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**THE FRACTURING OF CHINA? ETHNIC SEPARATISM  
AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE XINJIANG  
UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION**

by

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September 2007

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**THE FRACTURING OF CHINA? ETHNIC SEPARATISM AND POLITICAL  
VIOLENCE IN THE XINJIANG UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, China began to tout its own terrorist problem in the predominantly Muslim populated province of Xinjiang. Claims that the province's separatists and extremists threaten China's national security seem contrary to literature focusing on the region's ethnic minorities. Yet Xinjiang has historically been a restive, rebellious province, and only in recent years come fully under Beijing sphere of control. Throughout the 1990s sporadic political violence occurred in Xinjiang and as the geopolitical situation in Central Asia changed, Beijing's claim Muslims threat to its national security became a legitimate question. An evaluation of those elements which produce an environment ripe for mass organized political violence of such a scale as to threaten to China's sovereignty will provide useful understanding the current state of affairs within Xinjiang. This thesis concludes that while each element exists and has existed in varying degrees since Chinese rule of the region began, all of the elements have not been simultaneously at a level to produce the level of violence that would threaten China's sovereignty.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

As the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) continues to become a dominant regional power in Asia, China's domestic stability is crucial for regional stability. This stability is important for U.S. economic and security interests as well. The rapid economic growth that followed the reforms of Deng Xiaoping created an ever-increasing income gap between the coastal provinces and China's interior regions. The income disparity includes an ethnic dilemma as minority ethnic agrarian and industrial workers have not benefited from economic growth as much as their Han counterparts. This is particularly true of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) where Turkic Muslims known as Uyghurs make up the largest minority population. Additionally, valuable natural resources are believed to be located in the Tarim Basin (*Tarim Pendi*), which lies to the south of the Tian Shan mountain range in the XUAR (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China

These resources are vital to support the growing population of China. An increase in violence in Xinjiang would create safety concerns for workers attempting to access those resources. Loss of such resources would also force China to rely more heavily on imported oil and natural gas, impacting the state financially. Finally, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games focus international awareness on China, which has been criticized by human rights groups for its hard line stance against ethnic minorities. Any increase in political violence in Xinjiang could erode economic stability due to a lack of investor confidence.

The upswing of global religious fundamentalism, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the uncertainty regarding the stability and capability of the newly formed Central Asian states with ethnic ties to the Uyghur population concern the PRC leadership. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a lack of security at the borders of Former Soviet Union (FSU) Central Asian states. Heightened fears of external support from non-state international religious and ethnic actors for separatism within Xinjiang contributed to the creation of the Shanghai Five, a regional security organization formed to address border security issues. Additionally, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, increased trade opportunities have created contacts between ethnic Uyghurs outside China and Xinjiang Uyghurs. Increased Uyghur nationalism within the Xinjiang population due to these new ties as well as the creation of ethnic based Central Asian states on China's periphery also concern Beijing. This makes evaluating the likelihood of major armed ethnic violence in Xinjiang important to the United States and its Asian allies for five reasons:

- 1) Instability in Xinjiang would limit the exploitation of natural resources (oil, natural gas, and other resources) and most likely would adversely impact China's economy.

- 2) Instability caused by major armed conflict in Xinjiang would affect multiple facets of Chinese society internally and could lead to a snowball effect in other provinces with ethnic minority problems, such as Tibet. Additionally, such instability might signal to Taiwan an opportunity to declare its independence.

3) The internal instability created by large-scale ethno-political violence in Xinjiang would directly affect the Central Asian states bordering Xinjiang. A large number of refugees entering adjacent central Asian states would create both economic and social issues for these countries;

4) The United States economy is heavily tied to the Chinese economy. Any instability that affects Chinese economic health would affect the United States as well. American companies invested in Chinese companies would suffer from an economic crisis in China. The United States could also be drawn into the conflict due to our force disposition in central Asian states and our informal commitment to Taiwan.

5) China's support for the U. S. led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) remains crucial to operations in Central and Southeast Asia. Instability in Xinjiang could adversely impact China's stance on U. S. basing in Central Asia.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the motive, means, and opportunities available for political violence in Xinjiang based on various factors and indicators, and then assess the prospects for ethnic conflict within the Xinjiang. The research focuses on Xinjiang's ethnic minorities, of which the Uyghur population is the largest. Xinjiang's minority ethnicities have historically been opposed to Han rule of what they consider their rightful possession.

The primary question of the thesis research is: Are the elements for a major armed ethnic conflict within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) present and, if so, to what extent? Using a sociological theoretical framework, the thesis also asks secondary questions: Were the elements that led to armed ethnic conflict in the past similar to the conditions present today? Does the current situation provide an environment conducive to major armed conflict in the near future?

In order to discuss these research questions, I will approach the problem using a two-step process. First, I will evaluate the motives for political violence within Xinjiang. Then, I will evaluate the means available for supporting political violence as well as the opportunity structure for engaging in political violence. The role of ethnicity as a contributing factor to the conflict will be included in both steps. Motive, means, and

opportunity have traditionally been impacted by expanding and contracting of government policies, restrictions on ethnic minorities, and turbulent changes within the region due to war and imperial power struggles. These factors have often created an environment conducive to political violence in Xinjiang. Therefore I will examine impact of current People's Republic of China (PRC) government policies as well as the impact of international non-state actors, economic conditions, and social factors on the region. Academic and policy literature on Xinjiang have predominantly been focused on discontent within Uyghur society due to Chinese government policies. The debate among scholars focuses on how PRC economic, political, and social policies have led to Uyghur dissatisfaction and promoted violence. Arguments that allude to unintended consequences of government policies are present in some works. The repressive nature of the Chinese government is a recurring theme in all contemporary works of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

This thesis argues that a variety of factors exist within the Xinjiang today that create the motive within Uyghur society for people to engage in political violence to address their ethnic, economic, social, and political grievances. Similar factors have led to large-scale armed ethno-nationalist conflict in the past when the opportunity structure existed. Such conflict may occur in the future if conditions are again favorable. Modern Chinese policies regarding civil liberties (religious freedom, etc.) and political liberties (autonomy) have created animosity toward the government in Xinjiang. Economic policies have favored the coastal regions and the Han nationality, contributing to relative economic deprivation for Uyghurs and other minorities, and providing motive for collective political violence to address these concerns. Additionally, external support from radical organizations promoting Islamic fundamentalism, although not favored by the majority of Uyghurs, provide the additional means for collective political violence because such organizations provide funding and arms to those who wish to engage in a armed conflict.

The research for this thesis will comprise a case study of the Xinjiang focusing on the motive, means, and opportunity for organized collective political violence and the role of ethnicity as a driver for it. The writings of Owen Lattimore, James Millward, and

Peter C. Perdue provide detailed historical accounts of the region under Qing rule with focus on the conquest of Xinjiang, the governance of Xinjiang, and the economic, political, and social impacts of Chinese rule. They provide an account of Chinese frontier policies that contributed to Uyghur frustration and fostered both greed and grievance. These works also provide some insight into the means and opportunity structure of the era, which includes Chinese policies, regional instability, and external support from other states. An evaluation of ethnic minority issues during both the Republican and Communist eras highlight the effects on Uyghur society of Chinese policies regarding religion, education, and culture. Donald H. McMillen, Linda Benson, and June Teufel Dreyer provide detailed historical accounts of the late republican era and early communist era within Xinjiang. An examination of Chinese policies that continued to foster grievance during China's Communist era, particularly the Reform era, highlight the constant contracting and expanding social and cultural freedoms which frustrate ethnic minorities. An evaluation of China's economic modernization highlights the cultural and religious exchanges that occurred due to expanded trade. It will also examine the impact of the rise of Islam, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the impact of Uyghur Diaspora in post-Soviet Central Asia. Finally, it will look at the expanding influence of international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and Uyghur Diaspora in Europe and the United States who highlight Chinese policies driven to suppress expressions of cultural and religious freedom.

Chapter II will discuss the theoretical framework for this thesis, providing a brief description of the Relative Deprivation and Rational Choice approaches to political violence as the driving forces behind motive, followed by the description of the Enabling Environment that facilitates political violence by providing means and opportunity. The chapter will synthesize motive, means, and opportunity with ethnic identity in order to provide the framework from which to analyze the prospects for organized collective political violence in Xinjiang.

Chapter III provides an overview of rebellion and revolt in the pre-Communist eras. The first section focuses on the Xinjiang region from Qing conquest in 1758 until Qing collapse in 1911, with emphasis given to the Muslim rebellion from 1863-1877.

The second section focuses on the Xinjiang region from the collapse of the Qing dynasty through the end of the Chinese Civil War, emphasizing the creation of independent East Turkistan states from 1932-1934 and from 1944-1949. Both sections examine the political, social, and economic factors that led to the motivation to engage in armed rebellion under Qing rule.

Chapter IV provides an overview of Uyghur Separatism under the Chinese Communist Party. The first section focuses on state-Uyghur relations under the Chinese Communist Party from the creation of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region until the death of Mao Zedong. It examines the political, social, and economic impacts on Uyghur society of Mao's revolutionary government, focusing on the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The second section focuses on Xinjiang from the emergence of Deng Xiaoping as the leader of the Chinese Communist Party until 2005. It examines the effects of economic reforms, the loosening and tightening of civil and political liberties throughout the era, and the anti-terrorism crackdown on ethnic Uyghurs after 9/11. Focus will be given to the rise of ethno-nationalism in the Xinjiang and its impact on the motivation to engage in political violence to address collective grievances, as well as to obtain selective economic and social. This section will also examine the collapse of the Soviet Union and creation of Central Asian states with ethnic overtones, the rise of Islamic theocratic nation-states, external support from Uyghur Diaspora, and support from radical Islamic fundamentalist groups with regard to their ability to create opportunities for armed conflict within Xinjiang.

The conclusion will summarize the findings of Uyghur propensity to engage in mass political violence. It will apply the theoretical framework to qualitatively analyze the prospects for major ethnic political violence in order to isolate indicators of a favorable environment for major armed conflict. It will evaluate cost versus benefit of such violence within the governmental framework and determine if the crossover point of risk versus gain can materialize in the XUAR under current conditions. It will also give policy recommendations for how the United States should respond to any large-scale violence in XUAR given the current economic ties with China and U. S. national interests in regional stability in Central, Southeast, and East Asia.

## II. ELEMENTS OF MASS ORGANIZED POLITICAL VIOLENCE

### A. INTRODUCTION

The basic theoretical proposition of this thesis is that three independent variables must be present for effective collective political violence to occur: motive, means, and opportunity (See Figure 2). This does not account for random collective violence, which may occur in conjunction with organized political protests or may occur separately due to radical elements of a larger group. It neither suggests that in the absence of one or more of these elements political violence cannot occur. Rather the argument is that organized collective political violence will likely have these features and that the stronger the motive, the greater the means and the opportunity, the more likely organized collective political violence will occur. The evaluation of the propensity for collective political violence must also synthesize ethnicity with motive, opportunity, and means in any case where the conflict has an ethnic element, as does ours. As an intervening variable, ethnic identity becomes an integral part of the equation when evaluating the motive, means, and opportunity structure for political violence. Ethnic identity, combined with discrimination and repression, will likely increase motive and certain elements of means for collective action within an ethnic group. To support this proposition we will discuss motive separately from opportunity and means; and will discuss ethnicity as required to amplify its impact. After our initial discussion of ethnic identity, we will discuss motive in terms of grievance and greed followed by the means and opportunity structure.

Motive	Means	Opportunity
1) Social, economic, or political grievance	1) Leadership and manpower	1) Internal instability
2) Environmentally scarce resources (mineral and oil deposits, water reserves)	2) Supply and logistics	2) External conflict
3) Greed (political or economic power)	3) Financing	3) Political changes in adjacent states
	4) Diaspora and external state support	4) Government collapse

Figure 2. Elements of Political Violence

## B. ETHNICITY

In the discussion of ethnicity, one must first have a suitable definition of the term. Although several variations exist, it is generally accepted that ethnicity consists of common identifiable characteristics such as race, religion, language, territorial attachment, and shared ancestry.<sup>1</sup> The two modern schools of thought attribute the salience of ethnicity to either primordialism or instrumentalism.<sup>2</sup> Primordialism argues that the common characteristics mentioned above strengthen ethnic salience because they create psychological sources of ethnic identity. One identifies with a particular group because he has common characteristics with the group.<sup>3</sup> An example of a primordialist argument might be that ethnic elites, who might otherwise distance themselves from their own ethnicity along class lines, would identify with and support those members of their ethnicity who suffer economically under a repressive regime. Another example might be the galvanization of ethnic identity across class boundaries due to the denial of an ethnic group's ability to practice its language, religion, or social customs.

The competing school argues that the common characteristics are a manipulation of ethnicity by ethnic elites to serve their political goals. Instrumentalists contend that ethnic identity can be formed and reformed based on those political goals.<sup>4</sup> Ethnic elites seeking political power may manipulate ethnicity as a means to politicize issues and rally support from their pursuit of their political goals. Ethnicity often becomes an issue unintentionally, at which point primordialist and instrumentalist arguments may overlap. When government policies or practices that promote economic growth but repress or deny social mobility, group members may naturally align with their coworkers while ethnic elites can be use the issue to strengthen ethnic identity. If a cultural division of

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1 Susan Olzak, "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), 356; see also Ronnie D. Lipschultz, "Seeking a State of One's Own: An Analytical Framework for Assessing Ethnic and Sectarian Conflicts," in Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschultz, ed., *The Myth of "Ethnic Conflict": Politics, Economics, and "Cultural" Violence*, (Berkeley, 1998), 44-78.

