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## Ethnic cleansing of Uyghur identity by China

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### Introduction

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the northwest province of the People's Republic of China, is where Beijing and the Muslim World cross paths. The region appears tremendously important for China from a geo-strategic perspective as it abuts the borders of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Russia and the Tibet Autonomous region, and connects the country with the regions of Central and South Asia, while also acting as a security and defence buffer zone. It further encompasses the disputed territory of Aksai Chin, part of the erstwhile princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, which is currently administered by China. In addition to that, the abundance of gas, oil reserves and mineral resources in the region is of vital significance for China for the alleviation of its energy security issues, alongside with the exploitation of the territory for nuclear testing. Yet, Xinjiang largely remains a troubled region and considered by many Chinese as a thorn in the eye. The main reason for that is the predominant Uyghur population, which is a Muslim community from Turkic origin, and which inherently is religiously, culturally, ideologically and politically different from the officially atheist Han Chinese-dominated population.

This paper will explore in-depth the history of the region, with a particular focus on the desire for ethno-political self-determination of the Uyghurs. It will shed light on the ongoing persecutions, human rights violations and religious suppressions on behalf of China upon the Uyghurs, and argue how they appear as instrumental policies for the containment of any sentiments considered by Beijing as undesirable. It will illuminate how the Chinese government often blurs the lines between ethno-religious movements for basic human rights and terrorism as an excuse of cracking down on these movements for political and social freedoms. This paper will establish a historical framework of the genesis of various domestic and international extremist groups, which align with the Uyghur cause and lure disenfranchised Uyghur individuals, and will provide a comprehensive overview of attacks. It will argue that any sort of nationalist movement, which is being so severely suppressed, experiences the likelihood of being hijacked by groups preaching extremist beliefs, which in return makes Uyghurs fall prey to terrorist propaganda.

It will further examine the building of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which stretches from the Xinjiang city of Kashgar to Pakistan's Arabian Sea port city of Gwadar, and it will discuss how this megalomaniac infrastructural project exacerbates many issues. This study paper will criticize Beijing's policies of oppression and denial of freedom of expression and religion in Xinjiang, which in return trigger anti-state attitudes and act as a catalyst for the processes of religious indoctrination and radicalization. It will demonstrate that as long as China proceeds on treating local grievances as a symptom of radicalization, and thus responds

harshly, violence in the region will continue to revolve in an endless cycle. Finally, the paper will call into question the inaction of the international community considering the gravity of the problems the region experiences, and will conclude with an assessment of the ramifications the situation of Xinjiang implies for South Asia.

### Uyghur Identity

The Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic group, which reside in East and Central Asia, primarily in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. They speak a Turkic language, written in an Arabic script and are predominantly Muslim. The community embraced Islam in A.D. 934 during the Karahanid Kingdom, and Kashgar, the capital of the Kingdom, promptly became one of the epicentres of Islamic teachings. Similar to Tibetans, for Uyghurs, their religious identity is one of the major facets which differentiate them entirely from Chinese culture. Yet, in Xinjiang the severe suppression of any expression, no matter how lawful or peaceful, of their distinct identity, lies in their desire for basic human rights – it is not a religious struggle. This becomes clear when one looks at Beijing's standpoint towards the Hui people. The latter are also a Muslim ethnic group, which experiences religious tolerance in regards to its worshiping traditions, since it is not endorsing any separatist sentiments. According to a 2013 Human Rights Watch report on the situation in China, *"under the guise of counterterrorism and 'anti-separatism' efforts, the government maintains a pervasive system of ethnic discrimination against Uighurs...and sharply curbs religious and cultural expression"*, while the People's Party, which is enduringly obsessed with issues related to territorial integrity and ethnic unity, bears little enmity towards the Hui, as long as they do not challenge the status quo. As an article of *The Diplomat* argues, despite numerous claims that the Communist Party's harsh repressive policies in Xinjiang attribute to a perceived Islamophobia, actually Beijing's attitude towards the Uyghurs reflects *"not a distaste for Islam as such, but it is an absolute neurosis towards the threat – serious or not – of territory loss, and with no small degree of xenophobia thrown in there as well"*.

