

EAST TURKESTAN REPORT

Religious And Ethnic Pressure From Past To Present

JULY 2020



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Research 119
East Turkestan
July 2020

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For Citation: İzbasar, Nureddin.
*East Turkestan Report: Religious
And Ethnic Pressure From Past To
Present*, Research 119. INSAMER. July
2020.

Responsibility for the information and
views set out in this publication lies
entirely with the authors.

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Nuhun Gemisi

Cover and Page Design

M. Masum Kır

Printing: Pelikan Basım

Maltepe Mh. Gümüşsuyu Cd.

Odin İş Merkezi No. 1/28

Topkapı-İSTANBUL



İNSAMER
İHH İNSANI VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

INSAMER is a research center of IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation.

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INTRODUCTION

The resistance of East Turkestan against assimilation and from being labeled as Chinese was considered a political challenge by the central Chinese administration and this situation was perceived as a security problem that would hinder China's industrialization especially in the 1980s.

The region had intermittent autonomy and occasional independence until 1949 when the forces attached to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) occupied it. China systematically and mercilessly occupied the region and forced to integrate its people into the Chinese population. China also monopolized the region's agricultural lands and rich underground assets. After an organized intense influx of Chinese settlers in the region, the connection of East

Turkestan with the world was cut by a wide intelligence network and security measures. Subsequently, all kinds of interventions that violate basic human rights were easily implemented.

The resistance of East Turkestan against assimilation and from being labeled as Chinese was considered a political challenge for the central Chinese administration and this situation was perceived as a security problem that would hinder China's industrialization especially in the 1980s. In the 1990s, turbulent political developments and the collapse of the communist bloc triggered many changes in the Central Asian geography including East Turkestan in which tensions accelerated. Following September 11 2001, the Chinese government started justifying and even facilitating its repression and actions toward the Uyghurs as part of the global "War on Terror". Its systematic escalation policy has been constantly and continually implemented until present.



As its strength in global politics and economy is increasing day by day, by 2010 China showed itself remarkably sensitive to criticism related to repression and rights violations of the East Turkestan people. Many families in East Turkestan have been detained and considered potential risks. Millions of people are gathered in camps and deprived of their liberty. While pressure

continues for the transformation of people in East Turkestan, actions have been accelerated to destroy the Uyghur cultural and religious heritage.

This report in your hands explains the transformation of East Turkestan throughout history and elaborates the period of ongoing violations it survived under the Chinese occupation.

WHERE IS EAST TURKESTAN?

East Turkestan is the name of the eastern region of Central Asian lands previously known as Ulu Turkestan (Great Turkestan) that has been divided into two parts throughout historical developments. East Turkestan's area is 1.823.000 km², third of which lays in Taklamakan, the second-largest desert

in the world. East Turkestan is bordered by Russia and Mongolia to the north; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, and India to the west; Mongolia and China to the east and its southeast is distinguished by the Dark Mountains and the Tibetan plateau.



The major water resource in East Turkestan is the 2000 km-long Tarim River. Ili and Irtysh rivers are also the region's important rivers that also provide clean water to other countries. The wide agricultural areas irrigated by these rivers have shaped the region's most ancient settlements. Kashgar, Yarkent, Karakash, Hoten, Bachu, Aksu, Kuqa, and Karashehir are the largest cities of the oases. In these oases, grain products are harvested twice a year. Moreover, these oases are the largest cotton production areas in East Turkestan.

The oldest settlements of East Turkestan prior to the communist Chinese invasion

were the Tarim's basin, Turfan Plain, Komul steppes, and Ili Plain, while the Kazakh Turks were the majority in the southern parts of the Altai Mountains, Tarbagatai and Kunes plateaus. Moreover, Kyrgyz Turks and Tajiks lived as nomadic tribes in East Turkestan. Apart from the Turks, a small number of Mongolian tribes lived a nomadic life in the region as well.

Following the Chinese Manchu invasion in 1759, Chinese ethnic people first inhabited regions such as the Muslim-Chinese Dungan tribe and the Sibe branch of the Manchu tribe, along with some other ethnic groups.

East Turkestan's 1953 official statistics said there was over 4 million Turkish-origin population, including 3,640,000 Uyghur, 504,000 Kazakh, and 70,000 Kyrgyz. In the same period, the Chinese population in the region was about 300,000. Accordingly, 90% of the region was composed of Muslims of Turkish origin, while only 7% were Chinese.

By the 1980s, China's official statistics reported that the Han Chinese population in East Turkestan reached almost 8,600,000, equal to almost 40% of the total population of the region, while the Uyghur Turks fell to 11,303,000, which is approximately 55% of the population. Apart from these two ethnic groups, there are also 1,590,000 Kazakh Turks that live in the region. East Turkestan academics affirm that the official figures do not reflect the reality; they claim that the number of Muslim Turks in the region is at least three times the reported numbers.

China founded the city of Urumqi after the invasion of East Turkestan due to the strategic importance of the region, making the city with the highest immigrant population. Aside from Urumqi, China built other crowded industrial cities with many oil companies. Apart from that, Altai, Tarbagatai, and Tacheng are the cities resided mostly by Chinese. Recently, due to the increasing number of arrests and as a result of mass internment camps, the region became sparsely populated with many Han Chinese that settled there with serious financial support.

