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# REPRESSION OF UYGHURS

## WHO ARE UYGHUR?

The Uyghurs, alternately spelled Uighurs, Uygurs, or Uigurs, are a Turkic-speaking minority ethnic group originating from and culturally affiliated with the general region of Central and East Asia. The Uyghurs are recognized as native to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Northwest China.



XINJIANG REGION





## IMPORTANCE OF XINJIANG REGION

- ▶ Significant of size of the region. Its about 17% of China.
- ▶ Silk Road Economic Belt project aimed at connecting China with Central Asia and Europe through a number of infrastructures and communication network building. Xinjiang is strategically important for China because it is the hub of trade with Central Asian and the the success of SREB it is directly linked to its stability.
- ▶ Most energy rich region of China. Xinjiang became an autonomous region of the People's Republic in 1955.
- ▶ From the year 2000, Beijing encouraged the influx of Han (main Chinese ethnicity) into the region to fuel its economic development. In fact the Han are concentrated in the north, where the main oil fields are located. The problematic coexistence between Han and Uyghurs (Turkish-speaking and Muslim minority) is at the root of the region's turmoil and instability.

## WHEN THIS ALL STARTED . . . .

In 2009, rioting in Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, broke out as mostly Uyghur demonstrators protested against state-incentivized Han Chinese migration in the region and widespread economic and cultural discrimination. Nearly two hundred people were killed, and experts say it marked a turning point in Beijing's attitude toward Uyghurs. In the eyes of Beijing, all Uyghurs could potentially be terrorists or terrorist sympathizers.

## ATROCITIES.....

- ▶ Extent of atrocities are largely unknown due to strict censorship.
- ▶ The Chinese government has imprisoned more than two million people since 2017 and subjected those not detained to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, and forced sterilizations.
- ▶ The United States has sanctioned officials and blacklisted dozens of Chinese agencies linked to abuses in Xinjiang.
- ▶ However, internal Chinese government documents leaked in late 2019 have provided important details on how officials launched and maintain the detention camps.

## ATROCITIES....

- ▶ Some eight hundred thousand to two million Uyghurs and other Muslims, including ethnic Kazakhs and Uzbeks, have been detained since April 2017, according to experts and government officials. ([https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418\\_Busby\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418_Busby_Testimony.pdf))
- ▶ Outside of the camps, the eleven million Uyghurs living in Xinjiang have continued to suffer from a decades-long crackdown by Chinese authorities.
- ▶ Most people in the camps have never been charged with crimes and have no legal avenues to challenge their detentions.

## ATROCITIES....

- ▶ Hundreds of camps are located in Xinjiang. Officially known as the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, the northwestern region has been claimed by China since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949. Some Uighurs living there refer to the region as East Turkestan and argue that it ought to be independent from China.



## ATROCITIES.....



## WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CAMPS....

- ▶ Detainees are forced to pledge loyalty to the CCP.
- ▶ Renounce Islam.
- ▶ Mandatory to learn Mandarin.
- ▶ Some reported **prison-like conditions**, with cameras and microphones monitoring their every move and utterance.
- ▶ Women have shared **stories of sexual abuse**, with some saying they were forced to undergo abortions or have contraceptive devices implanted against their will.



## WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE CAMPS....

- ▶ Children whose parents have been sent to the camps are often forced to stay in state-run orphanages.
- ▶ Uyghur **parents living outside of China** often face a difficult choice: return home to be with their children and risk detention, or stay abroad, separated from their children and unable to contact them.
- ▶ Some released detainees contemplated suicide or witnessed others kill themselves.

## GLOBAL RESPONSE

- ▶ The UN human rights chief and other UN officials have demanded access to the camps. But so far access is not given!!
- ▶ The **European Union** has called on China to respect religious freedom and change its policies in Xinjiang.
- ▶ Notably silent are many Muslim nations. Prioritizing their economic ties and strategic relationships with China, many governments have ignored the human rights abuses.
- ▶ In 2019, Turkey became the only Muslim-majority country to voice concern when its foreign minister **called on China** to ensure “the full protection of the cultural identities of the Uyghurs and other Muslims” during a UN Human Rights Council session.



## U.S. RESPONSE

- ▶ In October 2019, the United States of America **imposed visa restrictions** on Chinese officials “believed to be responsible for, or complicit in” the detention of Muslims in Xinjiang. It also blacklisted more than two dozen Chinese companies and agencies linked to abuses in the region—including surveillance technology manufacturers and Xinjiang’s public security bureau—effectively blocking them from buying U.S. products.
- ▶ In June 2020, President Donald J. Trump **signed legislation**, passed with overwhelming support from Congress, mandating that individuals, including Chen, face sanctions for oppressing Uighurs. The law also requires that U.S. businesses and individuals selling products to or operating in Xinjiang ensure their activities don’t contribute to human rights violations, including the use of forced labor.
- ▶ Human Rights Watch has **advocated other actions** the United States and other countries could take: publicly challenging Xi; denying exports of technologies that facilitate abuse; pressing China to allow UN investigators in Xinjiang; and preventing China from targeting members of the Uighur diaspora. Activists have also called on the United States to **grant asylum** to Uighurs who have fled Xinjiang.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- ▶ CFR's Jerome A. Cohen surveys what the United States and other countries can do to challenge the Chinese government's arbitrary detention in a July 2018 blog post.
- ▶ [CFR.ORG](https://www.cfr.org/)
- ▶ The New York Times analyzes more than four hundred pages of leaked Chinese government documents on repression in Xinjiang.
- ▶ The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists unpacks a classified government manual instructing officials on how to operate the detention centers.
- ▶ Using satellite imagery, Reuters analyzes how thirty-nine detention facilities have rapidly expanded over seventeen months.
- ▶ Human Rights Watch interviews former Xinjiang residents, detainees, and their relatives to detail mass arbitrary detention.
- ▶ In Foreign Affairs, Kelly Hammond, Rian Thum, and Jeffrey Wasserstrom explore why President Xi is ramping up repression.



## A PERSONAL STORY OF RAHIMA MEHMUT

- ▶ She was born near Kazakhstan border of Xinjiang.
- ▶ Moved to England for education in year 2000 but unable to go back due to restrictions imposed by Communist Government.
- ▶ She is not allowed to see or speak to her family members
- ▶ Her family is not allowed to visit her either even after her diagnosis of stage 3 breast cancer and she had no other family member to help her.
- ▶ Today we are honored to have her with us and with out any further delay, I would like to ask everyone to welcome Rahima Mehmud in this forum.