

**Committee:** Human Rights

**Topic:** The treatment of the Uyghur Muslims

**Chair:** William Baxter

**School:** Felsted School

### **Summary**

China has been accused over the last six to seven years of committing crimes against humanity, as well as possible genocide on the Uyghur population in the north-western region of China, known as Xinjiang.

It is widely believed by western human rights groups that China is detaining the Uyghur Muslims against their will and using the minority population for forced labour. Xinjiang alone produces roughly one fifth of the world's cotton and groups and countries have voiced concerns that much of this cotton is picked by forced labour. It is also known that women are being forcibly sterilised so that the Uyghur population does not increase and it is also believed that the people are being held in so-called 're-education camps' and are being treated as prisoners.

China has repeatedly denied all allegations and state that the 're-education camps' are there to combat 'separatism' and 'Islamic extremism'.

### **Definition of key terms**

Sterilised - 'Female sterilisation is an operation to permanently prevent pregnancy. The fallopian tubes are blocked or sealed to prevent the eggs from reaching the sperm and becoming fertilised' NHS, Female Sterilisation, Contraception Guide

Turkic - Turkic refers to the large ethnic group of Central, East, West and North Asia. Made up of 35 languages and over 160 million people the Turkic ethnicity spreads

throughout countries such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and so on. A large proportion of the Turkic population are Muslim.

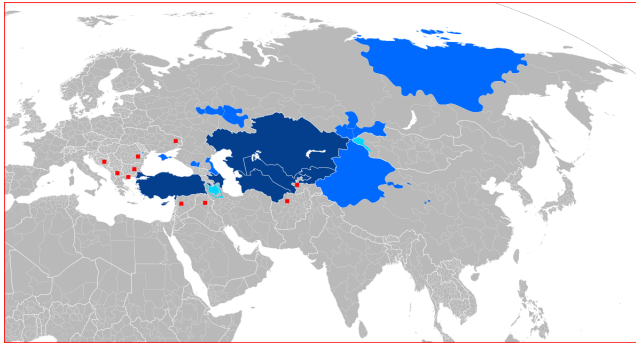
Historiography - The study of the various approaches to historical methods and the actual writings of history. It is essentially the different ways in which History can be interpreted.

Separatism - the advocacy of cultural, ethnic, tribal, religious, racial, governmental or gender separation from a larger group.

Islamic Extremism - Islamic Extremism refers to the extremist views associated with the religion of Islam. Certain ideas tend to come down to controversial interpretations of the Quran. A definition quite frequently used by Western countries refers to Islamic extremism as 'any form of Islam that opposes 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs'.

### **Background Information**

Turkic and Islamic culture were brought to Xinjiang from cities such as Istanbul, Kabul, Cairo, Kazan and Tashkent. These Islamic influences reinstated traditional Uyghur culture into the north-eastern parts of China and ultimately rooted itself into the historiography of Xinjiang. The Uyghur people call the region East Turkestan as they believe this is the historic and symbolic name of the region. Xinjiang was the name given to the region by the Chinese occupiers in the late 19th century.



It is important to understand the geographical nature of the Uyghur people who are part of the Turkic ethnicity. The central band which stretches across Europe and Western Asia is home to the Turkic people, among other ethnicities. As seen in the first map the most eastern point on the central band stretches into North-eastern China. This area is inhabited by the Uyghur people. The region now known as Xinjiang which can be seen on the second map has been home to Turkic people since the 6th century; it is unclear whether Turkic people originated in these parts and migrated east towards central Europe, or whether it was the other way round.

The issues between the Uyghur people and the Han Chinese have been around for decades, yet the real issues started during the 2008 Beijing Olympic games where there were a series of Bus-Bombings; these attacks were claimed by the 'Turkistan-Islamic Party'. And then in 2009 there were riots and fighting between the Uyghur and Han Chinese people where 200 people died, with the majority being Han Chinese. Finally, in 2014 there was an incident at a local market where a bomb and knife attack killed 30 and injured over 200. This was the beginning of the Chinese government's major crackdown.

## **Major Countries and Organisations involved**

22 nations signed a letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council addressing the human rights concerns in Xinjiang and calling for the so-called 'detention programme' to be stopped. Days later, a letter signed by 37 nation states defended China's policies.

**Nations for the ending of the detention programme:** Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

All nations included were either from within Europe, North America or Oceania with the exception of Japan. More importantly, the first letter criticising China has no Muslim-majority states backing it, with a large majority of the Muslim states defending China.

**Nations defending China's policies:** Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, Kuwait, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

What makes this list so interesting is the Muslim-Majority States such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that have signed the letter defending China's use of re-education camps. Very controversially, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan both chose to defend China. Both countries are part of the Turkic region and hold very similar religious, ethnic and cultural views. Both countries have lots in common with the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang yet the governments felt it was right to support China. This poses the question on whether China's superpower status has bullied these nations into siding with them even if they do not agree on the same matters

**Nations remaining Neutral:** Even more importantly the other Turkic countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan remained neutral and did not have a say on the matter. Again this could be linked to China's power and the countries being afraid to oppose the Chinese government.

### **Attempts to solve the problem**

Very little has properly been done or even attempted to help resolve the Uyghur Muslim crisis. Other than the letter addressing China with other nations' signatures, no direct action has been taken to stop the 're-education' camps.

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