

“Offers They Can’t Refuse: China’s Relations with the Muslim World”

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of unrest in East Turkestan on July 5, 2009, the international community has demonstrated a great deal of concern and interest in the plight of the Uyghur people. U.S. Congressman Frank Wolf wrote a letter to President Barack Obama prior to Mr. Obama’s November 2009 visit to China requesting him to raise the issue of the suppression of the demonstration on July 5, the persecution of peaceful Uyghur protesters and due process violations of those accused of violent crimes on July 5.¹ The Swiss foreign ministry expressed its concerns regarding the violence in East Turkestan and “urged the Chinese authorities to respect democratic rights, especially freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and to ensure the rule of law in all respects.”² During the 2010 4th Session and the Organizational Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, the European Union voiced its concerns regarding the trials of those involved in the July 5 unrest. Specifically, the European Union indicated concern in terms of how Chinese authorities conducted the trials and whether the Chinese respected due process and took measures to ensure a fair trial.³ In addition, the Society for Threatened Peoples asked the Human Rights Council to call on Chinese authorities to release peaceful protestors and those who were held without evidence, to ensure a fair trial for all

¹ Congressman Frank R. Wolf. (2009, November 10). Human rights issues should be ‘top priority’ in meeting with chinese officials. Retrieved from <http://wolf.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=34§iontree=6,34&itemid=1482>.

² Swissinfo.ch. (2009, July 8). Violence in xinjiang worries foreign ministry. Retrieved from http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/news_digest/Violence_in_Xinjiang_worries_foreign_ministry.html?cid=7499024.

³ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2010, 8 June). European union remarks during the general debate on human rights situations that require the council’s attention. [Webcast of the proceedings]. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/webcast/unhrc/archive.asp?go=100608#pm1>.

others involved, and to address the root causes of the unrest, namely repression, the dilution of the Uyghur language and culture, and economic discrimination.⁴

It is interesting to note, however, that with the exception of the Turkish government, the governments of primarily Muslim nation-states have remained silent regarding the July 5 unrest. In a *Financial Times* article, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan made a bold comparison in stating the parallel between China's treatment of the Uyghurs and genocide.⁵ Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population, even went so far as to explicitly state that it would not issue support for the Uyghurs. Indonesian ambassador to China H.E. Sudrajat stated that, "What happened in Xinjiang is China's internal affair. We respect China's sovereignty over the region and will never meddle in the problem."⁶ Thus, although predominantly Muslim countries share the Uyghurs' religious faith, there has been no official outpouring of support from these governments for the Uyghurs.

People outside of the government in several Muslim countries have expressed consternation regarding the July 5 unrest. Three clerics in Iran criticized their government for not condemning Chinese security forces' killings of Uyghurs on July 5.⁷ Also in Iran, Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi "demanded that the foreign ministry quickly condemn what he described as the Chinese government's 'horrible' backing of 'racist Han Chinese' violence

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2010, June 9). Society for threatened peoples remarks during the general debate on human rights situations that require the council's attention. [Webcast of the proceedings.] Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/webcast/unhrc/archive.asp?go=100609>.

⁵ Strauss, D. (2009, July 14). Xinjiang riots damage sino-turkish ties. *The Financial Times*. Retrieved from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f30ddb40-709c-11de-9717-00144feabdc0.html?nclink_check=1.

⁶ Zambelis, C. (2009, August 5). Xinjiang crackdown and changing perceptions of china in the islamic world? *China Brief: a Journal of Analysis and Information*, 9(16). Retrieved from <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/>.

⁷ Worth, R. F. (2009, July 13). Clerics fault a mute iran as muslims die in china. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html?_r=2.

against Muslim Uighurs.”⁸ In Jordan, forty lawmakers sent a letter to the head of Parliament asking the government to condemn Chinese authorities for their actions on July 5. Furthermore, the Jordanian Moderate Islamic Party expressed its hope that Arab and Islamic governments would take a stance on the issue.⁹ Journalist Khalid Amayreh indicated dismay at the fact that governments of Muslim countries largely refused to condemn Chinese authorities’ crackdown on Uyghurs, stating, “Muslims around the world have an absolute religious, moral, and human duty to identify with their oppressed brothers and sisters in [Xinjiang].”¹⁰ Yet even despite these calls to action from fellow Muslims, the governments of Muslim countries have elected not to take the Chinese government to task for its treatment of the Uyghurs.

The purpose of this report is to suggest reasons why governments in these countries would choose not to support the Uyghurs even though it would seem logical for them to do so. This report argues that many of these reasons are primarily economic in nature, but evidence also suggests that several of these countries are content to remain silent over China’s abuses of the Uyghurs as they carry out their own repression.

Human Rights in East Turkestan: An Overview

On July 5, 2009 in Urumqi, unrest broke out after a protest that initially involved only a few hundred people grew to over 1,000 participants.¹¹ According to witnesses, as many as 3,000 people smashed buses and overturned police barricades during the unrest.¹² Protestors also threw

⁸ Daragahi, B. (2009, July 12). Iran: are china’s muslims worthy of islamic republic’s support? *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2009/07/iran-are-chinas-muslims-worthy-of-islamic-republics-support.html>.

⁹ Hauslohner, A. (2009, July 17). In the middle east, little outcry over china’s uyghurs. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1911002,00.html>.