East Turkestan is rich with natural resources, 138 different mineral types

East Turkestan is rich in natural resources, containing 138 different mineral types so far, constituting 78% of the variety of minerals in China.

have been identified so far in the region, which makes up 78% of the variety of China's minerals. Actively operating mines in East Turkestan are 85% of all mines in China. The most prominent mines include chrome, salt, iron, asbestos, manganese, copper, silicon, lead, diamond, gold, silver, coal, and uranium. Since most of these metals are not found in the inner regions of China, they are converted into usable raw materials and then transported to factories of the inner regions. For example, according to 2015 data, a total of 27,880,000 tons of crude oil extracted from four major oil basins in East Turkestan in one year were moved to the inner regions of China. By the end of 2020, China plans to increase its extraction to 29 million tons of oil and 36 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. More than 60% of China's annual oil production is extracted from East Turkestan. In terms of energy resources, East Turkestan is very rich with oil. According to geologists, there is a total of 60 billion tons of oil reserves in East Turkestan. In addition to oil, 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas are transported to Shanghai, Fujian, and Guangzhou regions through three large pipelines with a total length of 7,378 km.

China plans to increase the number of pipelines to five. Besides, being the world's

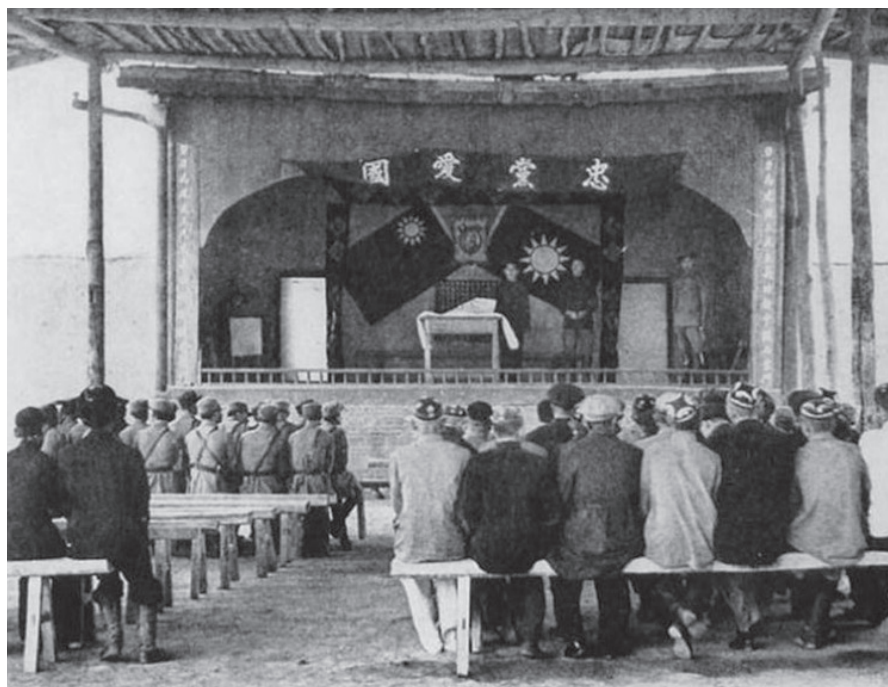
largest cotton producer, 84% of China's cotton comes from East Turkestan.⁸

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Many historians describe the Altai Mountains on the northern border of East Turkestan as the place where the Turks first appeared. According to written historical sources, East Turkestan was part of all the states founded by Huns, Gokturks, and Uyghurs that have ruled the region since the 4th century.

During this period when the Turkish states firstly emerged, The Chinese people had simultaneous intensified attacks on the region. While the Chinese had to withdraw from the

region in 752, local states based in East Turkestan emerged such as the Kara-Khanid Khanate State in 842 and the Qocho Kingdom Khanate in 845, after the Turks in the region accepted Islam. The stability of the region, which was governed as regional Islamic Khanates, was disturbed by the Mongol attacks since the beginning of the 13th century. As a result, East Turkestan was ruled by Chagatai, the son of Genghis. When the Chagatai Khanate weakened, the Timur Empire was established, and soon new divisions took place



The Seyyid Kingdom interval, which was full of political turmoil, created a security weakness and paved the way for “The preparatory era of the Chinese invasion” which occurred years later.

among the local administrators of Turkestan. Thus, the East Turkestan geography was divided between the Dzungar Khanate, the East Chagatai Khanate, and the Yarkent Khanate. Each Khanate tried to gain superiority over the other between 1347 and 1696. After 1696, the Seyyid period began. The main problem that marked this period was the power struggle between the Afakiyye and Ishakiyye sects. This internal power dispute that involved Mongolia and China ended in 1759 with the Manchu invasion. In other words, the Seyyid Kingdom interval, which was full of political turmoil, created a security weakness and paved the way for “The preparatory era of the Chinese invasion” which occurred years later.

The uprising of the local people against the Chinese lasted until 1764, the year when the Seyyid Kingdom was destroyed and the Chinese conquered East Turkestan. It is recorded that more than 500,000 died in Turkestan during the ten-year resistance. In the following period; many attempts were made to regain independence such as The Big Seyyid Revolt (1757-1759), the Uchturfan Igde Revolt (1765), the Seyyid Diya al-Din Revolt (1847), the Veli Han Tore Rebellion (1857), and the Kuqa Rebellion (1862).

After the last revolution in Kuqa, the Chinese were expelled from most regions of East Turkestan. Yakup Beg, who managed to take the city-states under his administration in a short time, established the Kashgar Emirate in East Turkestan. After Yakup Beg ruled the Kashgar Emirate in 1870, it became a neighbor to two great powers, namely the Russian and British Raj Empire.