2 Earl Conteh-Morgan, *Collective Political Violence: An Introduction to the Theories and Cases of Violent Conflict*, (New York and London, 2004), 197.

3 Conteh-Morgan, 199-200; see also Dmitry Gorenburg, "Not with One Voice: An Explanation of Intragroup Variation in Nationalist Sentiment," *World Politics*, 53, (October 2000), 115-142.

4 Ibid.

labor results from a combination of economic growth and government policies, ethnic salience may be increased if an ethnic group is denied job mobility. Concurrently, ethnicity may then be politicized.<sup>5</sup> Both views on ethnicity can be helpful in explaining why ethnicity becomes an important element that influences motive, as well as means and opportunity to which we now turn.

### **C. MOTIVE**

While discussing motive as a driving force behind political violence may seem to be a given, the debate over exactly *what* motivates individuals to collective political violence is ongoing. The discourse on political violence attempts to determine the root causes of political violence. Such determinations are beyond the scope of this thesis. Various arguments on root causes ranging from deprivation to environmental scarcities to greed are all plausible. More often than not, though, an argument based on deprivation as a root cause can also be argued as economically driven. One man's grievance is another man's greed and the determination of whether the root causes of political violence are either one or the other often bogs down the discussion. For our purposes, what scholars argue to be root causes of collective political violence, we will categorize as motive for collective political violence. It is useful, though, to understand the two leading approaches to determining the root causes of collective political violence. These two approaches are important because they provide the theoretical framework for the independent variable of motive and assist in the evaluation of political, social, and economic conditions as contributing factors to motive. Therefore, a basic examination of these approaches is appropriate in order to provide a point of departure when determining whether motives for collective political violence exist and to what level they permeate the ethnic group.

The first approach attributes such action to a response to frustration generated by deprivation of social, political, or economic opportunities that they perceive to be out of reach for varying reasons. Proponents of this model cite grievance as the root cause of collective political violence. This approach focuses on "relative deprivation" as the

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<sup>5</sup> Olzak, 356-357; Lipschultz, 44-78.

explanation for collective political violence. The second approach attributes such action to the desire for personal gain, whether social, political, economic, or psychological. Proponents of this model cite selective incentives, often characterized as greed, as the root cause of collective political violence. The leading theory in this school takes a “rational choice” approach to collective political violence.

### **1. Relative Deprivation**

Relative deprivation derives from the frustration aggression theory originally proposed in 1939 by John Dollard *et al*, which purports that people resort to violence due to frustration, specifically “that the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.”<sup>6</sup> According to this hypothesis, any type of frustration encountered by a person will eventually result in the expression of aggression. This argument, however, does not seem to take into consideration the human capability of delaying gratification and overcoming emotional weakness. The strength of this theory is not in whether a person acts on their frustration or not, but that their frustration creates aggressive emotions. Such aggressive emotions can be turned to action given the right catalyst.

Ted Robert Gurr, in his seminal book *Why Men Rebel*, developed the relative deprivation approach into a fully developed theory of collective violence. Gurr examined aggressive emotions that become aggressive action. He elaborated on the frustration aggression hypothesis by attributing frustration to relative deprivation, which he defines as “actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities.”<sup>7</sup> In his theory when people’s ability to obtain or achieve those objects, goals, or positions in life that they desire does not match their expectations of what they should be able to achieve, frustration develops. Abilities and expectations may be compared along many avenues: time (past vs. present, present vs. future); classes (peasants vs. bourgeoisie); or ethnicity are some examples. Gurr proposes three types of

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<sup>6</sup> John Dollard et al, *Frustration and Aggression*, (New Haven: 1939), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, (Princeton: 1970), 24.

relative deprivation: decremental deprivation, aspirational deprivation, and progressive deprivation. Of these three approaches, the most useful when conducting a chronological analysis of Uyghur society is progressive deprivation due to the expanding and contracting of government policies within Xinjiang throughout the communist era. Progressive deprivation occurs when a “more-or-less steady improvement in peoples’ value position generates expectations about continued improvement.”<sup>8</sup> A group’s expectations rise when its ability to achieve its aspirations improves. When that ability suddenly disappears and expectations for continued improvement remain, frustration occurs. Gurr argues that if the degree of relative deprivation is high enough, and the use of political violence may improve a group’s situation, then the group will engage in collective political violence against the source of their discontent in order to remove their frustration.

Since relative deprivation is a subjective comparison using the viewpoint of the aggrieved as its basis, and because so many comparisons can be drawn, virtually any group can claim they are deprived. Because of this fundamental flaw, we shall narrow our scope when examining the evidence that supports relative deprivation as a motive in Xinjiang. Our comparisons will view relative deprivation in terms of the conflict as claimed by the Chinese government, namely ethnicity. Our ethnic analysis will examine Uyghur society compared to Han within Xinjiang and Uyghur society in China compared to Uyghur society in adjacent nation states. We will also include a chronological analysis due to the Chinese government’s changing policies and their repercussions within Uyghur society. These comparisons will be based on evidence presented by third party observers from various NGOs as well as ethnic Diaspora in order to more plausibly determine its value as motive. I argue that relative deprivation alone does not equate to violence, but provides motive for political violence if, as Gurr claims, the group believes “that they stand a chance of relieving some of their discontent through violence.”<sup>9</sup>

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8 Gurr, 52.

9 Ibid., 210.

## 2. Rational Choice

The rational choice approach to collective political violence proposes that individuals engage in collective action for some personal benefit, which may be of an economic, social, psychological, or erotic in nature.<sup>10</sup> This argument purports that when individuals participate within a group for the advancement of collective good, they do not *solely* do it for the group as a whole, but rather as a means of obtaining a collective good while simultaneously achieving some personal benefit. In *The Logic of Collective Action, Public Goods, and the Theory of Groups*, Mancur Olson argues that group behavior does not necessarily follow the same pattern as individual behavior. In general a rational, self-interested individual will pursue interests that benefit him or her personally. However, in groups where those same interests are collectively sought, the same rational, self-interested person will likely not pursue the collective good.<sup>11</sup> In large groups individual action for collective good often requires coercion on the group's part, because the cost for engaging in collective action is greater than the benefits. Coercion, or the offering or withholding of a selective incentive, spurs the individual to action because "the recalcitrant individual can be ostracized, and the cooperative individual can be invited into the center of the charmed circle."<sup>12</sup> However, even if coercion is used the decision to act collectively still stems from personal desires for individual gain. It is a cost versus benefit analysis unique to the individual's value structure. Therefore rational choice in its most basic form involves individual gains to be made during the pursuit of collective action according to his value structure. Since a person chooses to engage in political violence for a selective incentive, the most argued incentive is economic gain.

Economic gain provides rationale for both social scientists and economists. Paul Collier argues that it motivates people to political violence far more often than grievance. In his assessment political violence remains an endeavor in which people engage when it is profitable to do so. Economic conditions such as dependence on primary commodity

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10 Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action, Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, (New York: 1965), 61.

11 Ibid., 13-14.

12 Ibid., 60-61.

exports, low average income of the country, and slow growth are more likely to be linked to political violence than grievance.<sup>13</sup> The desire to control primary commodity exports in order to control the wealth generated, provides more incentive than grievance against the government. In the terminology of Collier and Hoeffler, greed and economic viability have stronger explanatory power than grievance in such cases.<sup>14</sup> Greed and economic power can also be seen in ethnic conflicts associated with scarce or contested natural resources. Resources most frequently linked to civil conflict in this and other world regions are diamonds and other gemstones, oil and natural gas, timber and illicit drugs.<sup>15</sup> The conflict in Sierra Leone falls in this category. Although the rebel group arrived at the bargaining table with a litany of grievances, a peace agreement could not be agreed upon until the rebel leader was offered not only the vice-presidency, but also the position of Minister of Finance, suggesting that the mining of diamonds and its economic gains contributed more to the underlying cause of the conflict than grievance.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of non-economic incentives must be considered as well when discussing rational choice. Arguably it is more difficult to assess social, psychological, and erotic or spiritual benefits than economic benefits; however, such benefits cannot be discounted and must be taken into consideration when contemplating ethnic based movements. Two characteristics of ethnicity offer examples of intangible benefits: religion and language. The repression of religion or the use of language, while a form of deprivation, make the recapture of the ability to practice such integral facets of ethnicity a selective incentive unique to the ethnic collectivity. Each person's individual desire to obtain this incentive will vary, but the importance of the symbolism of religion and language to ethnic identity may well loom large in both the individual and collective realm.

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13 Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Causes and Their Implications for Policy," in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aell, Eds., *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (Washington, D.C.: 2001), 151.

14 Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, Greed and Grievance in Civil War, Working paper, World Bank, October 2001.

15 Michael L. Ross, "Oil, Drugs, and Diamonds: The Varying Roles of Natural Resources in Civil War", in Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, eds., *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict. Beyond Greed & Grievance*, (Boulder and London: 2003), 47-73.

### 3. Convergence of Relative Deprivation and Rational Choice

Neither grievance nor greed can account for every ethnic based political movement. Barbara Salert points out several flaws in both relative deprivation theory and rational choice theory. The lack of economic deprivation of many modern revolutionary leaders does not fit the profile. She also argues that people experiencing severe deprivation may be more concerned with survival than political rebellion.<sup>17</sup> With regard to rational choice theory she argues that large-scale group rebellion does not always include selective incentives great enough to offset the costs of rebellion. Her examples include both the French and Russian revolutions, in which severe penalties and lack of economic and political incentives to the lower classes did not dissuade political violence.<sup>18</sup> Even though these theories cannot account for every instance of collective political violence, they can both contribute significantly to the analysis of motive. Even Gurr and Collier acknowledge this. Gurr accounts for it by placing relative deprivation and ethnicity in the collective action theory framework, citing selective incentives based on ethnic identity. Collier provides the exception that societies where the ethnically dominate group represents 90-95 percent of the population, grievance will likely be a driving force for political violence than greed. It is clear to me that some people will act for personal gain and others will act for what they perceive as morally right. Some will act regardless of the costs, while others will wait until the cost benefit ratio is favorable. People who benefit from selective incentives would seem to be more limited in scope than those who benefit from the redress of grievance, but grievance would seem to be the better means of mobilization for leaders attempting to recruit large numbers of supporters. Thus lays the possibility of grievance and greed complementing each other in the pursuit of ethnic political violence within the framework of collective action theory. For collective political violence to occur, motive must combine with means and opportunity, the subject of the next section.

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16 Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Causes and Their Implications for Policy," 151.

17 Barbara Salert, *Revolutions and Revolutionaries: Four Theories*, (New York: 1976), 63-64.

18 *Ibid.*, 45-47.

#### D. MEANS AND OPPORTUNITY

Means and opportunity represents critical elements for collective political violence. Without means and opportunity, motive will likely not be enough to ignite collective political violence. Proponents of both greed and grievance cite means and opportunity within their theories. Their discussion acknowledges the importance of conditions to a collective political movement. This thesis will explore means and opportunity within Xinjiang's minority population, particularly current Uyghur society, because it is within this environment that they synthesize with motive to produce political violence. Kumar Ramakshira describes a "functional and political space" that can be exploited by organizations opposed to the state<sup>19</sup>, what I will term means. The functional space includes the extent of membership, finance, member expertise, and geography, primarily internal means; while the political space includes outside sympathy from similar groups, local root causes of discontent, and outside support for opposition to the state, primarily external means.<sup>20</sup> We categorize the local root causes within the independent variable of motive, so for our purposes, means may then be viewed as the administrative, logistical, and manpower elements needed to effectively plan and execute extended operations against the state. Obtaining the structure to support membership and operations requires mobilization of forces within the ethnic group opposed to the state.

Ethnic mobilization as a part of the means is the primary source for administrative, logistical, and manpower elements. Ethnic mobilization is the responsibility of the ethnic leadership, which makes ethnic leadership a key ingredient. Leadership must then be legitimate in order to mobilize the group. Within the Weberian model three types of authority provide leaders with the ability to exert their will on the people. Within a society where an ethnic group is in opposition to the state the first type, legal authority belongs to the government. The ethnic leadership typically attains its authority from traditional or charismatic means or a combination of the two. A leader

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<sup>19</sup> Kumar Ramakshira, "Countering Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: The Need to Confront the Functional and Ideological 'Enabling Environment'", in Paul J. Smith, ed., *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia: Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability*, (Armonk, NY: 2005), 146.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

who holds both traditional and charismatic authority can be quite dangerous for the state with which he is opposed. However, leadership that uses charismatic or traditional authority will likely use personal networks to fill the bureaucratic structure required to manage the administrative, logistical, and manpower elements. This leaves the group vulnerable to the loss of a charismatic leader, and possibly to the loss of a traditional leader as well if no other traditional authority can replace him. Leadership also operates within the political space as well.

The political space includes the psychological and social elements used to draw support from external actors by a group in opposition to the state. Here the leadership takes an active role in the political space. External support often generates tangible resources in the form of intelligence, additional manpower recruitment, safe-havens, and funds.<sup>21</sup> Rallying support from domestic and international requires that the leadership clearly articulate motives, means, and goals. A leader who cannot will likely fail to convince others to support the organization. The effective use of rhetoric can increase the perception of deprivation within the group and generate external sympathy. The most likely target of such rhetoric is geared to the actors who have the economic and political ability to support the organization: ethnic Diaspora, external states and international NGOs.

