

I. CASE BACKGROUND

The Muslim Uyghurs are an ethnic minority in Xinjiang, the most western province of China. Particularly since the Communist takeover of the region in 1949, the Uyghurs have experienced religious and cultural persecution by the Han Chinese. With the discovery of oil and other natural resources in the region, the Han Chinese are now flooding into the region in an effort to exploit the resources. This influx of people has intensified the already tenuous relationship between the Han Chinese and the Uyghurs over their religious, cultural and social differences. Furthermore, the influx of people has led to not only the extraction of resources but the over-cultivation of land and over-use of precious water resources in the area. As a result, the Uyghurs have strengthened their own campaign, sometimes resorting to violence, in an effort to reclaim their land to halt the religious and political persecution and, in extremist cases, to establish their own, independent Uyghur state.

Along with cultural and political repression, the fight for oil is contributing to the repression of economic progress in the region as well. In order to understand the importance or the magnitude of the struggle for resources, it is important to understand the political and cultural struggles that have come before. The conflict in Western China is also unique in that the environmental aspect, as said before, exists both in the natural resources at stake and in the strategic geographic location of the region. The growing importance of its geographical position (it is important to note) is related to the development of neighboring nations and economies within the region. The development of the Central Asian states and the sympathetic Uyghur populations located within those states may prove to be a problem for Chinese control as they may encourage or even assist in the drive for an independent Uyghur nation in the future.

Oil exploration officially began in 1951 with the drilling of the first well in 1955. Coincidentally, the first major incident of resistance occurred in 1954, the Khotan rising in Southern Xinjiang. In 1962 a mass exodus of Kazakhs and others westward was the result of a rationing of resources (specifically the grain rationing system). Han Chinese immigration and competition resulted in scarcities of agricultural land, water and pastures. Uyghur opposition grew increasingly more overt and nationalistic throughout the 1980s as the repressive atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977) began to wither.

With the discovery of large reserves of strategic natural resources in the area, specifically oil and natural gas, tensions have grown increasingly complex and more violent. Not only do the natural resource demands represent another way for the Han Chinese to exploit the people of Xinjiang in order to support the further economic development of Eastern China, Xinjiang also holds much value as a border province, or a link with the relatively newly 'opened' Central Asian (formerly Russian) states. Xinjiang is expected to replace northeast China as the new supplier of energy resources, mainly oil and natural gas (and some coal, too). For example, in early 2005, construction began on an oil pipeline between Kazakhstan and Western China (Dillon)

Over the last half of the 20th century several violent incidents have occurred. In the late 1990s and particularly in the aftermath of September 11th, the boundaries of the ethnic conflict and natural resources have grown beyond Urumqi, Xinjiang and the violence has now spread to cities like Beijing where deadly bombings were carried out in late 1997 (Dillon, 100).

The Uyghur conflict has also spread internationally. For example, in October 2002, China's Deputy Prime Minister claimed the U.S. government detained at least 12 Uyghurs at Guantanamo Bay for possible connections with terrorist networks. Though any terrorist connections have yet to be proven, if the Uyghurs are returned to China they will almost certainly face brutal interrogations and incarceration regardless. While the U.S. State Department has issued reports condemning China for its harsh treatment of accused separatists, they have also praised China on joining the West in the war on terrorism (Starr). The increasingly vocal Chinese dissidents or separatists (i.e. Uyghurs) may hurt China's economic relationships as well. For example, Kazakhstan's president has stated his opposition to any organization advocating separatism in China using Kazakh territory. China's economic

relationships, with neighboring nations, depends on China's ability to reign in the 'wild west of China' and maintain control over the 'violent separatists'.



4. Location: East Asia: China

Western China: Xinjiang Province, and the Central Asian States: Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The actual conflict has occurred in (what is considered) China, although scuffles have broken out near or on the Western border mainly with Kazakhstan but also Kyrgystan and Tajikistan as well. Also, it is important to remember that in discussing the connection between Chinese economic interests and the war on terror, Afghanistan does share a small border with Western China.

The conflict exists between two ethnic groups within Chinese borders. As with most conflicts that happen internally in China, there is a great degree of conflicting information. Additionally, it is important to clarify that though the single incident in Yining (Gulja) has been highlighted, the overarching conflict between the

ethnic Uyghurs and the Han Chinese spans many incidents of resistance and far more casualties.

The conflict originated over the Uyghur people's desire for political and religious independence from the Han Chinese. With this desire for independence, came the struggle for natural resources and local economic sustainability. The exploitation of local oil reserves exacerbated ethnic differences and helped fuel the conflict.

Source: <http://www.american.edu/TED/ice/iceall.htm>

CRISIS

As the Olympic Games are nearing, activists of the Uyghur people have deployed infinite ingenuity in order to appraise the world of their plight. Everybody knows today that there will be no Uyghurs among the Chinese athletes at the Beijing Olympics in 2008. On the other hand, in a daring and unheard of move, the Eurovision competition has for the first time opened itself to non European nations, and an Uyghur choir has been accepted to participate – a fact which raises the tensions with China, who protest vigorously against what it considers to be European meddling in internal affairs. On a less anecdotic note, has recently proceeded to displace whole Uyghur villages, to make space for oil drilling and for huge refineries.

The Secretary General of the UN, seeing that key principles of the UN are at stake, requires the Human Rights Commission to seize itself of the matter, and to come up with a resolution embodying the wisdom and the will of the international community.