While the Kashgar Emirate's policy was to avoid conflict with the British, the relations with the Russian State - which started to spread throughout the Central Asian and Turkestan regions - were not the same. Due to the spread of Russia's authority, which was seen as a threat to whole region of Turkestan, the Kashgar Emirate asked help from the Ottoman Empire. This request was welcomed by the Ottomans, and the requested weapons and military personnel were sent to the region. Thus, the Ottoman Empire was able to balance Russia and became more involved and effective in Asian politics, and made use of the fact that China would not be able to directly respond to it.

On June 16 1873, Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz accepted Yakup Beg's allegiance request and gave him the

The Chinese conquered East Turkestan and terminated its independence by destroying the Seyyid Kingdom. As a result, the people of the region resisted the Chinese conquest between 1754 and 1764. It was recorded that more than 500,000 died in Turkestan during the ten-year resistance.

title of “Emir” and allowed him to deliver khutbah and mint coins in the name of the Caliph in Kashgar. In addition to these symbolic political steps, the Ottomans sent six cannons, 1,200 rifles, ammunition, and several gunpowder manufacturers to the Emir of Kashgar along with four officers to train the Kashgar army. Military aid sent by the Ottomans not only created satisfaction but also strengthened the desire and hope of liberty in other Muslim Turkish states under Russian occupation.

However, the death of Yakup Beg in 1877 revived the Chinese ambitions toward the region. The presence of a state affiliated to the Ottoman Empire in the region was not accepted neither by Russia nor China, making these two great powers allied in 1875. Eventually, China turned the sudden death of Yakup Beg into an opportunity for internal reckoning; it invaded East Turkestan with a force of 80,000 soldiers. Upon the Chinese invasion, anyone who worked for Yakup Beg was arrested and imprisoned, and most of them were killed.

When reports about the general situation in Kashgar reached the Ottomans, troops under the command of Major İsmail Hakkı Bey and Captain Ali Kazım İbrahim Efendi were sent to the region for support. However, even though the Ottoman troops defended Kashgar against the Chinese-Russian alliance for a while, they left the region and returned to Istanbul via India when they ran out of ammunition and food.

China's second military campaign to occupy East Turkestan took place in 1884, and the region was transformed into a province of China, and its name was changed to Xinjiang, which is still used today. As a result of 25 years of repression and revenge policies, new movements arose in the region mainly after 1911 as China's central authority began to weaken. Even though most of these actions were violently suppressed, the events continued restlessly until 1933. Ultimately, the independence movement that started in the mountainous area of Kumul resulted in the establishment of the East Turkestan Islamic Republic in Kashgar on November 12 1933.

This republic was entirely founded by the means and national will of the people of East Turkestan, without the support of any foreign country. The Islamic Republic of East Turkestan declared a 30-article constitution and declared their flag, which consists of a moon and a star on a sky-blue background, of which is still used until today. Khoja Niyaz Haji became president of this independent state.

The establishment of new East Turkestan brought its two enemies, China and The Soviet Union, closer together, and the cooperation to curb this new nation soon followed. Considering that the independence of East Turkestan would pose a danger to other Turkish states under Russian occupation, the Soviet Union supported China's military and intelligence, which was effective at suppressing East Turkestan's national forces.

Unfortunately, the Dungans (Muslim Chinese) played a role in the collapse of the state. After the invasion of East Turkestan, the Dungans started to come to East Turkestan with Chinese immigrant. They did not receive much suspicion from the local people because they were Muslims. However, the fact that the Dungans were constantly on the Chinese side throughout East Turkistan's independence fights and other political events, and the fact that they belonged to the Chinese culture in a cultural sense, had negative consequences for the East Turkestan State. The Dungans partnered with the Chinese in massacres against the people of East Turkestan, and they were later massacred by Russia.

11 years after the collapse of the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan, Chinese militias in the region made contacts with the government of Kuomintang (KMT) Chinese National Party which dominates central China. As a result of the increasing oppression of the nationalist Chinese administration in



the region, an uprising in East Turkestan started under the leadership of Elihan Tore in the city of Ghulja. This uprising brought up the establishment of the East Turkestan Republic again with the participation of the Kazakh tribes. Thus, a new period of independence started in November 1944.

At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which received the support of the Soviet Union, increased their power in the civil war between them and the nationalists in other parts of China. In this turmoil, on June 13 1946, Elihan Tore was detained and kidnapped. Thousands of people were also arrested and executed in the repressive operations that began immediately afterwards.

In 1949, when the Communist forces took over all of China, a local

governor named Emetjan Qasim was put in office of East Turkestan with Russia's support. Qasim, who had no opportunity to negotiate with China, sat down with the CCP and signed an agreement declaring the dissolving of the East Turkestan Republic government, making him Vice President of the Xinjiang Province. After a short while - the same year - on his way to Beijing, he died in a suspicious airplane crash.

After the CCP forces reached Urumqi on October 13 1949, local Turkish forces were disbanded. The

CCP liquidated its non-obedient commanders and Turkish soldiers until 1955; pro-independence nationalists, intellectuals, Imams, and leading public figures of the region were either arrested or executed.

In 1955, East Turkestan was designated as an autonomous region and was given the name "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region". Since then, all madrasahs (Islamic schools) in East Turkestan were closed. Turkish Islamic tradition as well as all traces of 1,000 year-old history were erased.