¹⁰ Clark, M. (2009, July 13). Unrest in xinjiang: where’s the muslim outrage? *The Christian Science Monitor Global News Blog*. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2009/0713/unrest-in-xinjiang-wheres-the-muslim-outrage>.

¹¹ No author. (2009, July 6). Scores killed in china protests. *British Broadcasting Company*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8135203.stm>.

¹² Macartney, J. (2009, July 5). China in deadly crackdown after uighurs go on the rampage. *The Sunday Times*

stones through shop windows. According to a foreign student's testimony, "Vehicles were set on fire and traffic guardrails overturned. Bloodied victims were rushed to the hospital in the regional capital, Urumqi, as armed riot police moved in to restore order with tear gas, armoured vehicles, and road blocks."¹³ The *New York Times* assessed the violence in the following way:

The riot was the largest ethnic clash in China since the Tibetan uprising of March 2008, and perhaps the biggest protest in Xinjiang in years. Like the Tibetan unrest, it highlighted the deep-seated frustrations felt by some ethnic minorities in western China over the policies of the Communist Party.¹⁴

These "deep-seated frustrations" refer to decades of human rights violations in East Turkestan on the part of the Chinese Communist Party. According to Amnesty International, severe human rights violations took place during and after the unrest. Eyewitness accounts suggest that police and security forces engaged in beatings, arbitrary arrests, and the use of deadly live fire with the purpose of dispersing those engaged in peaceful protest. Furthermore, the police also used excessive and at times unnecessary force to restore order.¹⁵

Following the unrest, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) sent a delegation to China. The General Secretariat Delegation made its position clear, stating that the Chinese ought to handle the July 5, 2009 unrest in a calm manner, considering the root causes rather than jumping to conclusions about the event's connection to the "three evils" (extremism, separatism, and terrorism).¹⁶ Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu expressed concern at the "deteriorating situation in Xinjiang Uygur [sic] Autonomous Region of China, in particular the

(London). Retrieved from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6644574.ece>.

¹³ Brannigan, T. (2009, July 5). Muslim uighurs riot as ethnic tensions rise in western china. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/05/china-uighur-riots-xinjiang>.

¹⁴ Wong, E. (2009, July 5). Riots in western china amid ethnic tension. *The New York Times*, pp. A4.

¹⁵ Amnesty International. (2010). Justice, justice: the july 2009 protests in xinjiang, china. Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/>.

¹⁶ Aboushi, A. (2009). OIC delegation records diplomatic feat in beijing: visited xinjiang...took stock of muslims [sic] situation in china. *The OIC Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.oic-oci.org/data/journals/issue11/oic_journal_en_11_30_9_2009.pdf.

loss of life in great number among the civilian [sic] and loss of property.”¹⁷ Ihsanoglu furthermore expressed concern over what he termed “the use of disproportionate force that caused a high number of dead and injured civilian casualties.”¹⁸

In light of these concerns, Ihsanoglu indicated that “the OIC expects China to develop a new understanding of the cultural rights of Muslims...the incidents in Urumqi shocked the Muslim world because of the good relations that had historically existed between China and the Islamic world.”¹⁹ The importance of such a statement is clear: bilateral relations between China and the Muslim world are beneficial for both sides. China and many Muslim countries have important political and economic ties as well as mutual investments. China is also a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, making it an important partner for the Islamic world.²⁰

The OIC’s response to the July 5, 2009 unrest in Urumqi is worth noting in light of how it handles Muslim minorities. Khan correctly points out that the OIC functions within a Westphalian state system, or a system of sovereign states.²¹ In this sense, the OIC has not historically taken a position on Muslim minorities, taking great care not to annoy sovereign member states.²² In that case, how does the OIC discuss Muslim minority issues without interfering in state sovereignty? It declares these issues violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Khan, “By dealing directly with the central government of a

¹⁷ No author. (2009, July 8). OIC newsletter issue number 27. *Organisation of the Islamic Conference*. Retrieved from <http://www.oic-oci.org/newsletter.asp>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Organisation of the Islamic Conference. (2009, September 8). OIC: china needs new understanding for ethnic minorities. *Today’s Zaman*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayszaman.com/news>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Khan, S. (2002). The organisation of the islamic conference (OIC) and muslim minorities. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22(2), 351-366, 352.

²² Ibid.

non-Muslim state, the OIC acknowledges its sovereignty, but argues on behalf of the Muslim community to demand their basic rights, or as the case may be, autonomy for them.”²³

The Uyghurs have endured a number of human rights abuses over several decades. While the Uyghurs are a distinct, Turkic-speaking Muslim group in northwest China and Central Asia, evidence over the past few decades indicates an assault on the Uyghur culture and language on the part of the Chinese government. In 2009, the Chinese government announced that the first group of 700 Uyghur families had been moved to the outskirts of Kashgar as part of a resettlement program. The government has plans to demolish 85% of the buildings in old Kashgar. According to Amy Reger, “The imminent destruction of the centuries-old mud-brick houses, bazaars, and mosques has caused groups around the world to lament both the architectural loss and the corresponding disappearance of traditional patterns of Uyghur life.”²⁴ The demolition of buildings in Kashgar is just one of many examples of the Chinese government’s attacks on traditional Uyghur culture.