Such distinction is manifested through the laws enforced on both ethnic groups. For instance, despite the fact that religious education for children is officially prohibited in China, the country allows Hui Muslims to have their children educated in Islam and attend mosques, while for Uyghurs that is forbidden. Huis are also allowed to fast during the holy month of Ramadan, Hui women are permitted to wear veils and Hui men keep their beards, while Uyghurs are banned from such practices. Uyghurs are also often forestalled from obtaining passports to travel abroad, especially to go on their pilgrimage to Mecca. Overall, as Jörg Friedrichs, an Associate Professor of Politics at the Oxford Department of International Development and Official Fellow at St. Cross College, Oxford, argues: *"If Hui loyalty to China is sometimes questioned, Uyghur disloyalty is mostly taken for granted"*, emphasising on the deep-rooted antagonism against the Uyghurs on behalf of the Chinese State.

## Historical Background

The mountainous rugged territory of Xinjiang, only 9.7% of which is fit for human habitation, has been perpetually claimed and contended by a succession of people and empires throughout its 2,500-year documented history. The land area became part of the dominion of the Qing dynasty in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which in 1912 after the Republican Revolution, was superseded by the government of the Republic of China. In 1921, the Soviet Union formally declared the Uyghurs as successors of the Turkic peoples as part of their nation building campaign in Central Asia. In the early 1930s, an '*East Turkestan*' movement emerged among those Muslim communities, who sought separation from China, and on 12 November 1933, Uyghur separatists declared the short-lived and self-proclaimed East Turkestan Republic. Hence, the toponym '*East Turkestan*' became deeply entangled with the yearning for an independent State, emphasizing on the connection with other Turkic groups, especially since the official translation of the Chinese term '*Xinjiang*' stands for "*old territory returned to the motherland*", and it was renounced by the Uyghurs as it carried connotations of colonialism.

The First East Turkestan Republic politicised the Uyghur struggle for self-determination and gave geographical dimensions to the term '*East Turkestan*'. Nevertheless, shortly after its establishment, the Chinese warlord Sheng Shicai quickly overpowered the newly created country and consolidated his control over Xinjiang for a decade with the support of the Soviet Union. However, the Soviets took advantage of the following transition of governments and set up the puppet State of the Second East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949) in order to exploit its mineral resources, later trying to justify it as a national liberation movement against the conservative Chinese regime. In 1949 the People's Liberation Army invaded Xinjiang, and the region was surrendered to them, making it officially part of the People's Republic of China. In October 1955, People's Republic of China leader Mao Zedong declared Xinjiang an '*Uyghur Autonomous Region*', which technically meant that Chinese authorities recognised the Uyghur identity and let the ethnic minority have certain autonomy, yet secession was strictly forbidden under any circumstances. Nevertheless, starting with that period a massive State-sponsored resettlement of Han people was observed in the region, with the purpose of social and political control of the territory by changing its demographics. The reinforced immigration and settlement of Han, Hui and other mainland Chinese ethnic groups intended to promote Chinese cultural unity and decrease the prevalence of the Uyghur population.

In 1953, the share of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang was standing at 74,7%, which by 2000 has been reduced to 45,21%, in comparison with the Han community, which was respectively 6,1% and increased to 40,6%. This demographic shift amplified the ethnic tensions, making Uyghurs feel increasingly (ethnically) marginalised, and in rivalry with the Han community for employment, especially considering the widespread discriminatory recruitment practices on behalf of Chinese authorities. On top of that, there have been endeavours to narrow down the Uyghur birth rate and boost the Han fertility rate in order to counteract Uyghur separatism.

The USSR, with disregard to the Uyghur's just struggle and solely to serve its own national interests, started supporting certain separatists by disseminating anti-Chinese propaganda and encouraging them to emigrate to the Soviet Union and then launch attacks on Chinese territory. In return, China strengthened its Soviet border in Xinjiang with deploying more Han militia. After the break of the Sino-Soviet political relations in 1962, over 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs deserted from Xinjiang to the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, as a result of Soviet false promises for an independent Xinjiang. The Soviets kept on harbouring Uyghur separatists, "praising" their liberation struggle, and it is estimated that in 1966, 5,000 separatists launched attacks on China via the Sino-Soviet border. In 1969, Chinese and Soviet forces entered a combat alongside the Xinjiang-Soviet border, with the Soviets directly training Uyghur guerrilla groups to fight against China.

