

ASIAN SURVEY

A Bimonthly Review of Contemporary Asian Affairs ■ University of California Press

Vol. XLV, No. 4, July/August 2005

POWER POLITICS IN THE HIMALAYA AND BEYOND

- Power Politics in the Himalaya and Beyond: Introduction • LOWELL DITTMER
 - Tibet and Its Neighbors: Moving toward a New Chinese Strategy in the Himalayan Region • THIERRY MATHOU
 - Sino-Pakistan Relations and Xinjiang's Uighurs: Politics, Trade, and Islam along the Karakoram Highway • ZIAD HAIDER
 - Russia's New Role in Central Asia • LESZEK BUSZYNSKI
 - Bhutan's Military Action against Indian Insurgents • ARIJIT MAZUMDAR
 - Evaluating Nepal's Integrated "Security" and "Development" Policy: Development, Democracy, and Counterinsurgency • STUART GORDON
 - Rethinking the United States's Myanmar Policy • IAN HOLLIDAY
 - Is Regime Change Enough for Burma? The Problem of State Capacity • NEIL A. ENGLEHART
 - Regional Hegemonies and the Exercise of Power in Southeast Asia: A Study of Indonesia and Vietnam • RALF EMMERS
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SINO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND XINJIANG'S UIGHURS

*Politics, Trade, and Islam along
the Karakoram Highway*

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Ziad Haider

Abstract

China's Muslim Uighurs have recently proven to be an unusual source of friction in the stalwart Sino-Pakistan friendship. This essay analyzes how politics in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and trade and movement along the Karakoram Highway linking Xinjiang with Pakistan have affected the relationships among Beijing, Islamabad, the Uighurs, and the Pakistani traders operating in Xinjiang.

China and Pakistan have maintained an “all-weather” friendship based on their mutual interests in protecting their borders against, and checking the influence of, their rival neighbor India. The concrete nature of their friendship can be seen in the opening in 1982 of the Karakoram Highway, a 500-mile-long divided highway that connects Kashgar in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region with Islamabad. The highway was constructed for the explicit purpose of fostering trade and people-to-people contact and the implicit purpose of enhancing both countries' political and logistical control over their frontiers and capability to deal with external and internal security threats. Upon its completion, China's then-Deputy Premier Li Xiannian publicly stated that the highway “allows us [China] to give military aid to Pakistan.”¹ One

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1. Mahnaz Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 200.

Asian Survey, Vol. 45, Issue 4, pp. 522–545, ISSN 0004-4687, electronic ISSN 1533-838X.
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Indian official labeled its construction “a militarily sinister movement directed against India.”² In spite of the utility and symbolic value of the highway for both Pakistan and China, exchanges along its length throughout the 1990s involved arms, drugs, and religion, paradoxically clouding the countries’ friendship because of the road’s impact on Xinjiang’s Uighurs. Pakistan’s religious links with these Uighurs have contrasted with and strained Islamabad’s crucial politico-economic links with Beijing.

China considers Xinjiang indispensable because of its abundant natural resources and strategic location vis-à-vis Central and South Asia.³ Yet, maintaining and consolidating control over its “wild west” has been a historic and pressing concern for Beijing. Instability in Xinjiang arises from the Uighurs’ sense of spiritual, cultural, and political alienation, as a Muslim people of Turkic origin, from the officially atheist, Han Chinese-dominated People’s Republic of China. With their religious and ethnonational identity inextricably linked, the Uighur resistance to Beijing’s domination is partly captured in a “Muslim versus non-Muslim” framework that is of great interest to this analysis in light of the dynamic political nature of Islam today and the threat of Islamic radicalism. The clash of China’s policies with local sentiments favoring greater autonomy and separatism resulted in open conflict in Xinjiang through the 1990s, with over 200 incidents, 162 deaths, and more than 440 persons injured, according to Chinese official estimates.⁴

Beijing’s primary concern over the highway has been how it facilitates the spread of Islamic ideology into Xinjiang and the movement of radical Uighur militants. Many of these militants were enrolled in Pakistani *madrassas* (religious schools) during the 1980s and are veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War and Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. A separate concern is that the highway has served as a conduit for an extensive illicit drug trade that has led to spiraling HIV/AIDS rates in northwestern China because of shared use of contaminated needles among injection drug users. In response, Beijing has curtailed border trade, lodged strong protests with the Pakistani government, and even closed the highway for brief periods. While Islamabad has historically adopted a tolerant attitude toward the Uighur presence in Pakistan and never espoused their separatist cause, it has taken increasingly stern measures since the late 1990s to assuage China’s fears.

2. Ibid., p. 203.

3. Xinjiang is expected to become China’s second largest oil production center and largest natural gas production center by 2005, leading officials to dub it the “Sea of Hope.” “Xinjiang to Become China’s 2nd Largest Oil Production Center,” *People’s Daily*, December 2, 2000, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200012/09/eng20001209_57364.html>.

4. Human Rights Watch, *In the Name of Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Abuses Worldwide*, April 1, 2003, <http://hrw.org/un/chr59/counter-terrorism-bck4.htm#P183_32636>.

These have included closing Uighur settlements in Pakistan, arresting and deporting Uighurs, and killing alleged Uighur terrorists.

In spite of the Pakistan-Xinjiang highway link being possibly the most sensitive component of the otherwise stalwart Sino-Pakistan friendship, there is a dearth of research on the Pakistani government's policy toward the Uighurs and on the impact of China's and Pakistan's Uighur policies on the interactions and perceptions of ordinary Uighurs, Pakistanis, and Han Chinese operating in Xinjiang. This article argues that the opening of the highway to Pakistan, combined with Beijing's granting the Uighurs greater socioeconomic and religious freedom in the 1980s, fueled greater Islamic awareness among the Uighurs. Following the Soviet-Afghan war and the rise of the Taliban, radical Islam became a much more potent force in Xinjiang. Some Uighurs who were guided by this ideology adopted terrorist tactics in resisting Beijing's control. In response, Beijing forcefully asserted itself in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, contrary to Beijing's sweeping counter-terrorism rhetoric, the primary reason for Uighur dissent in the 1990s has not derived from radical Islam but from socioeconomic concerns and a lack of political autonomy. Moreover, most Uighurs have protested *peacefully* against Beijing's policies. Meanwhile, Pakistan has proven to be a willing ally in China's "war on terror" in order to preserve their all-weather friendship and safeguard its own national interests, from avoiding censure on its Kashmir policy of supporting cross-border militancy to its invitation in June 2005 to join as an observer the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a rising, powerful regional alliance that has a distinct counter-terrorism mandate. The increase in Beijing's official presence, along with greater numbers of Han Chinese business people in Xinjiang, has also driven a wedge between Pakistani merchants in the region and the Uighurs because the Pakistani traders' business and personal interests have trumped the notion of Islamic solidarity. Today, Pakistanis in the region and the Islamabad government alike continue to shun the Uighurs as Beijing seeks economically to coax the latter and politically to compel them into embracing a Greater Chinese consciousness.

The Evolution of CCP Rule over Xinjiang

According to Justin Rudelson, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) consolidation of its rule in Xinjiang has been "an attempt . . . to turn the region into an internal colony" for three reasons: to reduce the historic vulnerability of its borderlands, to avert emboldening the separatist movements in Tibet and Taiwan by agreeing to Uighur demands for greater autonomy, and to monopolize Xinjiang's rich natural resources.⁵ During the Cultural Revolution, government policy was oriented toward undermining Uighur culture and Islamic practices through tactics

5. Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 34.

including the forcible closure and destruction of mosques and the killing of religious leaders. The CCP has also actively encouraged Han settlement in Xinjiang as part of the Production and Construction Corps (PCC), paramilitary farms consisting primarily of demobilized troops.⁶ As a result of the increase in Han settlers in Xinjiang employed by the PCC or otherwise, the region has gone from 90% Uighur in 1949 to 45%–50% Uighur today.⁷ The increase in Han settlement has been a major source of friction in Uighur-Chinese relations.