The Chinese government has also indicated plans to phase out the Uyghur language in schools through the promotion of Mandarin Chinese. This policy has the potential to permanently marginalize the Uyghur language. According to the Congressional Executive Commission on China,

Authorities announced in May 2010 that by 2015, they would aim to universalize ‘bilingual education’—a policy that...has come to promote class instruction almost exclusively in Mandarin—with the goal of making all ethnic minority children proficient in Mandarin by 2020.”²⁵

Uyghurs also experience job discrimination. Recently, job recruitment announcements have indicated that positions in the civil service, state-owned enterprises, and the private sector

²³ Ibid., 352.

²⁴ Reger, A. (2010, March 25). Who will decide the future of kashgar? *Asia Sentinel*. Retrieved from <http://uhrp.org/articles/3681/1/Who-Will-Decide-the-Future-of-Kashgar-/index.html>.

²⁵ The Congressional Executive Commission on China. (2010). *2010 Annual Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt10/CECCannRpt2010.pdf>.

are reserved for Han Chinese. According to the Xinjiang Personnel Testing website, a September 16, 2010 job announcement indicated that 93 of the 224 advertised positions in the civil service county discipline inspection and supervision offices were reserved for Han Chinese.²⁶ Just 17 of those positions were reserved for Uyghurs.²⁷ In addition, a job announcement for a hospital in Urumqi municipality advertised for 28 positions, all of which were reserved for Han Chinese.²⁸

The Uyghurs also experience religious persecution at the hands of the Chinese government. According to Radio Free Asia, authorities near Kashgar detained a group of Uyghur women who established a group to study the Qu'ran. Dilxat Rashit, a spokesman for the World Uyghur Congress, stated that all those present during the raid were detained and more than 40 Qu'rans were confiscated.²⁹ Two of the women were detained on criminal charges, while the others were released. Those others were fined anywhere from 500 RMB (US \$73) to 5,000 RMB (US \$732) for their participation in the group.³⁰ In addition, an article from *The National* indicates that only older men are permitted to worship in mosques. Women, children, university students, and government officials may not enter mosques.³¹ Furthermore, the government selects those who may serve as an imam, and it exercises pervasive control with respect to religious schools and books on Islam.³²

²⁶ Xinjiang Personnel Testing Center. (2010, September 16). Civil service recruitment for county-level discipline inspection and supervision offices. Retrieved from http://www.xjrsk.com.cn/news_show.asp?id=678.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Graduate School of Lanzhou University. (2010, November 26). Xinjiang uyghur autonomous region hospital recruitment announcement. Retrieved from <http://ge.lzu.edu.cn/career/zpdx/201011/762.htm>.

²⁹ He Ping. (2010, June 8). Police raid qu'ran group. *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/raid-06082010112725.html>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mooney, P. (2009, April 5). Only older men allowed in mosques. *The National*. Retrieved from <http://uhrp.org/articles/2035/1/-Only-older-men-allowed-in-mosques-/index.html>.

³² Ibid.

The range of human rights abuses expounded upon here suggests that Uyghurs in Xinjiang have experienced sustained persecution in a wide variety of areas. Given the appalling nature of abuses against the Uyghurs, it is pertinent to ask how the Muslim world not only stands by and watches but also engages in commerce with the Chinese government, the perpetrators of the abuse.

A New Silk Road: The Economic Rationale

China's economic relationship with the Muslim world runs wide and deep. Charles Horner and Eric Brown express this sentiment when they state, "...the larger Islamic world, its markets and above all its energy riches are becoming ever more vital to the PRC's ambitions as a rising world power."³³ They go on to further support this point by saying that interactions between China and the Muslim world are actually centuries old and are now beginning to reemerge.³⁴ The relationship between China and the Muslim world, then, might best be characterized as a "new silk road."³⁵ This section will describe the nature of this relationship and its implications for the Uyghurs in East Turkestan.

To demonstrate just how close the economic relationship has become, consider the following: In the 1980s, China consumed three percent of the world's oil.³⁶ But between 2004 and 2007, China accounted for forty percent of the world's increase in oil consumption, and the International Energy Agency believes that by the year 2030, China will account for over forty percent of the world's increase in oil consumption.³⁷ In 2004, Sinopec signed a deal in order to begin exploration in the Rub al-Khali. This area covers approximately 40 square kilometers in

³³ Horner, C. and Brown, E. (Summer: May/June 2010). China's islamic complex. *The New Asian Order*, 22.

³⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁵ Simpfendorfer, B. (2009). *The new silk road: how a rising arab world is turning away from the west and rediscovering china*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁷ Ibid., 32.

southern Saudi Arabia. Sinopec chief Wang Jinming stated that signing the agreement amounted to “a landmark in Sino-Saudi ties in general and in the bilateral economic and trade co-operation in particular.”³⁸ Sinopec is also known as the China National Petrochemical Corporation and has significant influence within China.³⁹ The company is listed in Hong Kong, London, Shanghai, and New York. Its primary operations focus on exploring for and producing natural gas and trading crude oil, creating refined oil products, and the production of petrochemical products.⁴⁰ In December of the following year, China held its first talks with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). OPEC is an organization made up of the following twelve developing countries: Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. The mission of this organization is to coordinate policies and “ensure the stabilization of oil markets...to secure an efficient, economic, and regular supply of petroleum to consumers.”⁴¹ China signed pacts on energy cooperation, investment in oil, mineral deposits, and natural gas. In addition, it signed accords dealing with trade, the economy, taxes, technology, and a vocational training agreement.⁴² These agreements demonstrate that China’s economic relationship with the Muslim nation-state of Saudi Arabia in particular has been established for some time and is not likely to change even in the face of abuse towards fellow Muslims.