Xinjiang's importance to China increased even more after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which triggered Chinese fears of being encircled by the Soviets. Therefore, China perceived the Han resettlement in Xinjiang as an essential strategy for defending themselves from the Soviets. In addition to that, Beijing supported the Afghan Mujahideen and established camps in order to train them near Kashgar and Hotan, investing hundreds of millions of dollars in military infrastructure and weapons. Uyghur ranks also played a role in the war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. According to the reports of Dr. Ahmed Rashid, journalist and best-selling foreign policy author with an expertise on the AF-Pak and Central Asian regions, Uyghur Muslims were trained by Afghan and Pakistani terrorist groups in training centres and madrassas. Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat reportedly indoctrinated Uyghur Muslim youth with extremist beliefs in educational establishments across the country.

### Incidents of Inter-ethnic Violence

The political reality of China is a one-party rule, where Han Chinese constitute the majority of the ruling elite; therefore, claims about ethnic harmony among its highly socio-economically asymmetric society, particularly in turbulent regions such as Xinjiang, remain simply bogus slogans of the Communist Party, which attempts to gloss over the eyes of the international community about the ongoing inter-ethnic conflicts. Almost two decades ago, Dru C. Gladney, President of the Pacific Basin Institute at Pomona College and an expert on ethnic and cultural nationalism in Asia, has argued that China confronts the risk of making Xinjiang its own West Bank if it does not address the issues arising from its violent attempts to assimilate the region and inhabit it with Han settlers. He claimed that, "*If China does not explore other options besides repression, restriction and investment, millions of Uyghur Muslims might become disenfranchised, encouraging some to look to the intifada, the Taliban or al-Qaeda for inspiration*". And indeed, the following historical timeline in the section below makes it clear that Beijing's major problem is not acknowledging that its iron fist policy of 'repression, restriction and investment' is actually what continuously reinforces the Uyghurs' disaffection and malevolence against the Han Chinese.

With the increased restrictions and intrusions in Uyghur's lifestyles on behalf of the Chinese State, the indigenous people adopted the stance that a solution to the '*Xinjiang dilemma*' could come only through two possible routes; peaceful protests or violent revolts. Beijing's draconian measures of uniformly treating any expression of dissent as terrorism, and responding to peaceful demonstrations with a pattern of brute force, including political imprisonment, torture, and disappearance, led to alienation of the population to the point where labels such as '*terrorist*' or '*militant*' were attached to every Uyghur.

In 1980, riots took place in the city of Aksu, where some local Uyghur separatists made attempts to drive away Han settlers. In June 1981, Uyghur militants attacked Han settlers and People's Liberation Army base in Kashgar, after which the situation deteriorated even more when the Uyghur Provincial Committee rose up against the Chinese ruling majority, which led to the then Vice Chairman, Deng Xiaoping, to reorganize the Committee in order to strengthen the stability of the region.

Several peaceful Uyghur student protests occurred in the years following; In 1985-1986, students manifested against the nuclear tests in the dried-up basin of the Lop Nur lake and the settlement of Han people in Xinjiang, while in May 1989, public demonstrations against the Chinese birth control policies took place, which were all subsequently harshly quenched by the Chinese Army. Nevertheless, despite events of those kind, the region remained relatively quiet and stable until the beginning of the 1990s. In April 1990, violent riots erupted in the Baren township in the Kashghar district of South Xinjiang. The then newly established East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), currently an internationally designated Islamic terrorist organization, with an assembly of 200 people was leading the protests, which soon spread across other cities in the region. Reportedly, the turbulent riots were triggered by the mass migration of Han Chinese into Xinjiang, the enforced abortions on Uyghur women and the Chinese authorities banning construction of a mosque. As a result, supporters of ETIM declared '*Jihad*', preached the elimination of '*infidels*' in Xinjiang and called upon the establishment of an independent Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic. It has been argued that the Uyghur militants were equipped with weapons from the Afghan Mujahideen, which were delivered through Pakistan via the Karakoram Highway. This does not come as a surprise, since during the Soviet-Afghan War the Chinese government recruited and trained Uyghurs to fight alongside the Afghan Mujahideen. Hence, as Dr. Michael Clarke, an expert on the history of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, explains: "*possibility therefore existed that some elements of this group had returned to Xinjiang to extend the jihad against Soviet 'Marxism-Leninism' to its Chinese variant*".