With the onset of the Reform Era under Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s, greater economic freedom was afforded to the Uighurs, as “border minorities in general were encouraged to develop their economies through trade with neighboring countries.”⁸ Uighurs profited immensely, dominating trade in the region and establishing trade relations with Pakistanis and Uighurs who had fled to Pakistan in the 1930s to escape political repression. The Karakoram Highway gave rise to a number of trade ventures, with Uighurs buying wool and leather goods, clothing, cutlery, and jute bags and selling teas, hides, electrical equipment, hardware, and silk. Pakistani traders and tourists frequently traveled to Xinjiang, largely to Kashgar and the southern oases where their culture, music, and movies have left a visible mark to this day. Funneled in from Pakistan, the sights and sounds of Bollywood, the Indian film industry, are inescapable in the markets of Kashgar, from action movies playing in restaurants; blaring music emanating from stalls; to cheap notebooks with pictures of Indian actors and actresses on the cover, selling for a fraction of a dollar.

The cultural and religious freedom afforded to the Uighurs in the 1980s emerged in part from the government’s belief that, as Rudelson puts it, a “controlled ‘revival’ of cultural and religious affairs [would] encourage stability and economic development in the region and undermine nationalist movements and anti-government protests.”⁹ Large numbers of Uighurs were allowed to conduct the Hajj pilgrimage. Pakistan became a major transit point for Uighurs on their way to Hajj, making it and Saudi Arabia “focal countries for Islam” in the region. Most of the Uighur settlements that can be found in Pakistan today were established in the 1980s as transit points on the way to Mecca. Many Uighurs looked to Pakistani friends and acquaintances to provide

6. The PCC controls 48% of the region, including 30% of all arable and irrigated land today. Whereas in 1950 the area was home to only 300,000 Han, in 2000 more than 2.4 million Han Chinese were employed by the PCC in addition to the 4.6 million other Han settlers arriving there via the railroad to seek employment in the rapidly industrializing region. Uighur-American Organization, *Han Settlement Still Pouring into Western China’s Xinjiang Region*, August 2000, <<http://www.ughuramerican.org/mediareports/2000/afpaug2400.html>>.

7. Chien-Peng Chung, “China’s ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (July/August 2002).

8. June Teufel Dreyer, *China’s Political System* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000), p. 292.

9. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 129.

affidavits regarding their ability to host them, a written statement without which the Chinese government would refuse to let Uighurs leave the country.

Uighurs also enrolled in Pakistani schools and universities and some even traveled as far as Saudi Arabia and Egypt for their education. The Chinese government permitted many students to go abroad, though sometimes would not let them return to China for fear of their spreading Islamic ideologies and igniting separatist sentiments. Uighurs who went abroad for education often ended up settling overseas, including in Pakistan, where they raised their children as Pakistani citizens speaking Urdu as their first language.¹⁰ The Pakistani government accepted this Uighur presence on its soil, even allowing Uighurs to become citizens. However, there is no evidence that Islamabad ever supported the Uighurs' separatist aspirations. Thus, Uighur trade and movement along the highway in the early Reform Era pivoted on relatively stable Uighur-Han relations, a tolerant Pakistani government, and friendly cross-border personal relationships, thereby exposing the Uighurs to other forms of Islam and to fellow Muslims.

Rising Uighur Discontent in the 1990s

For many Uighurs, Beijing's sociopolitical and economic concessions were not far-reaching enough and its policies continued to be perceived as discriminatory. While the region had made significant advances with the introduction of economic reforms, the income gap between minority areas such as Xinjiang and other provinces continued to grow in the late 1980s. Uighurs complained that Han Chinese received preference for valuable jobs in the oil fields, key to the region's development, and elsewhere. They expressed anger at government family planning policies that curtailed the number of children that families could have, further threatening, in their view, the Uighur identity in lieu of a growing Han presence in Xinjiang. As tensions escalated and protests broke out, the government's concerns about the "pace of religious revival" increased. Following protests against the publication of a Chinese book titled *Xing Fengsu* (Sexual customs)¹¹ that allegedly denigrated Islam, Rudelson notes, the government increasingly "reverted to restrictive policies, amidst fears that Islam might provide a rallying point for ethnic nationalism and that Islamist movements abroad might inspire young Uighurs who had gone to study in foreign Islamic schools."¹² And so the 1990s were transformed into an exceptionally vicious decade in Xinjiang's history marked by a cycle of violence, as outlined in Table 1. Much of the discontent expressed through the 1990s has outlived the violence and is heard today in a considerably muted form. Uighurs point to

10. Author interview with Radio Free Asia's Dolkun Kamberi, Washington, D.C., March 2003.

11. *Xing Fengsu* [Sexual customs] (Shanghai: Shanghai Cultural Publication Society, 1989).

12. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 129.

TABLE 1 *Xinjiang's Cycle of Violence*

1989	Uighurs and Kazaks attack the Communist Party headquarters in Urumqi with rocks and steel bars following the publication of <i>Sexual Customs</i> , a book written by a Han author that allegedly defamed Islam; Beijing suspends mosque construction and closes many village Islamic schools.
1990	Uighurs and Kyrgyz clash over suspension of mosque construction and birth control policies; 50 people die and the province is closed for several months.
1992	Six people die in a Urumqi bus bombing.
1993	Three people die in bomb blast across from Kashgar's Seman Hotel.
1995	Riots occur in Hotan after government officials arrested an imam for refusing to help clear streets of mosque worshippers blocking traffic.
1996	Beijing implements "Strike Hard" campaign cracking down on "major common criminals," "ethnic splittists," and "illegal religious forces." During a two-month period, Xinjiang Public Security claims to have captured 2,700 criminals and terrorists, 4,000 sticks of dynamite, 6,000 pounds of explosives, 30,000 rounds of ammunition, and 600 firearms.
February 5–6, 1997	Series of protests launched in Illi, northern Xinjiang, culminating in 100 Uighur students waving the blue East Turkestan Republic flag; police open fire, killing 31 and wounding 200.
February 15, 1997	Uighur separatists bomb three buses in Urumqi to coincide with Deng Xiaoping's state funeral.
February 25, 1997	Pipe bomb explodes on a bus in the Xidan shopping district in Beijing.
1997–Present	Beijing further escalates campaign, resorting to mass arrests, summary sentencing, and executions, wiping out resistance.

SOURCE: Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 131.

