

China's Central Asian Power and Problems

by Felix K. Chang

China's northwest province of Xinjiang and Central Asia in general have been on the periphery of Chinese foreign policy discussions in recent years as Beijing's assertive proclamations and actions have focused attention on China's coast. Global apprehension ran high over Hong Kong's transition to Chinese rule, Chinese naval and air exercises near Taiwan, and China's claims to the much-contended Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. Beijing's December 1996 agreement with Moscow to purchase two Sovremenny-class destroyers and possibly fifty Su-30MK fighter aircraft only heightened these concerns.¹

But far from the conventional theaters in which China's new military acquisitions may prove useful, an entirely different challenge awaits Chinese leaders in the inland deserts and mountains of Xinjiang. Much of the native population there resists Chinese dominion and agitates for greater autonomy and even independence from Beijing. Foremost among these defiant groups are the Uyghurs, a Muslim people of Turkic descent. In February 1997, they mounted a major riot in Yining and three bombings in Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital city. Meanwhile, just across its western border, China confronts destabilizing

¹ See "A Rig Too Near," *The Economist*, Mar. 29, 1997, p. 36; Nigel Holloway and Charles Bickers, "Brothers in Arms: The U.S. Worries About Sino-Russian Military Cooperation," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter *FEER*), Mar. 13, 1997, pp. 20–21; Norman Friedman, "China Buys Russian Destroyers," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, Mar. 1997, pp. 125–26; "Price of Power," *The Economist*, Mar. 8, 1997, pp. 38–40; Edward A. Gargan, "In Looking to the Future, Hong Kong and Taiwan Face New Uncertainties," *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1997; Kathy Chen, "Latest Big China-Russia Arms Deal Could Raise Concern in Asia and U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 14, 1997; Patrick Tyler, "China's Military Stumbles Even as Its Power Grows," *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1996; "China Speeds Up Military Modernization," United Press International (hereafter UPI), Sept. 25, 1996; and Karl W. Eikenberry, "Does China Threaten Asia-Pacific Regional Stability?" *Parameters*, Spring 1995, pp. 82–103. See also Felix K. Chang, "Beijing's Reach in the South China Sea," *Orbis*, Summer 1996, pp. 353–74; and Felix K. Chang, "Conventional War across the Taiwan Strait," *Orbis*, Fall 1996, pp. 577–607.

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threats from Central Asia, including civil wars that periodically flare up in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.²

Given these domestic and international dynamics, can China contain the separatist movement in Xinjiang? And how will that movement affect Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia? A thorough examination of precisely what interests are at stake in Xinjiang for China, one of the world's last multinational empires, is long overdue.

Xinjiang's Importance

Three principal attributes make Xinjiang vital to China: its potentially rich hydrocarbon and mineral assets, its strategic location, and its relationship to the national legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Hydrocarbon reserves and mineral deposits. Upstream production of crude oil, natural gas, and coal and downstream refining and chemicals manufacturing represent the largest value-adding industry in Xinjiang. Currently, most of the province's hydrocarbon extraction occurs near Karamay in northern Xinjiang, where oil production has reached about 7 million tons of coal equivalent and natural gas production between 500,000 and 700,000 tons of coal equivalent each year. The province as a whole annually harvests approximately 8 to 9 million tons of coal from its fifty-six mines, including the largest two near Urumqi and Hami. While not currently China's most prolific energy-producing region, Xinjiang has the potential to be one of the country's largest land-based sources of fossil fuels.³

Indeed, great quantities of energy resources may lie undiscovered deep beneath the sands of the Taklimakan Desert in southern Xinjiang. Chinese geologists have estimated that the Tarim Basin in the Taklimakan could yield some 80 to 180 billion barrels of petroleum. Some crude oil has already been located in China's Tabei Exploration Area along the basin's northern edge. However, to profitably exploit the resources of this remote region, Beijing has turned to international oil companies and foreign money.

During the early 1990s, the Tarim Basin attracted numerous international oil companies with its lure of vast untapped oil fields. When Beijing allowed foreign companies to bid on five exploration blocks along the basin's southeastern

² See Economist Intelligence Unit (hereafter EIU), *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 1st quarter 1997* (London: EIU, 1997), pp. 12–19; Patrick E. Tyler, "In China's Far West, Tensions With Ethnic Muslims Boil Over in Riots and Bombings," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1997; Matt Forney, "Uighur Fire: Suppression in Xinjiang Attracts International Attention," *FEER*, Feb. 27, 1997, pp. 17–21; EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 3rd quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 15; Nicholas D. Kristof, "As China Looks at World Order, It Detects New Struggles Emerging," *New York Times*, Apr. 21, 1992; and Nicholas D. Kristof, "Beijing's Shivering Spine: Ethnic Groups, Watching Soviets, Worry Their Leaders by Hoping for Independence," *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1991.

³ Author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, ed. Institute of Geography, Chinese Academy of Sciences and State Planning Committee, State Economic Information Centre, and the Institute of Statistics, State Statistics Bureau (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 119–26, 157–62, 165–68.

rim between Hotan and Ruoqiang in 1993, sixty-eight companies registered for the auction, despite the fact that these blocks were the least-promising in the basin and only one circuitous road linked the area to Xinjiang's population centers. Whether they expected to strike oil or merely hoped to build relationships with the Chinese government that would aid future bids, oil companies paid as much as \$600,000 just for Chinese seismological data. Today, even as many foreign firms fail to uncover economically worthwhile deposits, other companies persevere—Texaco signed contracts for two additional exploration blocks in the Tarim Basin in early February 1996.⁴

Beijing sees oil production in southern Xinjiang as a way not only to generate cash flow for its coffers but also to ensure that the country will have enough energy resources to continue its economic expansion. In 1994 China became a net importer of crude oil for the first time in its history when its consumption of oil outstripped production. By 1995 it imported a net 9 million tons of crude oil—a particularly worrisome statistic for a government that places such great importance on national self-sufficiency in energy production. To sustain its growth China requires a reliable and relatively inexpensive source of energy, which Chinese leaders in Beijing hope their northwestern province will provide.⁵

Lastly, Xinjiang is also a mining center for other valuable raw materials, from building stones to ferrous ores. Rich mica deposits are mined near Altay and Fuyun in the province's northernmost mountains; at least thirty-eight different mines have been burrowed to extract this commodity. While much of the raw material produced in Xinjiang is consumed within the province, a significant amount is shipped abroad and to eastern China.⁶

Strategic location. Directly adjacent to Mongolia, Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, Xinjiang is a strategic pivot point for China. During the cold war the province was both a link with and a buffer against the Soviet Union, depending on whether Moscow was an ally or an adversary. Today Xinjiang acts as a shield between the populous cities of eastern China and the often unstable environments of Central Asia and the Middle East. Furthermore, China's common border with Pakistan greatly

⁴ See Pamela Yatsko, "Oh Well: China's Tarim Basin Is Proving a Big Disappointment," *FEER*, Sept. 19, 1996, pp. 68–69; "Texaco Signs Contract for Two Exploration Blocks in China's Tarim," Texaco Press Release, White Plains, N.Y., Feb. 5, 1996; Kathy Chen, "Shifting Sands: Foreign Oil Companies Find Risks in Exploring China's Tarim Basin," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 10, 1994; Steven Mufson and Steve Coll, "China Offers Its Oil Riches on the Open Market," *Washington Post*, Mar. 20, 1994; Marcus W. Brauchli, "China's Growing Thirst for Oil Clears the Way for Foreign Firms, but Spurs New Headaches," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 20, 1993; Carl Goldstein, "Oil Men on Silk Road: Western China Opened for Foreign Prospectors," *FEER*, Mar. 4, 1993, p. 4; and James McGregor, "China Opens Last Frontier to Foreign Oil Companies," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 22, 1993.

⁵ Tan E. Lyn, "China's Sinopec Set to Tackle 1997 Diesel Shortage," Reuters, Feb. 27, 1997; EIU, *Country Profile: China, Mongolia, 1996–97* (London: EIU, 1997), p. 38; and Craig E. Smith, "China Imports a Lot of Oil by Moonlight," *Wall Street Journal*, May 5, 1995.

⁶ Author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 127–37.

facilitates the growing relationship between those two countries by giving them an unimpeded route for commerce and military assistance.

Although Xinjiang's mountainous border offers a natural defense against external invaders, it is the expansive steppe and waterless deserts in the province's interior that would be the greatest challenge to any potential invaders. Regularly racked by hailstorms, sandstorms, and earthquakes, those areas experience severely cold winters and extremely hot summers.