Ethnic Diaspora and external states contribute significantly to the enabling environment. Diaspora contributes in three significant ways. First, they nurse grievances because they often have the political freedom to do so. Second, they are often financially independent, allowing them to fund separatist's activities. Third, they may have political leverage with foreign governments who can in turn pressure the state to accommodate the ethnic minority through unilateral actions or multilateral actions via the United Nations. Diaspora can be dangerous because they conduct such activities dislocated from the dangers of the political conflict. Their actions may cause greater problems for the ethnic

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<sup>21</sup> Ramakshira, 154.

population at home if the regime's responds to ethnic unrest with repression.<sup>22</sup> External states may impose economic sanctions or intervene militarily to stem ethnic repression. NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch impact the enabling environment in different ways. As independent actors within the international system, NGOs can provide analysis and recommendations with little fear of reprisal against the ethnic population due to their actions. Unlike Diaspora, NGOs typically do not have family linkages that may be manipulated in order to prevent publication of its findings. Although NGOs overtly support resistance by the ethnic minority, but like Diaspora, they do exert pressure on the United Nations and other governments to address grievances of ethnic minorities.

The likelihood that grievances induced by social inequality and economic deprivation will lead to violent political protests is also mitigated by other factors such as: a low degree of trust in political authorities combined with a high degree of belief that the use of violence by dissident groups in the past has helped their course; semi-repressive political structures in intermediate political regimes; defects of the democratic order such as low accountability and shallow patterns of political representation; and 'state weakness'.<sup>23</sup> As a part of the enabling environment these factors fall under the category of state actions that lead to opportunity. In our discussion, the factors associated with the Chinese state are primarily the areas of political trust, repressive political structures, and accountability of the political order. Our analysis of the Chinese state and its role in affecting means and opportunity will focus on those areas mentioned above.

## **E. APPLICATION**

In order to determine conditions favorable for ethnic political violence exist within Xinjiang's Uyghur population, an historical and contemporary examination of the socio-economic and political aspects of the ethnic society's relationship to the Chinese

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Causes and Their Implications for Policy," in Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aell, Eds., *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (Washington, D.C.: 2001), 155.

<sup>23</sup> Aurel Croissant, "Political Violence, Extremism and the Transformation to Democracy and Market Economy," paper presented at the Bertelsmann Foundation Conference "Transformation Thinkers," Berlin, 5-10 October, 2005.

state must be undertaken. Under these auspices this thesis will analyze motives for political violence using the relative deprivation and rational choice approaches discussed above. We will evaluate means and opportunity by examining the conditions of the political and functional spaces within the enabling environment as well as the Chinese state's impact. By evaluating Chinese-Uyghur interactions within this framework, this thesis will assess the motives and environment within Xinjiang to determine if favorable conditions exist for large-scale collective political violence against the Chinese state. In Xinjiang, ethnic distinctions such as religion, language, customs, and history, which are likely irreconcilable under the current regime, provide an intervening variable that shapes both motive and means.

### III. UNDER THE EMPIRE: FROM MANCHU RULE TO NATIONALIST RULE

#### A. OVERVIEW OF QING ERA (1759-1911)

In 1759 the Qing Dynasty finally completed its campaign in the far northwest region. The result was the acquisition of a land mass larger than Alaska that accounts for one-sixth the total land mass of modern-day China.<sup>24</sup> The goal of the Qing emperor was not necessarily to create an additional province, but to create a barrier region between China proper and those Central Asian threats from nomadic tribes to its population that could financially sustain itself.<sup>25</sup> The Qing governed this area through a military settlement and deployed its forces on a rotational basis.<sup>26</sup> The local system of rule by local tribal elders called *begs* remained in place in order to avoid resistance among the local Muslims. In 1765 a rebellion occurred in the far southwest city of Ush, but was quickly quelled by Qing forces.<sup>27</sup> Following this minor uprising the Qing ruled relatively peacefully until the 1820s. During the 1820s a series of incursions into Xinjiang by the Kokand Khanate troubled Qing rule in Xinjiang. The Kokand Khanate attempted to regain its foothold in Xinjiang through militarily incursions, a constant threat to Qing rule of the area that also created a drain on the imperial treasury for defense of the region.<sup>28</sup> The Qing responded with a trade embargo after a major incursion the 1826. In the 1830 the Kokand Khanate responded to this embargo with a major push into the region. Militarily the Qing repelled the Kokand forces, but in 1831 acceded to Kokand's trade demands and entered into what has been called "China's first unequal treaty."<sup>29</sup>

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24 James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Ethnicity and Economy in Chinese Central Asia*, (Stanford: 1998), 20.

25 Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005), 336.

26 Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 21.

27 Perdue, 337; Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 124-125.

28 Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 34-35; Joseph Fletcher, "The Heyday of the Ch'ing Order in Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 10 Late Ch'ing, 1800-1911, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, (London: 1978),

29 Fletcher, 378.

From the treaty with Kokand in 1831 until the Muslim uprisings in 1863, the Qing ruled Xinjiang unchallenged. Economic problems, due to Xinjiang's inability to sustain itself financially, forced the central government to send annual monetary shipment to augment Xinjiang's budget deficits. Notwithstanding, it was a time of increased Han migration to the region supported by government incentives. As the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion drained China's imperial treasury, the economic situation in Xinjiang worsened due to the loss of annual shipments.<sup>30</sup> When the Muslim rebellion in neighboring Gansu province erupted, Xinjiang's Muslims rebelled also. The Qing government, attempting to suppress the Taiping rebellion was in no position to meet the rebellion militarily and Xinjiang slipped into chaos. Russia moved troops into the Ili river valley in northwestern Xinjiang under the pretext of restoring order, while Yaqub Beg consolidated his power in southwestern Xinjiang.<sup>31</sup> The Qing finally quelled the Taiping rebellion in 1865, and spent the next twelve years reclaiming Gansu and Xinjiang. The government established by Yaqub Beg found limited recognition in the international community and found no support from external states when the Qing returned to Xinjiang. They recaptured the area held by Yaqub Beg in 1877 and he died during the fighting, by all accounts from a self-inflicted wound. The Qing then began negotiations for the return of the Ili region from Russia, which was completed in 1881.

In 1884 after bitter discussion in the Qing court, Xinjiang along with Taiwan were made provinces. Xinjiang now had all the rights and privileges of very other Chinese province, to include the mode of government. The Qing scrapped the beg system of local rule and established the full bureaucratic system of government.<sup>32</sup> Increased Han migration into Xinjiang continued, but economically the new province failed to blossom. As the Qing dynasty further declined economic conditions deteriorated as well. Han immigrants often left their Xinjiang farms and returned to their home provinces, leaving

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<sup>30</sup> These "conflicts" were primarily the Opium Wars of 1840 and 1860.

<sup>31</sup> Yaqub Beg had no role in precipitation of the rebellion itself. He opportunistically grasped power in Xinjiang and his government established itself with questionable legitimacy in the international arena. Several sources provide insightful information into his person and his regime in Xinjiang. For the purpose of this paper the period of his government and rule are a matter of fact and are outside the scope of this analysis of Muslim/Chinese relations.

<sup>32</sup> James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. Frederick S Starr, (Armonk, NY: 2004), 63-65.

untended plots of land for local Muslims, primarily the group known today as Uyghurs, to claim.<sup>33</sup> As the anti-Qing sentiment increased within China, factions within Xinjiang also emerged. In 1911 when the Qing was toppled, so was the Qing administration in Xinjiang. From the revolution emerged the warlord era in China, from which Xinjiang would fall prey as well.

## **B. MOTIVE, MEANS, AND OPPORTUNITY DURING THE QING ERA**

As stated previously, the determination of motive based on historical sources alone is difficult; however, evaluating the evolution of state policies that negatively impacted the ethnic minority helps to understand the layered nature of collective memory within an ethnic group. In the case of minority policy within Xinjiang during the Qing dynasty, the initial policy of non-interference with local customs and laws reflected Qing awareness of the danger of overburdening the local populous immediately following conquest. Their initial treatment of the Muslim population of Xinjiang mirrored their policies in China proper with a few key exceptions. Local minority leaders retained their position of authority and ruled as before with the exception that the local military authorities held overarching authority for the region.<sup>34</sup> The Qing reduced the taxes levied on the indigenous population compared to the former taxes levied by the Kokand Khanate in an attempt to offset any resentment of Qing authority in the region. However, unlike within China proper, law and order were based on both Islamic law and Qing Imperial law, with local peoples subject to local laws except in the most egregious crimes against other local peoples or family, crimes against the Han or the government; while Han soldiers and civilians were subject to Imperial law.<sup>35</sup> The Qing decisions to maintain the local minority ruling structure through the use of local *begs*, lower taxes, and allow minority crimes to be handled within Muslim courts created little incentive to rise up against the occupiers. To the average person life was not much different after the conquest than before.

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33 Millward and Tursun, 66-67.

34 Perdue, 338-340.

35 Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 121-122.

Initially Qing policies favored the local populous, primarily leaders and indigenous merchants. Although Han merchants were allowed access to Xinjiang in fairly large numbers to “accelerate Xinjiang’s commercial development,”<sup>36</sup> their activities remain limited. Chinese merchant trade within Xinjiang was primarily with the Qing military under government guidelines.<sup>37</sup> Han merchants could neither cross Xinjiang’s western borders to conduct trade (while local merchants could trade beyond the borders of Qing control), nor exploit indigenous farmers during harvest periods.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these policies, abuse of power created the friction between Muslims and the Qing government in the first few years due to Han officials conduct, including extortion, and allegations of licentiousness and rape.<sup>39</sup> This early friction culminated in an incident dubbed the Ush rebellion. The Ush rebellion sparked from “the impressment of 240 East Turkistan men in March 1765 to transport oleaster.”<sup>40</sup> This met with vicious response from the locals and resulted in the Qing having to send military forces to quell the disturbance.<sup>41</sup> The significance of the Ush rebellion lies not in its occurrence but in the changes in policy implemented afterward. After this incident the Chinese population and the Muslim population were segregated to ensure further such incidents.<sup>42</sup> This segregation combined with Qing economic policies presented little motive for Muslim rebellion against Qing rule.

The Kokand incursions of the 1820s made it clear to the local population that the previous rulers still held interests in the region. It also provided an external means to support collective violence against the Qing government in support of the Kokand forces when the opportunity arrived. This external support, even though in the form of direct invasion, would provide the manpower and weapons for those who wished to rise up against the Qing. The extent to which the Kokand could provide personnel and

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36 Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 116.

37 Perdue, 120-121.

38 Ibid., 122-124.

39 Throughout this chapter references to the Chinese population include both Chinese and ruling Manchu peoples.

40 Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 124

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 124-125.

equipment to local Muslims to be used against the Qing is debatable. When the opportunity presented itself for Muslims to align themselves with the Kokand forces against the Qing garrisons during the 1830 invasion, the question of local ethnic minority loyalty became highlighted because the Muslims had been living separate from the Chinese population. Chinese merchants holed up in the cities under siege believed rumors of Muslim local support during the incursion. This elicited a brutal response by these Han merchants. Although Qing officials called for restraint, their calls went unheeded and resulted in the deaths of several Muslims. After the Kokand invasion the Qing investigated the above mentioned incident and although there was inconclusive evidence that the general population supported Kokand, the Qing decided that the government's policy needed to change.<sup>43</sup> An increase in Han immigration into the region occurred, primarily merchants and their dependents from internal provinces.<sup>44</sup> Thus began an era in which relative deprivation influenced Muslim motive against the Qing government.

The Qing government had hoped that the increased immigration into Xinjiang would create a double benefit: first, Xinjiang would finally become self sufficient; second, Xinjiang would be populated by loyal Qing subjects. Neither benefit happened. The influx of Han into Xinjiang only exacerbated ethnic minority-Han relations. With the influx of settlers into the region land suitable for farming became increasingly limited. Qing officials removed locals accused of supporting the Kokand invasion from their land and gave said land to Han immigrants.<sup>45</sup> When comparing their lot to that of the newly arrived Han population, the local Muslim population was subjected to economic and physical deprivation by the Qing. Such policies and the resulting disparity in quality of life before and after policy shifts would contribute to motive for removal of the Qing and Han from Xinjiang according to Gurr theory of Relative Deprivation.

This shift in policy alone would have contributed to motive against the Qing, but the inability for Xinjiang to pay for its own costs for Qing occupation exacerbated the situation. With the combined costs of fighting the Opium Wars and the Taiping

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<sup>43</sup> Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 225.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

rebellion, the Qing emperor was unable to continue to financially support Xinjiang. Taxation of the local populous began to increase in order to offset the complete loss of revenue from the central government in Beijing.<sup>46</sup> On top of this taxation local merchants continued to compete with Han merchants and by the time of the Muslim uprising in 1864 tensions within Xinjiang were high and both economic incentives and decremental deprivation contributed to Muslim resentment of the Qing Empire.

From the elevation of Xinjiang to province level status until the collapse of the Qing dynasty government excessive taxation of the general population increased as the Qing dynasty continued its downward spiral and remained unable to meet its fiscal requirements.<sup>47</sup> The departure of many Han families due to the excessive taxation and the subsequent influx of Muslim families to take over these empty plots of land somewhat alleviated tension.<sup>48</sup> These latter two factors combined with anti-Qing sentiment among both Han Chinese and Muslims led to cooperation during the Chinese revolution. Overall during Qing rule changing policies created a declining state of affairs for Xinjiang's ethnic minorities economically. The events that led to Qing shifts in policy also left mistrust and bitterness. Both grievance and greed contributed to motive.

