

# The Uighur Crisis

## Historical Pretext of the Issue

Xinjiang is home to 10 million Uighurs, and it had many influencers over the years, such as the Tang period, Arabs, Genghis Khan, Qing dynasty and finally this area fell under the Republic of China officially in 1949. It was given autonomy by China in 1995, and although, the area was first dominated by Uighur Muslims and the Muslim and Turkish influence had remained strong, a wave of change hit the area due to the Chinese government. They began encouraging Han Chinese to settle there and the Han Chinese population grew from 6% to 39%. Consequently, the influence of Muslims gradually declined and Xinjiang became like any other integrated area within China. This proved to be the starting point for the issues within Xinjiang and proved to be the basis for this debate to happen in the first place.

## Importance in China's Foreign Policy

Xinjiang is the largest province of China, and has extensive oil and gas resources, which have been greatly valued by the Chinese government. The fact that it shares a border with Soviet states and provides a route to key allies of China, such as Pakistan, makes the region all the more important for China to maintain steady control over. Construction of oil and gas pipelines has been going on in the region for some time, and China intends to further expand its diplomatic ties and projects via Xinjiang. The strategic location and widespread resources present in the area make it a valuable asset in China's further development.

## Proof of the Existence of the Concentration Camps

The New York Times and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, confirmed a coordinated government effort to surveil and detain Uighurs. Randall Schriver, the Assistant Secretary of Defense of Asian affairs, estimated this May that "at least a million but likely closer to three million citizens, out of a population of about 10 million" were detained. ETNAM on Tuesday published a series of maps showing the coordinates of 182 suspected camps, which it calls concentration camps. This research drew on information from Uighurs in the region who reported that their families had been detained, as well as on existing satellite imagery from other researchers on the region. Radio Free Asia also reported last year that authorities were secretly transferring Uighur prisoners to jails around the country because the region's detention facilities had become too full. Amnesty International reported HR watch reported instances of DNA

collection, mosques being destroyed, religious persecution under the name of anti-extremism. Reports to the UNHRC suggested that China had turned the Uighur autonomous zone into an internment camp. As of now three camps have been found which have tripled in size, since the initial findings.

### **Alleged Conditions of these Camps**

Ilham Tohti, who ran a website, known as 'UighurOnline', was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014, finding him guilty on separatism charges, although his website only updated and alerted people about the status and situation of Uighur Muslim, and very little has been heard about him from 2017 onwards. Reports to the UNHRC suggested that China had turned the Uighur autonomous zone into an internment camp. Amnesty International reports of indoctrination attempts to make Muslims condemn themselves became widespread, and experiences in these camps have been told to the media and to UHRP. Every former camp detainee Amnesty interviewed in their reports recounted cruel and degrading treatment, including torture.

### **Procedure of Admittance to the Camps**

In 2020, there were an estimated 1.8 million Muslims detained in Xinjiang, and according to reports, the number has exceeded 2 million. This includes mostly Uyghurs, but also Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and other ethnic Turkic Muslims, Christians, as well as some foreign citizens including Kazakhs. Everyone from students to farmers are admitted, and Muslims have constantly been falsely accused on the grounds of terrorism. Often children may also be detained, or they are separated from their family members. Any person having a link with Islam is at risk of being detained. They link Islam with terrorism and have classified people in four categories: A, for people who they deem to be normal; B, is for people who are claimed to have obstinate thinking; class C, is for those who have unstable thoughts; and class D is for those who have extremist thinking.

### **China's Label of Re-educational Centers**

China denies the existence of camps as being indoctrination or concentration camps and has called them educational camps for the purpose of creating skilled labor. They claim that these people have a link with the history of terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and these camps serve as a basis of reforming them, so they can positively contribute to growth and development. The Chinese government argues that people in these camps can exercise their free will and leave whenever they want to. The matter has been kept extremely quiet and no external investigations

into Xinjiang have been allowed, which further hints towards illegal practices going on against Muslims. Despite UNHRC labeling the camps as indoctrination centers, Chinese official Hu Liane denied the existence of the camps as a whole.

## **Uighur Crisis in regards to Terrorism and Anti-terrorism**

The Chinese government has said that these camps are being used to make sure that no further terrorism in the region can take place. There have been no terrorist attacks in Xinjiang since 2017, mainly because of the Chinese government's harsh responses against it such as mass surveillance, increased arrests, and a system of "re-education camps", estimated to hold a million Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minority ethnic groups. Entities identified in Chinese government documents as having involvement in violent attacks include the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan (URFET), and the Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO). Although, a gradual decrease in terrorism has been seen, using inhumane treatment as a supposed means of doing so cannot be justified.