English being introduced later in Uighur schools than in Han schools, giving Han people an advantage in applying for jobs, and to the destruction of mosques built by local community resources because they exceeded the height limit. Feelings of alienation remain strong, with some Uighurs shunning Han restaurants because they serve pork, while looking down on those Uighurs who do eat at Han establishments. Bemoaning the plight of Uighurs and the

stringent government controls on their physical movement, one Uighur from Hotan, a southern oasis known for its pro-independence stance, spoke of the futility and fatal consequences of resisting the government and of his desire to leave and go to any country with Muslims—Pakistan, India, or anywhere—and never come back to China.¹³

Reexamining Uighur Separatism

In examining deteriorating Uighur-Beijing relations in the 1990s, it is important not to categorically label all Uighurs as violent separatists. Uighur militancy does exist, though it is waning, and two exiled groups in Kazakhstan, the United National Revolutionary Front and the Organization for East Turkestan Freedom, have claimed responsibility for most of the bombings, stating that their struggle will continue until Xinjiang's independence is secured. By contrast, most Uighurs calling for "real autonomy" or independence have chosen more peaceful means to advocate their cause. Moreover, many Uighurs are no longer demanding "complete separatism or real independence, but generally express[ing] concerns over environment degradation, anti-nuclear testing, religious freedom, over-taxation and recently imposed limits on child-bearing."¹⁴

While large numbers of Uighurs avoid confrontation with the government out of fear of retribution, there is also a compelling economic incentive for many Uighurs to accept the status quo. With increased domestic and foreign investment in the region and a rise in the overall standard of living, Uighurs have been more successful than their Central Asian neighbors in improving their economic status by being part of the world's fastest growing economy. The Chinese government's promulgation of the "Go West" policy in 1999, which seeks to develop the western regions and facilitate greater economic growth, also holds clear benefits and will provide jobs for local Uighurs.¹⁵ Still, the Go West policy is viewed with considerable suspicion as continued development of the region attracts more Han settlers. As Nuri Turkel notes, the policy is seen by some Uighurs as one that "not only facilitates China's attempt to make the Uighurs second class citizens in their own homeland but also destroys Uighur cultural identity."¹⁶

13. Author interview, Urumqi, August 2002.

14. Mike Jendrzeczyk, "Condemning the Crackdown in Western China," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, December 16, 2002, <<http://www.hrw.org/editorials/2002/china1216.htm>>.

15. The policy has five priorities (1) improving infrastructure, (2) protecting the environment, (3) strengthening agricultural development, (4) adjusting the rural economic structure, and (5) developing science, technology, and education.

16. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *Statement by Nuri Turkel Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, April 10, 2003, <<http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/031003/turkel.php>>. Nuri Turkel is the General Secretary of the Uighur American Association.

Since the late 1990s, the Chinese government seems to have employed a carrot and stick strategy in Xinjiang, providing economic benefits to the Uighurs that have eroded their ambitions for independence while mercilessly clamping down on the region. Following protests in 1997, separatist activities have visibly declined and an uneasy sense of peace has descended, thinly veiling the bitterness that simmers beneath the surface to varying degrees in Xinjiang's oases.

The Karakoram Threat: Islam, Drugs, and HIV/AIDS

Along with suppressing religious practices and expressions of separatist sentiment within Xinjiang, the Chinese government has sought to prevent Uighurs from securing external ideological and material assistance that could fuel the separatist movement. From the Chinese perspective, the two biggest threats that have emerged along the Karakoram Highway are Islamic ideology and illegal drugs. Drugs in turn have directly contributed to what the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has termed China's "titanic peril": HIV/AIDS.

Radical Islam and the Uighurs

As June Teufel Dreyer notes, during the 1980s, upon China's call for increased trade, tourism, and foreign investment in the region, Xinjiang drew sympathy—and financial assistance—from Muslim states and individual benefactors.¹⁷ Many of these foreign patrons, particularly Saudi Arabia, poured in money to build mosques and establish *madrassas*. Amid an emerging Islamic consciousness and lax government policies on religious practices, many Uighurs traveled to Pakistan to study Islam in *madrassas* well into the 1990s. In recent years, because of the Chinese government crackdown in Xinjiang and the Pakistan government's policies, the number of Uighurs enrolled in *madrassas* in Pakistan has steadily declined. Still, Uighur religious activity in these schools helped instill in them a strong, moderate Muslim identity.

Many of these *madrassas*, however, promoted more radical views, and some Uighurs studied under the patronage of groups such as the Jamiat-i-Ulema Islami.¹⁸ These *madrassas* provided an important site for the recruitment of fighters, including Uighurs, in both the Soviet-Afghan War and the 2001 war in Afghanistan. According to Ahmed Rashid, author of *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*:

17. Dreyer, *China's Political System*, p. 292.

18. The Jamiat-i-Ulema Islami is one of Pakistan's largest religious parties that subscribes to the strict puritanical Wahabi version of Islam and was a close ally of the Taliban. Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 140.

. . . militant Uighurs had been deeply involved in the Islamic jihad movements around the region since the 1980s, when they first traveled south to Pakistan to join the Afghan Mujahideen parties. Hundreds of Uighurs began to study in Pakistani madrassas and honed their battle skills in Afghanistan, first with the Hizb-i-Islami Party and later with the Taliban.¹⁹

In his book *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, John Cooley claims that the Chinese government trained and armed Uighurs in conjunction with Pakistan as part of the successful anti-Soviet efforts. Cooley states that the price China paid for allowing the Uighurs to participate in a jihad was a “renewed and spreading revolt of the Uighurs.”²⁰ Many Uighurs who fought alongside the mujahideen returned to Xinjiang along the Karakoram Highway, in spite of the Chinese government’s efforts to thwart them. Subsequently, they joined the nationalist movement there, often violently agitating for independence. Thus, several factors—the cross-border linkages established by the Uighurs through access provided by the highway, Beijing’s tacit consent to expanded Uighur travel and economic links with Pakistan through Reform Era policies, and Beijing’s explicit consent in supporting anti-Soviet operations—all prompted the radicalization of a portion of Xinjiang’s Uighurs.

With the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, China’s fears of the Islamic threat were further compounded as the Taliban, along with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a jihadi group with ties to al-Qaeda, began to recruit Uighurs from the vast network of Pakistani *madrassas*, many of which follow the conservative Deobandi teachings and advocate jihad.²¹ During the late 1990s, China even covertly attempted to reach out to the Taliban and urge them to stop supporting a Uighur insurgency in China. In one instance, as Chinese pressure on Pakistan and the Taliban grew, the latter, locked in battle with the forces of Ahmed Shah Masood, simply moved its Uighur troops from the front lines to Mazar-Sharif in the north to join the IMU. At a later meeting in Kandahar between the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan and Taliban leader Mullah Muhammed Omar, the Taliban denied that Uighurs were part of their forces.²² It is now widely acknowledged that there were Uighurs who fought alongside the Taliban and al-Qaeda, some of whom were apprehended. In fact, in August

19. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

20. According to Cooley, China joined the anti-Soviet coalition during the Soviet-Afghan War for a number of reasons, including a desire to improve ties with the United States. It concluded a number of agreements with the U.S. aimed at providing Chinese arms to the fighters in Afghanistan. China agreed to let U.S. planes fly arms for the mujahideen through Chinese airspace, in addition to the transfer of materials along the Karakoram Highway. Aside from providing arms, China also set up camps in Xinjiang to train Uighur fighters and had up to 300 instructors and advisors stationed at camps in Pakistan at one point in the mid-1980s for such training. John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism* (Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002).

21. Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 204.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

2004 then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell confirmed the presence of 22 Uighurs at Guantanamo Bay during an interview with Radio Free Asia.²³ Chinese authorities have claimed that more than 1,000 Uighurs fought in Afghanistan. While over 300 fighters were captured in Afghanistan and more than 100 were caught returning to China, the rest remain in Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁴

China has been quick to capitalize on the war against terrorism to justify renewing its brutal “Strike Hard” campaign. On January 21, 2002, the Information Office of the State Council issued a report stating that “terrorist forces from Xinjiang jeopardized . . . social stability in China, and even threatened the security and stability of related countries and regions.”²⁵ An extension of this position has been China’s allegation that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a small separatist group within Xinjiang, is a terrorist group with strong ties to al-Qaeda. The United States has controversially subscribed to this argument, labeling the group a terrorist organization in August that year. Many scholars and human rights organizations have condemned China’s sweeping generalization of all Uighurs calling for independence as terrorists propelled by radical Islam. According to Human Rights Watch, China has sought to “blur the distinctions between terrorism and calls for independence by the ethnic Uighur community . . . in order to enlist international cooperation for its own campaign, begun years earlier, to eliminate ‘separatism’.”²⁶

While radical Islam has influenced some Uighurs, it does not hold widespread appeal, possibly because Uighurs generally practice a more moderate Sufi form of Islam and because Beijing has succeeded in restricting religious and political activities in Xinjiang. Some scholars have even dismissed radical Islam altogether as the impetus behind the more violent forms of resistance. In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Chien-peng Chung argues, “The latest wave of Uighur separatism has been inspired not by Osama bin Laden but by the unraveling of the Soviet Union, as militants seek to emulate the independence gained by some Muslim communities in Central Asia.”²⁷

Uighur Militancy and Sino-Pakistan Relations

China’s concerns over Uighur resistance to Beijing’s authority significantly escalated as militancy increased by groups within Pakistan that allegedly lent

23. “Powell: U.S. Ready to Fund ‘Irreversible’ Dismantling of North Korean Nukes,” Radio Free Asia, August 12, 2004, <<http://bric.rfaweb.org:8080/english/news/politics/2004/08/12/powell/>>.

24. “Separatist Leader Handed Over to China,” *Dawn* (Karachi), May 28, 2002, <<http://www.dawn.com/2002/05/28/top18.htm>>.

25. Human Rights Watch, *In the Name of Counter-Terrorism: Human Rights Abuses Worldwide*, April 1, 2003, <http://hrw.org/un/chr59/counter-terrorism-bck4.htm#P183_32636>.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Chien-Peng Chung, “China’s ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (July/August 2002).

ideological and material support to the Uighurs. A series of events strained Sino-Pakistan relations in the 1990s. In 1992, after a failed Islamist uprising in the town of Baren (near Kashgar) in which 22 people were killed, China closed its road links with Pakistan for several months. According to Ahmad Faruqi, "The Chinese closed the highway because they . . . wanted to send a strong signal to the government of Pakistan that China would not hesitate to freeze the close ties between the two neighbors if Pakistan did not stop its backing for Islamic militants."²⁸ In an agreement signed in 1995, China and Pakistan agreed to upgrade the highway to facilitate bilateral and transit trade among Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan; however, Beijing displayed visible hesitancy in implementing the agreement. Describing Beijing's stance, Ahmed Rashid wrote in December 1995, "Beijing's reluctance stems from the fact that the proposed road would run across Xinjiang and the Chinese fear that the route would increase the traffic in fundamentalism."²⁹ In August 1997, China announced a plan to erect a security fence along the Sino-Pakistan border to prevent terrorists and drug smugglers from entering the region.

The Sino-Pakistani land-based trade agreement of 1963 expired in 2000. Only in the past year or so have serious talks of renewing the agreement resumed, along with substantive discussions on concluding a free trade agreement, although neither had been inked as of June 2005. The provisions of the land-based trade agreement are meant to be reviewed each year on the basis of the prevailing business, social, and political situations in both countries. In the absence of such a document, Sino-Pakistani land-based trade has long been badly affected, while smuggling and illegal business activities have increased. An article in *Dawn*, Pakistan's largest English-language daily, speculated that China's lack of interest in the agreement is related to "the intrusion of our [Pakistan's] religious elements in the affairs of Sinkiang (Xinjiang)."³⁰

These instances of "intrusion" have allegedly involved training militants and supplying Uighur separatists with arms. In February 1998, the *Xinjiang Legal Daily* reported, "There is also evidence of trade in heroin and weapons over Xinjiang's borders with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Afghanistan and three Central Asian Republics."³¹ On January 6, 1999, the Chinese authorities lodged a protest with the Pakistan Interior Ministry after the arrest of 16 Pakistan-trained Uighurs in Xinjiang. The Chinese stated that the arrested persons had

28. Ahmad Faruqi, "China Card Could Yet Triumph Musharraf," *Asia Times Online*, April 5, 2003, <<http://www.ughuramerican.org>>.

29. "China and the Taliban: Some Facts," *Strategic Affairs*, April 5, 2003, <<http://www.stratmag.com/issue2Nov-15/page05.htm>>.

30. Sultan Ahmed, "Pakistan Missing Vast Opportunities in Xinjiang," *Dawn*, March 3, 2003, <<http://www.dawn.com/2003/03/03/eb6.htm>>.

31. "China, Pakistan Highlight Cooperation in Beijing," *People's Daily*, November 4, 2003, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200311/04/eng20031104_127511.shtml>.

admitted during interrogation that they had received guerrilla warfare training in camps at Jalalabad in Afghanistan and Landi Kotal in the Pakistani Khyber Agency.³² A *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) article in November 2003 stated that "small numbers of separatist Muslims from Xinjiang have reportedly trained in Al Qaeda camps in Pakistan."³³ Pakistani authorities have denied the existence of any such training camps for Uighur separatists. Whether these activities and exchanges occurred with the Pakistani government's knowledge cannot be ascertained; nevertheless, the circumstances served to sour Sino-Pakistan relations.

Drug Trade and HIV/AIDS

For China, the Karakoram Highway is also a major challenge because it serves as a conduit for an extensive drug trade.³⁴ Although previously drugs had arrived primarily from the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia (Burma, Laos, and Thailand), toward the late 1990s there was a significant increase in supply from the Golden Crescent (Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran).³⁵ In particular, heroin and opium from Afghanistan via Peshawar, Pakistan, have been a major regional problem. Drug smuggling operations are the primary source of funding for some Pakistani and Central Asian Islamic militant groups. In this context, Zhou Shengtao, deputy secretary of the Xinjiang Chinese Communist Party Committee, has alleged that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement has derived immense profits from drug trafficking.³⁶

Some Pakistani business people in Xinjiang complain bitterly about Afghans giving Pakistanis "a bad name" by faking Pakistani documents and smuggling drugs into China. These Afghans are accused of carrying drugs sewn into their clothes across the border. Although some have succeeded in bribing officials and securing their cooperation, others were caught and hanged.³⁷ Dealing with this drug trade was central to transborder security discussions throughout the 1990s, and China did not hesitate to take unilateral steps to address the problem.

32. "Continuing Unrest in China," Security and Political Risk Analysis (SAPRA), March 14, 1999, <http://www.subcontinent.com/sapra/world/w_1999_03_14.html>.

33. "China, Pakistan Highlight Cooperation in Beijing," *People's Daily*, November 4, 2003.

34. According to a 2002 U.N. global drug report, the number of registered drug addicts in China has risen more than 1,000% from 70,000 in 1990 to 901,000 in 2001, though experts place this number at over four million. "Global Illicit Drug Trends 2002," *Report by the United Nations International Drug Control Program* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002).

35. Ahmed Rashid, *From Deobandism to Batken: Adventures of an Islamic Heritage*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Forum, <<http://bglatzer.de/aga/files/a-rashid.htm>>, accessed April 10, 2003.

36. "China's Xinjiang Region Plans to Deal 'Hard Blow' to Drug-Related Crimes," BBC Monitoring Service, February 24 2002, <<http://www.mail-archive.com/uighur-l@taklamakan.org/msg02839.html>>.

