Analogy

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***Uyghurs in Xinjiang (1949-present)***

Capturing eighteen percent of China’s total land area, Xinjiang is the largest province of China located in the west of the China’s border. The region despite being autonomous is heavily controlled by the Beijing to maintain the internal stability in the country[[1]](#footnote-1). Xinjiang exercised irregular autonomy in the past before coming under control of Chinese Communist Party in 1949. Xinjiang is exposed to many challenges that are economic, geographical, political, cultural, religious and ethnic in nature. Xinjiang is enriched with many natural resources like oil and gas but still suffered economic low development until the Han Chinese arrival by the Chinese government. The step was taken by the Communist Party to secure their fading position in the region as the majority population of Uyghurs started striving for independence from the Communist party rule. This resulted in many more connected conflicts that made the politicians take certain steps which ultimately threatened the identity, faith and survival of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang[[2]](#footnote-2). This paper will critically analyze the present situation prevailing in the Xinjiang region in the form of the severe conflict with the help of the famous examples presented in the history. The paper will also explore the different dimensions of this case and will explore the similarities it possesses with the most relevant conflict passed in recent times.

***Conflict and Violence in Xinjiang***

Xinjiang which is sometimes also known as East Turkestan is the region dominated by the otherwise minority ethnic group of the China. From the past many decades, Xinjiang was deprived of many economic efforts that could have played a critical part in bringing the economic stability of the region. In the past few years, Chinese government has taken strict action in developing the region and integrating the largest area to the rest of the China[[3]](#footnote-3). However, the indigenous population does not see the recent economic development to be in their favor and treats the whole scenario as a zero sum game. For them, in this zero sum game of economic progress, cultural assimilation and integration into the China, they will lose their distinct representation. Uyghurs do not want to merge into the rest of the China due to huge differences in the culture, religion, ethnicity and history because this will erase their identities and they want to preserve their heritage[[4]](#footnote-4). This is why they strongly oppose the continuous and rapid arrival of Han Chinese in their domain region because for them it is “Han colonialism”.

On the other hand, Communist party have their own insecurities related to Xinjiang and the government does not want to lose the control to autonomy and independence of Uyghur people[[5]](#footnote-5). To counter this problem of majority as being Uyghur, the government accelerated the migration of Han Chinese there so that the Uyghur power can be declined and economic activities can be facilitated. Han Chinese are currently the minority group in Xinjiang that are given more power than the majority group of Uyghurs and it has ultimately resulted in the concentration of wealth one side. Uyghurs are struggling to regain their autonomy from China that they once had before 1949 and want to implement the political structure of their own which has turned into a conflict for China. The Chinese government is very concerned over the security and territorial control matters of the region and does not let the Uyghurs to come in power. This dilemma forced many rebellious groups to respond with violence to which Chinese government participated equally.

***The Outbreak of Violence in Xinjiang***

Uyghurs are striving to reduce the presence of Han Chinese in their homeland so that they could acquire enough power to claim their autonomy both physically and politically in its internal matters[[6]](#footnote-6). This has led to the severe conflict as many Uyghurs that claim to solve this problem through national independence has already turned the matters violent for the government to handle. In this battle between the rebellious group and the government to hold control over the region, a large bulk of the population is left helpless, oppressed, paralyzed and fearful. The Uyghur people of this population are exposed to all forms of threats coming to them from both sides. Thus, the lives of Uyghur people in Xinjiang region are now at stake due to these corrective measures taken by the Communist government in the name of re-education camps[[7]](#footnote-7). These concentration camps are violating the human rights of thousands of people and rising serious questions.