COMMUNIST CHINA'S INVASION AND COLONIZATION

With the CCP army invading East Turkestan, a new historical period

started in 1949 and has continued until today. Since West Turkestan (Central Asian countries) was also occupied by the Soviet Union, East Turkestan was disconnected from the whole world and the region quickly became a closed box. While the Chinese were making intense Communist propaganda, they quickly implemented social transformation policies under the name of land reform, expropriation, and socialist-style sharing. Within the framework of these policies, the community's leading and noble families were firstly destroyed, then the means of production of the people were confiscated; on top of that, people were deprived of land and taken into forced labor camps.

The CCP administration, which had difficulty spreading its ideology to the



In 1966 Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in China. The revolution has had devastating consequences for all people across the country, especially those in East Turkestan.

Muslims in East Turkestan, closed the madrasahs, which are fundamental institutions for Islamic education. Moreover, they made warnings about Imams and intellectuals who were seen as threats and eliminated them. Due to these radical changes and oppression, there were riots involving tens of thousands in East Turkestan between 1950 and 1952, but all of them were violently suppressed by CCP soldiers.

By 1955, East Turkestan was named “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” with the promise of a socialist state that would understand and protect the rights of minorities, but no real change occurred in the region. Local government representatives and executives continued to be appointed by the CCP itself. In addition, since those in these positions had to be Chinese, the region was “autonomous” in terms of administration. However, the Uyghur identity was completely rejected and all decisions in the region were made by the Communist Party.

Another Chinese practice in the 1950s was the settlement policy that attempted to change the region's demography. Troops affiliated with the People's Liberation Army were deployed to the region and many Chinese civilians were settled in East Turkestan. A total of 175,000 soldiers from the first and twenty-fourth corps of the

Chinese People's Liberation Army were brought to East Turkestan. These troops, called Bingtuan (Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps), were sent not only for military purposes but also to control the agricultural production in the region, and were given the right to use the most fertile land. While these military units were working in agricultural production in the fertile lands of the region, they also had the privilege of extracting oil and other natural resources. The Bingtuan population, which was 1,480,000 in 1966, jumped to 2,600,000 in 2010. These troops were placed in the most productive and watery places in the region such as the Dzungar and Tarim Derya basins, which enabled them to dominate a large portion of the agricultural products and control raw food production.

Various disputes between the Soviet Union and China in the 1960s increased the tension in East Turkestan, which is a border region between the two nations. Respectively, around 500,000 people who were against the Chinese integration policy from Ili and Tarbagatai migrated to Soviet territories, which is today's Kazakhstan. Consequently, China expelled a significant number of Turks that it didn't want and dispersed those it accused of being a Soviet spy.

The policy of settling Han Chinese in East Turkestan resulted in a gradual increase of discrimination and polarization against the people of East Turkestan.

1966 was the beginning of the Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China. The revolution had devastating consequences for all people across the country, especially those in East Turkestan. The main goals of Mao's revolutionary impositions are listed as detaching the society from its traditional values and ties, giving up religious beliefs, creating a new type of individuals, and forcing all Uyghurs in East Turkestan to become Chinese. While the usurped rights of East Turkestan were suppressed by this revolution, anything that belongs to the Turkish-Islamic culture was declared as enemy under the name of resistance and fanaticism. As a result, hundreds of intellectuals and scholars were massacred. In response to the oppression, the East Turkestan People's Revolution Party was established in Urumqi in 1967, and was engaged in the fight, but it did not last long since the leader of the party Tohti Kurban was arrested and executed in 1969.

After Mao's death in 1976, the CCP was split between the moderate and radical wings. This internal conflict ended in 1978 when the representative of the moderate wing Deng Xiaoping took over the situation and opened the doors for a new era in the country. Within the framework of Deng's reforms, China opened its borders to trade and attempted to establish close relations with Western countries especially the US; soon "state capitalism" gained pace in the country. These policies had some

positive reflections on East Turkestan. Restrictions in areas such as pilgrimage, traveling abroad, trading with neighboring countries, education in and out of China, opening mosques and building new ones were loosened.

Although such small steps were taken, the fundamental problems continued in the region. In this period, the Uyghur Turks were subjected to obvious discrimination in the fields where profit margins are high such as the mining business, oil and raw material production, industrial enterprises, the construction sector, transportation, communication, and collaboration with foreign companies. The policy of settling Han Chinese in East Turkestan resulted in a gradual increase in discrimination and polarization against the people of East Turkestan. The rapid growth of the Han Chinese population caused serious violations of rights in agricultural areas and plateaus. Uyghur Turks were employed only in low and symbolic positions in local administration and government agencies.

Thus, although the Chinese administration had been propagandizing cultural integration and solidarity of nations, social inequality and political pressures have triggered ethnic conflicts between the local Uyghurs and Han Chinese people since the 1990s. After the end of the Cold War, demands for democracy increased in many old Communist countries. In China, similar demands were raised but



were harshly suppressed by the regime. Soon, prohibitions on political rights and religious worship in East Turkestan were expanded again.

The wave of independence that started in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union has also activated the desire of the Turks in East Turkestan for independence. In fact, it is not only the Soviet Union that implemented Communism and failed, even in China, demands for full democracy had begun. The CCP, which suppressed these attempts in a bloody way, believed that even the smallest movement in East Turkestan, which it considers as the closest crisis point in Central Asia, could get the region out of control. Therefore, it intensified its pressures by sending more troops to the region.