37. Author interview, Kashgar, August 2002.

On June 4, 1996, the Urdu language daily *Nawai Waqt* quoted a Chinese diplomat as saying, "Dozens of [Pakistani] people, allegedly involved in smuggling of drugs, were arrested by Chinese guards and one has been sentenced to death. Several Pakistani drug smugglers are still languishing in Chinese jails."³⁸

With the influx of heroin and the shared use of contaminated needles, HIV/AIDS rates in Xinjiang have skyrocketed, contributing to the second-highest infection rate in the country. A total of 85% of all reported people living with HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang are Uighurs.³⁹ Ninety-six percent of reported infections have been detected among intravenous drug users and in some border communities, the infection rate among them now exceeds 70%.⁴⁰ The Chinese government's alacrity in curtailing the spread of drugs has not extended to its efforts to deal with the pandemic, which still has considerable social stigma attached to it.

It is impossible to examine the HIV/AIDS situation in Xinjiang separate from the sociopolitical dimensions of the area. Some experts have speculated that because of the political and economic challenges facing the Uighurs, they have essentially become a marginalized population with exceptionally high unemployment rates in certain parts of Xinjiang. As a result, many have fallen prey to the ready supply of drugs, and HIV/AIDS seems to have spread more within this ethnic group than in others nearby. As a 1999 UNESCO report, *The Globalization of the Drug Trade*, puts it, "Since the availability of supply creates a dynamic of demand, consumption today is exploding not only in the North (Xinjiang, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Gansu) but also in producer countries from Pakistan to Vietnam, a vicious circle fuelled by poverty and unemployment."⁴¹

With increasing numbers of Uighurs being infected with HIV/AIDS through intravenous drug use, a cycle of economic and political instability is being perpetuated, with joblessness and feelings of marginalization increasing and HIV/AIDS rates escalating. Addressing these aspects of the pandemic in Xinjiang, Alim Seytoff, president of the Uighur American Association, writes:

The current alternative for the Chinese government is to publicize the AIDS epidemic among the Uighurs and take immediate measures to prevent and contain this outbreak. Otherwise, the outbreak of AIDS among the Uighurs could serve as a catalyst in the Uighur struggle against Chinese rule in Xinjiang. When that time comes,

38. "Continuing Unrest in China," *SAPRA*, March 14, 1999, <http://www.subcontinent.com/sapra/world/w_1999_03_14.html>.

39. China U.N. Theme Group on HIV/AIDS for the U.N. Country Team in China, "HIV/AIDS: China's Titanic Peril," *2001 Update of the AIDS Situation and Needs Assessment Report* (Beijing: UNAIDS, 2001).

40. Joan Kaufman and Jun Jing, "China and AIDS—The Time to Act Is Now," *Science Magazine* 296 (2002), pp. 2339–40.

41. UNESCO, *The Globalization of the Drug Trade* (UNESCO, April 1999), <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001158/115833e.pdf>>, accessed April 10, 2003.

the Chinese government will find it extremely difficult to simultaneously contain both AIDS and a Uighur resistance movement. The eventual cost and consequence of the AIDS epidemic among the Uighurs promises to be devastating and destructive to the communist Chinese authorities.⁴²

Seytoff goes on to say that certain Uighurs actually perceive the pandemic to be yet another “government-sponsored plot” to weaken the Uighurs. Although this notion of the marginalized community is purely speculative and such a conspiracy theory verges on absurdity, it demonstrates the political framework within which the key issues in the region, from trade to Islam to HIV/AIDS, are expressed.

Pakistan’s “Uighur Policy”

The Pakistani government has maintained a sympathetic, yet never openly friendly, posture toward the Uighurs from the earliest stages of Pakistan’s relationship with China. No Pakistani government official has ever met publicly with Uighur leaders or promoted their cause. Through the 1990s, as the Chinese government cracked down on the region, Islamabad scrambled to show Beijing that although it tolerated the Uighurs’ presence on its soil, it was by no means supportive of their cause and placed a greater premium on Pakistan’s strategic ties with China than on its religious ties with the Uighurs.

On the ground, Uighur settlements and markets in Pakistani cities have been closed, although some have reopened. In December 2000, the Pakistani army closed two Uighur community centers called Kashgarabad and Hotanabad that had provided shelter for Uighur immigrants in Pakistan for decades. As a result, hundreds of Uighurs became homeless. According to the Uighur American Organization, when the Uighurs asked why the centers were being closed, the army officials told them that “the Pakistan government was pressured by China.”⁴³ The earliest reported deportation of Uighur students enrolled in local *madrassas* occurred when 14 students were deported to China in 1997 following the flag-waving protests in Illi, previously described in Table 1. Chinese authorities claimed that the students were connected with the recent bombings in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Amnesty International stated that the students were “handed over to Chinese authorities without any legal process and reportedly summarily executed on the Chinese side soon after being driven across the border.”⁴⁴

42. Alim Seytoff, “AIDS Epidemic Among Xinjiang’s Uighurs,” *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, <http://the_uighurs.tripod.com/AIDS.htm>, accessed April 1, 2003.

43. East Turkestan Information Center, *Uighur Community Centers in Pakistan Closed by Authorities*, December 2000, <<http://www.uighuramerican.org/mediareports/2000/eticdec200.html>>.

44. Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Transfer to U.S. Custody Without Human Right Guarantees*, <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA330142002?open&of=ENG-PAK>>, accessed March 25, 2003.

In 2001, an Indian Internet website, <dailypioneer.com>, posted an article claiming that a Pakistani intelligence agent captured by the Indian security agency had revealed that 19 Uighurs had been executed by the Pakistan Army at a training camp, at the behest of Beijing. The article was cited by the Uighur American Organization in its 2002 letter to the then-Pakistani ambassador to the United States, Maleeha Lodhi, protesting Pakistan's deportations.⁴⁵ In May 2002, Chinese authorities announced that Pakistan had detained Ismail Kader, a major Uighur separatist leader, at a secret meeting in Kashmir.⁴⁶ Most significantly, in December 2003, Pakistani authorities stated that Hasan Mahsum, leader of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, was shot dead on October 2 during a Pakistani military operation to flush out al-Qaeda elements in its South Waziristan tribal district.⁴⁷ The East Turkestan Islamic Movement was formally designated a terrorist organization by Beijing in its first-ever publicly released list of alleged terrorist organizations and terrorists in December 2003. The list consisted of four "East Turkestan" organizations and 11 individuals, including Mahsum.⁴⁸ The question of whether Mahsum's death was an operational goal or a "positive externality" is confounded by the significant lag time in the official Pakistani announcement. Nevertheless, his death likely makes Beijing more secure about its relationship with Pakistan in combating militant Uighurs.

Islamabad has also put pressure on religious leaders running *madrassas* not to accept any Uighurs. Although this has caused some tension between these mullahs and the government, the former have largely yielded. Their willingness to do so may have emerged from a shared desire to preserve Sino-Pakistan ties in the face of perennial hostilities with India and to win China's support for the Kashmir issue.

The Pakistani government's actions against the Uighurs have been accompanied by increasingly strong public rhetoric spelling out the official position on the Uighur issue. In a visit to China's Shaanxi Province in 2001, Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf, met with the imam of the Grand Mosque in Xi'an and urged all Chinese Muslims to be patriotic, shun violence, and "work for the good of China." During the same visit, a Chinese state television station quoted Musharraf as saying to then-Vice President Hu Jintao, "Pakistan

45. Uighur American Organization, "Appeal to Pakistan: Stop Deporting Uighurs to China," *Letter to the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States*, Maleeha Lodhi, <<http://www.mail-archive.com/uighur-l@taklamakan.org/msg02940.html>>, accessed March 25, 2003.

