

Persecution of Uyghurs in the Era of the “War on Terror”

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Over the past six years, PRC officials have maneuvered to use the concept of “terrorism” as a justification for their repressive treatment of Uyghurs in East Turkestan¹ (also known as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or XUAR) and to intimidate Uyghurs who have fled China. This report documents that the PRC government has:

- Placed tremendous emphasis on the threat of “terrorism” in East Turkestan, without providing credible evidence of a threat.
- Initiated a series of “security” campaigns in East Turkestan that have resulted in serious human rights abuses.
- Used its influence within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to seek the



return of Uyghurs from China’s neighboring countries in violation of international law.

- Attempted to influence overseas Uyghur activists by harassing their family members who remain in East Turkestan.

I. Questionable Assertions: “Terrorism” as an Excuse for Intimidation and Repression

Shortly after the attacks of 9/11,

public statements by PRC authorities signaled the official decision to use the “global war on terror” to intensify repression of the Uyghur people. On September 1,

2001, the XUAR Regional Government Chairman Abdulahat Abdurixit said in Urumqi, “By no means is Xinjiang a place where violence and terrorist incidents take place very often,”² and just a week before 9/11, XUAR Communist Party Secretary Wang Lequan told a group of Hong Kong

¹ Use of the term ‘East Turkestan’ does not define a ‘pro-independence’ position. Instead, it is used by Uyghurs wishing to assert their cultural distinctiveness from China proper. ‘Xinjiang’, meaning ‘new boundary’ or ‘new realm,’ was adopted by the Manchus in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and reflects the perspective of those who gave it this name. This use of terminology, whether ‘Xinjiang’ or ‘East Turkestan,’ is often compared by Uyghurs to use of the term ‘Tibet’ by Tibetans. That is, Tibetans use the name they choose, and not a translation of the Chinese ‘Xizang,’ meaning ‘western treasure-store.’ Uyghurs also choose to use a name other than the one designated by the Chinese authorities.

photo: Mass sentencing of Uyghurs © ETIC

² Bao Lisheng, “Wang Lequan Says That Xinjiang Is Not a Place of Terror,” *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), September 3 2001.

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investors that “Xinjiang is not a place of terror.”³

Two months later, then Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan stood before the UN and asserted that “East Turkestan terrorist forces have long received training, financial aid and support from international terrorist groups... East Turkestan is... a part of international terrorism and should be resolutely fought against.”⁴ This speech marked the beginning of a PRC campaign to use the concept of “terrorism” against the Uyghur people of East Turkestan.

Chinese authorities began lobbying for an obscure group known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to be labeled as a terrorist organization. Immediately after 9/11, the Bush administration warned the PRC government not to use the event to persecute Uyghurs, refusing to link any Uyghur group to terrorism.⁵ Nearly a year later, in August 2002, in an abrupt change in policy, the U.S. government designated ETIM as a terrorist organization.

In making this announcement, the US State Department cited, almost verbatim, the PRC government’s accusations against ETIM, and in fact mistakenly went even further than PRC authorities by attributing all of the violent incidents that the government claimed had taken place in East Turkestan in the past decade to ETIM.⁶ This announcement was criticized by several experts at the

time.⁷ A few weeks later, on the second anniversary of 9/11, ETIM was placed on the UN terror list.⁸

The move came just in advance of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, leading several independent experts to see the change as directly related to the impending war. Willy Wo Lap Lam, a prominent China scholar, wrote at the time, “Washington realizes that if it were to sponsor a UN resolution that involves the invasion of Iraq, it will need, at the very least, an abstention rather than a veto from China, one of the Security Council’s five permanent members.”⁹ In Lam’s analysis, “the decision by the U.S. and UN to label ETIM a terrorist outfit could afford Beijing much-needed legitimacy in its campaign to snuff out the entire pro-independence and dissident movement in the XUAR- and to Sinicize the region by promoting Chinese culture and encouraging Han Chinese to migrate to Xinjiang.”¹⁰

Official PRC government documents and statements frequently use vague and generic terms such as “East Turkestan terrorist organization” or “East Turkestan terrorist force,” implying that a unified and strong group of terrorists exists.¹¹ Hundreds of official speeches, reports, and news articles discussing East Turkestan use the “terrorist” designation.¹² However, many observers have questioned the legitimacy of these types of PRC government claims. In his comprehensive analysis of violence and

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Statement by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan at UN Security Council Ministerial Meeting on Counter Terrorism, November 12, 2001.