In 1996, China founded The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an alliance created due to concerns over the

developments in the Central Asian region, which includes East Turkestan. This alliance aimed at keeping the new Central Asian republics demand of full independence under control. Actually, it is nothing more than an attempt to prevent a regional awakening in the name of “fighting radical movements”. However, the region experienced many violent incidents that took place between 1990 and 2000, where the tension gradually increased. For example, the protests held in Ghulja in 1997 for the freedom of religious worship and the cancellation of the birth control law were violently suppressed and many civilians lost their lives in the process.

The Chinese administration turned 9/11 into an opportunity to smash all opposing thoughts and movements in East Turkestan. With this process, all contrary movements and thoughts had been easily eradicated by labeling them as “terror”. While the US and other

Western countries were busy fighting terrorism, the CCP administration embraced a terrorist discourse in respect to East Turkestan, which it had been occupying for decades. China attempted to describe the tension in East Turkestan as terrorism that emerged in the 1990s. This approach was easily accepted by the Western countries and the US, which were also inclined to accept any biased thesis about Islam.

In this period, the CCP advanced its discriminatory policies one step further. In 2005 the Turkish language was no longer used in universities, and the same for primary schools after 2007. Since 2000, Secondary school students who graduated with a high score were

taken to high schools in the inner parts of China to be educated in military discipline and deprived of their mother language. By 2006, the total number of students taken from East Turkestan to China reached 10,000.

In 2008, under the pretext of the security of the Beijing Olympics, checkpoints were increased in East Turkestan and surrounding villages and neighborhoods. While people's freedom of travel had been restricted, there was also a significant increase in the number of arbitrary arrests. These "let's ensure security" practices made the region more vulnerable and continued to experience violence.

JULY 5 MASSACRE



As mentioned earlier, in the beginning of the 2000s the Chinese administration increased its pressure in East Turkestan, and by 2005 it started the practice of bringing young girls from the villages of East Turkestan to factories located in different parts of China. In 2006, about 2,500 Uyghur girls from the Yopurga sub-district were taken to the Shandong province of China. Although some families were initially convinced to send their daughters due to economic reasons, most families refused the offer. Therefore, mandatory quotas were set for each village and town regarding age restriction and compulsory quota of number of girls to be taken to China. Local administrators are obliged to

After 2005, the Chinese administration began bringing young girls from the villages of East Turkestan to work in factories located in different parts of China.

fill these quotas to the CCP's regional offices and deliver the girls within the specified time. This triggered a lot of reaction and anger by many families, especially when the same practice was initiated toward their young boys. The government claimed that the reasons for taking the children to work were to evaluate excessive labor and enrich poor families. However, as the girls who had been taken to work in factories were not allowed to return home, their salaries were not paid, and cases such as harassment and rape appeared, reactions to these practices grew even more.

The events that took place in Urumqi on July 5 2009 are the peak of this tension. In a toy factory in Shaoguan, Han-Chinese workers started attacking Uyghur workers. The incidents spread out of the factory and racist Chinese were involved in a conflict that resulted in the death of a large number of people. After these developments, the government's approach of blaming the Uyghurs again on the incident and the racist manner of the Chinese people on social media were the last straw for the people of East Turkestan. Despite days passed since the incident, the perpetrators of the massacre at the factory were not caught. Thus, a group of university students in

Urumqi organized by social media marched and protests to demand the rights protection of those who were killed in Shaoguan, refused the idea of forcing people to China, and abandoning the policies of repression and discrimination.

The Chinese police interfered harshly as the protests grew into a conflict. At night, special police forces securely executed the protesters in every street they saw. Since then, the internet was disconnected for six months in East Turkestan and mass arrests were imposed. Besides, by July 7 Chinese militias in civilian clothes living in Urumqi started chasing Turkish Muslims for revenge. While the Chinese police pretended not to interfere with the Han Chinese, there were some video recordings showing that the police distributed sharp objects and sticks to the militias.

According to official Chinese news agency, 184 people lost their lives, 137 of them were Han Chinese, 46 Uyghur Turks, 1 Hui; 1,680 people were injured, and 1,434 were arrested during the clash. However, the World Uyghur Congress stated that at least 1,000 Uyghur Turks were killed in Urumqi, and the figure could even reach 3,000. On the international



stage, the CCP tried to portray the Chinese suffering during the incidents on July 5 as a terrorist attack, while implementing its arrest and exile policies most harshly. Moreover, China announced a new Anti-terrorism Act to practice its policies more comfortably. Thus, everyone involved in any incident in East Turkestan can be punished through the Act; the police can freely shoot during interventions, make arrest in night raids, and imprison people without a court order. The implementation of this law had turned the people of East Turkestan into targets. A report published in 2018 stated that after these events, 2,805,000 people were displaced across East Turkestan.

Five months after the incident, 80% of the websites published in Uyghur Turkish were closed. Television channels and media across China have consistently propagandized that the people of East Turkestan are “separatist”, “terrorist” and “people with radical thinking”. In May 2010, Beijing organized the Xinjiang Work Forum. China argued

that economic backwardness is the root of the problems in East Turkestan, and that if the economy develops, everything would be solved, and there would be no more ethnic issues or political mistakes. Therefore, Kashgar and Huocheng were declared Free Economic Zones. In the light of this decision, many Chinese immigrated to the region as “laborers”, whereas local Uyghurs were brought to other regions in China as “laborers”.

