



Forum: GA3
Issue: Establishing measures to diminish ethnic tensions in China.



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Introduction:

China is a big and diverse country, home to many different societies, cultures, and beliefs. Of the 56 officially recognised ethnic groups, the Han Chinese are the largest by far, comprising roughly 92% of the population. The other remaining 55 groups, make up the other 8% of the population¹. Sadly, the ethnic groups have not always cooperated peacefully. A recent example of this is what has happened to the Uyghurs. The government has systematically oppressed and tortured Uyghurs under the guise of fighting terrorism². This research report mainly focuses on the situation with the Uyghurs, but this is very similar to the situation with more ethnic groups. This research report talks about the causes of this ethnic tension and how this could be solved.

The situation in China violates many parts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Appendix A).

Through means including marginalisation, forced abortion and sterilisation³, the Chinese government has tried to indoctrinate the ethnic minorities. According to a report published by the US Department of State (Appendix B), there have been multiple credible reports of human rights violations such as unlawful killings, torture and forced disappearances. This research report talks about the history behind

Definition of Key terms:

Ethnic group/minority: An Ethnic group is considered a group of people with common descent and/or attributes, e.g. culture, language, or religion. Herein lies the difference between an Ethnic group and a nationality, because multiple ethnic groups can live together within one nationality. The opposite is also true, ethnic groups can



also be a part of different nationalities. An ethnic group is considered a minority when they consist of less than half the population in an entire territory or state. The image shows a map of China with the percentages of citizens being part of an ethnic minority per region.

Non-governmental Organisation (NGO): An NGO is an organisation that operates independently of any government. An NGO’s purpose is usually to address a social or political issue. In the case of ethnic tensions in China, important NGOs include Amnesty and Human Rights Watch.

The Permanent Five (P5): The P5 are special members of the UNSC, and they are the five states to whom the UN charter grants permanent seating in the SC (as opposed to the normal 2-year term). The P5 are also granted Veto power, the power to veto any resolution or amendment at their will. They consist of China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA.

Background:

As mentioned before, this research report mainly focuses on the repression of the Uyghurs. This has existed for quite some time, but a turning point has been the riots in 2009.

On the 5th of July 2009, there were protests against the deadly attacks on Uyghur factory workers in Guangdong Province³, and more specifically the lack of government action. The protests started peacefully, calling for justice for the killed Uyghurs and the systematic exploitation, but quickly escalated into riots after police violence against demonstrators.

Official figures say that 197 people died in the violence, the most victims being Han Chinese⁴.



Eyewitnesses gathered by Amnesty

International talk about excessive and unnecessary use of force by the police against the protestors, including the use of tear gas, beatings and shooting directly into crowds⁵. Once the initial police violence had halted, many Han took to the streets to exact revenge, often with police support.

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) has stated that nearly 600 people died on 5 July alone, most of which were Uyghur. The Chinese government blamed the WUC for the riots, while they had only asked Uyghurs and their supporters all over the world to:

“Stage demonstrations and other actions to commemorate the second anniversary of one of the saddest and most tragic days in the history of the Uyghur people and of East Turkestan and to ensure that the world does not forget about the devastating plight of the Uyghur people.”, WUC, Worldwide Uyghur Protests on Second Anniversary of 5 July 2009⁶.

After the 5th of July, the police went door to door, arbitrarily detaining hundreds, if not thousands of people. Many people were disappeared, some of whom have received official death sentences, but most of the family members of the disappeared have never heard from them again.

After these events, security and surveillance around Uyghurs were tightened and tensions rose further. The government forced the closing of many mosques and important Uyghur festivals in Xinjiang⁷. The government has also, since 1950, been working on reducing the Uyghur influence, resistance and their presence in general by encouraging Han Chinese to settle in the area⁸. They have also deployed means such as forced sterilisation and birth control to limit the Uyghur population growth.

In the following years, more eruptions of the built-up ethnic tensions followed. There were separatist strikes in the Xinjiang region like the 2010 Aksu bombing (Appendix D) and the 2011 Hotan attack (Appendix E).

2014 marks the launch of China’s “Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism”, which led to many arrests and sentencing, but also supported previous measures that linked religious practice with terrorism and extremism⁹. In 2017, the government

passed the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification (Appendix E), condemned by the international community for its broad and vague language⁹. According to this regulation, things like open, or even private displays of cultural or religious affiliation, including wearing a veil or headscarf, fasting, regular prayer, growing an “abnormal” beard, having an irregular name, avoidance of alcohol or being in the possession of articles or books about Uyghur or Islam culture can be considered “extremist actions”¹⁰

This regulation later proved to be the starting ground for the internment camps in 2017, because it gave the government a -albeit vague and broad- legal definition for terrorists or extremists. For over a year, the government denied all claims of the camps’ existence. It was only in late 2018 when they, pressured by the many surfacing reports, interviews and other items, confirmed the existence of “vocational education and training centres”. The official explanation stated that the camps had 2 goals¹¹: teaching vocational skills, Chinese law and the Mandarin language, and to prevent citizens from coming under the influence of extremist ideas, to “nip terrorist activities in the bud”(Appendix F).