46. "Separatist Leader Handed Over to China," *Dawn*, May 28, 2002, <<http://www.dawn.com/2002/05/28/top18.htm>>.

47. "China's Top 'Terrorist' Killed in Pak Army Raid," *The Nation* (Lahore), December 23, 2003, <<http://www.nation.com.pk/daily/Dec-2003/24/main/top8.asp>>.

48. "China Seeks International Support in Counter Terrorism," *People's Daily*, December 16, 2003, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200312/16/eng20031216_130505.shtml>.

will wholeheartedly support China's battle to strike against the East Turkestan terrorist forces."⁴⁹ More recently, during Musharraf's November 2003 visit to China, he reportedly told now-President Hu Jintao that Pakistan would never allow anyone, including the terrorist forces of East Turkestan, to use Pakistani territory to carry out anti-China activities.⁵⁰ Both leaders signed the China-Pakistan Joint Declaration calling for bilateral cooperation in numerous areas, including combating "separatism, extremism, and terrorism" and law enforcement efforts against drugs, weapons, and human trafficking.⁵¹ The provisions of this declaration, along with the recently concluded Sino-Pakistan extradition treaty, make Pakistan's current zero tolerance for Uighur militancy abundantly clear, but it unfortunately also holds negative implications for moderate, peaceful Uighurs in Pakistan who may face repression stemming from Chinese pressure on Pakistan.

Aside from bowing to Chinese demands, Pakistan's crackdown on the Uighurs and warming relations with China have also been an attempt to alleviate China's growing concerns over strengthened U.S.-Pakistan ties following the events of September 11, 2001. China is wary of the speed with which Pakistan, shunned after its 1998 nuclear tests by the U.S., has become a staunch American ally: Washington has lifted sanctions and offered billions of dollars in aid and debt rescheduling. In response, Pakistan has assured China that "the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy is its close association and relationship with China."⁵² Pakistan's adoption of such a distinct counter-terrorism policy vis-à-vis the Uighurs may also be motivated by a desire to win Beijing's support for its own regional political agenda, which extends from the Kashmir issue to securing observer status in the SCO. Pakistan wants to prove that it is on China's side in its war on "terror" in order to avoid potential future Chinese censure of its Kashmir policy of supporting cross-border insurgency.⁵³

49. Uighur American Organization, *Musharraf Backs China Crackdown* (2001), <<http://www.uyghuramerican.org/mediareports/2001/Musharraf%20Backs%20China%20crack%20down.html>>, accessed March 25, 2003.

50. "China, Pakistan Highlight Cooperation in Beijing," *People's Daily*, November 4, 2003, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200311/04/eng20031104_127511.shtml>.

51. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *China-Pakistan Joint Declaration: 2003/11/04*, November 5, 2003, <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t40148.htm>>.

52. Council on Foreign Relations, *Terrorism: Question and Answers, East Turkestan Islamic Movement*, April 10, 2003, <<http://www.cfrterrorism.org/groups/etim.html>>.

53. The Shanghai Five is a powerful rising regional alliance of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan formed in 1996 to improve regional relations, in addition to combating international terrorism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and Islamic fundamentalism. The group expanded to include Uzbekistan in 2001, evolving into the SCO. Pakistan's reasons for wanting to join the SCO may range from economic concerns with gaining access to energy sources in Central Asia to political goals of improving ties with member states who view it with distrust for its prior support of the Taliban, which in turn supported other Islamic movements in the region. Bruce

Highway Trade Realities

One might expect that Pakistani business people in Xinjiang would continue to feel a strong sense of Islamic solidarity with the Uighurs in spite of, or perhaps because of, the Chinese and Pakistani governments' measures against the Uighurs. It seems, however, that the realities of conducting trade in the region with increased Han regulation have heightened tensions even between ordinary Uighurs and Pakistanis. In sharp contrast to the 1980s, the process of trade along the highway today and the culture of the trading communities where Uighurs and Pakistanis intermingle both demonstrate the fraying of socioeconomic ties between Uighurs and Pakistanis.

The exact number of Pakistanis living in Xinjiang or conducting business there is unknown, as many traders are only in the region for short periods of time and frequently travel back and forth across the border. The predominant Pakistani ethnic groups in the region appear to be Pathans from the North West Frontier Province and Punjabis. Pakistani tourists from as far south as Karachi also travel to Xinjiang. The Pakistani business people, truck drivers, and tourists who travel to Xinjiang are generally of a lower-middle-class background. In the following sections, the "ordinary Pakistani's" perceptions of and interactions with Uighurs will be conveyed through these individuals' experiences, as traced through field research conducted by the author in the cities of Urumqi, Kashgar, and Turpan in August 2002.

Trade Logistics

As outlined earlier, the Karakoram Highway's terminus points are Islamabad and Kashgar. Consumer goods are brought into Pakistan by truck: artificial jewelry, decorations, glasses and crockery, shoes, garments, lighters, and foreign cigarettes. Previously, many Pakistani business people bought Chinese goods produced in the southern Chinese provinces in Xinjiang's local markets. However, as they have prospered, they have increasingly begun to travel directly to these provinces via Xinjiang, buying goods at wholesale prices and cultivating business relationships with Han suppliers. To some extent, this has minimized the role of the highway as a conduit for social interaction with the Uighurs, marginalizing the Uighur community's role in business partnerships with Pakistanis and their intermediaries.

Chinese drivers load their trucks with goods bought by Pakistani traders and drive to the border where chartered Pakistani trucks reload the goods into their vehicles, transporting them into Pakistan. A major change in recent years has

Pannier, "Pakistan: Most Shanghai Forum Countries Welcome Membership Request," Radio Free Europe, <<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/01/11012001115924.asp>>, accessed March 20, 2003.

been the replacement of Uighur truck drivers with Han drivers. As of 2002, five major Han Chinese-controlled trucking companies operated in Xinjiang, charging a commission of 30% of the total value of the goods being carried across the border while giving the government a cut of their profit. The shift from Uighur to Han control over trade has markedly impacted the dynamics of business relationships in the region.

In one incident at the Kashgar long distance bus station, several Pakistani traders were caught up in an argument between a Han Chinese bus driver and a Han Chinese station official. While the former was preparing to drive the traders and other passengers into Pakistan, the latter was supervising the loading of trucks with goods that the Pakistani traders had bought. Because the goods did not all fit into the trucks and the Pakistani traders were afraid that their remaining goods would be stolen, they successfully bribed the bus driver into placing some of these goods on top of the passenger bus. Subsequently, a heated argument ensued between the bus driver and the official, who thought that it was too dangerous to overload the bus, already weighed down by the passengers' luggage. The argument was finally resolved and the remaining goods were placed atop the bus, while the driver examined the Pakistani passengers' passports, chatting with them in fluent Urdu. The incident was marked by an absence of any Uighur officials or persons, illustrating the growing importance of relations with the Han for business purposes for Pakistani traders.