The means to conduct an armed rebellion favored the ethnic minorities in manpower from the beginning. The Qing military capability held the upper hand throughout the latter half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, but the Qing government's desire to have Xinjiang finance itself meant that soldiers spent more time farming than training, leaving their martial arts skills to atrophy.<sup>49</sup> By the time of the Muslim rebellions of 1864, the Qing military in Xinjiang no longer held the heavy advantage it once did, enabling the Muslim population to bring to bear their means of resistance.

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<sup>46</sup> Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: the Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877*, (Stanford: 2004), 32-33.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 32-33; see also Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 239.

<sup>48</sup> Millward and Tursun, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Millward, *Beyond the Pass*, 240-241.

The opportunity to rebel would seem to have been available almost constantly during Qing rule. Anger and resentment toward the Qing and the Chinese grew more steadily as the burdens created from Qing taxes and Han immigration grew. The Qing Empire, although on the dynastic decline, did not become a weak state until the western powers arrived. The costs of the First Opium War and the subsequent Taiping rebellion reduced the Qing in both financial and military strength to the point where opportunity, motive, and means aligned.

Although viewing such a period through an historical lens complicates analyzing such phenomena as what in modern terms is called political violence, the motivating factors and opportunity for armed rebellion can be seen fairly clearly, while the clarity of means is limited to the manpower advantage of the local population.

### **C. OVERVIEW OF REPUBLICAN ERA**

The Republican Era most notably was a time of constant change and chaos within Xinjiang. The period was rife with conflict, conspiracy, and revolt. Some of this came from internal forces and some came from the interstate political maneuvering due to colonialism, Japanese expansion, and the rise of the Soviet Union. From 1911-1944 Xinjiang was ruled by consecutive quasi-dictators who ostensibly served the nationalist government, but in reality ruled as they wished. The first of these was Yang Zengxin, followed by Jin Shuren, and Sheng Shicai.

In 1911 revolutionary elements rallied both Han and Muslim minorities around the anti-Manchu banner, enabling the ousting of Qing ruling elements in Xinjiang.<sup>50</sup> Yuan Da Hua, the last Qing governor handed power to Yang Zengxin as he fled Xinjiang. Due to the geographic isolation and relative weakness of the new Chinese republic, the newly inaugurated Chinese President Yuan Shi Kai confirmed this appointment of Yang, the commissioner of judicial affairs under the Qing, as governor of Xinjiang.<sup>51</sup> Over the next three years Yang consolidated his power through a series of political and military

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50 Millward and Tursun, 67.

51 Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949*, (New York: 1996), 11-12; Millward and Tursun, 68.

maneuvers which included the granting of political positions to opposition leaders as well as their assassinations in some cases.<sup>52</sup> He primarily followed the Qing example of rule for appeasing ethnic minorities by maintaining ethnic Muslims in lower positions of power, but surrounding himself at the higher levels with close friends and family.<sup>53</sup> However, Yang did not attempt to assimilate the Muslim minority, instead allowing them to live according to their customs within the confines of the limitations he set forth. Yang also did not overtax the minority population; neither did he remove them from their land.<sup>54</sup>

Economically, however, Yang had limited options. The lack of monetary subsidies from the Qing government in the final years of the dynasty continued through its collapse and into Yang's tenure. The lack of financial support from the Chinese central government had somewhat been offset by Xinjiang's trade with Russia. Xinjiang's economy became intricately linked with Russia.<sup>55</sup> The trade rights given to Russia after the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Ili region in 1881 had led to Russia becoming Xinjiang's most important trading partner. The loss of trade due to the Russian revolution resulted in "severe shortages of cloth, sugar, fuel, and industrial products,"<sup>56</sup> as well as lost revenue on Xinjiang's exports to Russia, which included "cotton and pastoral products."<sup>57</sup> Yang attempted to handle this through additional currency, printing no less than four different currencies and manipulating the exchange rates in favor of the local government. Yang was able to keep his hold on power through the economic downturn and once trade resumed with the new Soviet Union, Xinjiang's trade with the Soviet Union blossomed to "almost ten times the value of the province's

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52 Forbes, 12-13.

53 Millward and Tursun, 68; Forbes, 14.

54 Forbes, 15.

55 Forbes, 28-29.

56 Millward and Tursun, 70.

57 Ibid.

trade with China proper.”<sup>58</sup> Yang’s autocratic policies caught up to him eventually as his rule came to an abrupt halt in 1928 with his assassination at a dinner party in Urumchi by his closest advisors.<sup>59</sup>

Yang’s successor, Jin Shuren was neither as politically nor as economically savvy as Yang. His minority policies and incompetent handling of Xinjiang’s economy isolated him across the ethnic spectrum. Jin’s policies toward Muslims included “tax on livestock butchering, prohibition of the hajj, and replacement of local officials with Han officials.”<sup>60</sup> His economic policies led to rampant inflation as he printed currency without restraint, levied unpopular taxes on the general population, and embezzled money from government run monopolies to increase his own personal wealth.<sup>61</sup> Jin’s gravest mistake in ethnic relations came with the disbanding of the Kumul (also called Hami) Khanate,<sup>62</sup> the fallout of which will be discussed in the following section. Jin’s ineptitude led to not only rebellion of the Muslim minorities, but a coup by his own Han officers with the support of White Russians on April 12, 1933.<sup>63</sup> After Jin fled to China proper via the Soviet Union, the rebellion that began because of his misrule led to the establishment of the first Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR) in 1933.<sup>64</sup> This government existence was short-lived when Sheng Shicai, Jin’s military commander, recaptured those areas controlled by the ETR with the aid of the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup> He then consolidated his control of the province.

After the Soviet Union assisted him in quelling the rebellion, Sheng’s tenure was dominated by both political and economic interaction with the Soviet Union. Sheng’s association with the Soviets had practical roots. The Soviet Union’s proximity to Xinjiang being in closer than that of China proper, trade naturally favored the Soviet

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58 Millward and Tursun, 70.

59 Ibid., 71; Forbes, 33-36.

60 Millward and Tursun, 71.

61 Forbes, 40-41.

62 Ibid., 48-51.

63 Millward and Tursun, 71.

64 Ibid., 73-78.

65 Ibid., 78.

Union. In addition to Xinjiang crops, wool, and grain; Xinjiang also held valuable mineral and petroleum resources needed by the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> This allowed Sheng the assurance of Soviet aid against any uprising since the Xinjiang trade held great importance to the Soviets. Sheng had no fear of reprisal or opposition from the GMD given other concerns of the time such as the war against the Japanese.

Sheng's miscalculation of political currents ultimately led to the demise of his rule. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Sheng turned his loyalty from the Soviets to the Nationalists, becoming chairman of GMD party branch, "cut of Soviet trade [and] kicked out Soviet personnel."<sup>67</sup> The GMD government headed by Sheng Shicai now had problems. The loss of the Soviet Union as a trading partner had a severe negative impact on Xinjiang's economy. GMD fiscal policies to counteract the economic crisis, from minting excess Xinjiang currency to replacing it with the Nationalist Chinese dollar, only exacerbated the economic situation.<sup>68</sup> Neither of these plans benefited Xinjiang or its minorities. The only people who benefited from it were Han Chinese merchants and officials.<sup>69</sup> Sheng, however, attempted reconciliation with the Soviet Union when it became clear that Germany would not defeat the Soviets by purging nationalist advisors and appealing to Stalin. Stalin refused his overtures. Sheng had now lost favor of Chang Kai-shek as well. With the economic and political situation deteriorating Sheng was removed by the GMD in late summer 1944.

The GMD plan for Xinjiang also included increased Han colonization, replacement of Turkic officials with Han at all administration levels, and "enormous tax increases to pay for a standing army of 100,000."<sup>70</sup> Xinjiang again devolved into rebellion in late 1944. What is known as the "Ili Rebellion" began near the city of Yining. This rebellion included ethnic minorities within Xinjiang as well as exiles repatriated by the Soviet Union. The GMD and the rebels finally agreed to a coalition

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66 Forbes, 144-148.

67 Ibid, 81.

68 Whiting, 104; Millward and Tursun, 81.

69 Millward and Tursun, 81.

70 Ibid., 82.

government ruled in the south and east by the GMD and in the north by the ETR, whose close relationship with the Soviet Union remained strong until the Communist took power in late 1949.

#### **D. MOTIVE, MEANS, AND OPPORTUNITY DURING THE REPUBLICAN ERA**

Although in the discussion of means motive and opportunity during the Qing era, opportunity was discussed last, during the Nationalist Era, opportunity should be considered first. Simply put, opportunity for political violence remained present throughout the Nationalist Era due to the combination of weak central and provincial government and external influence in the region. During the first few years of the Nationalist government, Xinjiang was a part of China in name only. It was ruled by autocratic individuals whose only hold on power came from their personal militia's loyalty and their manipulation of the cultural differences of Xinjiang's ethnic minorities. Yang Zengxin adeptly manipulated control over opportunity through tight control of the information from the outside world while allowing the Muslim population to adhere to their traditional ways without overburdening them with taxation and immigration.<sup>71</sup> His successor, however, although attempting to maintain tight control of information, both overtaxed the people and shattered the economy,<sup>72</sup> thereby enabling opportunity and motive to juxtapose with means, which will be further discussed below. The third and final autocrat would shift back to a more pluralistic approach, albeit ruthless, after regaining control with the help of the Soviet Union. Once support from the Soviets disappeared rebellion once again occurred.<sup>73</sup> With the government weak and external influence constantly present in the region, those moments where opportunity cohabitated with motive and means, a general uprising occurred.

Although Yang Zengxin's regime was fairly stable, it was extremely unpopular in both Han and minority circles. Yang used divisive tactics and censorship to prevent any

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71 Millward and Tursun, 68-71.

72 Ibid., 71

73 Ibid., 79-81.

uprising against him. This was not solely limited to the minority element within Xinjiang, as seen by the inclusion of a ban on imported publications from both China and Central Asia.<sup>74</sup> He, in fact, severely repressed any form of written media that promoted individual thinking or the spread of revolutionary movements such as pan-Turkic nationalism, Communism, or the Islamic educational movement. Reformed minded individuals were often targeted by Yang to prevent collective thinking that may threaten his government.<sup>75</sup> However, although the repressive nature of the regime gave rise to motive for removal of Yang from power, his tactics of control were directed toward the entire population, therefore relative deprivation between Muslims and Han amounted to nothing. The Muslim population had no motivation to rebel under any ethnic grievance model, *per se*, because their lives were no worse than their Han neighbors.

Yang's government weathered the economic downturn created by the loss of trade due to the Bolshevik revolution in the late 1910's through tight political control and minimal taxation policy. Because the financial burden on the Muslim community was no more than that on the Han population their economic deprivation was no more than that of Chinese either. Trade with the newly formed Soviet Union slowly improved during the early 1920's and in this vein; Muslim's lives again were not in any way deprived economically compared to the Han population. Those things changed under Yang's successor.

Jin Shuren's general misrule created relative deprivation for Xinjiang's Muslims on multiple levels as well as bringing greed into the mix. Jin's unchecked printing of currency produced massive inflation.<sup>76</sup> Jin nearly doubled land taxes and established monopolies under government auspices in several sectors of business, such as the wool and pelt trade.<sup>77</sup> These policies created extreme relative deprivation compared to the previous regime, particularly when taxes on livestock butchering and prohibition of the

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74 Millward and Tursun, 69; Forbes, 14.

75 Forbes, 18-19.

76 Millward and Tursun, 71; Forbes, 40.

77 Forbes, 40.

*hajj* were added to the list. Jin did not only create a situation where Muslim's day-to-day living was worse than before, he also made it worse compared to the Han population's lives as well through one ill conceived plan.

Yang Zengxin had allowed the Kumul Khanate to maintain its autonomous status in line with Qing precedent. Jin continued the policy until Khan Maqsud Shah died then dissolved the Khanate, installed Han officials and implemented Han immigration into the region. These immigrants were allowed a two year tax exemption on the land on which they settled. Jin further aggravated the situation by removing local Muslim's from their land and giving it to some Han immigrants, who were given a three year tax exemption on their land. Finally, adding insult to injury, Jin required the Muslims that were transplanted to pay land taxes on the basis of their old holdings. Jin's removal of the local autonomous rule and installation of Han officials angered Hami Muslims. These changes in policy affected ethnic, religious, and economic deprivation when compared to their previous lives under Yang, but also meant that, compared to the adjacent Han population, they were extremely deprived. This increased motive within the Hami Muslim community against Chinese rule enormously. These policies fueled the Muslim motive for rebellion.<sup>78</sup>

The means had begun to accumulate almost immediately following Jin's assumption of power, while the opportunity for rebellion under Jin Shuren came from an incident that occurred after of the appointment of Han officials in the former Hami Khanate. As mentioned before, increased taxation provided general motive while abolishment of the Hami Khanate fueled the fire. Another result from the Hami policy was the uniting of that region's people in protest to the new land and tax policies after increased Han immigration. Men of the region banded together and sent a telegram to Jin Shuren "exposing their grievances [which] was signed by men of every class among the Moslems."<sup>79</sup> This unification of Muslims in opposition to the government provided manpower to the element of means for the opposition. When no reply came from Jin Shuren preparations for rebellion began and logistical support was added to the element

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<sup>78</sup> Forbes, 46-48.