China’s money is also more than welcome in Central Asia, mainly due to the fact that while there are political strings attached to Chinese credit, they are far more palatable to Central

³⁸ No author. (2004, March 8). Saudi arabia, china sign natural gas deal. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/home/2004-03/08/content_312762.htm.

³⁹ Downs, E.S. (2004). The china energy security debate. *The China Quarterly*, 177, 21-41, 25.

⁴⁰ Sinopec. (2008). 2008 annual report and accounts. Retrieved from http://english.sinopec.com/download_center/reports/2008/20090330/download/AnnualReport2008.pdf.

⁴¹ OPEC. (2011). Our mission. Retrieved from http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/23.htm.

⁴² Pant, Harsh V. (2006). Saudi arabia woos china and india. *Middle East Quarterly*. Retrieved from <http://www.meforum.org/1019/saudi-arabia-woos-china-and-india>.

Asian countries than Western requirements. Even before September 11, 2001, China issued warnings to the Central Asian states advising them to not protect, train, or support individuals whom the Chinese authorities labeled as “Xinjiang rebels.” The warnings were clearly successful—according to Niklas Swanstrom, “...Chinese investments and trade in Central Asia would be in jeopardy if the Central Asian states had refused to comply with Chinese demands.”⁴³ Recent evidence demonstrates that these political strings have not dramatically changed. The following anecdote is a clear example: China lent Turkmenistan four billion dollars for the purpose of developing its largest gasfield, South Yolotan. Out of this thirty-year deal, China will get forty billion cubic meters of gas.⁴⁴ In addition, last year, a 1,139-mile gas pipeline running from eastern Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to East Turkestan was inaugurated. Doing so has allowed for two things: China has now been able to secure energy for the ever-increasing speed of its economic development and Turkmenistan can reduce its dependence on Russia.⁴⁵ Given the win-win situation for both Turkmenistan and China, it is clear why Turkmenistan would be hesitant to criticize China for abusing fellow Muslims. Due to the fact that Turkmenistan would like to reduce its dependence on Russia, it simply cannot afford to anger China. Dossym Satpayev, an economic analyst in Kazakhstan, put it quite succinctly when he stated, “ ‘China doesn’t only buy loyalty with documents, but with money given at a low percentage.’ ”⁴⁶

China is also continuing to develop economic relations with Uzbekistan. According to China’s official Xinhua News Agency, China and Uzbekistan saw an approximately 19%

⁴³Swanstrom, N. (2005). China and central asia: a new great game or traditional vassal relations? *Journal of Contemporary China*, 14(45), 569-584, 572.

⁴⁴No author. (2010, January 28). Riches in the near abroad: china in central asia. *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/15393705>.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

increase in their trade volume, despite the global financial crisis.⁴⁷ After Russia, China is Uzbekistan's second largest trading partner.⁴⁸ Both countries are also making plans for an oil pipeline. In 2007, "Ma Kai, the head of China's top state planning body, and Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov signed an agreement in Tashkent...about the principles of building and running a pipeline..."⁴⁹ The development of such a pipeline is significant because Uzbekistan has traditionally supplied oil to Russia rather than China, and this opportunity "could diversify China's energy supplies while allowing Uzbekistan to break free of Gazprom's control and play China and Russia off against each other."⁵⁰ In addition, the Central Asian nation-states "want to include China among their energy export destinations to get an edge in price negotiations with other importing countries."⁵¹ These examples demonstrate the close economic relationship that China, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asian countries have forged. There are clear incentives not to jeopardize such a relationship from the perspective of these governments.

Economic incentives are not the only factor that binds Uzbekistan to China. Uzbekistan also has a history of brutal repression of political activity, and there is evidence that China supports the violent and draconian measures that Uzbekistan takes against its own people. The year 2005 was a tumultuous one for Uzbekistan, given the demonstrations in Andijan.

According to *The Washington Post*, "Armed militants angered by the prosecution of 23 local businessmen attacked a prison and set them free along with about 2,000 other inmates."⁵²

Thousands of demonstrators gathered in the street following the prison assault to protest Islam

⁴⁷ No author. (2010, June 7). President's visit to promote sino-uzbek cooperation—chinese envoy. *The People's Daily*. Retrieved from <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/7015474.html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Baigin, S. (2007, April 30). Update 1—uzbekistan, china sign major gas pipeline deal. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/04/30/uzbekistan-china-idUKN3044554920070430>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Tabeta, S. (2010, June 28). Chinese goods taking over central asian markets. *The Nikkei Weekly*. Retrieved from http://e.nikkei.com/e/app/fr/tnw/weekly_index.aspx?Keisai_dt=20100628&g_id=11.

⁵² Baker, P. and Wright, R. (2005, May 18). With uzbek unrest, unease in the u.s.; concern grows over repression by ally. *The Washington Post*, pp. A13.