Chinese regionalism and communist power. Since the late 1970s, and certainly after the fall of the Soviet Union, communist ideology has been losing much of its resonance in Chinese society. The late Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic promotion of markets to spur the country's economy further eroded communist appeals. By the early 1990s, the Chinese government proclaimed "Market-Leninism" and a "socialist market" to be its national goals. These officially sanctioned but adulterated forms of communism indicated to all that China's experience with communism had not been entirely successful.⁷

This shift in political attitudes fundamentally threatened the CCP. If communism was no longer persuasive, why should a communist party continue to govern China alone? The CCP clearly needed a new legitimizing rationale to maintain its monopoly of power. Partly by design and partly by fortune, Chinese nationalism and economic prosperity emerged as the solutions. Consistent with this new imperative, President Jiang Zemin expressed his desire for China to become a "spiritual civilization" in which people obey national authority and work not only for themselves but also for the nation. To further inspire popular nationalism, Beijing occasionally revived memories of past Chinese humiliations at the hands of foreign countries. China's new nationalism was evident in its diplomatic swaggering during its dispute with Japan concerning the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands in the East China Sea in September 1996. The combination of nationalism, economic franchise, and tighter party discipline has greatly benefited the CCP.⁸

Essentially, the party constructed its new legitimacy around an "image of an economically and militarily strong Chinese state capable of redressing past grievances, resisting current and future foreign intrusions, and wielding a high degree of influence in the international arena, at least on par with other

⁷ See Henry A. Kissinger, "The Philosopher and the Pragmatist," *Newsweek*, Mar. 3, 1997, pp. 42–47; James McGregor, "Chinese Officials Walk Tightrope in Bid to Create a 'Socialist Market Economy,'" *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 23, 1996; Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry Into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978–1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), pp. 472–523; Yan Sun, *The Chinese Reassessment of Socialism, 1976–1992* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 3–213, 258–76; and Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Sees 'Market-Leninism' as Way to Future," *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1993.

⁸ See Kathy Chen, "China Intensifies Ideological Campaign: President's Crackdown May Presage Leadership Changes," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 13, 1996; Marcus W. Brauchli, Norihiko Shirouzu, and Peter Stein, "Chinese Nationalism Crosses Borders: Rivalrous Groups Unite in Land Dispute With Japan," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 9, 1996; "China Says Nationalist Tide Due to U.S. Pressure," Reuters, Aug. 27, 1996; Patrick E. Tyler, "China's Campus Model for the 90's: Earnest Patriot," *New York Times*, Apr. 23, 1996; Patrick E. Tyler, "As Deng Fades, China's Leaders Tighten Grip on Power," *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1994; and James McGregor, "Deng Seems to Aim at Reforming Chinese Law While Strengthening Hand of Politburo Cadre," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 22, 1993.

major powers.”⁹ Deng’s reforms were never intended to move China toward liberal democracy. His motive “was never to transfer power away from the Communist Party to an institution independent of it; it was merely to allow others to work on the party’s behalf more efficiently than the party could do itself. Mr. Deng’s allegiance to communist ideology may have been expedient; his allegiance to the party’s monopoly on power was absolute.”¹⁰

But the rise of regionalism in China threatens to undermine the CCP’s new legitimacy. How strong or capable can China or the CCP be if ethnic groups like the Uygurs in Xinjiang continue to agitate for greater autonomy? Currently, people in a number of provinces are loosening their ties with Beijing for a variety of reasons. These divisive forces have been abetted by the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) deepening involvement in local economic affairs. Indeed, the party recently responded by reasserting its control over the army to thwart the effect that prolonged exposure to “corrosive” economic influences could have on the PLA’s institutional culture and political loyalties.¹¹

Any consequential concessions to restive elements in Xinjiang will thus be seen as a signal of Beijing’s weakness. And any perceived weakness on the issue of greater autonomy or independence for Xinjiang would trigger reverberating effects throughout Taiwan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. For the CCP, the threat of successful independence anywhere becomes a threat of independence everywhere. In the interest of its own survival the party simply cannot afford to concede to any separatist demands, including those in Xinjiang. Consequently, it will probably use every means in the Chinese state’s power to keep the intractable regions subdued and in the fold.

Separatism in Xinjiang

Historical autonomy. Resistance to Chinese dominion in Central Asia is not new. Before the region that is now known as Xinjiang became a part of China, it belonged to a series of independent Turkic empires. But even after

⁹ Matt Forney, “Patriot Games,” *FEER*, Oct. 3, 1996, p. 23.

¹⁰ “The Last Emperor,” *The Economist*, Feb. 22, 1997, p. 22. See also Fox Butterfield, “Crackdown in China: Deng Is Said to Link Force to Safety of Party,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1989.

¹¹ Benjamin Kang Lim, “China Tightens Party Grip on Military,” Reuters, Mar. 6, 1997; Robert Karniol, “China Confirms Party Leadership Over Army,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, May 29, 1996, p. 13; and June Teufel Dreyer, “The PLA and Regionalism: Xinjiang,” in *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension*, ed. Richard H. Yang et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 249–76. See also EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 4th quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), pp. 13–14; Michael D. Swaine, “Chinese Regional Forces as Political Actors,” in *Chinese Regionalism*, ed. Yang et al., pp. 59–84; Zhou Tao and Ma Chunlin, “Army Production, Operation Hit ‘Record’ Highs,” in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: China* (hereafter FBIS, *China*), Mar. 2, 1993, p. 27, from *Jiefangjun Bao* (Beijing), Feb. 18, 1993; Paul E. Schroeder, “Territorial Actors as Competitors for Power: The Case of Hubei and Wuhan,” in *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, ed. Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 283–307; and “Military Forum States That Developing Agricultural and Sideline Production is a Long-Term Policy of the Army,” in FBIS, *China*, May 8, 1990, p. 27, from *Jiefangjun Bao*, Apr. 13, 1990.

the Qing dynasty annexed the region in 1759, China never directly controlled its new province because of the dearth of Han Chinese available to govern it. Instead, the Qing largely allowed the Uygurs to govern themselves under Chinese rule. However, the native population's aspirations for complete independence never dissipated entirely. In 1864 the Uygurs successfully overthrew their Qing rulers and established Eastern Turkestan. Although eventually crushed by Chinese armies, the native population continued to maintain a good measure of autonomy because of the province's inaccessibility from the rest of China.

The Uygur population, led by Saifudin, a Soviet-educated Uygur and member of the Soviet Union's communist party, revolted against Chinese rule in 1933 and again in 1944. Nationalist China, preoccupied with combating

In the 1970s a new Islamic identity emerged in Xinjiang.

Japanese and Chinese communist forces in eastern China, could not suppress the second revolt, and the East Turkestan Republic was formed from the three northwestern districts of Xinjiang, with Yining as its capital. When PLA forces arrived in the region in 1950, neither Soviet-backed East Turkestan nor the new Chinese communist government saw any interest in fighting over Xinjiang, especially since Moscow and Beijing were allies at the time. Saifudin resigned from the Soviet Union's communist party

and joined the CCP. East Turkestan's army was subsumed into the PLA as the 5th Army Corps. Despite East Turkestan's brief existence, the "Three Districts Revolution" stands as an illustration of a successful Turkic independence movement in China that continues to inspire minority populations throughout Xinjiang and Central Asia.¹²

Immediately after China incorporated East Turkestan, Beijing appointed Wang Enmao, a former PLA officer, to govern Xinjiang. Though he thought communist ideology was important, Wang believed his first priorities were to sever Xinjiang's Soviet orientation, realign the province toward China, and minimize the animosity between the native population and the Han Chinese. Throughout his tenure in the 1950s and 1960s Wang understood that the Han Chinese were still very much the minority in Xinjiang and that their control over the region remained tenuous. To diminish the potential for conflict, he sought to moderate many of Mao Zedong's most radical communist policies. Still, the starvation that followed the Great Leap Forward led to small civil disturbances in 1958 and 1959 that escalated into a major revolt in 1962, when rioters in Yining set government and party buildings afire while thousands of Uygurs overwhelmed border defenses to flee to the Soviet Union.

The Cultural Revolution brought greater tension to the province as Red Guard units destroyed mosques and Islamic institutions. More Uygurs, this time

¹² Dreyer, "The PLA and Regionalism," pp. 249–60; Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944–1949* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), pp. 138–39, 177–84; Kamal Sheel, *Peasant Society and Marxist Intellectuals in China: Fang Zhimin and the Origin of a Revolutionary Movement in the Xinjiang Region* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3–21, 91–242; and Donald H. McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949–1977* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979), pp. 15–25.

from near Aksu, fled across the Sino-Soviet border. Although Wang was powerful, his nascent opposition to Mao's Cultural Revolution led to his removal from office and replacement by a committee chaired by Lin Biao's chosen successor, Long Shujin. However, Lin's fall from power also felled Long, whose deliberate implementation of Beijing's doctrinaire policies fueled unrest in Xinjiang, and Saifudin was elevated to chair the province's governing committee. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, food shortages became acute as industrial workers in Shihezi and oil-field workers in Karamay went on strike in 1974. Finally, Saifudin himself, with his Soviet past, was removed in 1978 under charges of managerial ineffectiveness and association with the Gang of Four.

