial assistance from Osama Bin Laden or his al-Qaeda organization. We don’t have any kind of organizational links with al-Qaeda or the Taliban. Involvement by some Uyghur individuals with the Taliban doesn’t mean that the East Turkestan Islamic Party has relations with the Taliban”, quoted in Dolet, E., U.S. Should not Support Chinese Persecution of Uyghurs, Uyghur Information Agency, 20 February 2002

¹³⁰ See Rashid, A. China Forced to Expand Role in Central Asia, *The Analyst*, 10 July 2000

¹³¹ Afghanistan and Its Neighbours, *The Economist* [London], 29 September 2001

¹³² Reuters, Vidaillet, T., Reconstruction: China to Ask Afghan Government to Repatriate Separatists, 8 March 2002

¹³³ Rohde, D., Taliban Enlisting Eager Recruits of Many Lands, *The New York Times*, 28 September 2001

While it may be possible that some Uighurs, in reaction to the repressive policies practised in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, have chosen the path of armed struggle, the Uighur diaspora organizations have completely rejected claims from Beijing that the Uighur movements could be linked to bin Laden.¹³⁴ They have also condemned terrorism.¹³⁵ In China the events of 11 September have above all provided legitimacy for their repressive policies in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, even though the terrorist threat in that region is more founded in propaganda than in reality. Beijing prefers to describe the Uighurs as “terrorists” rather than question its own policies and enter into dialogue with its minorities. There is a risk that this policy of closing down any possibility of political discussion will turn out to be completely counter-productive. Some Uighurs who would like to see the autonomous status of the region become a reality could in the end opt for independence pure and simple as the only alternative when faced with an increasingly oppressive government. In this scenario, the Chinese authorities would be responsible for this growing demand. Indeed, this may be the aim of some in Beijing in order to justify the spiral of repression.

Since September 2001 Beijing has been trying to benefit as much as possible from the attacks in New York and Washington in its campaign to legitimize its repressive action in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan, to strengthen its control of minority populations and to try to eradicate Uighur “separatism” by force.¹³⁶ Despite criticisms in the international press and by experts on the Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan question about the Chinese manipulation of the problem¹³⁷ (as Dru Gladney stated: “though the Chinese government seeks to demonstrate that the Uyghur are a growing domestic threat, they have been unable to cite any recent incidents of domestic Uyghur-related violence”¹³⁸) both Luo Gan, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, and Wang Lequan, Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Chinese Communist Party of the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, have stated that repression of the Uighurs should continue at the same level in 2002.¹³⁹ Indeed, in December 2001 China amended its Criminal Code to strengthen its legal arsenal in the fight against “terrorism”.¹⁴⁰ This repression has also been translated into ideology. In January 2002 the authorities in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang launched a

¹³⁴ See Dolet

¹³⁵ See Uyghur American Association Statement, 1 October 2001, <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/statements/UAAstatementoct1.html> and Résolution adoptée à l’occasion de la Conférence sur La situation au Turkestan Oriental après 50 ans d’occupation Communiste Chinoise, réunie au Parlement européen, 17 October 2001, <http://www.radicalparty.org/> (accessed May 2002)

¹³⁶ Reuters, Amnesty Fears Repression to Rise in China’s West, 12 October 2001. Also see Amnesty International, *China: Fight against Terrorism Is No Excuse for Repression*, London, 11 October 2001; Human Rights Watch, *China/APEC Summit: Crackdown in Xinjiang*, New York, 18 October 2001 and *China: Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang*, New York, October 2001

¹³⁷ See Bowring, P., China’s Xinjiang Problem Has Nothing Much to Do with Islam, *International Herald Tribune*, 30 November 2001

¹³⁸ Gladney, D., China’s Uyghur Dilemma, *Project Syndicate China Stands Up Series*, January 2002, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentaries/commentary_text.php4?id=770&lang=1 (accessed May 2002)