Karimov's government and the extreme poverty in the Fergana Valley region.⁵³ Karimov's crackdown on the protestors was the subject of international criticism.⁵⁴ China, however, supported Mr. Karimov's actions. SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang called the demonstrations in Andijan "a terror attack carried out by armed extremists."⁵⁵ Zhang's branding of the demonstrators as "terrorists" suggests that Karimov's crackdown was indeed justified. To take the point one step further, Chung suggests that China refrained from criticizing the Karimov regime due to its desire to foster closer ties with Uzbekistan. Chung states, "To bolster its influence among the clan-based authoritarian regimes of Central Asia, Beijing excused President Karimov's harsh suppression of the Andijan protests in May 2005."⁵⁶ China and Uzbekistan are clearly of like minds with respect to political protest and repression. Furthermore, this similar policy prescription allows China to be economically successful in Uzbekistan. Alexander Cooley, a Central Asia expert at Barnard College, argues that China has been so successful with the gas pipeline "because it did not blend energy ventures with support for democratic change in the region..."⁵⁷ Given this evidence, it makes sense that Uzbekistan and China would want to remain on good terms with one another.

There is also some indication that Uzbekistan supports China's severe repression of the Uyghurs. A 37-year-old Canadian citizen, Huseyin Celil, was detained in March 2006 while visiting relatives in Uzbekistan. Celil fled East Turkestan in the mid-1990s after the Chinese

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Yuan, J. (2010). China's role in establishing and building the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(67), 855-869, 865.

⁵⁵ Noi, G. (2005, July 5). Chinese reach out to central Asian neighbours; security summit will also discuss economic ties. *The Straits Times (Singapore)*. Retrieved from LexisNexis.

⁵⁶ Chung, C. (2006). China and the institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 53(5), 3-14, 11.

⁵⁷ Kramer, A. (2009, December 15). New natural gas pipeline from central Asia feeds China. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9804EFDE123BF936A25751C1A96F9C8B63&scp=1&sq=%22New%20Natural%20Gas%20Pipeline%20from%20Central%20Asia%20Feeds%20China%22&st=cs> e.

authorities held him for his participation in political activities. Following his detention in Uzbekistan, Chinese authorities reportedly sentenced him to life in prison.⁵⁸

In addition to forging the agreement for an oil pipeline, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Tashkent in June of 2010 to attend the tenth conference of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁵⁹ Besides being an economic organization designed to further the trade interests of China, Russia, and the former Soviet Union republics, the Almaty Declaration (which formed part of the basis for the organization in its current form) indicated that the organization would also “combat transnational security threats in the form of ethnic separatism, religious fundamentalism, international terrorism, arms-smuggling, drug-trafficking and other cross-border crimes.”⁶⁰ In addition to these aims, “The SCO also provides a forum for China to exercise leadership in a multilateral organization and expand its influence in a region of growing geo-political and geo-economic significance.”⁶¹ China’s active participation in the SCO is a departure from its previous position on multilateral organizations. In the past, Beijing was suspicious of multilateral security institutions, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.⁶² Currently, however, China demonstrates more “confident and closer engagement in multilateral processes dealing with a range of security issues and challenges.”⁶³ In this sense, it is significant that at the June 2010 meeting, Hu Jintao, along with his Uzbek counterpart, pledged “to jointly combat terrorism, a major concern for both countries.”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ No author. (2007, April 19). Canadian in china sentenced to life in prison: report. *CBC News Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2007/04/19/celil-sentence.html>.

⁵⁹ No author. (2010, June 10). Chinese expert on hu jintao’s trip to central asia. *Zhongguo Xinwen She*. Retrieved from LexisNexis.

⁶⁰ Chung, C. (2004). The shanghai co-operation organization: china’s changing influence in central asia. *The China Quarterly*, 180, 989-1009, 990.

⁶¹ Yuan, J. (2010). China’s role in establishing and building the shanghai cooperation organization (SCO). *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(67), 855-869, 856.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ No author. (2010, June 10). Joint effort to combat terrorism. *China Daily*. Retrieved from

The aforementioned examples clearly demonstrate that Central Asia's economic and national security interests may be preventing it from speaking out against Chinese repression of the Uyghurs. Central Asian governments seem to believe that China is an important ally to have in terms of economic and security concerns, thus they may not wish to evoke China's ire in criticizing too harshly or even at all.

China's thirst for energy reaches past the former Soviet Union. The International Crisis Group states that "China's thirst for energy and its vast foreign reserves are an ideal complement to Iran, which has the world's second-largest crude oil reserves but desperately needs investment to develop them."⁶⁵ Iran profits from these investments and China is simultaneously able to maintain its legitimacy due to the fact that domestic economic growth has still been increasing. Such a relationship is an ideal pairing, and neither party has any clear or visible incentive to terminate it. To ensure that it continues, one might argue that Iran would not want to criticize the Chinese government too vehemently in order to continue to take advantage of its investments. China was able to take advantage of the fact that mistrust between Iran and the United States began to deepen following September 11. Given the fact that U.S.-Iran relations cooled off, China was able to step in and develop closer relations with Iran.⁶⁶

It is also worth highlighting China's relations with Pakistan with respect to the highly contested Kashmir region and the port in Gwadar. In 2004, approximately 400 Chinese workers completed the construction of the Gwadar port, the purpose of which is to serve Central Asia and Afghanistan.⁶⁷ Through the use of inexpensive grants and loans, the Chinese government was

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-06/10/content_9958773.htm.

⁶⁵ International Crisis Group. (2010, February 17). The iran nuclear issue: the view from beijing. *Update Briefing*. Retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/B100-the-iran-nuclear-issue-the-view-from-beijing.aspx>.

⁶⁶ Lowe, R. and Spencer, C. (2006). Iran, its neighbours and the regional crisis. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 48.