Islamic revolution. Although most Uyghurs in Xinjiang have been Muslim since 934, Islam did not become a defining agent for these people until recently. Rather, the Uyghurs principally defined themselves by their Turkic ethnic identity. In fact, two Uyghur empires, one Buddhist and the other Muslim, merged in 1397 to form an empire that lasted until Chinese armies conquered it in 1759. By the 1970s, however, a combination of domestic and international events would give rise to a new Islamic identity in the province. The dislocation wrought by Beijing during the Cultural Revolution and the doctrinaire communist period that followed engendered great resentment among the native Xinjiang population. This enmity was further fueled by a new Islamic consciousness among Muslims across Asia and North Africa. The power of Islam as a political force was first felt in Xinjiang in 1975, when Muslim workers rebelled after being ordered to work on Fridays.¹³

By the end of the 1970s, the Islamic resurgence in Central Asia began to threaten not only Xinjiang but also the five Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. With the spread of voice and fax communications in Xinjiang, Muslims there could keep abreast of world developments as never before. Moreover, in an attempt to link Xinjiang closer to the rest of China, Beijing had ninety-two television relay stations erected in the province, so that by 1988 1.1 million televisions reached about 65 percent of the population. Unfortunately for Beijing, the new information sources, together with Muslims returning from their *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, brought new ideas to the province's Islamic adherents, who discovered that Muslims around the world shared similar concerns and aspirations.¹⁴ When the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in December 1979, sympathy for Afghan Muslims flourished in Xinjiang.

Concurrently, Uyghurs increasingly found their Chinese rulers to be apathetic or corrupt. They chafed at the fact that the Han Chinese did not share their Muslim traditions or economic way of life. Soon a new defining force, based on shared experience, religion, and ethnic nationalism, began to coalesce in Xinjiang. At the same time, the secular nationalism that the Chinese government

¹³ Dreyer, "The PLA and Regionalism," p. 256.

¹⁴ Kathy Chen, "China's Recent Bombings Push Beijing To Greater Role in Fighting Terrorism," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 10, 1997; A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West: Four Decades of Change* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), p. 389; and Muriel Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1989), pp. 29–64.

had tried to inculcate was losing its coherence.¹⁵ The trend toward religious and ethnic nationalism that took hold in Xinjiang mirrored those spreading throughout other regions around the world, from Algeria to Sri Lanka:

Ultimately secular nationalism is perceived by many as having failed not only because its institutions and leaders have disappointed them but also because they . . . no longer see secular nationalism as an expression of their own identities or as related to their social or economic situations. More important, they have failed to see how . . . [secular] nationalism can provide a vision of what they would like themselves and their nation to become.¹⁶

To keep the situation in Xinjiang from boiling over, Beijing sent Wang Feng, a Shaanxi native and cadre member experienced in dealing with *shaoshu minzu* (minority nationalities) issues, to replace Saifudin. Unfortunately, Wang proved unpopular with not only the Muslim population but the Han Chinese as well. After food shortages prompted the transfer of cadres from Tibet, minority groups in Xinjiang petitioned for similar transfers in 1981. When their requests were denied, those groups launched a two-day upheaval in Aksu against the Han Chinese. The demonstrations quickly spread to Urumqi and Korla. Under directions to exercise restraint, internal security forces stood aside as protesters ransacked Han Chinese property and occupied government and CCP buildings. In the end, Beijing dispatched troops from the Lanzhou Military Region to quell the insurrection and reinstalled Wang Enmao in Urumqi to restore order. Wang and his successor, Song Hanliang, attempted to ease popular discontent by apportioning economic benefits to Muslims and opening international air routes to Mecca.

Fall of the Soviet Union. The failure of the Soviet army in Afghanistan against a poorly armed but resilient Muslim population in the 1980s demonstrated to many in Xinjiang that the Chinese communists were not unassailable.¹⁷ As protesters gathered in Tiananmen Square in the late spring of 1989, between 2,000 and 3,000 students from Xinjiang University marched to the CCP headquarters in Urumqi on May 17 in support of hunger strikers in Beijing. The students were joined the following day by several thousand Muslims, including Islamic students from the Urumqi Koranic Studies Institute. Unlike the students

¹⁵ See Jane Macartney, "China to Teach Patriotism to Restive Moslem Group," Reuters, Feb. 13, 1997; Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 71–100; Karl E. Meyer, "Asia's Lost World," *New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1995; Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising Power* (New York: Times Books, 1994), pp. 134–37; Tom Hundley, "Islam Surges as Communism Recedes," *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 1, 1992; Dru C. Gladney, "The Hui, Islam, and the State: A Sufi Community in China's Northwest Corner," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 89–111; Kristof, "Beijing's Shivering Spine"; and Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 124–52.

¹⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 24.

¹⁷ Uyghurs commonly credit the Afghan *mujahidin* for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and discount the introduction of the Stinger missile by the United States in 1986.

from Xinjiang University, the Muslims were protesting the publication of a book in Shanghai that disparaged the Islamic *hajj* to Mecca. Clashes broke out as security forces tried to contain the demonstration; CCP headquarters was besieged, and more than 150 police officers and soldiers were hurt.¹⁸

Clearly, Islamic adherents were gaining confidence and strength. In an effort to curb religion in Xinjiang, the Chinese government restricted the construction of unsanctioned mosques and Islamic schools in March 1990. Consequently, a newly built but unauthorized mosque in Baren, a town in Atko County near Kashi (Kashgar), was ordered shut. Then on April 4, between 60 and 200 demonstrators gathered in Baren to demand greater religious freedom. As the number of protesters swelled to 2,000, security forces were alerted. More than 1,000 security personnel were deployed to Baren from April 4 to 6, including 700 officers of the People's Armed Police (PAP) as well as units from the PLA and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). Twenty-two died in the ensuing strife, including seven officers.

The violence in Baren spread throughout Xinjiang as riots broke out in Aksu, Artux, Hotan, Kashi, Kuqa, and Urumqi. (While Kashi, the largest city in southern Xinjiang, has the gray socialist buildings and statues reminiscent of other Chinese cities, 90 percent of its population of 200,000 is non-Han Chinese.) Unconfirmed reports that as many as sixty died in Urumqi and sixty-eight perished in Artux seeped out through exile Uygur organizations. When local security forces could not contain the strife, PLA forces were airlifted from Gansu to suppress the unrest. Following the incident, Chinese authorities tightened their control on religious expression, including purging the Muslim clergy and closing a number of Islamic schools. All unsanctioned religious activities were prohibited, and Chinese police kept religious dissidents under heightened scrutiny, detaining people as far away as Yecheng for the remainder of the year.¹⁹

The demise of the Soviet Union and its subsequent disintegration instilled even greater hope in Xinjiang's separatist groups. Recently some of those organizations decided to abandon the quest for a peaceful separation from China. Unrest in March 1992 prompted Tomur Dawamat, chairman of Xinjiang's government, to initiate yet another crackdown on subversive elements. Nevertheless, sporadic terrorism persisted: In June 1993, a hotel bombing aimed

¹⁸ Carl Goldstein, "Letter from Xinjiang," *FEER*, Aug. 9, 1989, p. 37.

¹⁹ See Amnesty International, *People's Republic of China. Secret Violence: Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang*, Nov. 13, 1992, pp. 3–14; Daniel Southerland, "China Confirms 22 Dead in Clash in Western Area," *Washington Post*, Apr. 23, 1990; David Holley, "An Islamic Challenge to China," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 12, 1990; Lena H. Sun, "Ancient Silk Road Oasis Restive," *Washington Post*, Sept. 25, 1990; Simon Long, "China's Muslims Face Crackdown," *Guardian*, May 25, 1990; Simon Long, "China Crushes Stirring of Muslim Revolt in West," *Guardian*, May 10, 1990; Guy Dinmore, "China Sees Internal Moslem Holy War," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 24, 1990; "Beijing Reports 22 Deaths in Revolt in Western Region," *New York Times*, Apr. 23, 1990; Ann Scott Tyson, "Beijing Rebukes Ethnic Unrest," *Christian Science Monitor*, Apr. 18, 1990; Nicholas D. Kristof, "Unrest Reported in Muslim Areas of China; Foreigners Are Barred," *New York Times*, Apr. 13, 1990; and "Islamic Unrest Reported in China's North," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 11, 1990.

against Han Chinese was carried out. In late February 1996, a pro-Beijing Muslim cleric and several policemen were assassinated in cities as far north as Urumqi.²⁰

Beginning in the spring of 1996, Chinese authorities implemented Beijing's new nationwide "Strike Hard" campaign to stem criminal and separatist activities. In Xinjiang, Chinese security forces clashed with Muslims armed with light weapons acquired from Afghan and Central Asian sympathizers. Several PLA battalions were rushed to Aksu in the largest movement of troops since the Kashi riots in 1990. PLA units were also needed to quell disorder in Urumqi. These skirmishes ended with a five-day sweep through the region for separatist agitators that netted some 1,700 Uygur suspects.²¹

Again under the auspices of the "Strike Hard" campaign, Chinese police swept through Yining in Yili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture to arrest suspected criminals and separatists in early February 1997. That sweep triggered a furious response. What citizens saw as the unjust detention of a Yining resident led more than 1,000 Uygurs to revolt on February 5–6, destroying Han Chinese homes and stores. Beijing had to deploy nearly a thousand People's Armed Police to subdue the violence. In the end, 10 died and another 198 were injured. Following the riots, the PAP arrested 200 to 300 Uygurs, and about 30 were tried and 3 were executed. Before the executions took place, however, a group of more than 100 Uygurs attacked the Chinese vehicles transporting the convicts outside of Yining in an attempt to rescue them. The PAP responded with gunfire that killed two of the attackers and wounded another five.²² (Exile Uygur organizations claim "that more than 100 were killed, including 31 young Muslims who were said to have been secretly executed in the yard of the Public Security headquarters on Feb. 8th."²³)

²⁰ "China's Rebellious West," *The Economist*, Feb. 15, 1997, pp. 33–34.