In addition to that, two Pakistani citizens, allegedly linked to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, were also arrested for fuelling the riots. The uprising continued several days with the Chinese government sending hundreds of heavy armed militia members to quench the riots. The counter-attack resulted in dozens of insurgents getting killed, including their commander Zahideen Yusuf. Immediately after the uprising, the Chinese

government introduced its ruthless three *No's policy* towards such separatist groups – No concessions, No compromises and No mercy.

The Baren riots clearly raised the spectre of political and religious violence in the region, and the following 1990-1997 years were further marked by numerous incidents. The fall of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the independence of Central Asian countries, and the rise of global Islamism and pan-Turkism additionally reinforced the separatist sentiments in the province, and triggered an outbreak of political violence. In February and March 1992, bombings took place across the cities of Urumqi, Bortala, Ili, Khotan, Kashghar, Korla and Kucha. In 1996, around 3,000 Uyghurs were arrested by the Chinese security forces as a result of the riots. On 5 and 6 February 1997, during the celebration of Ramadan, the so-called Ghulja incident took place, where 30 separatists were publicly executed. Up to 100 were injured and as many as 1,600 arrested, after holding demonstrations for basic human rights. Many of those detained suffered extremely severe frostbites after being purposefully held for six days in buildings with minus temperatures, as a result of which 50 protestors died. Shortly after, on 25 February, three bombs exploded on three different buses in the city of Ürümqi. Subsequently, on 7 March the same year, another bomb attack took place in Beijing, claimed by Turkish-based Organisation for East Turkistan Freedom established by Uyghurs in exile. During those times, the authorities continued to arrest and execute anyone alleged as a separatist or rioter, with no sign of due process; the targeting of perpetrators was based simply on ethnic profiling. For China, every Uyghur - man, woman or child - was a terrorist. In a report subsequently issued by Amnesty International, Beijing was accused of unlawfully executing political prisoners in Xinjiang, holding trials with ready-made verdicts and confessions derived through torture.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, some Uyghurs also started joining other terrorist groups such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, pursuing the goal of taking over Xinjiang and the region of Central Asia. The period of 2006-2015 was further stained with numerous incidents of violence and inter-ethnic clashes. In 2007, the Chinese government raided an alleged terrorist camp in western Xinjiang province, killing 18 suspects and arresting 17. The following year, an attempted suicide bombing on a China Southern Airlines flight was circumvented. On 4 August 2008, during the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing numerous attacks across the city took place, resulting in the death of 16 police officers. Yet, international media news channels remained sceptic to the Chinese governments statements of curbing down so many attacks, arguing it was a façade for justifying its excessive use of force against secession. During the night of 25 and 26 June 2009, the so-called Shaoguan incident took place between Uyghur and Han Chinese workers in a toy factory based on allegations of sexual assault. The violent civil disturbance, during which two Uyghurs were killed and 118 were injured, subsequently triggered the July 2009 Ürümqi riots, which has been considered the most dreadful interethnic conflict in China in decades. The riots, during which more than 200 people were killed and 1,600 were injured, took place at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of communist rule in China and started as a demonstration where over 10,000 Uyghurs protested against the killing of the two Uyghurs in Shaoguan. Thousands of



Hans responded by launching counter-protests to seek revenge for the killings of Han people. Following the incident, State authorities put the entire region on a lock-down for almost an year: 40,000 surveillance cameras were installed, Internet provision was shut down, international phone calls were blocked, barriers between Han and Uyghur neighbourhoods were built, Uyghurs mobility was limited, thousands of Uyghurs were arrested and an unaccounted number of Uyghurs – disappeared. These security measures further increased tensions between the two ethnic groups, which in return magnified the frequency and severity of violent incidents in the following years.