⁶⁷ Walsh, D. (2005, November 10). The new china: us uneasy as beijing develops a strategic string of pearls.

able to finance 80% of the \$250 million project. This port is highly important and useful to both Pakistan and China. The fact that the port is 1,250 miles from Xinjiang and suggests the prospect of traffic across the Himalayas and down to the Persian Sea gives Gwadar great commercial attraction for China.⁶⁸ In terms of strategic attraction, Gwadar is close to the Strait of Hormuz, which handles 40% of the world's oil. The vast majority of Chinese oil passes through the Malacca straits, which Beijing believes are US-controlled. The Gwadar port, then, is a key part of China's "string of pearls policy." Gwadar is the first "pearl" in the string that travels to Bangladesh, Cambodia, and into the South China Sea.⁶⁹ Should China make use of this port, it can reduce its reliance on the Malacca straits.

Pakistan also stands to benefit greatly from the construction and opening of Gwadar. Pakistan wants to reinvent itself as a large energy player in the region using Chinese money.⁷⁰ Under such circumstances, China would be in a position to outweigh American influence without adding pressure to democratize, respect human rights, and focus on counterterrorism.⁷¹ A statement from Richard Russell, a professor of national security affairs at the National Defense University in Washington, sums up the issue succinctly: "The Americans come with a great deal of ideological baggage. There's none of that with China...Pakistan's interactions with the Chinese are not nearly as radioactive as with the US."⁷² This contrast in policy objectives is indeed striking. When China indicates that it is willing to offer more resources, Pakistan seems to gravitate toward Beijing to counter American influence. The United States pushes Islamabad

The Guardian. Retrieved from
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2005/nov/10/china.internationalnews?INTCMP=SRCH>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Montero, D. (2007, April 13). China, pakistan team up on energy. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0413/p06s01-wosc.html>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

to promote counterterrorism measures, while China is willing to invest without the political strings that human rights, terrorism, and democracy imply.⁷³

Recently, China has been acting provocatively in Kashmir as it has deepened ties with Pakistan. China upset India greatly by issuing special stapled paper visas (rather than standard visas) for those in India-controlled Kashmir traveling to China. China did so on the basis that Kashmir is a disputed territory.⁷⁴ This issue is problematic because China and India disagree on what constitutes the Kashmiri border. China claims the disputed border is 1,240 miles long, while Indians place the border at approximately 2,175 miles. The difference is essentially the border between Tibet and Indian-controlled Kashmir. When the Chinese choose to leave this section out, they are questioning the status of Indian-controlled Kashmir, which India says supports Pakistan's own claims to the region.⁷⁵

One might reasonably ask why this dispute is worth noting. China is interested in the region of Kashmir because it hopes to establish a firmer grip on it. China desires unobstructed rail and road access to the Gulf by way of Pakistan. Currently, it takes approximately 16 to 25 days for Chinese oil tankers to arrive at the Gulf. When the high speed rail and road links that run through Gilgit and Baltistan are complete, China will be able to ship cargo from Eastern China to Chinese-constructed naval bases at Gwadar, Pasni, and Ormara (all of which are just east of the Gulf) within just 2 days.⁷⁶ Additionally, People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers are

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Yardley, J. (2010, December 30). Asia's giants face off: india digs in its heels as china flexes its muscles. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/30/world/asia/30india.html?scp=1&sq=%22Asia%27s%20giants%20face%20off%22&st=cse>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Harrison, S. (2010, August 27). China's discreet hold on pakistan's northern borderlands. *The International Herald Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/27/opinion/27iht-edharrison.html>.

also working on other projects in the same area. They are extending the Karakoram Highway (which links Xinjiang with Pakistan) and building dams and expressways.⁷⁷

Turkey's relations with China have taken an interesting turn due to July 5 unrest. While the government initially spoke out, it has since that time remained quite cautious regarding its rhetoric and has taken great care to appease China. Turkey has demonstrated keen interest in maintaining close economic ties with China even before the violent repression of the Uyghurs on July 5. In June 2009, President Abdullah Gul traveled to the region with a business delegation to sign trade agreements worth \$3 billion.⁷⁸ Following the July 5 unrest, while the government still prioritizes protecting economic relations with Beijing, sources suggest that public opinion dictates that the Turkish government also call for an end to the oppression of the Uyghurs.⁷⁹ These issues, coupled with the Kurdish issue, place the government of Turkey in a difficult position, but the evidence available suggests that Turkey leans toward appeasing Beijing.

“The Pot Calling the Kettle Black”: Legitimacy Crises and the Case of Turkey

There are sources suggesting that several Muslim countries are unwilling to speak out against the Chinese government due to the fact that they are facing their own legitimacy crises. This state of affairs puts them in a position where they are unable to criticize another country for the same offense that they are themselves committing. Some Arab and Muslim governments are choosing to ignore the crackdown on Uyghurs in East Turkestan due to the fact that the same kind of repression happens within their own borders. The human rights circumstances in the Central Asia Republics are classic examples of such crises. In Kazakhstan, while the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Strauss, D. (2009, July 14). Xinjiang riots damage sino-turkish ties. *The Financial Times*. Retrieved from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f30ddb40-709c-11de-9717-00144feabdc0.html?nclick_check=1.