²¹ See "Moslem Separatists Run Amok in Western China," UPI, Feb. 10, 1997; EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 3rd quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), pp. 13–14; "Large-scale troop movements reported in Xinjiang," *FEER*, June 13, 1996, p. 29; Sheila Tefft, "Frustrated China Cracks Whip on Wayward Western Regions," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 6, 1996; Steven Mufson, "Tibetans, Muslims Clash With Beijing," *Washington Post*, May 31, 1996; Uli Schmetzer, "1,700 Muslims Arrested by Chinese Forces," *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1996; Kathy Chen, "China Faces Dissent as Some Muslims in Xinjiang Push for Separate State," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 16, 1994; Nicholas D. Kristof, "Kash: On China's Silk Road," *New York Times*, May 15, 1994; Nicholas D. Kristof, "A Muslim Region Is Tugging at the Ties That Bind China," *New York Times*, Aug. 14, 1993; Carrie Gracie, "Chinese Muslims Fight for Self-Rule," *Guardian*, Mar. 9, 1992; "Muslim Area of China Is Facing a Crackdown," *New York Times*, Mar. 9, 1992; and "A Muslim Region in China," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 9, 1992.

²² See Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Police Thwart Rescue of Convicts, Kill Two," Reuters, Apr. 28, 1997; Benjamin Kang Lim, "Six Indicted in China's Muslim Rioting, Face Death," Reuters, Mar. 20, 1997; Tyler, "In China's Far West"; Mure Dickie, "Deadly Riot Shatters Image of China Ethnic Harmony," Reuters, Feb. 12, 1997; "10 Die as Muslims Battle Chinese in Border Zone," *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1997; Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Seals Off Muslim Riot Town," Reuters, Feb. 11, 1997; "China Imposes Curfew After Riot in Xinjiang," Reuters, Feb. 10, 1997; "Moslem Separatists Run Amok in Western China," UPI, Feb. 10, 1997; and "China Region in Call to Battle Unrest, Religion," Reuters, Feb. 7, 1997.

²³ Tyler, "In China's Far West."

Coinciding with Deng Xiaoping's funeral on February 25, three bomb blasts erupted on public buses in Urumqi, killing nine and wounding seventy-four more. Local Chinese officials immediately reacted by temporarily sealing off the city.²⁴ Leaders in Beijing wanted more. At the start of the National People's Congress, Vice Premier Li Lanqing admonished Xinjiang's delegates to "further improve ethnic unity, protect social stability and do a better job of building up Xinjiang."²⁵ Two weeks after the bombings, Wang Lequan, Xinjiang's communist party leader, announced that the province was finally stable as additional security forces were deployed.

But by that time the violence was no longer confined to Xinjiang. A bomb detonated on a Beijing public bus on March 7, killing two and injuring thirty. While it is still uncertain who the culprits were, many Chinese point to Xinjiang separatists. Despite official Chinese reports resolutely denying the claim, security measures have been taken in Beijing to guard against "people who look as though they are from Xinjiang."²⁶

As Beijing's efforts indicate, the struggle to keep control over Xinjiang grows more difficult for China. The synthesis of ethnicity, religion, nationalism, and confidence has invigorated the province's separatist movement.²⁷ Nevertheless, Chinese authorities continue to ascribe the movement to external sources. Some Chinese leaders in Beijing recently blamed not only the West but also Pakistan's Tableeghi Jamaat Muslim preaching group for conspiring to divide China.²⁸

²⁴ See Kevin Platt, "How China Sees Its Ethnic Separatists Differently," *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 11, 1997; "Uighurs Arrested in China on Bomb Charges," Reuters, Mar. 6, 1997; Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Arrests Seven for Bombings in Moslem Region," Reuters, Mar. 6, 1997; Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Makes Arrests After Bomb Attacks in Xinjiang," Reuters, Feb. 27, 1997; Jane Macartney, "China Cracks Down on Explosives After Bomb Blasts," Reuters, Feb. 27, 1997; "Security Tight After China Bombing," UPI, Feb. 25, 1997; William Kazer, "Bombs Rock Chinese City Torn By Muslim Secessionists," UPI, Feb. 25, 1997; and Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Honours Deng, Bombs Rock Western City," Reuters, Feb. 25, 1997.

²⁵ William Kazer, "China Says Xinjiang Stable, Subversion Crushed," Reuters, Mar. 13, 1997. See also "Ethnic Unrest in Western China," *Washington Post*, Mar. 8, 1997; and Scott Hillis, "China Calls for Unity in Xinjiang After Bombings," Reuters, Mar. 6, 1997.

²⁶ "A Bomb in Beijing," *The Economist*, Mar. 15, 1997, p. 37. See also Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Says Beijing, Xinjiang Attacks Unrelated," Reuters, Mar. 10, 1997; Chris Bird, "Uighurs Could Be Behind Beijing Bombings—Exiles," Reuters, Mar. 10, 1997; William Kazer, "China Says Criminals Bombed Bus, Exiles Claim Links," Reuters, Mar. 9, 1997; and Mure Dickie, "China Media Says No Deaths in Beijing Blast," Reuters, Mar. 7, 1997.

²⁷ Chris Bird, "Ex-Soviet States Fuel Dream of Uighur Independence," Reuters, Feb. 12, 1997.

²⁸ See Benjamin Kang Lim, "West Accused of Trying to Divide China," Reuters, Mar. 17, 1997; "Pakistan Reports Moslem Preachers' Visits to China," Reuters, Feb. 13, 1997; David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security*, Fall 1996, pp. 41–75; Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, pp. 165–212; Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 88–143; and Marie Broxup, "Political Trends in Soviet Islam after the Afghanistan War," in *Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives on Nationality, Politics, and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, ed. Edward Allworth (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 304–21. See also Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asia Studies, Harvard University, 1991).

Table 1
Xinjiang's Ethnic Demographics
(in millions)

	Xinjiang (1986)	CCP in Xinjiang (1993)	PLA in Xinjiang (1993)	Xinjiang (1996)	XPCC (1996)
Han Chinese	5.386 (38.9%)	<60%	>92%	6.08–6.56 (38–41%)	2.021–2.073 (86–88.2%)
All minorities		>40%	< 8%		
Uyгур	6.431 (46.5%)			7.2 (45%)	0.141 (6%)
Kazak	1 (7.2%)			1 (6.3%)	
Hui	0.612 (4.4%)				
Mongol	0.128 (0.9%)				
Kyrgyz	0.126 (0.9%)				
Xibe	0.03 (0.2%)				
Tajik	0.03 (0.2%)				
Other	0.097 (0.7%)			1.24–1.72 (7.8–10.8%)	0.136–0.188 (5.8–8%)
Total	13.84 (100%)	100%	100%	16 (100%)	2.35 (100%)

Sources: EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 4th quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 15; EIU, *Country Profile: Kazakhstan, 1996–97* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 9; "World Bank Projects," pp. 21, 24, 29, 36; IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, p. 179; Dreyer, "The PLA and Regionalism," p. 270; Barnett, *China's Far West*, pp. 343–44, 352, 379; and author's estimates.

Chinese Social and Economic Leverage

Demographics and geography. As part of its *shaoshu minzu* policy, Beijing has officially classified some fifty-five minority groups plus the Han, while "wholly denying the validity or even the existence of others" in order to effectively manage minority groups throughout China.²⁹ Unfortunately, Xinjiang's minorities are reproducing at a much higher rate than the Han Chinese, even as Han Chinese pour into the province's larger cities. Of course, Xinjiang itself is home to several ethnic groups other than the Han and Uyğurs, including the Kazak, Hui, Mongol, Kyrgyz, Xibe, Tajik, Uzbek, Russian, Manchu, and Daur peoples.³⁰ Nonetheless, it must be remembered that the 16 million who live in Xinjiang are a small fraction of China's 1.21 billion people.

²⁹ John Lipman, "Hyphenated Chinese: Sino-Muslim Identity in Modern China," in *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain*, ed. Gail Hershatter et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 97.

³⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies (hereafter IISS), *The Military Balance 1996/97* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 179.

These minority groups, especially the Uyghurs, are often underrepresented in the province's governing structure. That is particularly true within the principal coercive instruments such as the PLA and the XPCC, where Han Chinese maintain a decisive advantage. Still, members of minority groups, including Uyghurs, have joined Xinjiang's CCP in sizable numbers. (See Table 1.)

Notwithstanding absolute ethnic proportions, the geographic distribution of these groups also strongly affects China's ability to control the province. The Tian Shan mountain range, which stretches laterally across Xinjiang's center and splits near the Kazak border to form the Ili river valley, divides the province into northern, southern, and western portions and segregates many of the ethnic groups. In Xinjiang's northern tier there are enough Han Chinese to dominate the area's power structure and resources. While Uyghurs still reside there, they can no longer seriously challenge Chinese authority. As a result, organizing a strong separatist identity in northern Xinjiang has been arduous.³¹

The situation in the southern and western regions is completely different. Just south of the Tian Shan mountains, the Uyghur population dwarfs that of the Han Chinese. There human habitation clings to the edges of the Taklimakan Desert wherever the Tarim River and mountain streams carry water. And the lush Ili river valley in western Xinjiang, where rebellious Yining is located, is home to a dense admixture of several ethnic groups. It is in those regions that resistance to Chinese dominion is strongest and Chinese rule will be most strained.