Consular Affairs, Spouses, and Sponsors

Following the events of September 11, 2001, and the war in Afghanistan, security at the border has increased considerably, to the extent that Chinese border officials sometimes read the letters of incoming Pakistani traders. Chinese authorities now randomly stop Uighur traders along the highway, questioning them on their business contacts in Pakistan and occasionally confiscating their property. Corruption is rampant among border officials, who often charge high fees at arbitrary points in the journey for both traders and tourists traveling between China and Pakistan. Pakistani traders and tourists have few resources when dealing with any type of consular affairs, which results largely in increased bribery of Chinese officials. There are no Pakistani government offices in Xinjiang that can assist in resolving visa and passport issues. Traders have to apply for a visa that lasts for one month, before leaving their country. If they need to extend their stay, they have to pay off local Chinese officials into granting them an extension that usually lasts six months. Post-September 11, Chinese official policy stipulates that no extensions can be granted and that traders need to return to Pakistan to secure further documentation before coming back to China. In addition, the Chinese government recently stated that traders can only enter and leave the country in groups, though this regulation

has been largely evaded. If an individual Pakistani were to lose his passport in Xinjiang, he would either have to post bail or do hard time to make enough money to return home by road. Some individuals in the area argue that these rapidly increasing levels of corruption are arising from the greater control and power that Han authorities exercise in Xinjiang today.

Many Pakistani merchants circumvent Chinese rules and regulations by finding local spouses and sponsors. In order to secure a visa extension, many male traders marry local women, preferably Han, who generally enjoy a higher socioeconomic standing than Uighur women and are perceived to be more faithful. By marrying Chinese citizens, Pakistani businessmen are allowed to enter China on a more frequent basis during the year, after presenting a special card and picture of their spouse at the border.

Pakistani traders also cultivate sponsors or patrons among individuals working in government agencies or holding some social standing, once again generally Han Chinese. They develop a rapport with such individual benefactors who, in turn, speak up on the traders' behalf if they run into trouble with the local authorities. For example, Batt Sahib from Rawalpindi spoke fondly of his patron, known as Miss Lily, who was affiliated with a Chinese tour company, and described how he always brought her and her family presents from Pakistan. She translated and helped him deal with medical issues or the authorities, negotiating his release from the police after he was apprehended during a street brawl.

From conducting business with Han Chinese trucking companies and drivers to bribing Han officials over visa and passport problems to securing Han Chinese patrons, Pakistani business people have increasingly worked with and around Han Chinese authorities at the expense of maintaining good business relations with the Uighurs. As one trader put it, were he to get in trouble, he would need the Chinese authorities' help and not the Uighurs'. What is even more telling about this shift in alignment is that while the Han authorities have constrained previously relatively unregulated trade, many Pakistani business people perceive them to be strict but fair, never overly harsh or belligerent toward the Pakistanis.

One businessman shared an anecdote that aptly illustrated this attitude. Once, when he was purchasing goods in a store where another Pakistani had previously used fake currency, the storekeeper immediately called the police. After the policeman verified that the currency was legitimate, he apologized and even went so far as to call a taxi for the trader. This demonstrated to the Pakistani that the Chinese authorities could be just and friendly in carrying out their duties. Although rampant corruption among authorities has been highlighted in the media and elsewhere, it seems to be taken for granted by most Pakistani business people. Framed within the realities of their world, they see the actions of the Han authorities as being, on balance, reasonable.

Uighur-Pakistani Alienation

A growing social alienation pervades the ethnically diverse enclaves where Pakistanis and Uighurs live in Urumqi; this may be connected to their economic estrangement. On the surface, these neighborhoods seem to reflect a harmonious coexistence among the Uighurs and Pakistanis because of their cultural similarities—for example, similar cuisines. Nevertheless, underneath, they maintain a strong and aloof spirit of kinship. Despite eating at the same restaurants, Uighurs will eat separately from Pakistanis; the latter limit their interactions to fellow Pakistanis. In interviews, many Pakistanis describe the neighborhoods as being replete with deceit and debauchery. Considerable counterfeit currency is circulated, to the point that even officials sometime hesitate to take bribes. Pakistani traders have learned to be extremely discerning in terms of which money is changing hands and some Uighurs and Pakistanis shy away from conducting any monetary exchange with one another. In general, many Uighurs and Pakistanis complain about the others' lack of scruples.

Many Pakistanis also criticize the Uighurs for drinking alcohol, which often leads to drunken brawls that spill into the streets. At times, these brawls arise between the two groups, so the Pakistanis are careful to avoid certain areas of town late at night. Although there are undoubtedly Pakistanis in the region who also drink alcohol, those that strictly eschew it look unfavorably upon the Uighurs. They also censure the Uighurs for not praying regularly. This perception of spiritual laxity clearly diminishes any sense of Islamic allegiance that certain Pakistanis may have previously had toward the Uighurs.

Some of these critics, however, attribute the Uighurs' alleged drunken excesses and spiritual bankruptcy to the increasingly pervasive and "corrupting" Han culture, in which drinking is integral to many social activities. Closely linked to this perception is the word chosen by many Pakistanis to describe the Han Chinese: *kafir* (heathen). This word choice underscores the "Muslim vs. non-Muslim" lens through which Pakistanis view the tension between the Uighurs and the Han Chinese; nevertheless, it carries different weights for different people. To some the Han, as *kafirs*, are simply people who do not believe in Islam. To others, the word *kafir* has a much more loaded meaning, referring to the heathen who actively threaten and undermine the message of Islam, hearkening to the Chinese government's restrictive policies. And so, in successfully constraining and diluting the Uighurs' Muslim identity, the Chinese government has inadvertently increased the social divide between the Uighurs and the more devout Pakistanis, who view the Uighurs as insufficiently pious.

Certain Pakistani traders also criticize the rampant prostitution in cities such as Urumqi, largely involving Uighur women. As with alcohol, the Pakistanis are quick to condemn the Uighur women for their actions—while employing their services. In contrast to Han women, Uighur women are dismissed as being promiscuous and unfaithful. In one anecdote that a Pakistani trader shared, a

Uighur woman went to leave her Pakistani husband at the airport, crying the whole way because of their imminent separation. But shortly after the man left her to board the plane, he looked back only to discover that she was in the arms of another man. Whether a spouse is Muslim or not is of great importance to most Pakistanis, for Islam forbids them to marry adherents of non-monotheistic religions. Nevertheless, some Pakistanis in Xinjiang, though themselves in breach of their faith, dismiss Uighur women and society as being only nominally Muslim.

The economic and social alienation that exists between Pakistanis and Uighurs today should not necessarily be seen as comprising two distinct processes. Although the growing Han Chinese presence in Xinjiang has partially raised the overall Uighur standard of living, in Chung's view the Han "dominate commerce areas in Xinjiang's urban areas and are frequently seen as having the region's best jobs in the government, the Communist Party and the military."⁵⁴ As discussed above, some experts have theorized that growing economic marginalization of the Uighurs has turned some of them to alcohol and illegal drugs, whose use has directly spawned the highest HIV/AIDS rates among the ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Similarly, because they are poor many Uighur women have had to resort to prostitution to earn money, leaving themselves vulnerable to contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Thus, the aspects of urban Uighur society that have caused the growing rift between Uighurs and Pakistanis can be traced to the diminishing socioeconomic status of the Uighurs, closely linked to an increasing Han presence. Interestingly enough, some Pakistani men seem to be simultaneously undergoing a process of cultural "Sinification," characterized by learning to speak Mandarin, dating Han Chinese women, and eschewing Pakistani/Uighur food for Han Chinese food. These Pakistanis subscribe only minimally to their religious identity.

Because they must cultivate relationships with Han authorities and because they perceive Uighurs as being socioeconomically and spiritually weak, many Pakistanis today support the Chinese government against the Uighurs. They do sympathize somewhat with them because of the strict restrictions imposed regarding religious practice and physical movement, and because of the ever-increasing Han presence in the cities. Nevertheless, many Pakistanis somewhat surprisingly maintain that the Uighurs are troublemakers given to wanton behavior, whom the government should keep under control. Some even believe that the Uighurs should be grateful, as goods in Xinjiang are relatively cheap and the government has provided them with a means of livelihood. In dismissing the Uighurs as bad Muslims, it seems that Pakistanis have found it easier to reconcile themselves to the Chinese government's policies. These

54. Chien-Peng Chung, "China's 'War on Terror': September 11 and Uighur Separatism," *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (July/August 2002).

attitudes on the ground, guided by personal interests and a lack of affiliation with the Uighurs, largely reflect the current Pakistani government policy toward the Uighurs.