### China's Oppressive Security Strategies in Xinjiang

In 2015, the National People's Congress passed a counter-terrorism legislation, which virtually criminalised any expression of dissent or religious belief on behalf of Uyghurs alongside with branding their cultural traditions as signs of radicalization and terrorism. The law further granted authorities extensive powers of surveillance, control and censorship, allowing them to police and monitor Uyghur private communications, religious practices, physical appearances, mobility and demeanour. In October 2016, the government declared that all Xinjiang residents need to submit their documents for review to the Public Security Bureau (PSB), with the intention of limiting their travel outside the country. As a result of that, many students who pursued education abroad were forcefully returned and disappeared upon arrival at the Chinese border since their loyalty to the People's Party was questioned. In addition to that, throughout the province, smartphone owners found their phones inspected for suspicious content or undesirable social media applications, as a result of which many of them reportedly got installed bug- and tracking devices or spyware. Surveillance cameras were also updated with face recognition software, which facilitated the identification of individuals at crowded places. In South-eastern Xinjiang, authorities have ordered all vehicles to have compulsory GPS trackers installed, for what they call a '*comprehensive supervision*'. These and various other stringent security measures established the legislative foundation for the State's repressive policies in the following years.

One of the latest strategies is the building of detention camps, which are being branded as "*re-education centres*", and undeniably further deteriorate the situation by disenfranchising the local population. The epithet, "*re-education camps*" has been given to internment camps, which have been operating secretly and unlawfully since 2016. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Uyghur Muslims have been detained without a trial on the false pretext of preventing radicalization and terrorism. In 2016 and 2017, over 90,000 law enforcement personnel were recruited in the region and as many as 7300 heavily guarded check points were installed. Following that move, Xinjiang has come to be recognized as one of the most heavily controlled and monitored regions in the world.

Despite their name, those camps do not come even close to the concept of transformation through education; the ugly truth is that the government aims to vanquish the Uyghurs' aspirations for basic human rights through suffocating and eradicating their culture, language,

religion and identity. This is also visible from the sloppy “*criteria*”, which determines whether someone should be detained or not. As a local police officer reported to Radio Free Asia, “*Five kinds of suspicious people have been detained and sent to education camps: people who throw away their mobile phone’s SIM card or did not use their mobile phone after registering it; former prisoners already released from prison; blacklisted people; “suspicious people” who have some fundamental religious sentiment; and the people who have relatives abroad.*”

There is no official data on the number of detainees, yet estimates range from 100,000 through 500,000 to even 800,000. Nevertheless, many Uyghurs argue that at least one of their family members is being held in a concentration camp. The ultimate purpose of these facilities, which resemble military prisons, is to completely indoctrinate and brainwash the Uyghurs, to the point that they no longer associate with the Uyghur identity and condemn their own ethnic heritage. Those who do not obey the rules are subject to physical and mental torture, which include punishments such as waterboarding, being tied up or handcuffed for very long hours, or even being made to eat pork, which is forbidden by Islam, and thus is perceived as the ultimate form of humiliation and debasement. Former detainees also report being forced to study communist propaganda for hours, sing communist songs, learn Chinese and praise the president by chanting ‘*Long live Xi Jinping*’.

Dr. Adrian Zenz, an academic, whose research focus is on China’s ethnic policy and public recruitment in Tibetan regions and Xinjiang, describes how such establishments are analogous to concentration camps:

*“Many bids mandate the installation of comprehensive security features that turn existing facilities into prison-like compounds: surrounding walls, security fences, pull wire mesh, barbed wire, reinforced security doors and windows, surveillance systems, secure access systems, watchtowers, and guard rooms or facilities for armed police.”*

He argues that these mass camps are indiscriminately subjecting Uyghur Muslims to extrajudicial inhumane, humiliating and brainwashing conditions, supposedly as an attempt of lecturing the detainees how to distinguish ‘*legitimate*’ from ‘*illegitimate*’ religious practices, traditions and behaviour.

Dr. Sean R. Roberts, Director of the International Development Studies Program at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs and expert on Central Asia and China, has characterised Beijing’s perception of the Uyghurs as a “*biological threat to society, akin to a virus that must be eradicated, quarantined, or cleansed from those it infects*”. He explains how such attitude generates an environment similar to Michael Foucault’s all-seeing Panopticon or George Orwell’s Surveillance Society, where every single move or word of the individual is being monitored, rendering a milieu where surveillance remains the norm, even if the person discontinues his/her actions.