As a hedge against existing demographics, Beijing encourages Han Chinese to resettle in Xinjiang. People dislocated by various state projects, like the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River, are urged to move there. However, many in Xinjiang oppose such a resettlement, including Wang Lequan, who fears that the migration will trigger further unrest.³²

Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. When Chinese communist forces first arrived in Xinjiang in 1950, barely 200,000 Han Chinese lived in the entire province. Beijing desperately needed a means to not only mobilize the province's agricultural and industrial production but also defend against internal and external threats. The CCP wanted to consolidate its power over this huge strategic region as well as create a strong economy in the country's northwest to strengthen China's position in relation to the Soviet Union and South Asia. Consequently, surrendering Nationalist Chinese forces and some former East Turkestan Republic army elements were reorganized into the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps to serve those functions. Similar provincial corps were established in Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Hainan Island, but none became as essential as the XPCC.³³

³¹ Barnett, *China's Far West*, p. 358.

³² See Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Moslem Region Resists Relocation Plan," Reuters, Mar. 19, 1997; Patrick E. Tyler, "China's Fickle Rivers: Dry Farms, Needy Industry Bring a Water Crisis," *New York Times*, May 23, 1996; and J.H. Chao, "Muslims in China Fear Being Overrun," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 27, 1994.

³³ Dreyer, "The PLA and Regionalism," pp. 251–52.

While the corps was eventually removed from military command and placed under civilian control, it remained organized along military lines and retained strong ties to the PLA. Although nominally a collection of farmers and construction workers, the corps also fulfills paramilitary duties, such as border defense and internal security responsibilities. When border conflict erupted between China and India in 1962, the corps provided vital support for PLA forces.³⁴

The XPCC was officially disbanded in 1975, along with all the other provincial production and construction corps, after famine struck China's north-west region in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. But the XPCC was reinstated in 1982 in response to the continued unrest in Xinjiang. During the 1980s, the corps formed ten agricultural divisions and one industrial division. Ten years later, the XPCC still fields ten agricultural divisions, as well as four administrative divisions. Divisions typically comprise up to fifteen regiments, each with about twenty militia companies and a heavy-weapons depot. The 64th Regiment, 4th Agricultural Division, located in the Yili area, maintains a depot complete with mortars, heavy machine guns, plastic explosives, hand grenades, land mines, and other light infantry weapons. The 5th Agricultural Division has at least twelve similar depots. Moreover, the PLA and other military organizations have recently spent "a great deal of effort in militia weapons depot construction."³⁵

Each XPCC company can field about twenty full-time and thirty to forty part-time militiamen. To fill its ranks, the corps uses work incentives to recruit the majority of part-time militia members. Normally all XPCC members must perform at least fifty days of voluntary labor for the corps—typically digging canals, constructing roads, or building houses. But those chosen for the militia are exempted from such duties. In addition, the PLA financially underwrites much of the corps' militia training and border-defense activities. In the case of the 1st Agricultural Division, each of its companies is commanded by a former military officer so that, in a crisis, every company can immediately become a combat unit. In total, fifty-eight XPCC agricultural and husbandry regiments conduct routine patrols along a 2,109 km stretch of the border between China and Central Asia.³⁶

Altogether, corps members constitute approximately 14.7 percent of Xinjiang's total population. Given such numbers, the XPCC's hand in internal security cannot be underestimated. Indeed, since the Urumqi riots in May 1989, the corps has increasingly assumed just such a role. XPCC units are frequently more responsive to local riots than the PLA because of their proximity to the troubled areas. Thus, the XPCC "has taken part in various operations to stabilize

³⁴ See Liu Shuangquan, quoted in "World Bank Projects in Xinjiang, China," Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, July 25, 1996 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), p. 50; and Barnett, *China's Far West*, pp. 385–86.

³⁵ "World Bank Projects," p. 47. See also Barnett, *China's Far West*, pp. 398–99.

³⁶ "World Bank Projects," pp. 19–21, 24, 47.

areas inhabited by minorities and has organized its militia forces into several hundreds of militia duty teams to maintain social stability.”³⁷

The corps flexed its muscles and demonstrated its power and alacrity during the 1990 Baren revolt. (Since 1950, Baren has witnessed three revolts, including two in August 1969, when peasants stormed the county’s arms depot and Public Security Bureau. At least fifty security personnel and two hundred peasants were killed.) The XPCC 3rd Agricultural Division and a PLA infantry division were mobilized to disperse the demonstrators—a particularly difficult task in a county where, at the time, 102,000 of the 148,000 residents were Uyghurs (only 3,000 were Han Chinese). Subsequently, 5,000 militiamen of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Agricultural Divisions were marshaled to apprehend Uyghurs fleeing to the Soviet Union.³⁸

Last year, Zhu Ronji, China’s economic chief, reaffirmed “the irreplaceable role of the Corps in consolidating border defense, stabilizing the border, fostering ethnic unity, and developing regional economy.”³⁹ The 4th Agricultural Division alone arrested 430 suspected insurgents near Yining on April 25, 1996. Then on June 4, Xinjiang Television praised the 100,000 militiamen participating in the “Strike Hard” campaign. Clearly, “assisting the Public Security Bureau and the People’s Armed Police in maintaining internal security among Xinjiang’s ethnic minorities remains an important . . . mission of the [XPCC] and its militia units.”⁴⁰

Possibly the most critical lever the XPCC holds in southern Xinjiang is its control of much of the region’s water resources. Water, collected from the annual runoff from the mountains, is scarce. Anecdotal stories are telling:

In one small area, the Uyghur people asked for water—it is supposed to happen 4 times in 1 year. But the [XPCC] regiment said, “No, one time per year.” And you can see the land. The [Han Chinese], in their land, the cotton, the wheat, everything is green and pretty well. But the other side, the Uyghur people, no water.⁴¹

Insurgents wanting to stage a revolt in that region would have to seize at least some of those water resources before any sustained campaign could begin.

Although the entire corps may not always be in complete accord with the central government in Beijing, its members are mostly Han Chinese, who are unlikely to embrace designs of separation from China. In fact, the Han Chinese and Uyghur populations rarely make common cause, especially since the two groups are usually segregated and share no common language or culture. Even Tomur Dawamat lamented that

Han prejudice is experiencing a steady rise. Quite a few Hans do not respect local minorities’ customs and way of life. Many big- and medium-scale enterprises, referring

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 7–8.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 22–23, 47–48; and Amnesty International, *People’s Republic of China. Secret Violence*, pp. 3–5.

³⁹ British Broadcasting Corporation, Sept. 25, 1995, from *Xinbua*, Sept. 14, 1995.

⁴⁰ “World Bank Projects,” p. 7. See also pp. 14, 17, 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 33. See also Kent Hughes Butts, “The Strategic Importance of Water,” *Parameters*, Spring 1997, pp. 65–83.

to all possible pretexts, refuse to employ minorities. As far as living standard is concerned, there is a big gap between minorities and Hans. Relations between the XPCC members and the local minorities are hostile. Such factors are favorable to our local separatists, who make use of them and come out against our Communist Party, and make splits.⁴²

Viable economic independence? Although Xinjiang exhibits one of the highest real-income growth rates in China, this figure can be deceptive because the mean income in the province was initially so low. Moreover, the income growth that has occurred has not been evenly distributed among the province's minority groups. Relative to their Han Chinese neighbors, Xinjiang's *shaoshu minzu* do not fare as well. An XPCC employee can expect to earn Rmb 2,700 each year, while a minority group member can expect just Rmb 780. In Atko County, site of the Baren uprising, a Uygur can earn only Rmb 380 annually. Worse yet, Uygurs say "that the best jobs—created by new investment—go to the Han who have been encouraged to migrate to the region." Meanwhile, Han Chinese are irritated that Uygurs receive "cash subsidies, preferences for jobs and school places, and exemption from China's one-child policy."⁴³

Since the 1950s, the Chinese government, primarily through the XPCC and similar organizations, has tried to develop Xinjiang's economy to not only improve the population's welfare but, more important, bind the province to the rest of China. The completion of a single-track railway and paved two-lane roadways through Xinjiang in the 1980s significantly modernized the region as industry sprang up alongside these transportation arteries.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, Beijing developed the province's agriculture through land reclamation and irrigation. While China's Agriculture Ministry still lists food grain crops as the area's highest priority, cash and industrial crops are touted as a way to increase the income of Xinjiang's citizens and economically integrate the province's agriculture into the greater Chinese market. Today, fresh fruit and tomatoes are displacing grain crops.