Beside all the ongoing economical pressure and discrimination policies in the region, many Islamic practices began to be considered as crimes for security reasons. Men with beards or women are covered were targeted, and arbitrary arrests increased. As the tension expanded in the region, and people were fed up with China's violence, attacks against the Chinese police stations and government buildings were organized. Some attacks targeted Chinese security forces, especially between 2013 and 2015. Some of these events were the result of intentional provocations of the Chinese security forces. On July 27 2014, for example, Chinese police raided a house in a village in Iliishku, Yarkent, and massacred several people. When the men whose wives were killed demanded the criminals to be punished, bullets were shot on the crowd again. In the days-long clashes that exploded after this incident, several villages were wiped off the map and at least 2,000 people were killed.³⁹

Although East Turkestan is the richest region in terms of natural resources within the borders of China, it ranks 21st among the 31 provinces in terms of social development and welfare.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND VIOLATIONS

While most of the Uyghur Turks from East Turkestan are farmers, most of the city residents are shopkeepers or small business owners. Kazakh and Kyrgyz Turks, who live as nomads and are forced by the Chinese into a sedentary life, live on breeding livestock. There are no major industrial investments or companies belonging to Muslims in the region.

Even when most of the arable lands available in Kashgar and Hoten are not sufficient compared to the population density, they are still controlled by the Chinese army Bingtuan. Muslim peasants are only allowed to cultivate as little as what can keep them alive. People from different regions of East Turkestan go to Aksu, Kuqa, Karaşehir, and Dzungaria basins to work as seasonal workers, where agricultural lands exist in slightly larger numbers.

Since the plateaus owned by the Kazakh and Kyrgyz Turks were annexed by China and converted into fields, a significant number of people either worked for the Chinese for a minimum wage or remained unemployed. The production control in the Turfan Basin, which is at the forefront of dried fruit production, especially grape, is also in the hands

of Chinese traders.

According to the CCP's official figures, the annual income of East Turkestan was RMB 230 million in 1955, and it increased to RMB 920 billion in 2014. 2018 figures show that the average income per capita for people living in East Turkestan is about 11,975 RMB (about \$1,700) in rural areas, and RMB 32,764 (about \$4,700) for city residents. However, it should be noted that the majority of those living in East Turkestan cities are Chinese; in other words, people with high income per capita are largely the Chinese people and the majority of those who live in rural areas (where the income per capita is low) are Uyghur Turks. Poverty in the villages of Hoten, Kaşgar and Kızılsu provinces where Uyghurs live, is at a very pronounced level. Knowing that the average income per capita in the same year in Jiangsu, which is composed entirely of Chinese is about RMB 115,000 (\$16,428), it would be easy to realize that Uyghurs are subjected to socio-economic discrimination.

Although East Turkestan is the richest region in terms of natural resources within the borders of China, it ranks 21st among the 31 provinces in terms



of social development and welfare. Since the majority of young men in the villages were taken to the “training” camps after the buildings were established, even harvesting the crops became a problem in many places, and naturally poverty increased.

The situation in the region is not very different in regards to education opportunities. East Turkestan seems to be rather disadvantaged in this field compared to other provinces of China. Similar to the rest of China, the nine-year compulsory education system is implemented in the region. Schools carry out their educational activities with an atheist and communist ideology, which is completely different and foreign to the faith of the people of East Turkestan.

Students who have completed their compulsory education can go to university after three years of high school education. There are 46

universities in East Turkestan, but since there is a distinction between Chinese and non-Chinese in the preference list, Uyghurs can't study in every department they want. Regarding education opportunities, Han Chinese discriminate against all other minority groups, including Uyghurs.

The intervention of local administrators in the beliefs of ordinary religious people in the name of fighting extremist groups is among the most major complaints of Uyghurs. Some of the Chinese administration's practices in East Turkestan can be listed as follows: restricting the use of places of worship, banning the wearing of Islamic clothing, restricting the fulfillment of religious obligations, preventing religious education, humiliating some Islamic regulations, preventing the practice of some cultural rights, etc.

Uyghur families are forced to host Chinese individuals, especially the families whose men are sent to the so-called “training camps” under the China-Uyghur acquaintance and friendship program, which violates the privacy of people.

One major problem that Uyghurs experience is the illegitimate arrests and extreme practices against those detained. Families are usually not disclosed about their detained relatives, no information is given on what crime they are arrested for, where are they kept, or for how long they will be held. Many Uyghur families stated that the official authorities did not inform them about the fate of their male family members who were detained, and still cannot find out where and why they were held.

One of the most concerning rights violations is the “twin relative / family” practice. This means that Uyghur families are forced to welcome Chinese civil servants at their homes, especially the families whose men are sent to the so-called “training camps”. Accordingly, Chinese government officials or civil servants should live with their assigned families and share

meals or even beds with them, which violates the privacy of people under the name of “China-Uyghur family reunion” program. One of the most frequent complaints is the suspicion of those with relatives abroad. If the relative lives or studies abroad, especially in an Islamic country, the person and the family back home are treated as potential criminals. This disrupts money transfers from and to East Turkistan, communication among family members, as well as travelling to and from East Turkistan.

Some other violations of the Chinese administration towards the Uyghurs include economic pressure, unjustified taxes, forced seizure of property, sending Uyghur girls to distant areas, forced labor, etc. Besides, the underground resources of the region would almost impossible to be benefitted by the local people through regional investments.