China also pointed out that the centres had prevented violence, based on the fact that there hadn’t been a terrorist attack since 2016. The



included image shows satellite images of the rapid growth of a camp in Xinjiang.

Since then, many human rights violations have been committed. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2022 (Michelle Bachelet) has stated that the policies in China and specifically Xinjiang “led to interlocking patterns of severe and undue restrictions on a wide range of human rights.” One example of the torture devices used in these “educational centres” is a tiger chair, a chair which restrains a suspect in a very uncomfortable way during interrogations.

As of 2021, more than 1 million Uyghurs¹² are or have been detained in over 380 detention camps in China¹³. China has yet to face the allegations of many human rights violations by many other countries, NGO’s and the UN.

Major parties involved:

China: For a long time, China has faced ethnic tension. They have employed means such as marginalisation, forced abortion and sterilisation to limit ethnic minorities in their growth, and have denied all accusations of human rights violations made by the US and other countries.

World Uyghur Congress (WUC): The WUC is an organisation that protects the rights of Uyghurs all over the world. It has had quite some indifferences with the Chinese government. China has previously declared the WUC: “some truth-bending ‘academic institutions’, rumour-mongering ‘experts and scholars’ and ‘amateur actors’ with no moral scruples” and has accused them of “misleading international public

discourse, often through dirty funding, fact-twisting stories and massive smear campaigns.”¹⁴

USA: America is one of the global superpowers and has already used its status to declare the situation in China genocide. They have also taken a leading role in research about the internment camps.

Amnesty International: Amnesty International is an international organisation aimed at protecting human rights. They are also focussed on informing people on what is going on inside countries e.g. with the Uyghurs in China. They are a useful source of reliable information on topics such as this one.

Human Rights Watch: Human Rights Watch is an organisation that “investigates and reports on abuses happening in all corners of the world”¹⁵. They are close partners with the UN and have documented much on the ethnic tensions in China.

Timeline of Events:

1955: Xinjian is declared The Xinjiang Ughur Autonomous Region

5 July 2009: The Urumqi riots

2010: The Aksu bombing

2011: The Hotan attack

2014: Start of the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism

1 April 2017: The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification came into force

2017: Start of internment camps

Late 2018: China confirms the existence of “vocational education and training centres”

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

Many countries and organisations have attempted to solve this issue, but this is hindered by the fact that China is a very walled-off country and doesn't permit all organisations to research. They are also unwilling to cooperate in trying to diminish the existing ethnic tension. In recent years, China has tried to undermine claims of human rights violations by declaring them “Anti-China” claims made by “The US and other Western enemies”. They have also stated that there is “One big ethnic family in China” and that “all ethnic groups enjoy equality”¹⁶. Recently there has been a joint statement by 50 UN experts renewing the calls that: “The Government of China must address specific and systematic human rights violations” (Appendix H). There have not been any passed Security Council resolutions, as China is a member of the P5 and therefore enjoys veto power.

In October 2022, a motion in the UNHRC was rejected by a number of Muslim-majority countries to hold a debate on the situation in Xinjiang, throwing away a unique opportunity to hold China accountable for the human rights violations¹⁷.

Possible solutions:

This issue is a delicate one, and requires utmost precision from the delegates. This is because China is not keen on intrusions in its domestic policies. The delegates have to find a way to somehow ease the tension between the ethnic groups in China. One

thing that could be done is to make it more attractive again for Uyghurs to live in the Xinjiang region, this could help so that the Uyghurs don't feel as if they are being forced away from their region of birth.

Another possible solution is finding ways to establish help for ethnic minorities getting better jobs (via payments and better educational opportunities), especially in government positions. This would definitely help because the ethnic minorities would feel more connected to the government, instead of the government being perceived as one apparatus designed to take away their culture.

One thing that might help solve this issue is targeting abusive Xinjiang officials (via means such as visa and/or travel bans and individual sanctions) to send a message to the government.

The delegates can also maybe find alternative ways of living together for ethnic groups and convince China to at least allow more investigations to be held in the internment camps to also give families more information about their relatives

This way, ethnic tensions in China might ease and the beautifully diverse country can be just that, a beautifully diverse without internal conflict about religion and culture.

Appendix:

- a. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- b. US Department of State, 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: China (Includes Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet),
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/china/>
- c. China: “Justice, justice”: The July 2009 protests in Xinjiang, China
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/027/2010/en/>
- d. The guardian on the 2010 Aksu bombing
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/19/bomb-kills-seven-china-xinjiang>
- e. The Washington Post on the 2011 Hotan attack
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/armed-men-attack-police-station-in-chinas-xinjiang-province-killing-officers/2011/07/18/gIQAcfmclI_story.html
- f. Translation of the Regulation on De-extremification
<https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/>
- g. The Chinese government's report on the re-education camps
http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_8011005.htm
- h. Joint statement on human rights in China
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