⁵ White House Press Release, *President Says Terrorists Tried to Disrupt World Economy*, Shanghai, China, October 20, 2001 and *Press Conference of Ambassador Francis X Taylor*, December 6, 2001.

⁶ James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment*, p.12, p. 27, East-West Center, 2004.

⁷ Erik Eckholm, *U.S. Labeling of Group in China as Terrorist Is Criticized*, The Washington Post, September 12, 2002.

⁸ U.S. State Department, *Designation of the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement under UNSC Resolutions 1267 and 1390*, September 11, 2002.

⁹ Willy Wo Lap Lam, *Exploiting a Favorable Climate*, China Brief Volume 2, Issue 19, September 26, 2002.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment*, p.13, East-West Center, 2004.

¹² Nicholas Becquelin, *Criminalizing Ethnicity: Political Repression in Xinjiang*, China Rights Forum, No.1, 2004.

“terrorist” groups in East Turkestan, Georgetown University professor James Millward concluded that “the notion of an imminent terrorist threat in Xinjiang or from Uyghur groups is exaggerated.”¹³ In April 2007, the U.S. State Department re-assigned ETIM to its list of “Groups of Concern,” taking the group off of its terrorist list.¹⁴

The PRC government has also labeled nearly all Uyghur organizations as terrorist groups, regardless of their violent or non-violent nature. In late 2003, China’s Ministry of Public Security released a list that gave the “terrorist” label to ETIM, the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), the East Turkestan Information Center (ETIC), and the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC).¹⁵ With the temporary exception of ETIM, none of these organizations have been recognized as “terrorist” by any other country in the world.

On several occasions, the PRC government has raised the specter of terrorism, without providing corresponding evidence. In August 2005, Chinese authorities warned a visiting delegation from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom that “elements of Al-Qaeda” were targeting them. The Commission later determined that this claim was used to “restrict Commission activities and to monitor its contact with local people not approved by the government.”¹⁶ In June

2006, the Chinese diplomatic mission in Pakistan claimed that “members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement” were planning to kidnap senior Chinese diplomats and consular officers in the country. However, no evidence was presented.¹⁷

The most dramatic claim was the announcement that PRC authorities raided on a “terrorist camp” near the village of Kosrap, in the mountainous region of the Pamir Plateau on January 8, 2007. This raid was said to have resulted in the death of 18 and the capture of 17 ETIM members.¹⁸ Dru Gladney, president of the Pacific Basin Institute and an expert on Uyghurs and other Muslims living in the PRC, stated his doubts that ETIM was involved, saying that the organization “dropped out of sight with the death of its reputed leader, Hasan Mahsun,” who was killed in 2003 by Pakistani security forces.¹⁹ PRC authorities have yet to provide documentation of this alleged terrorist camp.

II. PRC “Security” Campaigns in East Turkestan: Intimidation, Arrests, Torture, and Executions

Over the past six years, using “terrorism” as a justification, Beijing has undertaken a renewed, systematic, and sustained crackdown on all forms of Uyghur dissent. As is common in the PRC justice system, those arrested in these campaigns frequently suffer from physical abuse and other maltreatment while in government custody. In addition, they are often subject to non-transparent trials and denied access to

¹³ James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment*, p.31, East-West Center, 2004.

¹⁴ U.S. State Department, *U.S. Designates 43 Terrorist Groups*, April 30, 2007, at http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&v=2007&m=April&x=20070425112939idybeekcm0_9128382

¹⁵ Xinhua, *China Seeks International Support in Counter-Terrorism*, December 15, 2003.

¹⁶ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Policy Focus China*, at http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/region/east_asia/china/China_PolicyBrief.pdf

¹⁷ Daily Times (Pakistan), *Chinese Diplomats Face Kidnapping*, June 26, 2006.

¹⁸ Deutsche Presse-Agentur, *Doubt Raised over ‘Terrorism’ in China’s Restive West*, January 9, 2007.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

independent counsel. Convictions are regularly obtained on the basis of forced confessions extracted through torture.