<sup>79</sup> Mildred Cable with Francesca French, *The Gobi Desert*, (New York: 1944), 221.

of means as supplies began to make their way to staging areas within the mountains.<sup>80</sup> The element of leadership, although present, can only be speculated with regard to who took the lead; although in the former Hami khanate it would likely have been Yulbars Khan and Khoja Niyas Hajji, who emerged as co-leaders of the Muslim insurgents.<sup>81</sup> With these key elements in place the only thing left was for opportunity to become juxtaposed with motive and means, which came earlier than expected in the form of an ethnic slight.

Several different versions of the incident followed, but all follow this basic story. A young Han official in early 1931 became infatuated with a local Muslim (Uyghur) girl and wanted to marry her.<sup>82</sup> The insult sparked a local uprising which quickly spread and was joined by other Turkic Muslims (Kazaks and Kyrgyz), as well as Tungans (Muslim Chinese).<sup>83</sup> From that point the rebellion expanded and the entire province was in open rebellion during 1932-1933.<sup>84</sup>

When Jin fled the capital of Urumchi, Jin's military commander Sheng Shicai became the provincial ruler and after quelling the province. Sheng, with the help of the Soviet Union slowly regained control of Xinjiang, and began ruling Xinjiang with an iron fist, but with improved economic policies. In addition to improved fiscal policies Sheng also improved communications and agricultural infrastructure, building schools, medical facilities, and roads.<sup>85</sup> His cultural policy subscribed to the minority policies of the Soviet Union, categorizing the minority ethnicities in Xinjiang into fourteen categories. This ethnic labeling can be considered the origin of the today's Uyghur ethnicity.<sup>86</sup> This policy promoted literacy among the various ethnicities; assigned government posts for the minorities based on ethnicity; and promoted literacy in the various languages, to

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80 Cable and French, 233.

81 Forbes, 49.

82 See Forbes, 48, Cable and French, 221-222, Millward and Tursun, 75, for the different versions.

83 Millward and Tursun, 75.

84 Ibid., 75.

85 Allen S. Whiting and General Sheng Shih-ts' ai, *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?* (East Lansing, MI: 1958), 137.

86 Millward and Tursun, 80.

include “publication in various Turkic languages.”<sup>87</sup> His fiscal policies and ethnic policies lessened motive to a manageable level, and with the help of the Soviets, means for the Muslims to rebel against Sheng were no longer available.

Motive would still remain, however. Sheng was by no means a benevolent ruler and he also subscribed to Stalin’s use of purges against internal political opposition, to include minorities, which only served to increase motive.<sup>88</sup> When Stalin’s Great Purge descended over central Asia, Sheng carried out his own in Xinjiang.<sup>89</sup> Estimates of prisoners executed under Sheng range from 50,000 to 100,000.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, when Sheng passed from the scene and the GMD assumed full control of Xinjiang in 1944, the province had returned to a position where motive was high and opportunity was knocking. All that was needed was means, which the Soviet Union provided handily.<sup>91</sup> With motive, means, and opportunity aligned once more, rebellion again erupted. The result was the establishment of the East Turkistan Republic (ETR), which battled GMD forces for control until an armistice was established in 1946 with Soviet participation in the negotiations.<sup>92</sup>

## **E. CONCLUSION**

As previously stated, Xinjiang’s political environment throughout the nationalist era remained one where opportunity for rebellion constantly overshadowed the region and motive constantly hovered just below the surface. Only proper manipulation of the environment kept motive and opportunity from overlapping with means. In those cases where all three did overlap, rebellion typically occurred. The Soviet Union’s influence in the region grew in the 1930’s and their involvement in Xinjiang predicated the final rebellion before the Chinese Communists assumed control of the province in late 1949.

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87 Millward and Tursun.

88 Ibid., 80-81.

89 Forbes, 154.

90 Millward and Tursun, 80-81; Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949*, (Armonk, NY: 1990), 27.

91 Benson, 39-40; Forbes, 177-181.

92 Millward and Tursun, 83; Forbes 190-193;

Soviet influence did not end there, but Chinese Communist influence began. The reaction of the Uyghurs to their new central government will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **IV. UNDER THE COMMUNISTS: FROM MAO TO THE MILLENNIA**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the Chinese government's minority policies in Xinjiang since the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) victory in the Chinese Civil War. This will be divided into two parts, each including a brief historical overview of Xinjiang during that particular period of Communist rule followed by an evaluation of these policies impact on the motive, means, and opportunity for large-scale political violence against the state. The first part will cover the period from the establishment of the PRC in 1949 until Mao Zedong's death in 1976. The second part will cover the period known as the Reform era from the rise of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s through present day. This discussion is designed to evaluate the recent history of the Chinese state's relations with Xinjiang's minorities to determine existing factors in present day Xinjiang that will impact Xinjiang's potential for large scale organized political violence.

### **A. OVERVIEW OF MAO ERA**

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on Oct 1, 1949 completely changed the face of China. In Xinjiang, though, the PRC also represented the possibility of self-determination.<sup>93</sup> The CCP fostered this hope and designed initial policies to avoid disharmony and upheaval during the transition to socialism. In the end, however, Xinjiang suffered relatively the same turbulent times of ideological discord under Mao as the rest of China. All of China, including Xinjiang, underwent a series of government policies that shifted from moderate to radical and back, which undermined social, political and economic structure of the state. These policy changes affected Xinjiang differently than other areas of China due to both Xinjiang's history of rebellion and its ethnic demographic composition.

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<sup>93</sup> The original CCP minority policy afforded minorities the right to self-determination, autonomy, and even the right to secede in addition to several other cultural rights. As the policy evolved the right to self determination and secession disappeared from the rhetoric. See June Teufel Dreyer, *Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China*, (Cambridge Ma, 1976), Chapter 2, 63-92 for an in depth discussion of the evolution of the CCP's minority policy.

Early policies in Xinjiang were moderate, based on the need for stability, but the party still instituted land reform and collectivization. The CCP leadership recognized that ethnic unrest remained a very real threat and avoided drastic changes in the daily lives of the local minorities, instead opting for a long-term slow transition to socialism.<sup>94</sup> Muslim collectives were organized according to clans and land was given to each collective. Traditional leadership according to ethnic group's customs maintained stability.<sup>95</sup> The distribution of land from wealthy landowners to the farmers who worked the land met with some approval and land reform and collectivization met with little resistance in the agricultural sector.<sup>96</sup> The party did not target the pastoral sector for collectivization initially. Nomadic Kazakhs under the leadership of Osman Batur continued to resist CCP occupation, and since their traditional means of production did not rely on land, *per se*, but rather livestock, the Party opted to proceed slowly.<sup>97</sup> Recruitment of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities into the CCP became an important concern for party leaders.<sup>98</sup> Former pro-Soviet leaders of the ETR were retained in positions of leadership within the Xinjiang government.<sup>99</sup> These actions enabled the CCP to gain legitimacy in Xinjiang while simultaneously consolidating its power in the area.

Beginning in the early 1950s, Beijing began establishing autonomous areas within ethnic minority dominated regions, finally establishing the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955. The system began at the county level, slowly moving through the prefecture level and ultimately the provincial level. These “autonomous” areas were based on the largest ethnic population in the particular government level that was being made “autonomous.” This unique distribution complicated the region’s self-governance when “autonomous” counties designated for one minority fell under a higher level

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94 Donald H. McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977*, (Boulder: 1979), 115.

95 Dreyer, 102-104.

96 Dreyer, 130-131; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: a History of Xinjiang*, ((New York: 2007), 240.

97 Dreyer, 151-152; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 241; see also Millward and Tursun, 88.

98 Dreyer, 108-114.

99 McMillen, 85.

designated for a different minority.<sup>100</sup> Thus in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region there are Kazak Autonomous Prefectures as well as Kyrgyz Autonomous Counties. This division of autonomy on both a horizontal and vertical scale worked well for the CCP in keeping minorities from uniting, particularly when a concrete definition of autonomy never emerged, but rather the leadership was co-opted into the Party and assumed low-level positions of authority.<sup>101</sup>

Until the latter half of the 1950s government policies regarding minority language and religion were fairly relaxed.<sup>102</sup> The CCP allowed minority children to be taught in their native language and allowed for the use of minority cadres' native language in the government as well. Land reform and collectivization did not negatively impact minority language either since collectives were ethnicity based and traditional clan structure.<sup>103</sup> Land reform and collectivization did take away the revenue base of Islam as land revenues were shifted from the religious infrastructure to the Chinese government. While this weakened the power of traditional religious leaders, the religious base merely shifted to decentralized Sufi sects and the party did not place restrictions on its practice as it represented no major threat.<sup>104</sup> These branches of Islam did not compete with the government for land or land revenue, instead operating off donations.<sup>105</sup> This enabled the CCP to expand its power without dismantling the religious structure.

In the latter half of the 1950s, several policy shifts occurred in Xinjiang. In 1956, the same year that Chairman Mao initiated the "Hundred Flowers Campaign" to allow public criticism of the Party, language reform began in Xinjiang. Language reform nominally served to eliminate illiteracy, enabling minorities "to learn modern science more effectively" by modifying the script in which they were written.<sup>106</sup> This new script

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100 McMillen, 85.

101 Dreyer, 104-108.

102 Ibid., 114-120.

103 Ibid.

104 McMillen, 114; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 247-251.

105 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 247-251.

106 McMillen, 115-116.

was to be based on the Cyrillic script used by the Soviet Union. The reform also had a secondary goal to “erode the old Muslim religious teachings written in Arabic” because of the incompatibility of socialism and religion.<sup>107</sup>

Public criticism of the Party during the “Hundred Flowers Movement” did not occur in Xinjiang until late 1956, when complaints about the autonomy structure and Han chauvinism made its way into the media.<sup>108</sup> Although Xinjiang’s administrative organs retained a comparatively high percentage of non-Han and non-Party elements, there was never any question as to their continued subordination to the CCP.<sup>109</sup> The Party was dominated by Han elements drawn primarily from the PLA 1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery. Previous pro-Soviet ETR officials were brought into the CCP and some gained high positions within the Xinjiang CCP hierarchy. However, “in nearly all cases where a minority national was chosen to be a chairman, a Han national from the CCP-1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery group was chosen as vice-chairman and more often than not exercised *de facto* authority.”<sup>110</sup> There remained no doubt as to who held the power in Xinjiang. Commentary that Xinjiang would be better as a republic under the Soviet Union or as an independent state in its own right came to the forefront.<sup>111</sup>

Complaints derived from such issues as the dissatisfaction of the autonomy structure in which true autonomy did not exist to Han cadres’ refusal to learn minority languages. These types of complaints were labeled as “local nationalist” sentiments and led to the purging and dismissal of numerous minorities during the Anti-Rightist Campaign that followed. “During the anti-rightist campaign of 1957-58...a number of minority nationals belonging to the CCP who held government position were either demoted or purged as...local nationalists and anti-Party elements.”<sup>112</sup> These series of purges severely reduced the number of ethnic minorities in the Party’s ranks in Xinjiang.

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107 McMillen, 115-116.

108 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 247-251; McMillen, 90-92.

109 McMillen, 29.

110 *Ibid.*, 39.

111 *Ibid.*, 92-94.

112 *Ibid.*, 46.

Immediately following the Anti-Rightist Campaign the Great Leap Forward (GLF) began. While the PRC moved toward rapid industrialization, the conditions in Xinjiang began to change as well. In Xinjiang, where collectivization had been slow due to Party fears of ethnic tensions becoming ethnic rebellion if socialism were forced on minorities too fast, the Party decided to step up the speed of collectivization.<sup>113</sup> However, the attempt to industrialize rapidly using communes to produce both agricultural as well as industrial products did not fair well in Xinjiang.<sup>114</sup> As elsewhere in the Chinese interior, the labor force being used to produce industrial products took away from the labor force used to produce agricultural products. The subsequent starvation that ensued from the under reporting of crops occurred on a dramatic scale in Xinjiang as well. An influx of several thousands of people from the interior also fled to Xinjiang in search of food.<sup>115</sup>

The internal political situation of Xinjiang also grew worse as tensions between the Soviet Union and the PRC increased. The fracturing of relations with the Soviet Union, due the non-standard model that Mao chose to follow, negatively impacted government-minority relations. Minority cadres were accused of pro-Soviet sympathies and local nationalism.<sup>116</sup> Those minority cadres who were suspected of pro-Soviet sympathies and those who were formerly pro-Soviet cadres of the ETR were purged.<sup>117</sup> As the GLF progressed, Sino-Soviet relations continued to deteriorate. Xinjiang's ethnic minorities who saw their kinsmen's lives under the Soviet Union as being better began an exodus from Xinjiang.<sup>118</sup> Mutual antagonism with the Soviet Union increased and as McMillan describes it:

Numerous border clashes between the two former allies were reported and unrest among the region's minority nationalities intensified. In 1962 hostilities broke out in the

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113 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 259-260.

114 McMillen, 140.

115 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 260.