Cotton promises to be another crop of the future. Already 20 percent of China's cotton production originates in Xinjiang, and Chinese authorities want to increase that amount to 50 percent by 2000. The total sown area of cotton currently represents 46.3 percent of the total area sown with industrial crops. North of the Tian Shan mountains, cotton production extends from Usu in the west to Qitai in the east. In southern Xinjiang, production is centered around Awat, Kuqa, Xinhe, and Xayar north of the Taklimakan Desert, and around Moyu, Hotan, and Yutian south of it. So far, Chinese authorities have managed

⁴² "World Bank Projects," pp. 23, 47–48.

⁴³ "A Bomb in Beijing," p. 37. See also Patrick E. Tyler, "In China's Outlands, Poorest Grow Poorer," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1996; "World Bank Projects," p. 22; EIU, *Country Profile: China, Mongolia, 1995–96* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 22; Patrick E. Tyler, "On the Farms, China Could Be Sowing Disaster," *New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1995; Ross H. Munro, "China's Waxing Spheres of Influence," *Orbis*, Fall 1994, pp. 585–605; and Sheryl WuDunn, "China Is Sowing Discontent With 'Taxes' on the Peasants," *New York Times*, May 19, 1993.

⁴⁴ Author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 195, 312–13; and A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West*, pp. 385–86.

to boost cotton production through artificial adjustments of price controls; in September 1995, the price for a kilogram of cotton was raised from Rmb 4.30 to Rmb 5.02. Like efforts in Soviet Central Asia during the 1970s and 1980s, cotton growth has been emphasized in southern Xinjiang as much to raise national production as to pacify the native population through wealth creation.⁴⁵ (However, while concentrating on drought-tolerant industrial crops like cotton may be the best use of the dry lands south of the Tian Shan mountains, that practice gradually limits crop rotation and increases the probability of crop disease.)

Xinjiang's crops of exportable oil seeds are also flourishing in the province's northwest corner, adjacent to the Kazak border. Oil crops represent 42.1 percent of the total area sown with industrial crops, and in 1991 the World Bank funded the construction of an advanced seed-processing plant for the province's cotton, wheat, and corn seeds.

Since agriculture is so vital to the region's economy, water conservation projects abound in Xinjiang. The Ilikaxhe, Kuytunhe, and Manashe irrigation regions in the north and west, and the Oganhe irrigation region near Kuqa, are supported by an intricate network of reservoirs, and individual reservoir projects span the length of the Tarim River to Kashi. Even the Chinese army has contributed men and resources to more than twenty water conservation projects.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, few resources have been devoted to developing electric power, and some parts of the province are starved for electricity. While the relatively large Manas and Hongyanchi thermal power stations service Urumqi and the surrounding areas, only two small hydroelectric power stations are available for Kashi and Korla, and two equally small thermal ones for Karamay and Shihezi. In 1991 the World Bank funded a \$125 million project to irrigate land along the Tarim River as well as build a twenty-one-megawatt hydroelectric power station. Usually financing for such projects comes primarily from the Chinese government since, outside of Urumqi, the region's finances are dominated by a single bank, the People's Bank of China.⁴⁷

Uygurs favoring independence from China often cite their region's potential hydrocarbon deposits as a means to fund their future. But creating a new country entails onerous financial burdens, and separatists should recognize that even an abundance of oil will not necessarily compensate for all these expenditures. If monetary expansion goes unchecked, a country suddenly flush with oil cash could suffer spiraling inflation, appreciating domestic currency, and declining industrial health.⁴⁸ Moreover, should Xinjiang secede from China,

⁴⁵ Lawrence D. Fuell, "Agricultural Developments in Xinjiang Province, China," U.S. Embassy, Beijing, China, Oct. 18, 1995; Richard Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 19–40; and author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 80, 312–13.

⁴⁶ "China Army Builds Up Xinjiang—Paper," UPI, Oct. 7, 1996; "World Bank Projects," p. 25; and author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 81, 312–13.

⁴⁷ "World Bank Projects," p. 3; and author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 30, 312–13.

⁴⁸ Malcolm Gillis et al., *Economics of Development*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), pp. 476–80.

its crude oil would lack an outlet to world markets, since it is doubtful that China would permit passage through its territory.

Opposing Forces

The People's Liberation Army. The Chinese army is a vital part of Beijing's ability to govern Xinjiang. Called upon many times in the past to restore domestic order, the PLA also serves as a bulwark against foreign invasion. Currently, the Chinese 21st and 47th Group Armies from the Lanzhou Military Region maintain units in Xinjiang as well as Ningxia, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and Nanjiang. The two group armies together control an armored division and twelve infantry divisions. Although their headquarters is far to the east in Shaanxi Province, their units are dispersed throughout Xinjiang.⁴⁹

The group armies' sole armored division likely has 240 T-59 medium tanks organized into two regiments and a 2,340-man mechanized infantry regiment mounted in armored personnel carriers. These main tactical units are supported by ten heavy mortars, ten towed field guns, and twelve self-propelled howitzers. Though armored units of this sort are crucial for external defense, it is the infantry divisions that will be essential to maintain internal stability. At its authorized strength, each Chinese infantry division can field up to 13,304 men, of which 8,451 are infantry. The infantrymen, in turn, are supported by a regiment of eighty T-59 medium tanks as well as eighteen towed field guns, twelve towed howitzers, and fifty-four antitank recoilless rifles.⁵⁰

Major combat formations such as these are necessary to resist external invasions, but they are clearly unsuited for a counterinsurgency role. Fortunately for China, few of its infantry divisions are organized along their optimal lines. Instead, most are divided into small garrisons, with only some of the larger armored forces remaining united.

Operational agility is essential to any successful counterinsurgency. Unfortunately for the PLA, it lacks such a capacity in Xinjiang because the province's internal road network is so poor. Consequently, in the event of local unrest the Chinese must rely largely on XPCC militia companies to contain disturbances until reinforcements arrive. The road network south of the Tian Shan range centers on National Road 314 from Urumqi to Kashi. The 314 road connects all the major cities on the northern rim of the Taklimakan Desert, such as Korla, Kuqa, Aksu, and Kashi, and eventually leads into Pakistan as the Karakoram Highway. Possession of this road is critical to maintaining Chinese dominance in southern Xinjiang. A second route from Kashi to Urumqi does

⁴⁹ Michael D. Swaine, *The Military and Political Succession in China: Leadership, Institutions, Beliefs* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1992), p. 252; and IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, pp. 179–80.

⁵⁰ IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, pp. 179–80; Christopher F. Foss, ed., *Jane's Armour and Artillery 1995–96* (Surrey, England: Jane's Information Group Limited, 1996), pp. 6–15, 278–88; and Defense Intelligence Agency, *Handbook of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, Nov. 1984), pp. A-3, A-7, A-16, A-17, A-18.

exist, but it requires one to travel far to the east along National Road 315 to Ruoqiang before turning north along 216 and 218. These precious few roadways would be natural magnets for insurgent forces seeking to ambush Chinese columns and convoys.⁵¹

The single-track railway that leads through northern Xinjiang originates in Gansu and can normally handle about 10 million tons of freight per kilometer annually, and between 5,000 and 10,000 persons daily between Hami and Urumqi.⁵² While this railway continues past Urumqi to the Kazak border near Yining, its southern spur terminates at Korla, far from Aksu or Kashi—hubs of separatist activity. Any military reinforcement or supply movement, light or heavy, past Korla would have to travel on a single-lane roadway or by air transport. Either method would further complicate Chinese logistics by adding demands for fuel and spare parts for motor vehicles and aircraft. And, of course, the railway itself could become a target for sabotage.

Clearly, the most reliable transportation method available to the PLA is by air—over which the Chinese air force maintains undisputed command—to its eleven major air bases throughout Xinjiang. Nonetheless, Chinese airlift capability alone is inadequate to support a sizable ground force during a sustained campaign without assistance from China's civilian commercial airlines. The Chinese air force can deploy approximately 485 aircraft of all types, including Russian Il-14, Il-18, and Il-76 and Chinese Li-2, Y-5, Y-7, Y-8, Y-11, and Y-12 transports.⁵³ Because the Il-76 and Y-8 transports have already been sequestered to serve as airborne early-warning and tanker test platforms, they would be unavailable. Likewise, many of the short-range Y-5 and Y-11 transports would be ineffective over the great distances between air bases in Xinjiang. Collectively, the remaining aircraft could probably lift and supply no more than three infantry divisions conducting sustained field operations. Still, possession of the province's air bases would be crucial to both sides of an insurgency. Chinese forces must hold the bases open, while insurgent forces must either deny their use or capture them outright.

Lastly, with many PLA units stationed for long periods in the same locality within the province, a certain measure of good intelligence might be expected to develop from abiding relationships with local residents. Unfortunately for the PLA, that may never occur because most army garrisons are intentionally isolated from the general populace.⁵⁴

Islamic and Turkic resistance. While it is uncertain how many insurgents Uygur separatists could muster and place in the field, they would likely understand the terrain better than their Chinese counterparts would. Accustomed to small-scale raiding tactics, some Uygurs fought with the Afghan *mujahidin* against

⁵¹ Author's estimates from *The National Economic Atlas of China*, pp. 196–97, 201.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 199–200, 207–8.