⁷⁹ Nojonen, M. and Torbakov, I. (2009, August 5). China-turkey and xinjiang: a frayed relationship. *openDemocracy: Free Thinking for the World*. Retrieved from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/china-turkey-and-xinjiang-a-frayed-relationship>.

government claims to permit freedom of religion, a law passed in 2005 gives it considerable power to determine whether or not a religious group is extremist in nature. The Kazakh government may ban the activities of these groups as it deems appropriate.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Freedom House also calls into question the independence of the Kazakh judiciary. Judges frequently take bribes and are also subject to political bias. The report also states that, “Police at times abuse detainees during arrest and interrogation, often to obtain confessions, and arbitrary arrest and detention remain problems.”⁸¹ This behavior towards religious groups and prisoners are similar to Chinese government behavior towards the same groups. In this sense, the Kazakh government is hardly in a position to criticize Chinese authorities’ treatment of the Uyghurs when it treats its own people much the same way

Turkey has a similar issue regarding the Kurds within its own borders. Yitzhak Shichor asks how Turkey can support the Uyghur cause if it does not allow self-determination for the Kurds.⁸² The only language of instruction in the education system is Turkish⁸³, effectively excluding the Kurds from an opportunity to learn in their own language. Desmond Fernandes, a scholar who has worked extensively on the Kurdish issue, outlines the Turkish policy as the following:

- 1) A forced assimilation program, which bans the Kurdish language, denies Kurdish history, and forcibly relocates Kurds to non-Kurdish areas of Turkey.
- 2) Restriction of any opposition to Turkish government programs, including Kurdish cultural organizations and political parties among others.

⁸⁰ Freedom House. (2009). Country report: kazakhstan. Retrieved from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7635>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Shichor, Y. (2009). Ethno-diplomacy: the uyghur hitch in sino-turkish relations. *The East West Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/ps053.pdf>.

⁸³ Commission of the European Communities. (2006). Commission staff working document: turkey 2006 progress report. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/tr_sec_1390_en.pdf.

3) Violent repression of Kurdish resistance.⁸⁴

These policies are strikingly similar to the policies the Chinese government enacts against the Uyghurs. Due to the striking parallels, it becomes clear why the Turkish government has spoken out, but has remained hesitant to follow up on its vehement condemnation with any substantive action. The Turkish government is well aware of the fact that if it puts pressure on the Chinese government, China will likely respond harshly regarding the Kurdish issue. In fact, China has a history of criticizing Turkey regarding this issue. According to Yitzhak Shichor, Chinese scholars deplore “the use of force by host governments (primarily Turkey) to suppress Kurdish nationalism.”⁸⁵ A closer look at Sino-Turkish economic relations and general background on Sino-Turkish relations will help shed more light on this issue.

Diplomatic relations between China and Turkey were first established on August 4, 1971. Since that time, exchanges have increased, with a large surge during the 1980s. There are a number of reasons why Turkey would want to maintain good relations with China, and most of them are primarily economic. In October 2010, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao prepared for talks with Turkey with the purpose of strengthening trade.⁸⁶ One of the main highlights of the talks was the signing of 10 agreements on energy, trade, telecoms, transport, and culture.⁸⁷ In particular, with regard to transport, the new Orient Express is worth highlighting. This high-speed 4,500 kilometer Turkish railway would take passengers from Istanbul to Shanghai. Such a project would bring Turkey and Shanghai together, and doing so is appealing for the following reasons:

⁸⁴ Kurdish and armenian genocides focus of london seminar. *Armenian Forum*. Retrieved from <http://www.gomidas.org/forum/af4kurds.htm..>

⁸⁵ Shichor, Y. (2006). China’s kurdish policy. *China Brief: a Journal of Analysis and Information*, 6(1). Retrieved from [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=3919](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3919).

⁸⁶ Hande, C. (2010, October 7). China’s wen in turkey to lure rising economic star. *Agence France Press*. Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/>

⁸⁷ Ibid.

- 1) With the completion of this project, China's engineering and financial support could allow trade between Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey to triple.
- 2) Turkey and China have committed to redressing the current trade imbalance between the two countries. Wen has stated that the two countries have set a goal of a \$50 billion trade volume for the next five years. To hold up its end of the bargain, China is committing to pursue more sustainable and balanced trade by focusing on Turkish imports.⁸⁸

In 2009, Turkey's imports from China were \$12.7 billion, while Turkey's exports amounted to \$1.6 billion. Ankara plans to redress the imbalance by promoting Chinese investments in Turkey, increasing tourism from China, and creating greater exposure for Turkish products within China.⁸⁹ These terms provide a strong incentive for Turkey to remain on good terms with China. Kardas also argues that the world now exists in a post-American-led order. The current global order is in flux. Turkey has traditionally integrated itself into the Western world, but it is now seeking to readjust its economic and political priorities. Turkish leaders have been asserting for some time now that the global economy's gravity is shifting towards Asia, thus Turkey is now shifting its priorities to reflect that new order.⁹⁰

Turkey's relationship with China goes beyond the economic as well. In 2010, Chinese and Turkish air forces engaged in joint military exercises in the central Anatolian province of Konya.⁹¹ Turkey's agreement to hold these joint exercises with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is significant because Turkey agreed to these exercises (in addition to hosting

⁸⁸ Brown, P. (2010, October 21). Turkey boards china's new orient express. *The Asia Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/LJ21Ad01.html>.

⁸⁹ Kardas, S. (2010, October 19). Turkey inches closer to china. *The Asia Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central Asia/LJ19Ag01.html>.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹ Fulghum, D. (2010, September 30). Chinese su-27s fly mock combat in turkey. *Aviation Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/blogs/defense/>.