### **Reasons**

**Economic-** The One Belt One Road initiative is another main reason for this, as it holds a great economic and geographical standpoint as the railway route from Europe to China lies through Xinjiang and it has a large coal and oil reserve and the Chinese government is going out of its way to maintain peace in the region

**Social-** Islamophobia and Xenophobia are major causes of the Uighur crisis and a narrative is created that Muslims pose a threat to the people and there is extreme hatred for minorities. There is a monetary benefit to Chinese people for turning Uighur Muslims to the authority of 500 yang and this encourages more Chinese people to report Muslims and they often blame violent events on Muslims

**Political-** Mainstream China doesn't want to see Muslims which have been influenced by Arabs to be a part of the political scenery as Muslims have little to no representation in the government. There is systematic approach in the government for "normalizing" these Muslim factions and making them Chinese

### **Violation of Privacy**

The police would carry out frequent 'health checks', which involved collecting several types of biometric data, including DNA, blood type, fingerprints, voice recordings and face scans – a process that all adults in the Uighur autonomous region of Xinjiang, in north-west China, are expected to undergo. Not to mention, a blacklist is maintained by the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (Ijop), a regional data system that uses AI to monitor the countless checkpoints in and around Xinjiang's cities. Any attempt to enter public institutions such as hospitals, banks, parks or shopping centers, or to cross beyond the boundaries of a person's local police precinct, would trigger the Ijop to alert police. The system had profiled certain individuals and predicted that they are potentially terrorists.

### **Media and Transparency**

Media is censored, all the knowledge that the locals in the area have is perpetuated solely by the government. There is almost a complete media blackout and no transparency in the area whatsoever. Consequently, there are difficulties in making compelling claims on the matter, due to the lack of media coverage that locals receive and that is given to other countries of the area. Therefore, the only information gained on the camps in Xinjiang come from prisoners who have escaped and successfully fled the concentration camps.

### **Law Enforcement**

These are out of the jurisdiction of the normal law system and hence independent action is taken in Xinjiang. In China, the lack of an independent judiciary and free press, coupled with fierce government hostility to independent civil society organizations, means there is no way to hold the government or participating businesses accountable for their actions, regardless of what implications their actions have on common people. The propagation of such acts by law enforcement, is largely responsible for systems such as Ijop existing.

### **Laws in China regarding Muslims and this Crisis**

China has passed a new law that seeks to "Sinicize" Islam within the next five years. Practicing Islam has been made forbidden in parts of China, with individuals caught praying, fasting, growing a beard or wearing a hijab, a headscarf worn by Muslim women, facing the threat of arrest. U.N. Committee against Torture concluded that China had failed to eliminate torture, enforced disappearances, deaths in custody, and numerous other forms of ill-treatment in

detention. What suggests the significance of Document 9 is the fact that a worrisomely harsh crackdown against human rights lawyers, media outlets, academics, and other such independent thinkers has followed. For example, French reporter Ursula Gauthier, was effectively expelled from China, owing to her critical coverage of the government's ethnic policies in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The Constitution was amended on March 11, 2018, with 2,958 votes in favor, two against, and three abstentions. It includes an assortment of revisions that further cement the Communist Party's control and supremacy, including setting up the National Supervisory Commission, establishing a new anti-graft agency, extending the powers of the Communist Party's graft watchdog, adding Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook on Development and Xi Jinping Thought to the Preamble of the Constitution, and removing term limits for both the President and Vice President, enabling Xi Jinping to remain president indefinitely. As a result, no signs of discriminatory and oppressive laws against Muslims, being removed, can be seen in the coming future.

### **Rebuttals for the Chinese Side**

All of these are western news sources, or western dominated bodies that are giving this information. There is a large chance that this is a part of western propaganda to bring down China. It also happens to be speculative and circumstantial. The Hui Muslims in China are perfectly integrated into society and have no problems with the government. China's Muslim Hui people, who are comparatively well integrated into Chinese society, regard some Uyghurs as "unpatriotic separatists who give other Chinese Muslims a bad name," according to the New York Times. This does provide China with some ground to disprove accusations against itself. In addition, the frequent terrorist activities taking place in Xinjiang, not too long ago, further help China support its case. However, 43 countries were against China for its detainment of Uyghurs, when the issue was raised in the UN, in October, 2021.