INTERMENT CAMPS

Since 2013, intensive propaganda has been launched all over East Turkistan, where all kinds of religious worship have been restricted as they are deemed “related” to ISIS. Interestingly, during

this period, thousands of East Turkistan were transferred to Syria and Iraq via Malaysia and Thailand, smoothly crossing South China borders, a place where even birds would not fly to. At this

Since 2013, thousands of East Turkestan people pass through the southern China borders - a place where even birds would not fly to- and are transferred to Iraq and Syria via Malaysia and Thailand. At this point, it is remarkable to find thousands of Uyghur Turks could be easily taken out of the country in an environment where it is not even possible to take steps without the permission of the Chinese security forces.

point, it is remarkable that thousands of Uyghur Turks could easily be taken out of the country in an environment where it is not even possible to take steps without the permission of the Chinese security forces.

The reason for this ease of transfer had later been understood as the Chinese and international media have started to gain intensive coverage of Turkestani in ISIS ranks. The Chinese government, whose persecution and occupation in East Turkestan dates back years and decades, has had an excellent opportunity to reflect the problem in the region as if it were a newly emerging terrorism issue. Hence, to prevent the reaction of the West and the Islamic world, China successfully played victim and in turn easily spread the idea of its “fight against terrorism” in East Turkestan.

Thus, China increased its repression policies in East Turkestan believing it has gained moral superiority. This

new practice has been carried out with several fancy slogans, such as people being taken to training camps under the name of purifying radical thoughts and creating brotherhood amongst Chinese and Uyghur families.

The turning point of the internment camps in East Turkestan was the appointment of former CCP general secretary of Tibet Chen Quanguo as general secretary to East Turkestan in August 2016. Quanguo, who was known for his excessive pressure and punishment policies, initiated the “Become a Family” project, which they claim to be an affectionate cultural exchange between Chinese and Uyghur Turkish families. In fact, this program is mainly placing Chinese officials into the homes of Uyghur families, violating all family privacy and private life under the name of cultural assimilation.

Respective to this application, special records were made on every Muslim family in East Turkestan; information such as whether any family member pose a threat to China, family structure, religious life, and adherence to customs are recorded. Accordingly, they were able to prospectively identify those who are not eligible for “Sinicization” and who are likely to be a threat to China. In this project, Imams, intellectuals, opinion leaders, rich people, in short everyone in East Turkestan is recorded in a very detailed way. In addition, students from East Turkestan who studied abroad in 2017 were notified to return to China by May of the same year.

Thousands of students abroad, especially in Egypt, whose families were subjected to repression and threat in East Turkestan, were forced to return, leaving their education behind. However, when they learned that returnees were to be arrested, many students in Egypt refused to return. Thus, China carried out a joint operation with the Egyptian security forces and returned many students to China like criminals. It is stated that there had been about 5,000 East Turkestan students in Egypt before the operation, of which only 50 families remained. Simultaneously, applications from Uyghurs living abroad to extend their expired passports have also been rejected and Uyghurs were completely prohibited from going abroad.

Concurrently, reports of large arrests in the region and their transfer to camps have started to pop up. Reportedly the number of detainees in the camps has reached 1 million in a short time. However, this was proved only after Kazakh Turks were arrested in these camps. Relatives of these people in Kazakhstan, who constantly went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan to file an investigation about their relatives in East Turkestan, have mobilized the Kazakh authorities. Due to these actions, which turned into a diplomatic crisis between Kazakhstan and China, the world woke up to the existence of China's internment camps.

Previously, the Chinese administration insistently denied the existence of the camps. But it could no longer deny it



following interviews by the witnesses who escaped the camp and returned to Kazakhstan. Yet in its defense, China later said that these camps are for educational purposes. By January 2018, the news in which 82-year-old Muhammad Saleh - the famous Imam who translated the Quran into Uyghur Turkish - was taken to the internment camp despite his old age and died there, clearly showed that human rights violations had reached a high level.

In August 2018, the United Nations (UN) announced that more than 1 million Muslim Uyghur Turks were held in internment camps in East Turkestan. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) also published a 125-page report in September the same year concerning the camps. According to these reports, no crime justifies detaining people inside such camps. The Chinese authorities consider having religious thoughts, relatives abroad, not drinking alcohol,

Most of the camps are built integrated with major factories, where prisoners are employed-without-pay by CCP administrators.

using Whatsapp, going to the mosque, wearing a headscarf, or anything that identifies with Muslim and Turkish, give sufficient reasons for detainment in the camps.

It was found that there are watchtowers and barbed wires all around the camps, which are also surrounded by high walls. In some regions, evacuated schools were also used as camps. At the entrance of these internment camps signs such as “re-education center”, “vocational course” or “technical skill school” are hung. However, even though they're named as “schools”, these prisons, which are far from education institutions, are forbidden for public and are surrounded with intensive security measures.

It is stated that there are many buildings in the prison complex with various wards and cells capacities starting from small camps that can accommodate 1,000 people to large camps that can accommodate up to 10,000 people. Most of the camps are built connected with major factories, and prisoners are employed-without-pay by CCP managers to work there. Apart from working, the camps also come with several educational activities such as studying the Chinese language, singing songs that praise China and Han Chinese, praising President Xi Jinping, and memorizing all the discipline rules of the party.

According to the information obtained from Radio Free Asia (RFA) correspondent through phone calls with camp officers in December 2018, a camp consists of more than 60 buildings with a total of 1,000-1,200 wards, and 10 to 20 people occupy each ward. The journalists who visited the region after the UN's report were shown people dancing, singing, learning professions, and doing sports. But when a journalist saw a graffiti that reads “oh my heart don't break” in a secluded corner of the camp, he said that he doubts of what was shown to them.