⁵³ "Charting the Deng Revolution," *Newsweek*, Mar. 3, 1997, pp. 26–27; IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, p. 181; and Paul Jackson, Kenneth Munson, and John W.R. Taylor, eds., *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1995–96* (Surrey, England: Jane's Information Group Limited, 1996), pp. 53–55, 60–61, 65–67.

⁵⁴ Paul B. Henze, *Xinjiang and Ex-Soviet Central Asia: Impressions of Chinese Turkestan* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1995), p. 5.

Soviet and Afghan government forces during the 1980s. Often led by charismatic leaders, they strike vulnerable targets and quickly withdraw into the mountains, where Chinese troops cannot easily follow. However, the Uygurs' range of operations would be restricted by the lack of cover and water in the desert. As a result, any insurgency activities would likely be centered in the mountainous areas.⁵⁵

The Uygurs' most difficult challenges are organization and cooperation. Already dispersed because of their nomadic history, few Uygurs live in urban centers, and most live in towns of fewer than 10,000 people. Despite the recent riots and bombings, the Uygur population has yet to be fully mobilized in support of independence from Beijing. While discontent may be widespread, no single person or organization has stepped forward as a strong, integrative leader, and many separatist groups struggle for preeminence in the province, including the Regional Uygur Association, the Organization for the Liberation of Uygurstan, the East Turkestan National Salvation Committee, the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan, and the United National Front of Turkestan. Still, recurring riots should give Chinese authorities cause for alarm because they point to the initial stages of a cohesive resistance among the native population.

Lastly, the Uygurs currently have no major external supporters—as the East Turkestan Republic did in 1944—although they do receive small-arms caches from friendly Islamic organizations outside the province, such as former Afghan *mujahidin* and rebel Tajik forces. However, these groups are frequently entangled in their own turmoil and are less likely to support their Muslim brethren in Xinjiang. In any case, Beijing remains hopeful that a combination of military force and economic prosperity brought about by reform and foreign investment in the region will help assuage the Uygurs' antipathy toward China.⁵⁶

Chinese Influence in Central Asia

Looking beyond their western border, Chinese leaders' principal concern is that a rising tide of religious and ethnic turbulence in Central Asia might spill over into China. Thus, China's international interests in Central Asia are firmly intertwined with its domestic interests in Xinjiang.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ James A. Millword, "New Perspectives on the Qing Frontier," in *Remapping China*, pp. 122–23; Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, trans. Robert A. Selig and David Curtis Skaggs (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 32–38.

⁵⁶ "China's Rebellious West," *The Economist*, Feb. 15, 1997, pp. 33–34; and Kathy Chen, "Muslims in China Hate Beijing a Bit Less," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 21, 1994.

⁵⁷ See Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia*, pp. 153–54; Henze, *Xinjiang and Ex-Soviet Central Asia*, p. 5; Michael D. Swaine and Donald P. Henry, *China: Domestic Change and Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1995), pp. 7–9, 31–34, 45–46; and Lillian Craig Harris, "China Returns to 'Great Game' in Central Asia," *Financial Times*, June 2, 1992.

Russia and Kazakstan. Following the small pitched battles between Chinese and Soviet forces over the Zhenbao (Damansky) Islands in the Ussuri River in March 1969, similar clashes occurred on Xinjiang's border in August 1969.⁵⁸ These clashes convinced Beijing to prepare the province's military forces and CCP for a conventional conflict in China's far west. Since that time, however, the Soviet Union has collapsed and hostile forces on China's border have atrophied. Now concerns have arisen about Chinese forces intervening in Central Asia, despite Beijing's repeated statements that it would never do so.

From a military standpoint, Beijing currently can project power into Kazakstan thanks to the railway that connects the two countries near Yining. But an incursion into Kazakstan would be a dubious venture. China's base of operations would necessarily be Yining, a city over which Beijing has friable control owing to the restive Uygur inhabitants. Even worse, the Kazak air force's forty-three MiG-27 and thirty-eight Su-24 ground-attack aircraft could then concentrate their sorties against this single Chinese target in an area without an integrated air defense. Indeed, despite their generally unprepared state, Kazakstan's MiG-29 and MiG-23 fighters are superior to their Chinese counterparts in the region. Meanwhile, the Kazak army, traveling along good lateral roadways, could bring to bear its tank and motorized-rifle divisions, armed collectively with at least 630 T-72 tanks, to repulse Chinese ground forces. Lastly, China must consider any Russian forces to be ready to intercede on behalf of Kazakstan. Operations against Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan would encounter similar problems, as well as towering mountains, defensible passes, and a lack of roads.⁵⁹

Concerns have arisen about Chinese forces intervening in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, China does hold a powerful lever in Central Asia: it can serve as an alternative outlet to world markets if Russia falters and becomes unstable. Thus, Beijing's influence over Central Asia is negatively correlated with Moscow's ability to maintain a stable route for the region's trade.

Moreover, China has an inherent advantage over Russia as Kazaks begin to resist Russian interference in their internal affairs. Many believe that chronic dependence on the Russian military would, in the end, jeopardize Kazak independence. Beijing must take advantage of this sentiment to strengthen its relationship with this key Central Asian country. Simultaneously, Kazakstan's internal stability is deteriorating. Serious crime and poverty have reached alarming levels, and strikes periodically paralyze certain industries. On November 17,

⁵⁸ Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 263; and John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 278.

⁵⁹ IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, pp. 161–62.

1996, Azamat (Citizen), a political opposition movement formed by non-autocratic intellectuals, organized a large rally of trade union groups in Almaty.⁶⁰

Twice in 1996, and again on April 24, 1997, China and its Central Asian neighbors, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, agreed to a series of confidence-building measures along their common borders.⁶¹ The agreements also set limits on land forces, short-range aviation, and anti-aircraft defense deployed in the 100-kilometer-wide (63-mile) strip along their borders and settled a number of outstanding boundary disputes. While these accords would appear to bode a new mutual respect for international boundaries, they were created as much for external as for internal purposes. China fully understands that without the cooperation of Central Asian governments, exile Uyghur organizations will find it difficult to operate.⁶²

For the moment, Kazakhstan's attitude on secessionism coincides with China's. President Nursultan Nazarbaev affirmed his opposition to the spread of Islamic forces through Central Asia, and his foreign minister, Kasymzhomart Tokaev, declared that the age of secession was over. Inasmuch as that is the case, "Kazakhstan has acquiesced to Chinese demands that it crack down on the activities of Uighur nationalists on its territory."⁶³ After the March bombing in Beijing, exile Uyghur organizations in Kazakhstan tried to distance themselves from the incident because of the pressure Almaty placed on them at the request of the Chinese government. These groups had no option but to bend, since they lacked the crucial support of any major external power.⁶⁴

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Other Central Asian governments, like those of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are also concerned about Islamic insurgents and the possibility of the civil war in Afghanistan spilling over into their countries.⁶⁵ Kyrgyzstan put its Osh Motorized Rifle Division on alert in May and September 1996 in response to increased fighting between the Tajik

⁶⁰ Chris Bird, "Kazak Leader Warns of Gap Between Rich and Poor," Reuters, Apr. 10, 1997; "Kazak Teachers Strike, Demand Unpaid Salaries," Reuters, Feb. 6, 1997; Dmitry Solovyov, "Serious Crime Rises Sharply in Kazakhstan," Reuters, Jan. 16, 1997; "Poverty Overshadows Kazak Independence," Reuters, Dec. 16, 1996; "Quiet Protest," *The Economist*, Nov. 30, 1996, p. 36; Kyle Pope, "Kazakhstan Fears Russia's Resurgent Reds," *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 1996; Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia*, pp. 75–97; and G.E. Fuller, *Central Asia: The Quest for Identity*, RAND Research Paper 309 (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1994), pp. 1–5.

⁶¹ "Russia, China, C. Asia States To Limit Border Forces," Reuters, Apr. 24, 1997; and Michael R. Gordon, "Russia-China Theme: Contain the West," *New York Times*, Apr. 24, 1997.

⁶² See Scott Hillis, "China President to Sign Troop Cut Pact With Russia," Reuters, Mar. 14, 1997; Oleg Shchedrov, "Border Pact to Mark Russia-China Summit," Reuters, Mar. 12, 1997; EIU, *Country Report: Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, 1st quarter 1997* (London: EIU, 1997), p. 11; EIU, *Country Report: Kazakhstan, 3rd quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), pp. 9–10; and EIU, *Country Profile: Kazakhstan, 1996–97* (London: EIU, 1997), p. 9.

⁶³ EIU, *Country Report: Kazakhstan, 3rd quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 10. See also "Kazak Leader Says C. Asia Wary of Fundamentalism," Reuters, Dec. 9, 1996; "Kazakhstan Alarmed Over 'Aggressive Secessionism,'" Reuters, Oct. 5, 1996; and EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 3rd quarter 1996* (London: EIU, 1996), p. 16.

⁶⁴ "Kazakhs 'Disturbed' By Unrest in Nearby China," Reuters, Mar. 25, 1997; and Bird, "Uighurs Could Be Behind Beijing Bombings."