Security forces target Uyghurs who express any type of dissent as they “strike hard” against the “three evil forces” of “separatism, terrorism, and extremism.” Reminiscent of the Chinese proverb “killing the chicken to scare the monkey,” these activities are calculated to send a strong and intimidating message to the Uyghur population. For example, in the fall of 2005, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Luo Gan, China’s most senior law official, in charge of law enforcement for the Standing Committee of the Politburo, urged XUAR authorities to prepare for danger and renew their campaign against separatism.²⁰ Luo encouraged armed police to “keep improving their abilities of dealing with emergent events and fighting against terrorism as well as increasing combat and defense capabilities.”²¹

Since 9/11, Amnesty International has documented that, under these types of campaigns, “tens of thousands of people are reported to have been detained for investigation in the region, and hundreds, possibly thousands, have been charged or sentenced under the Criminal Law; many Uyghurs are believed to have been sentenced to death and executed for alleged “separatist” or “terrorist” offences.”²² According to a scholarly paper from a 2001 Ministry of Justice compendium, one out of eleven convicted Uyghurs are in prison for

“state security crimes.”²³ The state-run *Xinjiang Daily* reported that, in 2005 alone, 18,227 individuals were arrested in East Turkestan for endangering state security, a jump of 25 percent from the previous year.²⁴

The heavy-handed nature of the campaigns can be seen in the case of a poster branded as “separatist” that appeared in Terem Village in Yopurgha County of Kashgar in June 2003. After discovering the poster, local authorities detained hundreds of Uyghurs, including two schoolchildren, on suspicion of writing the poster, and levied fines on many of those who they detained.²⁵ After nearly four years, police are still conducting a full investigation, hoping to find the poster’s author, and have not returned any of the fines that were collected.²⁶

Security sweeps of Uyghur areas are often carried out shortly before the Chinese New Year. For example, in early 2005, on the eve of the Chinese New Year, more than 700 Uyghur youths were picked up by local Public Security Bureau officers in Ghulja City.²⁷ These types of round-ups are often followed by mass sentencing rallies, parades of political prisoners through Uyghur neighborhoods, and public executions.²⁸ As a result, many Uyghurs view Chinese New Year as “a dreadful season of possible death and destruction, followed by mourning and lamentation.”²⁹

²⁰ China Daily, *Leader urges vigilance as celebrations near*, September 29, 2005.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Amnesty International, *People’s Republic of China Uyghurs fleeing persecution as China wages its “war on terror”*, July 2004;

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170212004>

²³ Human Rights Watch, *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang*, April 2005. p. 72.

²⁴ South China Morning Post, *18,000 Uyghurs Arrested for ‘Security Threats’ Last Year*, January 21, 2006.

²⁵ RFA, *China Detains Uyghurs over ‘Separatist’ Poster*, February 4, 2007.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ RFA, *More than 700 Uyghur Youth detained in the eve of Chinese New Year*, February 10, 2005.

²⁸ UHRP interview with Uyghur scholar, May 26, 2007.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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The recent establishment of several government organizations suggests that human rights abuses as the result of “security” campaigns in East Turkestan will continue. It was reported in April 2007 that the Xinjiang and Tibet Working Groups had been established specifically to handle Uyghur and Tibetan separatism. Through an analysis of the working groups’ members, some Chinese experts predict that the PRC will be adopting an even more aggressive policy towards Uyghurs in East Turkestan.³⁰ Luo Gan, Secretary General of the Central Political and Legislative Committee, leads the Xinjiang Working Group, with Vice Premier Hui Liangyu and Central Political Bureau member and XUAR Party Secretary Wang Lequan acting as deputy group leaders.³¹ All three are widely seen as holding hard-line views.

In addition to the two working groups, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission announced in March 2007 the creation of a new mechanism to monitor the activities of certain ethnic groups, especially Uyghurs and Tibetans, in order to “deal with emergencies resulting from ethnic issues.”³² According to Dainzhub Ongboin, vice director of the Commission, the monitoring group represents “a major step in the central government’s efforts to develop the country’s ethnic minorities.” However, one stated goal of this “development method” is to “clamp down on ethnic separatism so as to safeguard ethnic unity, social stability, and national security.”³³

³⁰ UHRP, *Uyghur Canadian Sentenced to Life on “Terrorism” Charge*, Apr. 19, 2007.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Xinhua, *China to Monitor Ethnic Relations*, March 30, 2007.

³³ *Ibid.*

Uyghurs in Government Custody: Ill-Treatment and Torture

Uyghurs who are arrested during “security” sweeps often suffer in government custody.³⁴ Amnesty International has documented a number of extremely cruel forms of torture used by PRC authorities, including “severe beating and kicking; the use of electric batons; the use of handcuffs, shackles or ropes to tie prisoners in positions which cause intense pain; and exposure to extreme cold or heat.”³⁵ Other torture methods used in East Turkestan are “unidentified injections which cause the victim to become mentally unbalanced or to lose the ability to speak coherently; the insertion of pepper or chili powder in the mouth, nose or genital organs; and the insertion of horse hair or wires into the penis.”³⁶

In late 2005, after making his first visit to China, during which he visited prisons in Urumchi, Lhasa, and Beijing, Mr. Manfred Nowak, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, confirmed that “torture was widespread” in China, especially in East Turkestan and Tibet. Forms of torture he documented included the “use of electric shock batons, cigarette burns, guard-instructed beatings by fellow prisoners, submersion in pits of water or sewage, exposure to extreme heat or cold, being forced to maintain uncomfortable positions, deprivation of sleep, food or water, (and) suspension from overhead fixtures by handcuffs.”³⁷ Several

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, *2006 World Report*, January 2006.

