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**The Uygur: Friendless in the Turkic World?**

**By Stephen Sullivan**

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The Uygur people of Xinjiang China are in really a very unenviable position.

They do not wear saffron robes and are not Buddhists (or at least not any more) so they do not attract the attention of the Richard Gere's of this world as the Tibetans do. Somehow after "9/11" being Muslim does not elicit a lot of world sympathy.

They live under a regime whose censorship laws are so harsh that you could be imprisoned ( and possibly worse) for handing out leaflets that are anyway negative of the state. So, they can not effectively get the message of their plight to the outside world.

They live in a country that is on the verge of an economic boom which has all the capitalists "free" nations around the world almost salivating to get a part of the bone and who are willing to bury any scruples or ignore any "minor issues" of human right abuses to do so.

But the Uygur are a Turkic people and until fairly recently that meant something important to them. They had a worldwide brotherhood of "kinsmen" stretching from the Central Asian plateaus through to the Caucuses and to Turkey. Among these "brothers" they sought solace, moral support and inspiration. In many instances their lives were saved by being able to step over the borders of Xinjiang into the neighbouring Turkic nations. Generations of Uygur intelligentsia have looked to Turkey for inspiration as leaders and supporters.

However, as recent new articles attest, this is no longer the case. Where, once they sought and received a shoulder, now the Uygur may face a fist. Where once they may have sought sanctuary more than likely now they will be marched back to the borders and forcibly repatriated no matter what their possible fate. Where once in Turkey they had parks named after their nationalist leaders now the Uygur organisations in diaspora are refused the right to hold peaceful international meetings.

This then is the reality of Central Asian and Turkish politics today where "brothers" can be ignored.

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Is it because the Uygurs are international terrorists? Do they pose a threat to regional peace and safety? No, it is no more than a desire by these nations to curry favour with the Chinese.

The Central Asian states, predominantly run by near despots who came up from the ranks of the old Soviet regimes, see the wealth of opportunity of being viewed as supportive of Beijing. Trade deals, millions of dollars in potential investment and one plus billion potential consumers can do a lot to turn a fellow's head. Being less than vocal in supporting the Uygur is a small investment indeed for the expected returns.

The "Great Game" of the 19th and early 20th centuries that was played out between Russia and Britain over Central Asia and north western China is back on and being joined by the likes of the United States, China, India and some European countries including Turkey. Each is trying for an economic

and/or military presence. The Central Asians are falling over themselves in accommodation, hedging bets each way and that all for the sake of almighty dollar, yuan or ruble.

One of the articles I mention ( "Uyghurs offended at newspaper slur" Institute of War and Peace Reporting 23/1/04) cite, among other things, reports how a Kazakhstan newspaper essentially branded the 50,000 – 200,000 plus Uygurs (depending on whose figures you believe) living in Kazakhstan as terrorists and trouble makers. This is not a new story though it has not been as publicly stated before. In Uzbekistan for example there have been rumblings against the Uygur residents there for some time. The publication of this article, however, does mark a watershed for the Uygur.

Whilst the Kazakhstan Interior Minister distances his government from the opinions expressed in the news article one can not help thinking back to the early rumblings against another ethnic group. Not that one expects a "final solution" to the Uygur question but the outcome could be less than pleasant for the Uygur in Xinjiang and of Central Asia generally if they continue to remain friendless in the world.

The Uygur truly are in an unenviable position. Alone in the world, championed by no one and now sold out by their brothers for 12 pieces of silver. It is hoped that they are happy with the money and do not want to take a part in the execution.

Amateur "uyguurologist" author and webmaster of the "uygurWORLD" group of websites

### **The Chinese Bin Laden: The terrorist leader China forgot**

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On December 15, the People's Republic of China commenced a series of press releases on "Uygur Terrorism" in which they "publicly" and for the "first time" identified Uygur organisations and individuals that they claim to be terrorists.

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The Uygur are a Turkic/Muslim ethnic group numbering some 7 million who live mainly in the economically and strategically important north western border region known as Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

A Caucasian race and speaking the Turkic language the Uygur have long harbored sentiments of independence and there were several isolated incidences of violence perpetrated in the 1990s by individuals or small groups claiming to represent this cause. More realistically today the Uygur generally seek nothing more than greater autonomy and cultural integrity within the PRC

The Chinese have repeatedly claimed that there existed several well organised and active "separatist/terrorist" organisations whose objective were for the Uygur to gain independence from China and the establishment of the state of East Turkestan.

They have attributed some 400 terrorist acts to these groups which they claim have resulted in 200 deaths and 400 injured to these groups since 1990.

On the basis of this "organised" and "ongoing" terrorist activity the PRC has very heavily cracked down on any form of dissent, rights of association, free speech and religious freedom. Amnesty International, among other groups and commentators, has claimed numerous incidence of unlawful detention, prison sentences and even executions in the name of the "War on Terrorism".

It is also claimed, by some who are knowledgeable in the "Uygur Question", that like some other states in Central Asia and elsewhere, China have used the events of "9/11" and the subsequent "War on Terrorism" to mask ongoing and premeditated attacks on this ethnic group. By bringing their policies concerning the Uygur under the banner of The "War" they have been successful in achieving their objectives without international scrutiny, and further, in fact, the likes of the US have turned a "blind eye" to these activities as a trade off for Chinese support.

Among the organisations listed in these series of press releases was the "East Turkestan Islamic Movement" a little known group who had been listed in 2002 as an internationally recognised terrorist organisation by the UN as a result of lobbying by China and supported by the United States.

The press releases claimed the leader of this so called terrorist group was one Hassan Mahsun an Uygur living in exile who, it was further claimed, had strong ties to Al Qaida and had masterminded, among other things, several bomb attacks within China. These claims had been refuted by Mahsun in several prior interviews.

These were the events of December 15 2003.

On December 23 2003 it was reported by the BBC that Mahsun was killed in October 2003 by Pakistani soldiers in a raid on a suspected Al Qaida hideout in South Waziristan, Pakistan. It was further reported that the Chinese Government were involved in making positive identification of the body through DNA testing.

On the same day the Chinese newspaper Xinhua ran a similar story. Later that day Xinhua edited out

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all links to the story claiming it had been withdrawn because of its "sensitive nature". (Yahoo News)  
How then does the PRC release fairly significant press statements identifying the virtual "Bin Laden" of Uygur terrorists groups when they supposedly actively participated in his bodies identification in October? Why was the Xinhua article cut?

It would seem that these events give strong credence to the arguments that the PRC is waging a calculated and pre-meditated campaign against the Uygur. At the very least it raises some very serious questions.

How could this happen? Perhaps because the press release was written well in advance and set for release at a particular opportune time?

Does the cutting of the Xinhua article prove that the PRC recognises it's fairly significant mistake?

Does the fact that this mistake was allowed to occur prove that the case for the existence of Uygur terrorism argued by the PRC is not taken seriously enough, even by them, to the point that the death of China's "Bin Laden" is of so little consequence?

These questions raise very serious doubts about the Chinese claims as to the existence of Uygur terrorist groups and in doing so suggests that the Chinese "War on Terrorism" is in fact a war on the Uygur and their human rights.

It also casts serious doubts on the US's and other countries' foreign policy towards China ( and other countries for that matter) in respect of human rights violations in the name of the "War on Terrorism".

In pursuit of the objectives embodied in the "War on Terrorism" are we "throwing the baby out with the bath water"?

The author is an Australian who runs the uygurWORLD group of non profit websites concerning the Uygur and Turkic peoples of Central Asia. He is also the publisher of "The Ugur Letter"



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