⁶⁵ Rajan Menon, "In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *International Security*, Summer 1995, pp. 149–81.

government and its Muslim opposition. As a result, when China expressed concern about the potential sanctuary Kyrgyzstan may be providing Uygur groups, Bishkek authorities were “more than happy to cooperate with China, banning the Uighur minority association Ittipak (Unity).” But despite Beijing’s best efforts to curtail the illicit arms trade across its porous western border, the internal problems in a number of Central Asian countries make it extremely difficult to police the area effectively (especially with poorly supervised and low-paid border guards).⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Tajikistan continues to battle an internal insurrection of mainly Muslim opponents, despite the latest peace initiative in early December 1996. By late last year, opposition forces had achieved some striking successes, “including the temporary seizure of towns like Komsomolobad and Garm and a Western-run gold mine” in the eastern part of the country.⁶⁷ At the same time, the reinforced Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division remains deployed along the Tajik border to block opposition forces from obtaining external support from Afghanistan. Moscow believes that its commitment to the security of the Tajik border is also “its barrier against the infiltration from Afghanistan of Islamic militancy, revolution, guns and drugs,” especially as the Afghan Islamic Taliban militia has continued its northward advance after capturing Kabul on September 27, 1996.⁶⁸ In fact, Russian army forces and border guards occasionally battle Muslim rebels and suffer casualties. Although the Central Asian countries have political interests in accord with China’s, they may not have congruous economic interests—they already fear inexpensive Chinese goods and immigrants flooding their markets.⁶⁹

Conclusions

Separatists in Xinjiang remain far from their goals, despite the recent riots and bombings. Even if a full-scale insurgency erupted in the province, no clear victor would emerge in the short or medium term. Both sides have too

⁶⁶ EIU, *Country Report: Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, 1st quarter 1997* (London: EIU, 1997), p. 11. See also Anatoly Verbin, “China, Russia Reach Pact on Border Forces,” Reuters, Dec. 27, 1996; “Russia, China Seal New Ties During Li Peng Visit,” Reuters, Dec. 27, 1996; and Amy Louise Kazmin, “China, India to Reduce Troops on Border,” UPI, Nov. 29, 1996.

⁶⁷ EIU, *Country Report: Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, 1st quarter 1997* (London: EIU, 1997), p. 26.

⁶⁸ Steven Erlanger, “Troops in Ex-Soviet Lands: Occupiers or Needed Allies?” *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1993. See also Sophie Quinn-Judge, “Building a Bulwark: Moscow Shores Up Tajikistan Against Taliban,” *FEER*, Mar. 27, 1997, p. 24; “Islamic Rulers in Kabul Report Gains in North,” *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 1997; Ahmed Rashid, “Surprise Showing: Taliban Appear Close to Final Victory,” *FEER*, Feb. 6, 1997, pp. 22–24; Steve Levine, “Tajiks Talk of Peace Between Battles,” *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1997; and Michael R. Gordon, “As Its World View Narrows, Russia Seeks a New Mission,” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1993.

⁶⁹ See Shenman W. Garnett, “Russia and its Borderlands: A Geography of Violence,” *Parameters*, Mar. 1997, p. 9; Sharon Behn, “After Years of Civil War, Cease-Fire In Tajikistan May Last,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 19, 1996; Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia*, pp. 98–118; and Henze, *Xinjiang and Ex-Soviet Central Asia*, pp. 1–9.

much at stake, and neither would easily concede defeat. Beijing would mobilize its most powerful counterinsurgency instruments, the XPCC, PAP, and PLA, to suppress the rebellion. The insurgents, on the other hand, would draw added resolve from their new Uygur identity, created from a fusion of ethnicity, religion, nationalism, and confidence. Nevertheless, the insurgents would be hard pressed to fight a protracted guerrilla war without substantial external support. Thus, at this writing, although Chinese security forces might not be able to entirely quell an insurgency in southern and western Xinjiang, they also could not be decisively defeated there.

Only weakness at China's center could enable Xinjiang to break away on the periphery. Although it is unclear whether Beijing will weaken, China's political structure is seemingly less certain now than it was before February 1997. Deng Xiaoping's death released many political actors in the CCP and the Chinese government from their old affiliations and allowed them to pursue new alliances. Even during the 1980s and 1990s, when the Chinese Communist Party

regained much in internal coherence under Mr. Deng, it also had to absorb huge shocks to its ideology which followed from his economic reforms. These distressed not only instinctive hardliners, but also more enlightened conservatives who found Mr. Deng's cavalier style of policy-making as off-putting as his policies.⁷⁰

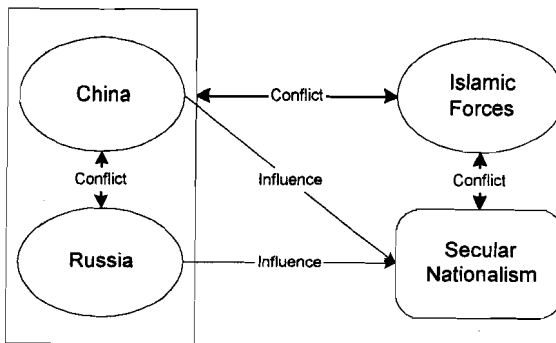
Thus, internal discord is a possibility. Jiang Zemin recently came under pressure from hardline communists in the Chinese press for his tacit abandonment of socialist ideals. Moreover, 40 percent of the National People's Congress revealed their collective displeasure with the ongoing "Strike Hard" campaign in March 1997 by refusing to approve a government report on the country's judicial system. This extraordinary vote by a normally docile legislative body signaled that things will not remain the same in Beijing. The congress's leader, Qiao Shi, even "called for the creation of a 'system of law' which even party members and cadres must obey . . . [threatening] the fiat power held by the Party's top echelon."⁷¹ Nonetheless, Premier Li Peng resolutely argued that whatever the future may hold, as far as Xinjiang is concerned, Beijing will "unswervingly safeguard the unity of the motherland and ethnic unity, and resolutely oppose any words or activities designed to split the country or damage ethnic unity."⁷²

⁷⁰ "The Last Emperor," p. 22. See also "The Mourning After," *The Economist*, Feb. 22, 1997, p. 35; Peter Humphrey, "No Soviet-style Breakup Seen Over China Muslims," Reuters, Mar. 3, 1997; Kevin Platt, "Muslim Revolt in China Leads to Clampdown," *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 2, 1997; and "China's Li Vows Tough Stance on Ethnic Unrest," Reuters, Feb. 28, 1997.

⁷¹ "Qiao Shi's Radical Ideas," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 18, 1997. See also "China Bars Zhao Ziyang From Returning to Beijing," Reuters, Mar. 18, 1997; "China Parliament Lodges Rare Protest Vote," UPI, Mar. 14, 1997; "China's Jiang Zemin Comes Under Fire From Leftists," Reuters, Feb. 22, 1997; "CIA Report Said to Question Jiang's Control," Reuters, Feb. 21, 1997; Kevin Platt, "Deng's Legacy: Beijing Power-Sharing," *Christian Science Monitor*, Feb. 20, 1997; and Jane Macartney, "Deng's Departure Raises New Succession Question," Reuters, Feb. 20, 1997.

⁷² "China's Li Vows Tough Stance," Reuters. See also EIU, *Country Report: China, Mongolia, 1st quarter 1997* (London: EIU, 1997), pp. 13–14; and "NPC Delegates Urged to Guard Against Minority Unrest; New Race-Hate Crime Created," *FEER*, Mar. 20, 1997, p. 26.

Figure 1
Competition in Central Asia



For the United States, its strategic interests in Xinjiang and Central Asia are few, apart from American consular and corporate concerns. Kazakhstan's strategic arsenal has been largely dismantled. Fewer than twenty-four SS-18 Satan (RS-20) intercontinental ballistic missiles remain in their silos near Derzhavinsk, and all of them have had their nuclear warheads removed. The missiles themselves eventually will be shipped to Russia.⁷³

In any event, U.S. interests would be best served if no single country or force dominates Central Asia. Fortunately for the United States, a new rivalry has emerged in the region between China, Russia, and the Islamic faith. (See Figure 1.) As Islamic forces struggle against the region's Soviet legacy of secular nationalism, China and Russia vie on the traditional inter-state level. However, China and Russia both share a common interest in opposing the spread of Islamic influences in Central Asia for external as well as internal reasons. Thus, the United States should seek to maintain a balance among these competing forces. But to achieve its goal, Washington should use only modest economic resources. To do any more would be costly and probably ineffective owing to the region's remote location and lack of pressing American objectives.⁷⁴

With Deng's long-expected death, China's collective leadership is now searching for ways to "renew its mandate" among the Chinese people. Although the PLA remains the guarantor of party rule, the CCP continues to etch out its new socialist market and nationalist *raison d'être*. Accompanying these new national imperatives has been economic, but not political, change. In fact, the party plans to exercise even more political control as a hedge against future internal restiveness. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Beijing's relationships with Xinjiang and Central Asia.



⁷³ IISS, *The Military Balance 1996/97*, pp. 113, 151, 162.

⁷⁴ See Fareed Zakaria, "Hedging It," *Newsweek*, Mar. 3, 1997, pp. 36–37; David Shambaugh, "Containment or Engagement of China? Calculating Beijing's Responses," *International Security*, Fall 1996, pp. 180–209; Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia*, pp. 152–62; and Graham E. Fuller, "Central Asia and American