³⁵ Amnesty International, *Torture Campaign Leaflets*, August 1, 2000. See also Amnesty International, *Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Uighur Autonomous Region*, London: Amnesty International, 1999.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ UN News Service, *Torture, though on Decline, Remains Widespread in China, UN Expert Reports*, December 2, 2005.

released prisoners interviewed for this report confirm that they faced or witnessed these types of cruel and unusual methods of torture while serving their prison terms.³⁸

There are many specific examples of the use of these torture methods. In mid-2006, Tudahun Hoshur, a 31-year old trader from Ghulja City, was suspended from a ceiling by his hands, beaten, and denied food for three days for failing to memorize all 45 articles of the detention center’s regulations in Chinese.³⁹ Ismail Semed, who was executed on February 8, 2007 for allegedly attempting to “split the motherland,” was convicted on the basis of confessions that were likely extracted from two other Uyghur prisoners through torture.⁴⁰ Semed told his wife just before his execution that his confession was coerced through torture.⁴¹

Alim and Ablikim Abdureyim, the sons of prominent Uyghur leader and human rights defender Rebiya Kadeer, were sentenced to seven and nine years in prison respectively. Alim and Ablikim were severely beaten by police officers on June 1, 2006 after they were detained near Urumchi.⁴² As a result of his beating, Ablikim lost consciousness and was taken to a hospital.⁴³ Alim was detained and tortured, later “confessing” to the criminal and political charges brought against him as a direct result of this torture.⁴⁴

³⁸ UHRP interviews with former Uyghur political prisoners, May 12, 2007.

³⁹ UHRP, *Details Emerge of Uyghur Political Detainee Suffering Torture, Abuse*, June 5, 2006.

⁴⁰ UHRP, *Uyghur Prisoner Executed in Urumchi*, February 9, 2007.

⁴¹ RFA, *Uyghur Activist Executed in China*, February 8, 2007.

⁴² UHRP, *Rebiya Kadeer’s Adult Children Severely Beaten in front of Her Grandchildren*, June 1, 2006.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ UHRP, *Rebiya Kadeer’s Son Tortured*, June 23, 2006. and UHRP, *Rebiya Kadeer’s Youngest Son “Confesses” to Crimes under Torture*, July 6, 2006.

“Terrorism in the Spiritual Form”

All manifestations of Uyghur opposition, no matter how peaceful, are in danger of being labeled “separatist” or “terrorist” conspiracies against the government. On January 1, 2002, Uyghur poet Tursunjan Amat was arrested after reciting a poem purported to promote “separatism” at the Xinjiang People’s Hall in Urumchi. Soon afterwards, Wang Lequan warned against the danger of “separatist forces” using ideology to attack PRC policies, saying, “the anti-separatist struggle in the ideological field had always been a major battleground without the smoke of gunpowder.”⁴⁵ One year later, another Uyghur poet was accused of “attacking” the PRC’s policy towards Uyghurs when his recitation of a poem in a Kashgar concert hall was labeled “terrorism in the spiritual form.”⁴⁶

According to a Human Rights Watch report, “In January 2002, pressure to follow the official ideological line was explicitly extended to include artists, writers, performers, and historians, among others, when Abulahat Abdurixit, the region’s chairman, made clear that ‘all who openly advocate separatism using the name of art’ would be purged.”⁴⁷ Since that time, official government sources have indicated that “the ‘struggle against separatism’ is wide-ranging and encompasses all potential dissent and opposition activities, including the peaceful expression of views via poems, songs,

⁴⁵ Amnesty International, *PRC: China’s Anti-terrorism Legislation and Repression in XUAR*, March 22, 2002.