¹³⁹ Agence France Presse, China: Crackdown against ‘Terrorists’ Will Continue in 2002, 4 December 2001; China: Xinjiang Party Chief Calls for Crackdown on Separatism, Terrorism, *BBC Monitoring Service*, 10 December 2001; Smith, C. S., China, in Harsh Crackdown, Executes Muslim Separatists, *New York Times*, 16 December 2001

¹⁴⁰ Xinhua, China Intensifies Attack on ‘East Turkistan’ Terrorists, 7 March 2002; Amnesty International, *China’s Anti-terrorism Legislation and Repression in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, London, March 2002

campaign aimed at increasing their control of education and the arts. For example, Abdulahat Abdurixit stated: “this time at the ideological front we need to re-educate people in the ideological scene. We have to watch closely cadres in the secondary and higher education systems. Our duty is to control publishing all books, magazines, journals, art works and literature. Workers in these areas will get the ideological upbringing and re-education.”¹⁴¹ Control of the press and other publications in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang has intensified since September 2001. Yang Si, the region’s police chief officially called upon the security forces to make the fight against “separatism” their priority. For him, even if the Uighur pro-independence activists have lost their support from Afghanistan following the disappearance of the Taliban government, the separatist forces outside of China still exist and should not be underestimated.¹⁴² According to the Laogai Research Foundation, since September 2001, around 3,000 Uighurs have reportedly been arrested in the context of the campaign of repression carried out in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan.¹⁴³

The international climate which resulted from the 11 September 2001 attacks has also led to a reduction in the level of attention paid by international public opinion to Beijing’s repression of the Uighurs. Even the Chinese authorities admit that the international campaign against terrorism has helped China domestically in her fight against Uighur separatism in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan. For example, Wang Lequan, Secretary of the Communist Party of the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, stated that: “the global anti-terrorism campaign has to a great extent been beneficial to our crackdown on terrorist forces. It has greatly suppressed the space they have to carry out their activities”.¹⁴⁴ However, Beijing’s attempts to get Washington to acknowledge the legitimacy of their fight against Uighur “terrorism” in exchange for their participation in the US launched campaign against terrorism has failed. President Bush stated in a speech to the UN General Assembly in November 2001 that the anti-terrorist campaign must not be used “as an excuse to persecute ethnic minorities”. Following negotiations in Beijing in early December 2001 between the two governments about what form Sino-American cooperation would take in the fight against terrorism, General Taylor also stated “the United States would not support Beijing’s effort to paint Uighur Muslim nationalists in China’s Xinjiang region as terrorists”.¹⁴⁵ In January 2002 the State Department stated that while Washington was opposed to terrorism in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan and elsewhere in China, “we have made clear to Beijing that combating international terrorism is not an excuse to suppress legitimate political expression. Effective counter-terrorism requires a respect for fundamental human rights”.¹⁴⁶ Beijing’s attempts to get recognition of the legitimacy of their policy in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan have clearly been only a mitigated success. Following the publication of an Amnesty International report focusing on the increasingly coercive practices in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, Washington repeated its warning to Beijing not to use the fight against terrorism as a pretext

¹⁴¹ Chinese Government Uses the Case of Tursunjan Emet as an Excuse to Strengthen Its Fight against the Religious Activities..., *Spark*, No 10, 27 March 2002

¹⁴² Agence France Presse, China Steps Up Ideological Battle in Muslim-dominated Xinjiang, 18 January 2002

¹⁴³ Laogai Research Foundation, In China, a Blurred Line between Terrorism and Self-preservation, 3 April 2002, <http://www.laogai.org/chinese/news-commentary2-uighur.html> (accessed May 2002)

¹⁴⁴ Agence France Presse, China’s Xinjiang Leader Says Global Anti-terror Campaign Helps China, March 2002

¹⁴⁵ Eckholm, E., Official Praises China for Its Cooperation in Rooting Out bin Laden’s Terror Network, *The New York Times*, 7 December 2001

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Recommendations for U.S. Policy on China, 13 February 2002, <http://www.uscirf.gov/reports/13Feb02/chinaRecommendations.php3> (accessed May 2002)

for increasing their repression against the region's minorities.¹⁴⁷ However, despite the words, it must be said that the means and perhaps also the will are still very limited when it comes to putting pressure on Beijing on this matter.