116 McMillan, 94-95.

117 Ibid.

118 Dreyer, 169-170.

Yili area as well as along the Sino-Indian border. This prompted Peking to seal off the Sino-Soviet border in western Xinjiang and build up PLA strength there.<sup>119</sup> Prior to this sealing of the border though, some 60,000-70,000 Kazaks, Uyghurs, and other minorities fled to the Soviet Union partly in response so Soviet propaganda.<sup>120</sup>

After the failure of the GLF, the Sino-Soviet split, and the self-imposed withdrawal of Mao from active leadership of the Party, government policies in Xinjiang aimed at maintaining stability through unity.<sup>121</sup> Minority policies liberalized in as much as “local peoples were to be allowed to use their written and spoken languages and that their local customs were to be respected.”<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, a new round of language reform occurred with the same end goal for the removal of Islam’s influence on Xinjiang’s minorities, but additionally to reduce the Soviet influence by changing to a Latin alphabet based script.<sup>123</sup> This period saw little economic growth as the region’s major trading partner, the Soviet Union, now became an adversary. Inasmuch as the period was tense, it would only become tenser once the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began.

The Cultural Revolution created discord throughout China. Ironically, in Xinjiang the focus of conflict was between the local Han leadership and Beijing. The purges and conflict were between radical Red Guards from interior China who were sent to Xinjiang by the Beijing leadership and Xinjiang Red Guards supported by local PLA units and Xinjiang CCP elements.<sup>124</sup> These elements adhered to Mao’s policy of wiping out the “four olds,” and as a result, Cultural Revolution activities frequently resulted in abuses of minorities under the guise of removing local nationalist separatists.<sup>125</sup> These abuses ranged from the penning of pigs in mosques, an affront on Muslim culture, to the

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119 Dreyer, 56.

120 Figures vary concerning the number of minorities who fled. Dreyer, 170; McMillen, 123; and Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 264 all give different figures.

121 McMillen, 124-127

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid., 119-120.

124 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 265-271.

125 Ibid., 274-276.

defacing of minority cultural works of art, to public beatings of minorities.<sup>126</sup> These activities occurred throughout the remainder of the Cultural Revolution and finally subsided with the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of the “Gang of Four.”

Throughout the Mao era ideological shifts in policy influenced the government’s reaction to its minority population. In Xinjiang these policies impacted more than social, economic, and political status. These policies affected language, religion, and traditional cultural hierarchy. With this additional impact on the lives of Xinjiang’s minorities, the policy shift’s effect on motive, means, and opportunity were great. Yet major armed political violence did not occur during the period. The reasons for this lie in the juxtaposition of differing levels of motive, means, and opportunity, as discussed in the following section.

## **B. MOTIVE, MEANS, AND OPPORTUNITY DURING THE MAO ERA**

In 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party gained control of Xinjiang, opposition to Chinese rule remained present. The ETR still retained control of the northwestern part of Xinjiang and Kazakhs led by Osman Batur continued to resist the Chinese.<sup>127</sup> The only common thread that most Muslim Turkic ethnic groups had in common with the Chinese Communists was mutual opposition to the Nationalists. With the help of Soviet influence, the CCP was able to absorb the ETR government into the newly established Peoples Republic of China, enabling the CCP to begin its social and economic programs of land reform and collectivization.<sup>128</sup> Motive, means, and opportunity for large-scale organized political violence during the initial stages of CCP rule were relatively low in Xinjiang, despite anti-Han sentiment.

Although motivation of some members within the leadership of the ETR for independent rule was likely high, other members did not oppose being absorbed into a Communist China. Some sources purport that the first delegation to Beijing to meet with

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<sup>126</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 274-276.

<sup>127</sup> Millward and Tursun, 88; Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 237-238.

<sup>128</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 233-234.

Mao Zedong and the CCP leadership, planned to demand independence for Xinjiang.<sup>129</sup> However the delegation that attended eventually attended the meeting, made no such demands. The motive for major armed conflict within the general population was likely not very high either. For the average person in Xinjiang their situation relative to the preceding decade was much improved. World War II had ended and the Soviet Union, who Sheng Shicai had kicked out of Xinjiang, had returned and brought with it economic benefits. Land reform under the Chinese Communists meant that poor peasants now shared land of their own. Even the CCP offered opportunity as it launched a major campaign to recruit ethnic minorities, even accepting members of the former ETR into its ranks. Major armed political violence against the Chinese government would not create a situation better than the current one for the average person, thus keeping the level of motive marginally low. Additionally, initial CCP policies toward minority language and religion were relatively relaxed in that no major changes to the language structure and use were made and Muslims were able to practice their religion as they chose. As such no intrinsic motive based on psychological or emotional needs existed.

Opportunity and internal means for major political violence, however, was initially high at the start of CCP rule. Although the Chinese Red Army occupied Xinjiang; and although some of Xinjiang's ethnic minority leaders supported Communist rule, local leaders opposed Chinese rule could have recruited people to aid in fighting against the communists since the CCP had not yet assumed full political control of the province. Kazakhs in nomadic areas continued to resist CCP occupation and could have been co-opted to assist in large-scale organized rebellion. With the new government just beginning to govern China, its ability to simultaneously quell a large-scale rebellion in Xinjiang while maintaining a defensive posture against the Nationalists may have been too much for the fledgling government.<sup>130</sup> Two reasons combined to prevent major organized political violence though opportunity and internal means were high. First, the

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129 Millward and Tursun, 86; Millward, 233-234.

130 This point would likely be disputed given that little over a year after forming the PRC Mao Zedong dispatched troops to assist the DPRK in repelling the American push into North Korea. However, that argument would be predicated on the fact that the Soviet Union and the PRC by that time had signed the "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance." During the period under question, the general population of Xinjiang would not have taken such things into consideration.

overall level of motive for large-scale political violence was low given the relative prosperity of Xinjiang's inhabitants compared to the previous decade. Second, while the resources for means could be derived from internal sources, external sources critical to the success of mass political violence could not be found.

At the outset of the Mao Era, the ethnic minority population of Xinjiang no longer had the external means to conduct major political violence. The Soviet Union, who had been a benefactor for Xinjiang's rebellions a decade earlier, decided to support and to foster the newly established Communist government in China.<sup>131</sup> The Soviet Union had supported the establishment of the ETR for two reasons: first because the ETR had maintained strong ties with the Soviets both economically and politically; and second because the ETR had opposed the Nationalist regime that had been exerting its influence in Xinjiang after the ouster of Sheng Shicai to the detriment of Soviet interests.<sup>132</sup> With the Nationalists gone from the mainland, the Soviets could operate within Xinjiang not only without opposition from the new Chinese Communist government but also at its request. Consequently, while the Soviet Union had willingly provided the means for rebellion against the Nationalist government, they were disinclined to provide such means against the Communist government. Without such means, the minority population within Xinjiang had no external means for mass organized political violence. This combined with the low level of motive rendered the internal means and opportunity for major rebellion impotent.

For the first half of the decade following the Communist takeover of China and Xinjiang, the dynamics of motive, means and opportunity changed little. The level of internal means and opportunity lowered as the CCP recruited more and more ethnic minorities into the party and solidified its political control of the province. External means also remained low as the Soviet Union and the PRC maintained cordial relations. The level of motive remained low as the party continued the process of collectivization because only those minorities whose means of production were agricultural were moved into collectives, while those whose means were pastoral were left to their traditional

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<sup>131</sup> Millward and Tursun, 86; Millward, 233-234.

<sup>132</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 227-230.

ways. Additionally, those who were moved into collectives were allowed to maintain their traditional social structure. Thus Xinjiang's minorities suffered no relative deprivation compared to their previous quality of life, social status, or economic position. Their confidence in the Party, while possibly skeptical due to its Han dominance, also had not been lost.

However, at this juncture Mao Zedong launched the Hundred Flower's Campaign with the Anti-Rightist Campaign following on its heels. As with the rest of China, the discontent and dissatisfaction expressed by the masses were not well received by Chairman Mao. The calls for an independent Xinjiang or a Soviet republic led to mass purging of minority cadres. These purges and the overall crackdown on minorities that accompanied them created conditions worse than before, thus relative deprivation, and heightened opposition to Chinese rule and a loss of confidence and trust in the Party.<sup>133</sup> From these events the level of motive for political violence as a response likely rose, however, with the CCP in firm political as well as military control, opportunity remained low. Means, both internal and external, remained low as well due to the loss of ethnic leadership during the purges and the Soviet Union's continued fraternal position to the PRC.<sup>134</sup>

After the Sino-Soviet split, the dynamics for means reduced even more. The Soviet Union began to promote anti-Chinese propaganda and offered better conditions and greater autonomy within Soviet borders.<sup>135</sup> The opportunity to leave China provided an alternative to Chinese rule, while avoiding the possible costs associated with political violence. As tensions heightened, hostilities broke out, and the mass exodus of 1962 from Xinjiang to the Soviet Union occurred, the militarization of the border shut off the external means of support from the Soviet Union, reducing overall means to a low level. Without Soviet support, Xinjiang's minorities had no means available for any type of

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133 Dreyer, 165.

134 These purges were primarily targeted at former ETR leaders whose Soviet links made their loyalties questionable as the Sino-Soviet rift deepened; see McMillen, 94.

135 McMillen, 123-124.

large-scale political violence. The Chinese government had also strengthened its political control of Xinjiang through its purge of minority cadres, leaving the level of opportunity low as well.

### C. OVERVIEW OF REFORM ERA

After Mao's death the dawn of the Reform Era changed Xinjiang's situation. Deng Xiaoping's reform policies opened China to the world and Xinjiang to a degree as well. Economic reform in Xinjiang did not have the same facets as on the eastern seaboard, such as foreign direct investment and state-owned-enterprises becoming private ventures, but even the opening of trade to the outside world influenced certain social aspects of Xinjiang. Trade between the Soviet Union and Xinjiang remained virtually non-existent, yet trade between Xinjiang and its southwest neighbors, particularly Pakistan, improved.<sup>136</sup> The border between Xinjiang and Pakistan was opened, increasing trade and reintroducing Islam into the region as Pakistani traders in addition to bringing their wares into Xinjiang "often saw it as their duty to provide information about Islam to local Muslim peoples."<sup>137</sup> This reintroduction of Islam into Uyghur society sparked great interest and hope, particularly among older Uyghurs, of a return to traditional Islamic values to a region where government control had altered them.<sup>138</sup>

Economic reform and social liberalization led to the expansion of certain rights to Uyghurs and other minorities as the Chinese government loosened its restrictions on such activities as clothing, language, literature, and worship. As redress for the destruction of mosques during the Cultural Revolution, the government began constructing or rebuilding large numbers of mosques for Muslims in Xinjiang during the 1980's. Chinese authorities also began to allow Uyghurs to conduct the *Hajj* to Mecca with

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<sup>136</sup> Zaid Haider, "Sino-Pakistan Relations and Xinjiang's Uyghurs: Politics, Trade, and Islam along the Karakoram Highway", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, (July/August 2005), 526.

<sup>137</sup> Sean R. Roberts, "A 'Land of Borderlands': Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-border Interactions", in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, NY: 2004), 226.

<sup>138</sup> Gardner Bovington, "Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han National Imperative and Uyghur Discontent", *Policy Studies 11*, East-West Center, Washington, DC 2004, available online <http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org>.

certain restrictions, such as being sponsored by Pakistani Nationals.<sup>139</sup> In addition, the government became more tolerant of Islamic education, allowing *imams* (religious educators) to take on *talips* (religious students) and Islamic schools to operate. Chinese reform and open door policy brought mixed benefits as “Uyghurs also enrolled in Pakistani schools and universities and some even traveled as far as Saudi Arabia and Egypt for their education.”<sup>140</sup> Yet while the government “permitted many students to go abroad, [they] sometimes would not let them return to China for fear of their spreading Islamic ideologies and igniting separatist sentiments.”<sup>141</sup>

The Chinese government also allowed Uyghur language to reemerge in its Arabic script.<sup>142</sup> Restrictions on the use of Chinese only in educational institutions relaxed also, predominantly at the primary school level. Chinese was to be taught at the higher levels of primary education, but the government “encouraged the use of texts and oral instruction in the minority languages as well.”<sup>143</sup> Educational institutions improved as a whole in Xinjiang during this period and political participation by minorities in local government increased as those party cadres purged during the Cultural Revolution were reinstated.<sup>144</sup> Han cadres were transferred from Xinjiang to other areas, opening the way for some measure of political autonomy as minority cadres assumed government positions.<sup>145</sup> From these positions minority leaders pushed for more rights for their people through traditional religious education and the lifting of family planning restrictions on Xinjiang Muslims. During the 1980s the Chinese state turned a blind eye to these activities as the economic benefits of reform continued.

Following the Tiananmen Square Incident in June 1989, Xinjiang felt the tightening of the CCP control along with the rest of China. In Xinjiang the policy shift

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139 Haider, 526.

140 Haider, 526.

141 Ibid.

142 Linda Benson, “Education and Social Mobility among Minority Populations in Xinjiang”, in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, NY: 2004), 197.