⁴⁶ Christian Science Monitor, *Pressure to conform in West China*, September 29, 2003.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *China Human Rights Update*, February 2002.

books, pamphlets, letters, or the Internet.⁴⁸

As a result of this campaign, many Uyghur writers have been arrested and given lengthy prison sentences. Abdulghani Memetemin, a writer, teacher, and translator, was sentenced to nine years in prison by the Kashgar Intermediate Court in June 2003 on charges of “sending secret state information out of the country.”⁴⁹ Memtemin was arrested on July 26, 2002 when authorities discovered he had been translating news articles, forwarding official speeches, and conducting original reporting for the German-based East Turkestan Information Center.⁵⁰



Writer Nurmemet Yasin

Nurmemet Yasin, a well-known Uyghur writer, was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2005 for writing “Wild Pigeon,” a fictional story about a pigeon that commits suicide because it is unable to escape its cage.⁵¹ Shortly after Yasin’s story was published in the Kashgar Literature Journal in late 2004, he was accused of inciting separatism and arrested by Kashgar police who confiscated his computer, which

contained 1,600 poems, commentaries, and stories, as well as an unfinished novel.⁵² Kuresh Huseyin, chief editor of the Kashgar Literature Journal, was sentenced to three years for publishing Yasin’s “Wild Pigeon” in late 2005.⁵³

Sitiwaldi (Dilkex) Tiliwaldi, a young Uyghur man from Ghulja, disappeared in October 2004 after speaking to Serene Fang, a reporter from PBS who had come to investigate human rights violations against the Uyghur people by PRC authorities.⁵⁴ After an interview about East Turkestan’s general situation, Tiliwaldi and Fang were approached by PRC security agents, who questioned and searched them and confiscated the interview tape and other materials.⁵⁵ Fang was deported to the United States. Tiliwaldi’s whereabouts remain unknown.⁵⁶

III. The PRC’s Campaign Against Uyghurs Outside of China

Two disturbing trends in the era of the “war on terror” are the PRC’s use of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to seek the return of Uyghurs from neighboring countries and its attempt to influence overseas Uyghur activists by harassing their family members who remain in East Turkestan.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

In 1996, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan created the Shanghai Five to resolve border issues remaining after the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five became

⁴⁸ Amnesty International, *PRC: China’s Anti-terrorism Legislation and Repression in the XUAR*, March 22, 2002.

⁴⁹ Committee to Protect Journalists, *China: Journalist Imprisoned*, August 3, 2004.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ RFA, *China Court Jails Uyghur Editor for Publishing Veiled Dissent*, November 10, 2005.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ PBS Frontline, *China-Silenced*, January 11, 2005.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Since the founding of the Central Asian states in the early 1990s, PRC leaders have feared that these nations, which are culturally and linguistically related to Uyghurs, would sympathize with the Uyghur situation and support their cause. The PRC government views the approximately one million Uyghurs living in SCO countries as a threat, wary that this population might aid Uyghurs in East Turkestan to resist Chinese control of their traditional homeland. PRC authorities have used the SCO to suppress Uyghur opposition in East Turkestan and Central Asia, enlisting support for its attacks on Uyghurs.⁵⁷

In May 2006, during the SCO Summit, member states signed fifteen agreements aimed at strengthening cooperation in the fight against “terrorism.”⁵⁸ China has also signed bilateral “anti-terror” agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan, as well as several Arab states.⁵⁹

In addition, the PRC has conducted a series of large-scale exercises targeting the “three evil forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism,” together with SCO member states Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and SCO observer state, Pakistan.⁶⁰

From August 9 to 17, 2007, more than 6,500 troops from SCO countries participated in “anti-terrorism” exercises in Urumchi, the capital of East Turkestan, and Chelyabinsk, Russia.⁶¹ This was the first time that the SCO has conducted military exercises inside East Turkestan. The scale of the exercises suggested that they were aimed at controlling and intimidating local populations and not just combating “terrorism.”

In a practice that began before 9/11, but that has accelerated in the past six years, SCO member and observer states have assisted the PRC in tracking down Uyghur political activists and extraditing them to China, where they face serious human rights violations, including torture, unfair trials, and execution. In all of these cases, the PRC and its neighboring states are in violation of the principle of non-refoulement under international law, which protects refugees from being returned to places where their lives or freedom could be threatened.

In 1999, Kazakhstan forcibly returned Uyghur political activists Kasim Mahpir, Ilyas Zordun, and Zulfikar Memet to the PRC, where they were executed.⁶² In 2003, Pakistan forcibly repatriated Uyghur activist Ismail Semed to China, where he was executed on February 8, 2007 on charges of “attempting to split the motherland.”⁶³ In the same year, Pakistan also deported Muhammed Tohti

⁵⁷ Ariel Cohen, *The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Heritage Lectures No. 961, Heritage Foundation, September 7, 2006.

⁵⁸ China Daily, *SCO to Sign Anti-terror Agreements*, May 16, 2006.