As a Kashgar State official reportedly summarises the major objective of those camps: “*you can’t uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one by one – you need to spray*



*chemicals to kill them all; re-educating these people is like spraying chemicals on the crops... that is why it is a general re-education, not limited to a few people”.*

China’s campaign of coercive social re-engineering, justified under the slogan of “*war on terror*”, clearly comes closer to “*war on humankind*”. Such violent repression inevitably appears counter-productive, since it evokes even more violent resistance on behalf of the Uyghurs, which eventually leads to more repressive security measures on behalf of Beijing. Therefore, such perpetual cycle of repression-violence-repression only contributes to the complete disintegration of relations between the Chinese and the Uyghurs, rendering their peaceful habitation practically impossible.

### China Pakistan Economic Corridor

The current construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, the \$62 billion infrastructural megaproject, part of the China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is further exacerbating the issue. According to Peter Hatcher, the Political and International Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, “*the Chinese Communist Party has a history of using infrastructure as a Trojan Horse for domination*”. Having said that, he explains how the BRI’s underlying strategic intentions are of making those countries and regions, which it passes through, unable to stand against Beijing.

As Qiao Liang, a retired Major General in the People's Liberation Army Air Force, military theorist, and author, puts it in a nutshell: “*if you tell people, 'I come with political and ideological intentions', who will accept you?*”, exposing the hidden objectives of the project.

The Uyghurs in Xinjiang have already started witnessing the adverse effects of the building of the CPEC. 51,000 law enforcement personnel has been deployed additionally to the already existing militias, which attempt to contain any sentiments related to the distinct Uyghur identity among the Uyghur population. China’s economic investments in the region, might be improving its infrastructure and connectivity, yet they do not directly benefit the people, as the Uyghurs remain excluded from many sectors of the projects and the financial benefits flow into the hands of Han Chinese. For example, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, has currently employed around 2.7 million workers, yet Uyghurs constitute only 7% of the labour force despite the fact that they make up more than half of the population of the region. On top of that, the rapid extraction of mineral and fuel resources has already inflicted land degradation, desertification and serious environmental hazards, in a region, where the local population predominantly relies on agriculture to meet their ends.

### Conclusion

The origins of the Uyghur’s movement for basic human rights are traceable to the Post-Cold War era, which witnessed the decline of the Soviet Union, the subsequent independence of Central Asian countries, the rise of global Islamism and pan-Turkism, alongside the pervasive ascent of Chinese chauvinism, which is characterised by a contempt for ethnic minority

nationalism and oppression of those who express dissent. The Chinese heavy-handed approach towards halting these movements is always meant to be counter-productive. The ‘terrorism’ label assigned on all Uyghurs indiscriminately and the ensuing cycle of repression-violence-repression creates an environment fraught with animosity, hostility and aggression, which only culminates in more bloodshed.

The Uyghur issue is generally seen as an internal Chinese security problem, whereas it should be viewed on a more global scale, especially since Western powers fuel China's economic growth and thereby exacerbate the conflict. Although few human rights organizations and researchers have expressed their fears about the aggravation of the Xinjiang issue, information about the region still remains limited and insufficient, which is certainly not a coincidence.

International players must put more pressure on China to open its borders and take responsibility for the human rights violations against the Uyghur population the country commits on a daily basis. An independent Xinjiang is an unlikely scenario, yet eliminating the socio-economic, religious, cultural and political discrimination against the Uyghur community, granting them the rights they are entitled to, ceasing to treat them as third-class citizens and allowing them to benefit from the resources of their own region, could conceive an environment where the Uyghurs, feeling they are served with the respect they deserve and are provided with equal opportunities for development, could decrease their feeling of enduring humiliation while the community would taste basic human rights.

Considering the ‘terrorism arch’ between extremist groups in Xinjiang, Afghanistan and Pakistan, a peaceful, secure and stable Xinjiang is an indispensable element of a successful counter-terrorism strategy for the countries of South Asia and vital ingredient for their positive regional cooperation and development. Yet, such strategic stability is becoming even more inconceivable with Xi Jinping’s ambitious ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative, which clearly delineates who the benefitting stakeholders are, and in return generates more (violent) resentment.

It is high time for China to stop crying wolf and acknowledge the fact that it is only China which is responsible for the impedance it long claims to have been enduring.



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