A report published on August 3 2018 by the Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) stated that by the end of July 2018, more than 2 million people were arrested and detained in training centers in East Turkestan. According to the report, 600,000 people registered in the peasant population system in the south of East Turkestan were taken to these camps; while 1,300,000 people were subjected to compulsory education by dividing them into day and night classes. The CHRD team interviewed people in eight villages in Kashgar, with a population of 1,500 to 3,000. It was estimated that approximately 12% of the population in each town was taken to camps. As a result of their research, CHRD calculated that approximately



2 million people are being held in internment camps. CHRD came up with the number by proportioning the data they have with the total population in Aksu, Kashgar, Hoten and Kizilsu regions. There are also reports prepared in 2016 based on the satellite images and researches carried out in the region about the overcrowded internment camps.

A field study conducted by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) found 28 detectable camps in the region were examined and it was determined that the number of these camps grew by 465% from 2016 to 2018. Until the release of this report, various media outlets have pinpointed the location of 128 camps. It is estimated that there are currently more than 1,200 internment camps in East Turkestan. However, long-term studies

are required to determine the exact sizes and locations of the camps that are constantly growing. For example, a 7,000 square meters camp built in 2016 was found to have expanded to 172,000 square meters by September 2018.

According to the internment camp witnesses, some people are tortured and forced to sign a confession after being taken to the camp, and then directly imprisoned without any adjudication. During interrogation, people were charged if they have relatives abroad, make phone calls with people living abroad, worship or encourage people to worship and do good, observe their national culture, do not drink alcohol, do not speak Chinese, etc.

In the control centers set up on the streets, the Uyghur Turks' mobile phones are routinely checked. The presence of photographs with the word

According to the witnesses who could leave the camps, upon the completion of interrogation, prisoners are subjected to a detailed medical examination that focuses on their internal organs and then are sent to the camps designated according to their conditions.

“Allah”, pictures of the Turkish flag or the symbol of the moon and the star, verses from the Quran or hadiths, and documents or information that evoke Islam is considered sufficient reason for their arrest. The identification of any of the “75 Signs of Religious Extremism” list prepared by the CCP is also sufficient reason to detain them in camps. These 75 signs include accusations such as self-learning religion, refusing their children to learn Chinese, encouraging the consumption of halal food, advising people not to smoke or drink, and abruptly quitting drinking and smoking.

According to the information given by witnesses who could leave the camps, after the prisoners undergo their interrogation, they are subjected to a detailed medical examination that focus on their internal organs and then sent to

specific camps based on their conditions. In the camp, they are left in the wards all day long with their hands and feet cuffed and connected to each other with heavy chains attached to the handcuffs. Prisoners are woken up very early every morning and they can only eat after singing the Chinese national anthem and chanting “Long live Xi Jinping” to thank Xi Jinping. On Fridays, prisoners are forced to eat pork and to take oaths that deny religion and God. They are strictly prohibited from speaking their language. Witnesses reported that some people disappeared and others die in the camps. They were subjected to all kinds of torture such as being left hungry and thirsty in the summer heat, standing bare feet on ice in winter, thrown into dark cells, being soaked in water etc. It is also stated that women are injected with unknown fluids and are constantly inspected while naked. Young girls are prohibited to cry and are commonly subjected to rape in the camps.

Moreover, one of the most common torture methods used in the camps is striking people with high voltage electricity during interrogation. Moreover, it is stated that the prisoners are forced to memorize documents that praise the CCP, praise China, discipline rules, even though they are all written in Chinese.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

When we talk about colonization and imperialist states in history, the first thing that comes to mind is Africa

for some reason, and the colonists are mostly Western states. But what about a country that has been colonized at the

same time as Africa and is still under occupation today? The Occupation on East Turkestan is approaching a century full of tragedy and has cost three generations of Uyghur Turks living in pain.

The increasing persecution of the CCP administration in the region, where all kinds of rights violations are easily hidden under the locked and oppressive Chinese administration, has finally surfaced. Muslim Uyghur Turks in East Turkestan have paid, and are still paying, for their dream of independence. The increasing power of China in the global economy and trade dependency that it developed with other countries seem to have been effective so far in making them to look the other way to the cries of the people of East Turkestan.

China, which has been occupying East Turkestan for years, has tried to mislead the world's public opinion by presenting the problem in the region as terrorism. However, it is clear that the real problem is not security and terrorism, but the struggle of people whose rights have been violated. Eventually, the Chinese

China, which has been occupying East Turkestan for years, tried to mislead global public opinion by presenting the problem in the region as terrorism. However, it is clear that the real problem is not security and terrorism, but the struggle of people whose rights have been stolen.

administration, which pretends to be the victim in this matter, increased its oppression and persecution in the region. The collective punishment on the entire Uyghur community clearly will not solve the problem. Instead, China's actions on the Muslim Uyghurs have caused an increasing hate wave in the entire Islamic world.

Any positive small steps taken by China will not only ensure the life condition of the Uyghurs, but also provide an advantage to China when seeking an ally against the West in the Islamic world. The problem in the region will easily be solved by a fairly shared political system in which Uyghurs live in their autonomous region without discrimination and persecution.

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The region had intermittent autonomy and occasional independence until 1949 when the forces attached to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) occupied it. China systematically and mercilessly occupied the region and forced to integrate its people into the Chinese population. China also monopolized the region's agricultural lands and rich underground assets. Today, as its strength in global politics and economy is increasing day by day, by 2010 China showed itself remarkably sensitive to criticism related to repression and rights violations of the East Turkestan people. This report in your hands explains the transformation of East Turkestan throughout history and elaborates the period of ongoing violations it survived under the Chinese occupation..



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