⁵⁹ People’s Daily, *China, Kazakhstan Issue Joint Statement*, May 18, 2004; Xinhua, *China, Kyrgyzstan Sign Anti-Terrorism Agreement*, December 11, 2002; Xinhua, *Hu Firm on Anti-terror Efforts*, June 15, 2006; PRC MOFA, *China, Russia to Promote Humanistic, Anti-Terror Cooperation*, September 25, 2004; Reuters, *Turkmenistan, China Sign Anti-terror Agreement*, April 4, 2006; Xinhua, *China Ratifies Anti-terror Pact With Pakistan*, August 28, 2006; Xinhua, *China, Arab States Pledge Anti-terror Cooperation*, June 2, 2006.

⁶⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Russia/China: Military Exercises Underscore Growing Ties*, August 5, 2005; China

Daily, *Anti-terror Exercise Targets ‘3 Evil Forces’*, August 28, 2006; BBC, *China-Kyrgyz Anti-terror Exercises*, October 10, 2002; Xinhua, *China, Tajikistan Hold Joint Antiterror Exercises*, September 22, 2006. VOA, *China, Pakistan Hold Joint Anti-Terror Military Exercises*, August 6, 2004.

⁶¹ Xinhua, *SCO to Stage Joint Anti-terror Military Exercise in 2007*, April 26, 2006.

⁶² Amnesty International, *China: Further information on Torture/Health Concern/Unfair Trial /Fear of Execution*, June 16, 2000.

⁶³ RFA, *Uyghur Activist Executed in China*, Feb. 8, 2007.

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Metrozi, a recognized refugee awaiting resettlement in Sweden.⁶⁴ Businessman Osman Alihan was extradited in July 2007, also from Pakistan. On May 10, 2006, Kazakhstan forcibly returned Uyghur activists Yusuf Kadir and Abdukadir Sidik to China, where they are being held in incommunicado detention.⁶⁵

In yet another case, the UNHCR expressed concern that Arkin Sabirov, who disappeared on October 23, 2006, had been secretly deported to the PRC from Kazakhstan.⁶⁶ Criticism from human rights organizations and international pressure have led to secrecy surrounding the deportation of several Uyghurs. In 2004, Vladimir Bozhko, Kazakh National Security Agency Deputy Chairman, admitted that over a six year period 14 Uyghurs had been extradited from Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan and China for their “involvement in Uyghur separatist organizations.”⁶⁷

The Case of Canadian Citizen Huseyin Celil

The extradition of Uyghur-Canadian Huseyin Celil from Uzbekistan to China in June 2006 is a recent and powerful example of the PRC’s use of the SCO to force the return of an ethnic Uyghur in violation of international law. In early 2006, Celil, a charismatic Uyghur imam and activist who had been granted

Canadian citizenship, traveled with his wife to visit her parents in Uzbekistan.⁶⁸



Huseyin Celil

In March 2006, Uzbek authorities detained Celil, reportedly at the request of the Chinese government, and later extradited him to the PRC to face charges of “terrorism,” refusing to recognize Celil’s Canadian citizenship. This act was in direct contradiction to Article 9 of the Nationality Law of the People’s Republic of China, which states that a person loses Chinese citizenship when he or she is naturalized as a citizen in a foreign country.⁶⁹

Celil’s extradition immediately became a major issue in Sino-Canadian relations. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper expressed great concern about Celil’s case when speaking with Chinese President Hu Jintao on the sidelines of the 2006 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vietnam.⁷⁰ Despite this direct and high-level intervention, in April 2007, a

⁶⁴ Amnesty International, *Documented Cases of Uyghurs Forcibly Returned to the XUAR*, at http://www.amnesty.ca/archives/resources/huseyin_celil/uyghur_forced_returns_cases.doc.

⁶⁵ Amnesty International, *Kazakhstan: Further Information on Forcible Return/Torture/Death Penalty*, June 27, 2006.

⁶⁶ Institute of War & Peace Reporting, *Kazakhstan under Fire for Reported Extradition of Uyghur*, December 7, 2006.

⁶⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Kazakhstan Reveals Uyghur Extraditions*, November 16, 2004.

⁶⁸ UHRP, *Uyghur Canadian Sentenced to Life on “Terrorism” Charges*, Apr. 19, 2007.

⁶⁹ *The Nationality Law of the People’s Republic of China*, (sponsored by the Supreme People’s Court of the PRC), at <http://en.chinacourt.org/public/detail.php?id=2706>

⁷⁰ CBC, *Canadian Diplomacy Taking Tougher Approach: Harper*, Nov. 19, 2006.

