Recent discriminatory policies towards the Uighur ethnic group in Xinjiang, China

Cassidy Anne Weekes

1Global Conflict Studies, Department of Security Studies & International Affairs, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Introduction

In 1949, when Communist China and Mao came into power, the regime quickly took control of their “territory,” which included Xinjiang province. This province makes up almost one sixth of overall Chinese land and shares borders with eight other states. The Uighur ethnic minority mainly lives in Xinjiang and identify as Muslim people who have close ties with multiple Central Asia countries. In a census from 2010, there were over ten million Uighur’s making up a little under 1% of the population and almost all practicing Islam. Over the years, the Uighur and Han ethnic groups have had tension which has created the desire for separation within some of the Uighur ethnic group. Xinjiang is bordered by five Muslim countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, which means that the Uighur people have close support for their differences from the rest of China. This was a concern for Mao, who when in power employed different policies in order to keep the Uighurs from seceding. In recent years the policies against minorities have increased in discriminatory behavior and become more directed towards the Uighur minority.

Methods

• Peer-reviewed articles and open-source documents
• Qualitative analysis of case studies.
• Limit: Past 10 years; Updating previously published work
• Case-study based approach which has many advantages in social sciences including “their causal complexity”2.
• Qualitative analysis of case studies.
• Extra points taken off of state exams
• Previously added points taken away from minorities who take the Gaokao, the Chinese university entrance exam, in Mandarin and not their native language
• An incentive to learn Mandarin
• Minorities have a longer graduation time and harder time finding jobs

Results

The Government’s Construction of Uighur Identity and its Effects

• Number of Accused Terrorists by the Chinese Government in Xinjiang
• Officials within China reported that hundreds of individuals joined terrorist activities and became more directed towards the Uighur minority. This has increased national and local policies that directly affect the relations between the Uighar and Han ethnic groups. The new label has created a tenser relationship between the two ethnic groups by giving one a discriminatory behavior and become more directed towards the Uighur minority.
• In 1949, when Communist China and Mao came into power, the regime quickly took control of their “territory,” which included Xinjiang province. This province makes up almost one sixth of overall Chinese land and shares borders with eight other states. The Uighur ethnic minority mainly lives in Xinjiang and identify as Muslim people who have close ties with multiple Central Asia countries. In a census from 2010, there were over ten million Uighur’s making up a little under 1% of the population and almost all practicing Islam. Over the years, the Uighur and Han ethnic groups have had tension which has created the desire for separation within some of the Uighur ethnic group. Xinjiang is bordered by five Muslim countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, which means that the Uighur people have close support for their differences from the rest of China. This was a concern for Mao, who when in power employed different policies in order to keep the Uighurs from seceding. In recent years the policies against minorities have increased in discriminatory behavior and become more directed towards the Uighur minority.

Results (Continued)

Effects of Religious Policies

• Banning of Uighurs from sports events in 2014
• Poster published creating a regulation on clothing and appearance features like beards and goatees
• Ban retribution of a deadly attack carried out by extremists who happened to be Uighurs

Effects of Labor Market Policies

• Forced Labor or Hashars
• Officials in Xinjiang province have warned members of the Uyghur ethnic minority that they must surrender religious items on pain of “harsh punishment”6.

Effects of Education Policies

• Change of Language in schools
• Hotan in South-Western Xinjiang faces new education policy in 2017
• The new policy “insists on fully popularizing the national common language and writing system according to law, and add the education of ethnic language under the bilingual education basic principle”7.

Effects of Religious Policies

• Karamay City, Prefecture level city in North Xinjiang
• Poster published creating a regulation on clothing and appearance features like beards and goatees
• Ban retribution of a deadly attack carried out by extremists who happened to be Uighurs

Effects of Labor Market Policies

• Forced Labor or Hashars
• The government of China is using forced labor or hashars to not only help stop terrorism, but they are creating “re-education” camps, forcing men who have been accused of helping individuals that are seen as terrorists to re-learn what is right and wrong in Chinese society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has added to research by analyzing the most recent policies in order to show the increase of tension and divide within Xinjiang. The analysis of these policies shows discriminatory tendencies that are directed towards the Uighur minority. These policies are very recent and not all effects have been seen, but through analysis and comparison with policies previously implemented, the divide between the Han and Uighur’s looks to be increasing, and the government’s actions may create a backlash effect. Not only is this paper looking at the effects of Uighurs in Xinjiang, but this gets to ethnic integration all over the world and what states need to do to make sure they are not increasing the tension by using discriminatory policies.

For the future, the national government in China and other governments who may face this problem need to review their policies and their ultimate goals to see if they coincide or not. Specifically, with focusing on China, it must be noted that this type of authoritarian government has the ability to use any policies they see fit without any input from their citizens. For further research into the most recent discriminatory policies other scholars can add by traveling to Xinjiang and collecting personal data from survey’s and interviews. Ethnic relations in a region is important for a stable environment and the Chinese national government needs to decide whether their ultimate goal is to squash the Uigher identity or increase the positive relations between the Uighar and Han ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

References

[8] [Figure] China Map, China Province Map, China City Map. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2018, from http://www.identifycon-china-map-china-maps.html