***Ethnic conflict***

The triggering component that led to this violent clash prevailing in Xinjiang now is the ethnic conflict. Uyghurs considers themselves drastically different from the other ethnic groups of China due to their religion, history and culture etc. They have a claim that they are ought to be separated from the country and form their own autonomous state as they are in majority in Xinjiang and Xinjiang belongs to them[[8]](#footnote-8). They make more than half of the population of the Xinjiang if other minor ethnic groups are also included with them on the basis of similar faith. The differences they have with Han Chinese are many that should not be denied as Uyghurs are of Turkish descent and have language related to Turkish[[9]](#footnote-9). They practice Islam as an important element of their daily lives and identity which is way they are finding it hard to assimilate with the rest of the China[[10]](#footnote-10). They protest that they should be treated as a separate ethnic identity whereas authorities disagree with this commencement[[11]](#footnote-11).

***Religious persecution***

Chinese government in its attempts to re-education the Uyghur population is forcing the Xinjiang citizens to change their faith. The authorities are banning the public practice of Uyghurs’ religion and are punishing those who opt for scarf or beard. They have also formed thousands of hidden camps in the region where Uyghurs are imprisoned who refuse to deviate from their path. Recently, many cases were reported to the international media related to the innocent Uyghurs who were kept for years in prisons without any legal justification. Excessive policing is implemented all over the Xinjiang to observe the actions of Uyghurs and monitor their religious activities. China defends its actions of religious persecution as precautionary measures against the so called terrorism threat that can damage the country[[12]](#footnote-12).

***Economic conflict***

Apart from all the ethnic and religious differences to which Uyghurs are exposed to, there is significant economic conflict present in the Xinjiang. Xinjiang is a region enriched with natural resources like oil and gas and due to this separate reason the Chinese leadership is very much anxious for the loss of the region in future. They cannot afford to lose the Xinjiang as along with abundant resources, Xinjiang also links China to the trade with Europe from its west border. This is why authorities have deprived the Uyghurs of the economic independence as well so that they do not rise to claim for an autonomous state.

***Human rights violation***

China is clearly violating the human rights of the Uyghurs present in Xinjiang with its excessive involvement in the internal matters of the region by opting for illegal tactics[[13]](#footnote-13). The concentrations camps are more like prison and does not depict any feature of schools. China has managed to legalize the unlawful camps in the country[[14]](#footnote-14). Uyghurs cannot travel on Chinese passport internationally due to one of the restrictions China has imposed on them.

***Similarities and Differences Between Burma and Xinjiang***

Looking in the history, many similar issues were faced in different parts of the world where many insurgent groups emerged and went on civil war with the government for decades[[15]](#footnote-15). From all these examples, the most relevant case that best suits in terms of violence and conflict is Burmian conflict[[16]](#footnote-16). Burma has many sharp similarities with the Uyghur people in Xinjiang. The historical elements of Burma and Xinjiang are somewhat similar as both the lands gained their independence in 1948, Xinjiang however became part of China immediately in 1949. In Burma, many rebel groups emerged to fight against the government for the power but they had significant differences as well that led to acceleration of the conflict. Majority population in Burma is of Muslims and due to this fact many Rohingyan muslims are in a state of battle since 1940s to create a separate Islamic state for themselves in the west of Burma. Burma like Xinjiang is also rich in resources as it produces the opium and heroin needed for narcotics business. The grounds of both the kinds of conflicts are similar here with a huge contrast of international position of both the countries. Burma’s central control was very weak over its west side whereas China’s central is quite strong and dominant in Xinjiang region with high policing. Burma’s government also faced hurdles in funding their military against the rebelled groups, this is why Burma opted for Patronage whereas this is not the case with China. China has not faced any trouble in financial assistance related to its military. Burma is a weak country with insubstantial governance and very low economic development that is still struggling to maintain its existence in the world whereas China is one of the most powerful countries in the world at present with strong political leadership.

***Lessons for Xinjiang***

Although there is great resemblance in both the cases but the differences are also evident enough to think carefully for adaption of the solution. Excessive policing and imprisonment is certainly not the answer as well for the solution to this conflict. Matters should be resolved with effective negotiation of both the parties and differences should be respected not integrated.

End Notes

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