Chinese court sentenced Celil to life imprisonment.

According to Celil’s sister, in early 2007, while Celil was in Chinese custody, he was tortured and forced to sign a pre-written confession, which he signed only after he was told by prison guards that if he refused he would be “buried alive and disappear without any clues.”⁷¹ Celil was also denied the Canadian consular access he was entitled to under Sino-Canadian bilateral agreements.⁷² During his official visit to Beijing one week after Celil’s sentencing, Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay raised the Celil case with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, demanding that Celil receive consular access.⁷³ The PRC denied MacKay’s demands.

On July 10, a Chinese high court rejected Celil’s appeal in a process that lasted just 15 minutes before the court read a prepared statement nearly identical to a previous court ruling.⁷⁴ During the appeal process, Celil’s lawyer was not allowed to defend him.⁷⁵ After the ruling, Foreign Minister MacKay accused the Chinese government of failing to provide due process in Celil’s appeal.⁷⁶

Celil had traveled to Uzbekistan believing that his Canadian citizenship would protect him from Chinese persecution. Celil’s Canadian lawyer, Chris Macleod, believes that the PRC government, by punishing Celil, wished to send a warning to Uyghur human

rights activists in exile that it is impossible “to hide behind a Canadian passport or a charter of rights or whatever other document in other countries you may have.”⁷⁷ The Celil case remains one of the thorniest issues in Sino-Canadian relations, with Canada continuing to apply pressure for his release before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.⁷⁸

Targeting Rebiya Kadeer’s Family



Rebiya Kadeer

Another PRC strategy that is used to intimidate and silence Uyghurs is persecuting activists’ family members who live in East Turkestan. An example that illuminates this strategy is the case of Uyghur democracy leader Rebiya Kadeer.

On August 11, 1999, PRC authorities arrested Ms. Kadeer in Urumchi as she was on her way to meet with members of a U.S. congressional delegation. After her trial, she received an eight-year prison sentence for “providing secret information to foreigners.”⁷⁹ At the trial, the court presented openly available

⁷¹ The Epoch Times, *Canadian Tortured in Chinese Jail, Family Says*, Feb. 7, 2007.

⁷² Reuters, *China Jails Uighur-Canadian “Terrorist” for Life*, Apr. 19, 2007.

⁷³ The Toronto Star, *MacKay Talks Tough with China*, May 1, 2007.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ The Globe and Mail, *Celil Appeal Rejected by Chinese Court*, July 10, 2007.

⁷⁶ CanWest News Service, *China Violating Due Process by Jailing Canadian for Life, Ottawa Charge*, July 11, 2007.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ The Toronto Star, *Imam’s Lawyer Pins Hopes on Olympic Spirit*, July 11, 2007.

⁷⁹ Amnesty International, *China: Uighur Businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer Sentenced to Eight Years’ after Secret Trial*, March 10, 2000.

newspaper clippings as evidence of the “secret information” provided by Ms. Kadeer.⁸⁰ She was incarcerated for nearly six years at Liudaowan Prison in Urumchi.⁸¹ On March 17, 2005, when she was released on “medical parole” just three days before U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s official visit to Beijing, Ms. Kadeer became the first Uyghur political prisoner to be freed by the PRC due to international pressure.⁸²

In order to reduce Ms. Kadeer’s influence among Uyghurs by pressuring her into silence after her exile to the United States, PRC authorities began an intense campaign of intimidation against her family members and business associates inside East Turkestan. Two months after her release, government authorities raided Ms. Kadeer’s Akida Trading Company in Urumchi, attempted to arrest her second youngest son Ablikim Abdureyim, and arrested company director Aysham Kerim and assistant Ruzi Mamat on unnamed charges.⁸³ Two days later, more than 100 police raided the firm, confiscating fifteen large bags full of documents.⁸⁴ According to Alim Abdureyim, Ms. Kadeer’s youngest son, police seized “every single piece of paper, documents, files, everything from our company.... therefore, the government can accuse us of being in any amount of debt they wish.”⁸⁵

On May 30, a day before the arrival in Urumchi of a U.S. delegation affiliated with the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and two days after Ms.