Chinese Premier Wen) even despite the discontent and anger among religious groups in Turkey regarding Chinese suppression of Uyghurs in East Turkestan.⁹² Additionally, these are the first military exercises involving China and a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member. These actions also demonstrate that Turkey is changing its international stance.⁹³ According to Brown, a recent survey demonstrates that Turkish people do not view the benefits of NATO as obvious, and only one in three Turks value Turkey's membership in NATO as integral to Turkish security.⁹⁴ Additionally, Turkey is also more closely aligned with Iran—the same survey shows that only one in ten Turks support the use of military force to prevent Iran from using nuclear weapons.⁹⁵ In short, Turkey wants to remain an ally of the West while simultaneously acting as a regional power in a region that is suspicious of the West.⁹⁶ Uyghur demands will remain a sore spot in an otherwise good relationship with China. The Turkish government is simply not allowing issues with Xinjiang to ruin growing Sino-Turkish economic and political ties.⁹⁷

Willingness to Support Palestine

It is also worth noting that China has expressed strong ideological support for Palestine. China was the first country to establish ties with Palestine and has been known to provide it with military and financial assistance. China has stated that it is committed to championing causes of the developing world, which includes “the struggle for Palestinian self-determination.”⁹⁸

⁹²Raman, B. (2010, October 16). Chinese air force planes refuel in pakistan, iran on way to turkey. *Sri Lanka Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2010/10/chinese-air-force-planes-refuel-in.html>.

⁹³Fulghum, D. (2010, September 30). Chinese su-27s fly mock combat in turkey. *Aviation Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/blogs/defense/>.

⁹⁴ Brown, P. (2010, October 21). Turkey boards china's new orient express. *The Asia Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/China/LJ21Ad01.html>.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Kardas, S. (2010, October 19). Turkey inches closer to china. *The Asia Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central Asia/LJ19Ag01.html>.

⁹⁸Zambelis, C. (2009, March 4). China's palestine policy. *China Brief: a Journal of Analysis and Information*, 9(5). Retrieved from [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34662&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34662&tx_ttnews[backPid]).

Furthermore, China's reference to "Palestine" is particularly important—according to the Jamestown Foundation, "...China's reference to 'Palestine' acknowledges Palestinian national identity and, by extension, the territorial claims of the Palestinians."⁹⁹ Indeed, more than ten years ago, then-president Jiang Zemin stated, "We would like to reassert that our support for the just cause of the Palestinian people is a permanent policy of China."¹⁰⁰

Other countries with large Muslim populations have also demonstrated strong support for Palestine, but they have been far less vocal with regard to violent suppression of the Uyghurs. Turkey has given strong support for the Palestinians to seek an independent state. Prime Minister Erdogan recently stated that a crucial part of the resolution to the problems in the Middle East is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. He said that, "establishing an independent and viable state, whose capital will be in East Jerusalem, is the basic condition to solve this problem."¹⁰¹ In addition, the Kingdom of Jordan has also provided indisputable support for the Palestinians.¹⁰² Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh stated that "establishing a Palestinian state and addressing all the final status issues on the basis of the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative...constitute a top priority for the Kingdom."¹⁰³

It is interesting to observe that countries like Turkey and Jordan with significant Muslim populations have made Palestine and its issues a top priority for foreign relations when they have not done so in the case of the Uyghurs.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ No author. (2000, April 17). Jiang vows to back Palestinians. *The Gazette*. Retrieved from LexisNexis.

¹⁰¹ No author. (2011, June 25). Turkey voices strong support for Palestinians' seeking of recognition. *The People's Daily*. Retrieved from <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90854/7420534.html>.

¹⁰² No author. (2011, July 31). Jordan support for Palestinians 'indisputable.' *The Jordan Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.jordantimes.com/?news=39139>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates that the advantages of engaging in commerce with China take priority over speaking out against egregious abuses against the Uyghurs for a number of Muslim countries. The numerous examples also show that the payoffs are quite lucrative. Especially salient is the point that China will offer assistance to these states without demanding that they democratize or make more concerted efforts to address their own human rights situations. In this sense, remaining silent with regard to one another's human rights records forms a basis of reciprocity between China and Muslim countries. The fact that China and Muslim countries can safely leave human rights out of their trade negotiations suggests that they are more palatable trading partners than liberal democracies. It is also worth pointing out that those Muslim countries that signed trade or oil development agreements can expect to deal with China well into the future. Their incentive for a good working relationship with China is strong, and the evidence indicates that they are not willing to jeopardize relations to speak out on behalf of fellow Muslims.

Many of these same countries are just as guilty as China in terms of how they treat their own people. The fact that many Muslim countries also exercise draconian and violent repression of citizens' freedom of speech, religion, and other human rights may make them far more hesitant to point out China's similar flaws in these respects. Being guilty of similar human rights violations, however, does not refute the charge that very real and serious violations have occurred. China's violent repression of the Uyghurs is still morally reprehensible regardless of whether or not other countries engage in violent repression of their own people.

Finally, Muslim countries' public record of support for the Palestinian cause illustrates that they are indeed willing and capable of speaking out against injustices when they witness them. This report implores these same countries to give the same attention to the suffering of the

Uyghurs in East Turkestan. Calling the Chinese authorities to account for the atrocities in East Turkestan is a necessary and urgent step in redressing grievances and working for peace in the region.