5 Conclusion

During the 1990s Beijing's repression in the face of the developing national Uighur identity in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan intensified. The "carrot" (of economic development) and "stick" (of repression) approach has not been a total success. Beijing's power in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan is still seen as illegitimate and oppressive by a large part of the Uighur population. At the same time the members of the Uighur diaspora outside China have embarked on a process of creating organizational structures and of informing international public opinion about the situation in the region. Uighur resistance to Chinese domination in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan may have taken the form of a "sub-political" approach which is less attractive to the media, but it is nevertheless very real.

American intervention in Afghanistan raises some important questions for Beijing. The end of the Taliban regime has certainly been welcomed by China is so far as the separatist Uighur movements of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan have lost a potential ally. And the prospect of stability returning to Afghanistan would represent a major security gain for China. However, in the context of its Uighur strategy, Washington's strategic penetration of Central Asia is a challenge to the Chinese authorities. The Shanghai forum, which is one of China's strategic pillars in Central Asia, could be called into question. China must acknowledge that some members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – have become allied to Washington to the extent of accepting military facilities and even the deployment of US military forces on their territory. Moreover, there has been a spectacular rapprochement between Russia and Washington since 11 September. This dramatic US breakthrough into the Central Asian arena weakens China's strategic position in the area.¹⁴⁸ Given the mistrust expressed by Chinese commentators for NATO and the US, Washington's long-term goals in the region can only worry the Chinese authorities, especially as the possibility of seeing a permanent US military base on the very border of the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan cannot now be totally ruled out. The Bishkek-Manas airport seems to have effectively become the most important US operational base in Central Asia. This is some 280 km from the Chinese border and, as R. Cagnat comments, the Manas base is "approximately equidistant between the Caspian Sea, southern Afghanistan and also the far east of Xinjiang. Kyrgyzstan, which is a small, easily defendable and controllable country where Islam has less influence – at least in the northern part - is becoming the 'ideal pivot' for Washington right in the heart of Central Asia."¹⁴⁹ During a recent visit to Iran, Jiang Zemin clearly expressed his opposition to this situation for the first time.¹⁵⁰ From the point of view of the Uighurs, the US presence in Central Asia may diminish Beijing's influence on its Central Asian neighbours and therefore by implication reduce the pressure on the Uighur populations in Central Asia. Paradoxically, their experience in Xinjiang/Eastern

¹⁴⁷ Agence France Presse, US Renews Warning over Repression to China Following Xinjiang Report, 23 March 2002

¹⁴⁸ Yu, Bin, Tales of Two U.S. Partners: Coping with Post-Taliban Uncertainty, *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 4, No 1, April 2002, <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/cc/0201Qchina-rus.html> (accessed May 2002); Cutler, R. M., Redrawing the Architecture of Central Asian Security, *The Analyst*, 27 February 2002

¹⁴⁹ Cagnat, R., Asie centrale: le Très Grand Jeu, *Défense nationale*, March 2002, p. 31

¹⁵⁰ Lam, W. W-L., Chinese Oppose U.S. Presence in Central Asia, *CNN*, 22 April 2002

Turkistan is likely to be the reverse. The fear that Washington will use the Uighur problem in its relations with Beijing and the risk that the US might receive support from those people in the event of tensions with China could encourage the Chinese authorities to further intensify their repression in Xinjiang/Eastern Turkistan in order to reduce these potential threats. This has been China's chosen path since September 2001. If international opinion does not take care, the first victims in China of the campaign against international terrorism launched by Washington could be the Uighur people.

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