The Uighur View

The policies and attitudes of the Pakistani government and business people have elicited a strong and bitter reaction among the Uighurs. Many Uighurs have protested against the closing of settlements within Pakistan and deportations to China. The alleged execution of the Uighurs under deportation to China in 1997 left little doubt in the minds of many as to the extent of Pakistan's allegiance to China. International Uighur advocacy groups have posted letters raising these issues on their websites, addressed to Pakistani officials. In one such letter to the Pakistani ambassador to the United States, the Uighur American Organization asked Pakistan to reconsider its closure of Uighur settlements during Ramadan:

Uighur and Pakistan people have been good neighbours for thousands of years. We not only share the same religion we also share many cultural traditions. But, today we Uighurs are fighting desperately to save those very things we share with you. Our Islamic religion and culture are under constant attack by the atheist Chinese communist regime. In fact, what Uighur people are experiencing is nothing less than genocide! It hurts to get a slap from a friend at such a hard time! We do not blame Pakistan or the other Muslim countries for turning a blind eye on our sufferings. We do not ask Pakistan government to stand up for us. We know it is too much to ask. But, we ask Pakistan government to stand by its law and principle and give Uighurs the same treatment they have been getting else where in the world.⁵⁵

Within Xinjiang, many Uighurs highlight the same faults in Pakistanis that the latter point to in them, namely a lack of scruples and wanton behavior. A continual sore point for Uighur men has been the behavior of Pakistani men toward Uighur women: "Uighurs act negatively toward Pakistanis and accuse them of leering at or making suggestive comments to Uighur women."⁵⁶ Many Uighurs also distrust Pakistanis and consider them to be dishonest in their business practices, as described earlier. While dining in a street side restaurant, a Pakistani businessman pointed out a Uighur acquaintance who had risen to prominence. As a child, the Uighur man used to ride in his vehicle with him; he had grown up before the Pakistani's eyes. Upon starting his own business, the Uighur had been cheated out of money by another Pakistani businessman. Ever since, he had been wary and distrustful of maintaining business relations with any Pakistani trader.

55. Uighur American Organization, *Letter to the Pakistani Ambassador in the United States*, <<http://www.uighuramerican.org/recentevents/lettertopak.html>>, accessed March 26, 2003.

56. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 62.

Xinjiang is a vast region, and different perceptions of Pakistanis are prevalent in different oases. In the eastern oasis city of Turpan, away from the historic trade routes linking Xinjiang to the Indian Subcontinent, many Uighurs have limited interaction with Pakistanis. Pakistanis are greeted with considerable warmth and there is a great deal of emphasis on shared Muslim identity. In Urumqi, many Uighurs are also hospitable to Pakistanis and able to speak Urdu and cook Pakistani food. In Kashgar, however, where there are plenty of Pakistani business people, the Uighurs' distrust of Pakistanis seems almost palpable at times. Thus, among Uighurs who live in areas with a limited Pakistani presence, the sense of affiliation with Pakistan is much stronger and genuinely warm; in cities such as Kashgar where interaction between Uighurs and Pakistanis is frequent and centered around trade, tensions seem to run high.

Conclusion

Compared to the early years of the Reform Era, today the Uighurs suffer from decreased control over their religious practices, mobility, and trade, also manifesting increased disillusionment with their Pakistani co-religionists, although expectations were in fact never particularly high for these relations. Islamic ideology does not significantly serve to rally the Uighurs to the side of the Pakistanis or in opposition to the Han Chinese. China's curtailing of external influences has successfully prevented a vigorous revitalization of the Uighur Muslim identity; still, Uighurs remain proud of their heritage and quietly defiant toward the Chinese government. China faces a dilemma: suppress Islam and alienate the Uighurs or encourage religious practices to curry their favor even though these could lead to the Uighurs' feeling "more separate and apathetic toward Chinese society."⁵⁷ To achieve the right balance, China needs to reexamine its current rhetoric and policies toward the Uighurs and address the long-standing socioeconomic and political roots of Uighur discontent. Beijing's vociferous dismissal of Uighurs' calling for reform, greater autonomy, or even independence as separatists, terrorists, and criminals with ties to al-Qaeda demonstrates a disturbing disregard for the fact that most Uighurs have not affiliated themselves with radical Islam or violently resisted the government. China's draconian policies to combat these "terrorists" may well polarize moderate Uighurs and create the very problem they are aimed at "solving."

Pakistani official action against the Uighurs and assurances at the highest level of Islamabad's refusal to tolerate organizations on its soil carrying out anti-China activities have both helped diminish China's fears that Pakistan has had a hand in the threat along the Karakoram. Pakistan's success in regaining China's trust on this matter is acutely reflected in two provisions of the November 2003 China-Pakistan Joint Declaration:

57. Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, p. 48.

- Promote and standardize border trade. The two parties will take steps to facilitate existing border trade and further take steps to conclude a new border trade agreement so as to promote their economic development and social stability, especially in the border areas.
- Strengthen transport cooperation and promote interflow of personnel and commodities through the Karakoram Highway.

China is also investing heavily in the Gwadar Port project in Baluchistan, touted as the potential seaport where goods can be exported from and imported into western China.⁵⁸

As Sino-Pakistan relations continue to evolve in the face of the growing Sino-Indian rapprochement, the Pakistani government will likely continue to offer unflinching assistance to the Chinese in dealing with the Uighurs, inevitably leading to the suffering of many peaceful Uighurs in official dragnets. Islamabad will want to ensure that drug and weapons trafficking, and the movement of militants along the highway, are all stopped. While the spread of ideologies will be harder to check, the problem has not escaped the notice of the Pakistani media, where little mention is made of the potential appeal of radical Islam to Uighurs facing Beijing's oppressive policies or the gross human rights violations that take place in Xinjiang. As Kamal Matinuddin, a retired lieutenant-general of the Pakistan Army and member of the recently established Pakistan-China Friendship Forum, stated in an article in a Pakistani newspaper *The News*:⁵⁹

China is spending a lot of resources developing its western region. According to some Chinese sources, outside elements have ties with religious and ethnic separatists in Xinjiang. They believe that this is the Al-Qaeda network, which is giving them trouble in that province. Pakistan must ensure that overzealous and extremist elements amongst us do not encourage this tendency in any way whatsoever. We should not allow them to harm our time-tested friendship with China.⁶⁰

And so Beijing and Islamabad's prior "tolerance" of the Uighurs has been supplanted by a forceful marginalization of the Uighurs today, as reflected in government policy and ground realities.

58. For more on the Gwadar Port, see Ziad Haider, "Baluchis, Beijing, and the Gwadar Port," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 6:1 (Winter/Spring 2005), <<http://journal.georgetown.edu/Issues/6.1/?article=politicsdip.html>>.

59. The Pakistan-China Friendship Forum was established during then-Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali's March 2003 visit to China. The Forum facilitates a deepening of bilateral relations and makes recommendations to both governments, many of which were incorporated in the China-Pakistan Joint Declaration in November 2003.

60. Kamal Matinuddin, "Pak-China Friendship Forum," *The News* (Pakistan), November 15, 2003.