143 Ibid.

144 Bovingdon, 29; Benson, in Starr, ed., 211.

145 Bovingdon, 21.

focused itself on those things that had been opened up to minorities again during the 1980s, primarily religion. In the aftermath of Tiananmen the Chinese government imposed several constraints on the practice of Islam in Xinjiang. State regulations prohibited attendance of mosques by persons not eighteen or older.<sup>146</sup> Construction of new mosques throughout Xinjiang was halted and some mosques were destroyed during the 1990s for a variety of reasons from being used as meeting places for separatist's conspirators to having been built without government approval.<sup>147</sup> Certain Islamic social and educational activities, such as the Uyghur Masrah, a social organization for young Uyghur men, and private Koranic instruction became labeled as illegal religious activities.<sup>148</sup>

This clampdown on this civil society during the 1990s became more pronounced in 1996 as the Chinese government began its "Strike Hard" campaign to root out secessionists and separatists. The Chinese government focused on what it considered illegal religious activity, which it claimed fuelled separatists sentiments.<sup>149</sup> The campaign led to thousand of arrests and rapid punishment. Reaction to the government's crackdown varied in degree, ranging from student protests to full-blown riots to a series of bus bombings in Urumchi on the day of Deng Xiaoping's memorial.<sup>150</sup> The result was civil society moving underground as the cycle of government repression and Uyghur response continued throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s.

From the beginning of the reform era Xinjiang's Uyghurs and other minorities had been able to receive an education in their own language. Beginning in the early 2000s the government modified this policy in order to "increase levels of Chinese fluency and literacy for all students."<sup>151</sup> The government's stated goal of these changes was to

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146 Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang", in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, NY: 2004), 335.

147 Bovingdon, 33.

148 James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment", *Policy Studies* 6, East-West Center, Washington, DC (2004), 17, available online <http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org>.

149 Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Far Northwest*, (New York: 2004) 84-85.

150 Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment", 18.

151 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 345.

create a bilingual education system whereby elementary through secondary education would be taught in a bilingual setting. Such change would arguably help minorities obtain better careers with higher salaries. In some circles it has been viewed as a way to stamp out Uyghur language, while in others it has been viewed as a way of integrating Uyghurs and other minorities in to mainstream Chinese society.<sup>152</sup>

Notwithstanding the rise in ethnic tensions, Xinjiang underwent incredible transformation during the 1990s and early 2000s. While the warming of relations with the Soviet Union had resulted in the opening of five cities to border trade, the collapse of the Soviet Union created an economic opportunity. Central Asian states whose Soviet orientation had leaned toward Moscow now looked toward the east and Xinjiang. This increase of trade with China and the Central Asian states provided opportunities for Uyghur entrepreneurs such as businesswoman Rebiya Kadir, who used this opportunity to expand on her business ventures already operating in Xinjiang. Xinjiang also became the target of foreign investment, as companies scurried to secure footholds in the oil and natural gas fields in Xinjiang that have yet to be tapped.

Beijing also began investing in the development of Xinjiang's infrastructure. From the Sino-Soviet split until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Beijing had no reason to develop Xinjiang's infrastructure. Trade with the Soviet Union was non-existent, so infrastructure was not needed for transport of products between the two. Additionally, such infrastructure could be exploited by the Soviet Union to reach interior China in the event of war, which Beijing definitely did not want. However, this infrastructure, which includes highways, railways, and airports, could now serve as a means of increasing tourism and trade by providing rapid, easy access to Xinjiang's cities and towns. It also provided a means for connecting Xinjiang's and China's markets to Central Asia, Russia and Europe, as seen in the building of an oil pipeline built between Kazakhstan's oilfields and Xinjiang that began operating in May 2006. Xinjiang is finally reaping the promised benefits of the Reform Era.

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<sup>152</sup> Jon Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China's Silk Road*, Columbia University Press, (New York: 1997), 80-82.

#### **D. MOTIVE, MEANS, AND OPPORTUNITY DURING THE REFORM ERA**

During the 1980s motive, opportunity, and means were all relatively low. Improved living conditions, both economically and socially, gave Xinjiang's minorities some personal, if not political, autonomy. The opening of trade and its economic benefits, the increased number of educated minorities, and the resurgence of Islam due to relaxed government policies gave rise to civil society. Business professionals, religious leaders and educators, as well as journalists began to assume leadership positions within society. From these positions Uyghurs and other minorities began to address social ills. Because the Chinese government ignored such activities during this period, motive for political violence against the state became low. Such organized rebellion would only reverse the trend of social and religious liberalization bringing no benefit to individuals or the group as a whole. During the 1980s nothing was to be gained through mass political violence. However, religious influences were making their way into Xinjiang, and while radical forces had not yet gotten a foothold in the region, toward the end of the decade these influences had begun to take seed. The rise of the Islamic state in Iran, coupled with the successful Afghani resistance of the Soviet Union provided some hope that Xinjiang might one day be able to gain its independence.

External means during the period remained relatively low as well. Relations with the Soviet Union did not thaw until the late-1980s. With the border sealed, Xinjiang's minorities had no contact with their Soviet kinsmen, much less the Soviet government, and therefore could not expect monetary, equipment, or personnel support from their former benefactor. Internal means while present in the form of personnel remained lacking in equipment and funds. With government minority policies relaxed, the minority leadership that would be the key to any uprising sought to use their influence within the government to make life better for their kinsmen.

Opportunity also remained very low. While the country had just emerged from the leadership transition period after a decade of political upheaval, the Chinese state was strong by most accounts. It had no internal or external conflicts that would prevent it from bringing to bear the full force of its police and military in the event of an armed

rebellion. Economically it was growing stronger and had gained international recognition. The United States had reestablished diplomatic ties, thus reducing the threat of war with America. Additionally, the Soviet Union was occupied in Afghanistan, thus reducing the Soviet threat of invasion. The lack of conditions in which the government would be unable to contend with major political violence in Xinjiang would continue for the duration of the decade and only improve in the state's favor as Sino-Soviet relations warmed during the 1980s.

Several things came together to change the level of motive and means to a point where organized political violence began to appear a viable course of action by the mid-1990s. After Tiananmen and throughout the 1990s motive increased within Xinjiang enormously. After almost a decade of expanded religious, educational, and economic improvement, the sudden loss of many of those privileges heightened discontent. Anger over the loss of what was obtained and the loss of expectations of future rights and privileges clearly adheres to the aspirational form of relative deprivation. Just as religion was once again becoming a fundamental part of ethnic identity, the Chinese government deprived the minority population of it, placing restrictions on its practice and banning social organizations associated with it. Such restrictions deprived minors of being unable to attend local mosques and build relationships according to traditional Muslim values, thus hampering the instilment of the religious foundation of Islam in children.<sup>153</sup>

The government's repression of religious activities had the unintended effect of uniting the Uyghurs. The result was civil society moving underground as the cycle of government repression and Uyghur response continued throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. The rise of religious and business leaders as positive role models in society with the capacity and willingness to confront social issues not addressed by the state had empowered civil society in Xinjiang. These leaders could mobilize minorities, especially the Uyghur minority, to oppose the government. The subsequent arrests of those leaders

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<sup>153</sup> Graham E. Fuller and Jonathan N. Lipman, "Islam in Xinjiang", in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, NY: 2004), 335.

for acting outside the state guided parameters surely created frustration, and as mentioned before, united Uyghurs in their opposition to the Chinese government, thereby increasing motive.

Islamic social organizations began to operate underground due to government scrutiny.<sup>154</sup> The addressing of grievances against government policies, having no legal place to be aired, were aired in public protests, often inciting violent government responses and riotous outcomes. The government still refused to address ethnic issues within Xinjiang even as the amount and strength of grievances rose. Without a means to address relative deprivation within Xinjiang, the use of political violence to obtain both group and individuals goals likely began to be seen as acceptable in some circles.

Means for major organized political violence increased drastically during the early to mid-1990s, particularly external means. The beginning of the decade saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of Central Asian states with ethnic nationality names. With this development came several important changes in perspective within Xinjiang. With the newly created states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan the Uyghurs became the only remaining ethnic minority without its own state. Calls for an independent “Uyghurstan” or another “East Turkestan” echoed through Xinjiang.<sup>155</sup> Those minorities, particularly Uyghurs that had gone abroad to study and remained in foreign countries, began to become a political force within the international community, appealing to the United States, and other governments, as well as the United Nations to address the Uyghur plight in Xinjiang.<sup>156</sup> Uyghur Diaspora in the newly formed Central Asian states also began to provide support and safe haven to Uyghurs that sought to oppose the Chinese government.

With motive and means rising, opportunity heightened as well. The demilitarization of the former Soviet border and the increased traffic associated with trade and tourism as Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, renewed contacts with their

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154 Gardner Bovingdon, “Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han National Imperative and Uyghur Discontent”, *Policy Studies 11*, East-West Center, Washington, DC 2004, available online <http://www.eastwestcenterwashington.org>, 17.

155 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 288-289.

156 Bovingdon, 11.

Soviet kinsmen impacted opportunity, giving safe haven from which to strike and then to retreat. The knowledge that Diaspora and states sympathetic to the plight of minorities in Xinjiang were right next door may have also emboldened Uyghurs to oppose the government. However, it was the weakness of the states from which this support sprang that created the opportunity. Even with the “Strike Hard” campaign in 1996 and its large number of arrests, political violence in Xinjiang increased during the following year. With political violence continuing through the end of the decade, the Chinese government finally made a move in 2001 that helped reduce opportunity by reducing means. While the “Strike Hard” campaign continued in Xinjiang to counter internal means of political violence, Beijing began using diplomatic methods to counter external means.

Beijing had initiated the formation of the "Shanghai Five," which changed its name to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization when Uzbekistan obtained membership in 2001, for the primary purpose of addressing border delineation and military disarmament in the border regions.<sup>157</sup> After those issues had resolved themselves, the situation changed to reducing security threats in the form of terrorist groups, religious extremists, and ethnic separatists.<sup>158</sup> Using financial aid China put pressure on SCO members to control their domestic support network for Uyghur dissidents, a move that reduced means and opportunity. This tactic also helped spur economic improvement for SCO members, which in turn helped economic development in Xinjiang. The trade volume between China and the five Central Asian states grew to 19.72 billion in 2003<sup>159</sup> and hit \$27 billion in 2004.<sup>160</sup> Xinjiang accounted for more than 40 percent of the total trade between China and SCO members. This trade significantly aided in the

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157 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China website, available online at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm>.

158 Benjamin Goldsmith, “Here There Be Dragons: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” Center for Defense Information, available online at <http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=3153>.

159 “China, SCO Members Boost Trade Ties Along with Anti-Terror Cooperation,” *People's Daily Online*, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200406/16/eng20040616\\_146579.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200406/16/eng20040616_146579.html).

160 “Central Asia Attracting Chinese Investors,” *People's Daily Online*, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200511/11/eng20051111\\_220665.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200511/11/eng20051111_220665.html).

development of Xinjiang as the government launched its “Develop the West” campaign to modernize Xinjiang’s infrastructure. This combined with China’s internal investments brought economic benefits to Xinjiang.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The shifting policy situation in Xinjiang created discontent and discord for Xinjiang’s minority throughout the Communist Era. Varying levels of motive means and opportunity occurred during the period, but these levels never simultaneously reached a level high enough to create conditions that led to mass organized political violence. While occasional violent incidents occurred and several incidents of organized protests occurred, particularly during the 1990s, no major movement arose within the seven million plus Uyghur population. This is partly attributed to the role of the Soviet Union in the affairs of Xinjiang before the Sino-Soviet split and partly due to the strength of state of China itself through the remainder of the period, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

China’s rise since its opening began in the early 1980s strengthened its domestic control through economic means while slowly opening the door to civil society. Yet during the 1990s Beijing once again found itself with ethnic unrest in Xinjiang due to the cultural differences of its minority population. Beijing’s ability to use political and economic influence to obtain assistance from adjacent states in controlling their Uyghur population during the first half of the 2000s and began to regain stability in Xinjiang. Since China’s economic maneuvering and opportunity and repressive tactics after 9/11, the Chinese state has slowly moved to more moderate policies while stepping up its development of Xinjiang. Whether or not this will offset the collective memory of repression during the 1990s, thus reducing motive, is yet to be seen, as is the likelihood of means and opportunity remaining low.

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## V. FUTURE PROGNOSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Historically Xinjiang has been a difficult region for China to control. Several factors contributed to this problem, including geography, ethnicity, religion, economic/trade orientation, and international politics. While globalization and the formation of nation-states have mitigated some of these, they have also heightened the impact of others. The level at which each of these impact motivation, means, and opportunity depends on the importance of each to the residents of the region. In this context it is difficult to assess with absolute certainty the likelihood of mass organized political violence. Only individuals know whether they will choose to participate in such activities, and even then they may not be absolutely certain. The most difficult aspect to determine when evaluating such prospects therefore, is motivation. While opportunity and means are more obvious to the observer, even they too are subject to interpretation.

This makes the theoretical concepts of rational choice and relative deprivation solid starting points for determining the degree of motive. Typically, an entire ethnic population will not be the subject of relative deprivation, and will likely not succumb to individual desires to resort to violent means to address grievances. But grievances can be manipulated by those who believe that they will gain in some fashion if the ethnic population will mobilize behind their leadership. Rational choice then becomes the determinant for the benefit to be obtained. The benefit to be obtained can be assessed by evaluation of those things that one group, when comparing itself to another group, sees itself as relatively deprived. In the case of Xinjiang's minorities, comparisons of themselves to Han Chinese in political, economic, and cultural areas determine their perceptions of their position within Chinese society. Comparisons of themselves to their kinsmen in the adjacent Central Asian republics determine their perceptions of religious and cultural freedoms, or the lack thereof, under Chinese rule. Finally, comparisons of other ethnicities that have a "home" of their own in the form of Central Asian states determine Xinjiang's Uyghurs perceptions that the Chinese government has kept them from a country of their own.