Kadeer was elected as the president of the Uyghur American Association in Washington, D.C., Ms. Kadeer’s two sons, Alim and Ablikim, along with her daughter, Rushangul, were detained.⁸⁶ They were warned not to attempt to contact the visiting U.S. delegation and released.⁸⁷

Two days later, on June 1, International Children’s Day in China, Public Security agents severely beat Alim and Ablikim in front of their own children and forced Rushangul to call her mother so that Ms. Kadeer would hear the beating of her sons.⁸⁸ After it was clear that Ms. Kadeer had heard her sons’ screams, the phone was taken away from her daughter.⁸⁹ After the beatings, Alim was taken to a detention center, Ablikim was admitted to a hospital, and Rushangul was put under an intrusive form of house arrest.⁹⁰ On June 13, Alim was officially charged with tax evasion and “attempting to divide the country,” Ablikim on conspiracy to overthrow the government, and Kahar, Ms. Kadeer’s oldest son, who a few days later had been transported in handcuffs from Aksu to Urumchi, was charged with tax evasion.⁹¹

In early November 2006, prior to her election as president of the German-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC), Ms. Kadeer was warned through a third party that her detained sons would suffer greatly if she were to run for the position.⁹² Later that month, the day that

⁸⁰ Human Rights in China, *Case Profiles - Rebiya Kadeer*, October 17, 2000.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Amnesty International, *China: Rebiya Kadeer Release Welcome, but Tactically Timed*, March 17, 2005.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ RFA, *Xinjiang Police Form Special Unfit for Exiled Dissident’s Family*, August 30, 2005.

⁸⁶ UHRP, *Three of Rebiya Kadeer’s Children Detained As US Congressional Team Arrive in Urumchi*, May 30, 2006.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ UHRP, *Following Detentions, Formal Charges Brought against Ms. Kadeer’s Sons*, June 14, 2006.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ UHRP, *Son of Rebiya Kadeer Sentenced to Nine Years in Prison on Charges of “Secessionism*, April 17, 2007.

⁹¹ UHRP, *Following Detentions, Formal Charges Brought against Ms. Kadeer’s Sons*, June 14, 2006.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Ms. Kadeer was elected as president of the WUC, Alim was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of tax evasion and fined 500,000 yuan (USD 62,500) and Kahar was charged with tax evasion and fined 100,000 yuan (USD 12,500).⁹³ Five months later, in April 2007, Ablikim was sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment by the Intermediate People’s Court in Urumchi on charges of “instigating and engaging in secessionist activities.”⁹⁴

Xinhua News, the official PRC news agency, reported that “Ablikim’s legal rights were protected during the trial and the information concerning the time and venue of the trial was publicized three days beforehand” and that Ablikim “confessed” to the charges against him during trial.⁹⁵ However, according to his family’s understanding, Ablikim was not allowed legal representation, the family was given no advance notice of the trial, and the “confession” was likely the result of torture. In November 2006, reportedly suffering from severe mistreatment, Ablikim was seen being removed on a stretcher from the Tianshan Detention Center.⁹⁶

V. Conclusion

PRC authorities have made great efforts to silence independent Uyghur voices both domestically and internationally. Repression in East Turkestan stems from the PRC government’s inability to address the basic democratic aspirations of the

Uyghurs and has resulted in widespread, systematic, and egregious violations of Uyghurs’ human rights.

In the era of the “war on terror,” the PRC government has justified its repression in East Turkestan by attempting to link Uyghur dissidents and groups to international terrorism. Without presenting any evidence of a genuine terrorist threat, PRC authorities continue to defend the crackdown in East Turkestan in the name of fighting the “three evil forces of separatism, terrorism, and extremism.”

The PRC government has used frequent “strike hard” campaigns to target many peaceful expressions of Uyghur identity inside the country, and has been influential in the extradition of Uyghur activists from neighboring countries, after which they are subjected to non-transparent, irregular trials that regularly result in executions. As Uyghurs in exile have become increasingly vocal and successful in exposing the PRC’s gross human rights violations in East Turkestan, government authorities have begun to target activists’ family members in East Turkestan.

If the PRC wishes to be accepted as a legitimate member of the international community, it must cease the domestic and international campaigns it employs to silence Uyghur voices. The PRC must implement basic human rights, the rule of law, and democratic reforms in East Turkestan in order to be respected in the eyes of the world.

⁹³ UHRP, *Rebiya Kadeer’s Son Sentenced to Seven Years; Another Fined; Another Feared Tortured*, November 27, 2006.

⁹⁴ UHRP, *Son of Rebiya Kadeer Sentenced to Nine Years in Prison on Charges of “Secessionism*, April 17, 2007.

⁹⁵ Xinhua News Agency, *Xinjiang Secessionist sentenced to Nine Years in Prison*, April 17, 2007.

⁹⁶ UHRP, *Son of Rebiya Kadeer Sentenced to Nine Years in Prison on Charges of “Secessionism*, April 17, 2007.