With that being said, an assessment can be made based on the manner in which the state's policies affect its minorities' economic, social, and political positions within overall society. The state's responses to minority discontent most certainly will affect motive. Their minority policies will also affect motive, but as will be discussed below, often times the state is in a no-win situation when handling certain aspects of those policies. Interactions with neighboring nation-states and international institutions can affect external means, while its internal security decisions will impact internal means. The state's strength and stability, plus its relations with regional neighbors have the greatest impact on opportunity. Within this framework I will attempt to offer an answer to the question of whether or not likelihood of mass organized political violence in Xinjiang exists for the immediate future. Obviously this includes a bit of guesswork, but as with any assessment of political events, no answer is perfect.

#### **A. MOTIVE**

When trying to reduce motive in Xinjiang the most problematic issue for the Chinese government is unintended consequences. During the 1980s relaxed minority policies allowed religion, traditional leadership, and language to return to an important place in society. Economic reform enabled individuals to accumulate wealth, thereby raising their social status and putting them in positions of leadership within a newly emerging civil society. During the repressive years of the 1990s, this civil society went underground but leaders still influenced the minority population. As the government targeted what it considered to be the cause of discontent, primarily religion and those organizations associated with religion, it inadvertently increased motive against it by attacking something ethnically significant, something that unites Xinjiang's minorities, and something whose intrinsic value cannot be calculated.

Considering that the largest rebellion in Chinese history, the Taiping rebellion, was religiously based and that the Muslim rebellions that followed had religious dimension; it is understandable that the Chinese government fears the influence of religion. However, an accommodation to religious practices would likely reduce the risk of those moderate Muslims sympathizing and supporting extremists of the faith.

Currently, the Chinese constitution grants two religious freedoms: the right to believe and the right not to believe. Party members only have the right to the latter. This creates a conflict in Muslim society as those minorities in government service either have to give up the party or give up the religious practices. This dilemma results in cadres whose reputation within their ethnic community is less than positive or minority leaders that are unable to penetrate the party and properly represent their minority. What is left is a lack of confidence in the government.

The leadership left in the government now has not only little influence in the party sphere, but also little influence in the minority population. Religious leaders, who returned to their some of their traditional leadership roles and were targeted during the 1990s, likely have more credibility within Muslim society. While it is hard to reconcile an atheist government to the acceptance of, much less the support for, religious leadership, such tolerance might be a critical piece to reducing motive within Uyghur society. At the least, repression of religion and targeting of religious leaders will continue to have the unintended consequence of uniting Uyghurs and other minorities against the government. Additionally it will continue to perpetuate the perception that relative to Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the adjacent Central Asian states their situation is worse because they are being deprived of a central part of their ethnicity, their religion.

The Chinese government recently been modified another ethnic area that it targeted in the past, minority languages. However, this time the Chinese government's policy change is not assimilationist, but rather integrationist. When the Chinese government decided to allow for the use of Uyghur script in its traditional Arabic script in 1981, it also allowed for the use of Uyghur language in primary and secondary education, including the university level. Minorities were not required to study Chinese until the university level. This contrasted sharply with the policy of the 1960s and 1970s in which the practice of only teaching in Chinese, in both primary and secondary education, combined with the changes to Uyghur script, created a generation of

minorities who could not communicate with their own ethnic group. In both cases a language barrier emerged that created problems within society and animosity directed at the government.

The new policy attempts to avoid the problems created by previous policies by ensuring the use of both minority language and Chinese in the classroom. The government's decision to provide bilingual education during elementary and secondary education and to provide only Chinese instruction at the university level has met with resistance within some minority circles. Yet, education in the Uyghur language only created a generation of Uyghurs who cannot function within Chinese society due to their inability to communicate with Han Chinese. While some calls that it is an attempt to wipe out the Uyghur language have arisen, some Uyghurs realize the benefit of bilingual education. This policy will likely lessen motive within Xinjiang as the benefits for Uyghurs who speak Chinese increase. Arguably when compared to their kinsmen in the neighboring Central Asian states they are deprived of the use of their language in all levels of government and within in all segments of society. However, they will have an advantage over those same people by virtue of their Chinese language ability in a world where China is a rising power.

Xinjiang's economic situation, which has been improving rapidly and can be expected to continue to do so in the foreseeable future, will help curb motive against major organized political violence. The Chinese government sees economic benefits as the key to avoiding civil unrest. While the income disparity has proven divisive in the eastern part of the country where the predominant ethnicity is Han, in Xinjiang the outcome might be otherwise. While relative deprivation of Uyghurs compared to Han in economic realm currently puts the government in a negative light, as more Uyghurs, particularly those who will benefit from the language reform discussed above, gain higher positions and greater wealth from the development of the region, the perceived relative deprivation of Uyghurs will be reduced. These Uyghurs also will no longer view themselves as relatively deprived compared to their Central Asian kinsmen whose economic fortunes also depend heavily on China and Xinjiang.

Based on these observations the level of motive in Xinjiang over the next several years will be hard to predict. Economic growth and investment, along with increased trade with the Central Asian states will likely reduce relative deprivation on the economic scale, and thus motive, as individuals base their decisions for or against political violence on their quality of life. However, repression of religious leaders and restrictions on the ability to practice Islam will continue to unite Xinjiang's Turkic Muslims against the government, and create a situation where choices on the use of such methods are based on intrinsic factors. Language reform could as in the past have the unintended consequences of uniting Uyghurs against the government if they feel their language and culture is being targeted for destruction. If undertaken correctly though, the Chinese government could turn language reform into way to reduce motive by maintaining Uyghur culture and improving upward social mobility. The final assessment though will have to be done in hindsight.

## **B. MEANS**

Beijing has been far more successful reducing external means than reducing internal means when confronting what it sees as separatist activity in Xinjiang. Beijing's approach to reducing internal means for political violence in Xinjiang during the 1990s amounted to little more than repression and brutality. While Beijing was able to arrest and incarcerate thousands of Uyghurs it considered to be separatists or sympathizers, the result was an increase in motive and the decision of many Uyghurs who would otherwise not participate in such activities to do so. This led to a cycle of repression and response that benefited neither the state nor Xinjiang's minorities. This repression/response cycle received international attention and following the intervention of NATO in Kosovo to prevent the genocide of ethnic Muslims, hope swelled that the same might occur in Xinjiang. The Chinese government slowly eased off from its "Strike Hard" campaign and began using the SCO as a mechanism for reducing external means, less repressive times returned, reducing motive and thus reducing internal means.

Beijing has been far more successful reducing external means than reducing internal means. China's greatest success in addressing means has been its use of the

SCO. The SCO charter calls for cooperation in the areas of political affairs, economy and trade, science and technology, culture, education, energy, and transportation, however in 2001 Through the SCO China has gained security cooperation from its Central Asian neighbors, reducing the threat of terrorism as a tool of political violence in Xinjiang. The clamping down on dissident groups and their training camps within those states' borders has limited the ability of Uyghur extremist to gain weapons and training. These neighboring governments have also moved to limit the activities of Uyghur Diaspora within their borders, thereby muting the voices of dissension that could aid in any major separatist movement. China then used the SCO framework to increase its ability to control means by establishing a regional anti-terrorist structure was in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2004.<sup>161</sup> In 2005 India, Iran, and Pakistan were given observer status in the SCO. China's support for the inclusion of Pakistan and Iran highlights the importance of those Muslim states' influence on the affairs of Xinjiang.

This cooperation did not come cheap, but the benefits were worth it to the Chinese government. From Beijing's perspective economic growth is the key to success in Xinjiang. China decided to offer "a total of 900 million U. S. dollars of preferential buyer's credit loans to the other five members" of the SCO.<sup>162</sup> China also decided to provide assistance and preferential loans to Uzbekistan, the specific sum of which was not revealed, but which was reported to be a 20-year preferential credit for a total sum of \$350 million, [and] a \$900-million credit.<sup>163</sup> These loans not only orient SCO members to China, but a vast majority of these loans will be used to develop infrastructure to increase trade between them. This serves to both strengthen relations between other SCO members and China, as well as help maintain those governments strength of state.

Chinese investments in Central Asia helped ensure that governments will continue to rein in support for any separatist movement in Xinjiang. Without monetary support, training support, and safe haven for Uyghur refugees, the external means available were

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<sup>161</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), available online at <http://www.sectsc.org/html/00030.html>.

<sup>162</sup> "China offers US \$900 million in credit loans to SCO members," People's Daily Online, available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200406/18/eng20040618\\_146720.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200406/18/eng20040618_146720.html).

<sup>163</sup> Viktoriya Panfilova, "Uzbekistan Earned Almost \$4 Billion at Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit. China Has Started Advancing Deep into Central Asia," Moscow Daily, 30 Jun 04, available via [www.fbis.gov](http://www.fbis.gov).

greatly reduced. China has invested heavily in Central Asian markets. As another facet of this strategy, the Chinese government has also used 9/11 to its advantage. After 9/11 the United States placed a Uyghur group on the U.S. State Department's list of international terrorist groups, Beijing used this as a way to legitimately target Uyghurs under the guise of rooting out terrorists.

### **C. OPPORTUNITY**

Beijing knows all too well that in times of a weakened state, social upheaval, or military conflict conditions are most conducive to political violence. China's history has proven that and Beijing has worked hard to create the strength of state to counter such possibilities. Because of China's experience its goal is to maintain strength of state and foster positive foreign relations, not only for itself, but also for its Central Asian neighbors. China has labored hard to strengthen its economic, political, military, and soft power. It has been effective at doing so and the results have been the reduction of opportunity for mass organized political violence in Xinjiang.

The CCP has bet its legitimacy as a government on its economic reform policies being the solution to the problem of domestic stability and a weakened state. This approach has worked so far. China's economic power continues to rise and its political influence is spreading throughout the world. Economic growth rates of 9% or better continue and China's economic boon has enabled it to become a donor of financial aid to developing countries, most importantly when evaluating the Xinjiang problem is the members of the SCO. This political power will help ensure SCO member support for China should Beijing find itself in a weakened state or military conflict. It will also ensure that attempts by other states to exert influence in the Central Asian region through unilateral means or international organizations will be negated by the SCO.

China's military power is also growing and it continues to expand its military contacts and exchanges. It has conducted military training exercises with its SCO partners and continues to develop ties elsewhere in the region and in the globe. Beijing's military modernization effort, while considered threatening by some, also serves the purpose of creating domestic stability as well. By maintaining a strong, modernized

military force Beijing can counter any moves by adjacent states to weaken its position through military confrontation. Additionally, some observers believe that a confrontation across the Taiwan straits due to a Taiwanese declaration of independence might lead to such declarations in China's provinces that have traditionally resisted Beijing's control, i.e. Xinjiang. China's military power from this standpoint must remain strong in order to avoid such a predicament. Mil-to-mil cooperation with SCO and other western neighbors will help to limit opportunity for political violence in Xinjiang by ensuring SCO support should it be needed to control such a mass uprising.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

China has several issues it must come to grips with in order to significantly reduce motive. The primary issue is religious tolerance. Beijing's unwillingness to allow the Uyghurs and other Muslim Turks the ability to maintain their religion while participating in the political process will continue to drive a wedge in ethnic minority relations. Additionally, its inability to address social problems within Uyghur society to the satisfaction of traditional Uyghur leadership will only cause those leaders to maintain an underground civil society that the Chinese government cannot penetrate, much less destroy. This civil society will always view that government as an adversary instead of an ally, and those Uyghurs who conform to the atheist requirements of the party will be viewed as party patsies. An undercurrent of motive to rid Xinjiang of Chinese rule will continue as the situation continues this way.

Furthermore, the government's continued use of repressive tactics to handle minority discontent will only fuel motive and push more Uyghurs toward extreme methods of expressing frustration. The point where an individual perceives that possible rewards of using political violence outweighs possible punishment varies from individual to individual and the ability of outside observers to determine when that point has been reached remains a mystery. However, a person who feels that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain will not hesitate. The Chinese government would be wise to bear this in mind when it so quickly sentences and executes political dissenters.

A secondary issue is minority language policies, which may have finally reached a correct solution to the language barrier that has hampered interethnic relations throughout the PRC period. While there will always be opposition to change, bilingual education will allow Uyghurs and other minorities the ability to communicate in the official language of the PRC. Regardless of the fact that many minorities find Han refusal to learn the minority languages offensive, the reciprocal attitude will only be detrimental to them. The key to success for Uyghurs and other minorities who wish to attain successful careers and positions in society is ability to speak multiple languages. Minorities who can do so actually have an advantage over their Han counterparts, particularly in business, and as that generation of minorities enters the workforce, relative deprivation of opportunities due to language will be reduced.

Finally, the “Develop the West” program has finally begun in Xinjiang what was started in the coastal regions over two decades ago. China will continue to labor to bring economic benefits and political stability to Xinjiang. These economic benefits alone will not ensure Beijing's success, but if Xinjiang's minority population finds itself economically as well off as its Han counterparts and its kinsmen in surrounding Central Asian states, relative deprivation will not loom large as a motive for major organized political violence.

Beijing has also successfully reduced means and opportunity through the use of economic incentives and political maneuvering and its continued rise a regional power will only strengthen its ability to do so. China's ever growing relationship within the SCO negates the support network for Xinjiang's political dissidents that began to appear after the collapse of the Soviet Union and also provides economic and political partners who strive for security within Xinjiang and the rest of Central Asia. So while China does have problems in its ethnic minority relations within it

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