



Civil Resistance Against Authoritarian and Religious Radicalism



The Global Challenge of Authoritarianism (China) and the Plight of the Uyghurs: An Urgent Call for International Solidarity



Dolkun Isa

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Rise of Authoritarianism: A Contemporary Challenge	4
The Uyghur Situation: Historical Context and Current Realities	6
Uyghur Repression: Mechanisms of Oppression and Cultural Erasure	7
The Broader Implications of Cultural Suppression and Human Rights Abuses	9
Transnational Repression and Its Global Implications	10
Case Study: Dolkun Isa and the Challenges of Activism	12
So call Autonomous: Rights in Theory and Practice	13
Theoretical Rights vs. Practical Violations	14
Political Rights	14
Economic and Social Rights	15
Cultural and Educational Rights	15
Religious Rights	16
Rights over Underground and Surface Resources	16
Conclusion	17
Implications for International Human Rights Law	18
Toward International Solidarity and Action	18
Conclusion	19

About the Author

Dolkun Isa is currently the President of the Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights and Former President and Co-Founder of the World Uyghur Congress, and the Author of the "China Freedom Trap". He is a former student-leader of the pro-democracy movement in East Turkistan in 1988. He fled China in 1994. In 1997, he was added to the Interpol Red Notice list at the request of the Chinese government, leading to his detention at many country borders, only to be deleted in 2018. He has advocated for the rights of the Uyghurs at international forums.

His mother died in a concentration camp in 2018 in China, and his two brothers were sentenced to long-term prison. In 2016, he was awarded by the Washington-based Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. In 2019, he received on behalf of the WUC, the NED World Democracy Award. In 2023, he was also awarded the honorary membership award by the German Society for Threatened Peoples. In 2020, he requested that Sir Geoffrey Nice QC establish an independent tribunal - Uyghur Tribunal to investigate 'the Genocide' against the Uyghurs.



Fereydoon Rahmani

Abstract

The plight of the Uyghur people in East Turkestan ("Xinjiang") exemplifies the extreme measures used by authoritarian regimes to suppress ethnic and religious identities. This piece examines the nonviolent resistance spearheaded by Uyghur activists, focusing specifically on my (Dolkun İsa's) experiences as the founding and former President of the World Uyghur Congress. My journey recaps Uyghurs' struggles for justice, particularly their experiences with the Interpol Red Notice, which highlighted transnational repression. This topic is explored in detail and with my personal experience in my new book, "The China Freedom Trap: My Life on the Run," published by Optimum Publishing International in October 2023 in Canada.

From digital advocacy to community solidarity to peaceful protests, Uyghur activists have employed a variety of nonviolent strategies to raise awareness about their plight. They aim to transform the narrative surrounding their struggle and demonstrate the intersection of cultural identity, human rights, stop the ongoing genocide, and the fight against authoritarianism. The significant challenges they face, including censorship and repression, underscore the need for innovative strategies that can effectively engage with and garner support from global audiences.

Our work focuses on voicing these concerns on international platforms, highlighting dialogues calling for accountability, and highlighting the ongoing Uyghur genocide in East Turkistan. We advocate for an end to the authoritarian tactics employed by the Chinese government and promote a vision of peaceful resistance that seeks justice rather than revenge. Our interactions with global leaders and rights organizations reveal the potential of nonviolent movements to influence geopolitical dynamics and foster transnational solidarity.

This research will place Uyghur nonviolent efforts within the broader context of everyday resistance against authoritarianism and draw parallels with movements worldwide. By analyzing the structural and contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of nonviolent action, we aim to uncover lessons learned from the Uyghur struggle. This analysis not only reveals one person's resistance to oppression but also offers insights into the interconnected nature of global resistance movements.

Ultimately, the aim is to contribute to the ongoing discourse on civil resistance and advocate for a renewed understanding of how nonviolent action can combat authoritarianism and foster pluralism. By using the Uyghur experience, particularly my personal experiences as a case study, we hope to inspire new frameworks of solidarity that transcend borders and foster collective action against the injustices faced by marginalized communities.

Introduction

The current geopolitical landscape is increasingly characterized by the alarming rise of authoritarian regimes, which are testing the foundations of democratic governance and undermining universal human rights. This trend is evident across the globe, as seen in various contexts—from the aggression displayed in Ukraine to genocidal acts in Sudan, from the relentless persecution of the Rohingya to the escalating atrocities in Gaza. These situations exemplify a growing global crisis where communities are witnessing the systematic erosion of their rights and freedoms, particularly those of oppressed peoples.

Amidst this backdrop, the plight of the Uyghurs in East Turkistan (known as Xinjiang), China, stands out as a particularly egregious example of state-sponsored repression. Reports of mass detentions, forced labor, and cultural genocide highlight a deeply troubling reality that has emerged in recent years. The Chinese government employs various mechanisms of repression under the guise of combating terrorism, implementing extensive surveillance measures, and establishing a network of “re-education” camps designed to indoctrinate Uyghurs and other Türkic Muslims. Within these camps, individuals are subjected to severe psychological manipulation and are faced with harsh restrictions on their cultural and religious practices, aiming to erase Uyghur identity.

This paper examines the rise of authoritarian regimes globally, focusing specifically on the human rights abuses committed against the Uyghur people. It delves into the complex dynamics of oppression in East Turkistan, analyzing the implications for international human rights laws and frameworks. Furthermore, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of various struggles against authoritarianism, recognizing that the challenges faced by the Uyghurs resonate with those experienced by myriad oppressed groups worldwide.

Additionally, the global response to these human rights violations warrants critical examination. While there have been condemnations and targeted sanctions against Chinese officials, the need for a cohesive international reaction is more pressing than ever. Countries must unite to uphold the principles of democracy, human rights, and self-determination, ensuring that their actions resonate with a commitment to solidarity among communities facing similar challenges across the globe.

In summation, the rise of authoritarian rule presents formidable challenges to global human rights efforts. The situation of the Uyghurs is not only a significant humanitarian crisis but also a pivotal moment that underscores the need for international solidarity, coordinated action, and unwavering advocacy for the rights of all marginalized peoples and to stop an ongoing genocide.

The Rise of Authoritarianism: A Contemporary Challenge

The past decade has witnessed a troubling resurgence of authoritarianism, evidenced by the increasing consolidation of power in regimes that suppress dissent and erode fundamental human rights. Authoritarian regimes employ a variety of tactics to maintain their grip on power, including military aggression, propaganda, and technological surveillance. Among these regimes, China has emerged as a prominent player, exhibiting a unique blend of traditional authoritarianism and a strategic manipulation of international norms and institutions.

One of China's primary strategies for promoting its authoritarian model on the global stage involves the deliberate cultivation of alliances with other autocratic states. This has significant implications for the international human rights landscape, as these states often collaborate to undermine universally accepted human rights norms. The Chinese government has actively worked to reshape the understanding of human rights at the UN, promoting the concept of "sovereignty" and emphasizing the primacy of state security over individual rights. This narrative implies that a stable government should prioritize national security, thereby legitimizing state repression and the restriction of personal freedoms.

China's influence at international institutions, such as the UN and INTERPOL, exemplifies its strategy to export its authoritarianism. The country has sought to position itself as a leader in multilateralism while simultaneously undermining the principles of democratic governance and human rights that underpin these institutions. Chinese diplomats have strategically aligned themselves with other authoritarian regimes to push back against criticism of their human rights records and to counter campaigns advocating for greater transparency and accountability.

A prime example of this manipulation can be observed in the workings of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). China has exerted considerable influence within this body, often employing its diplomatic leverage to silence dissenters and minimize scrutiny of its domestic practices. By fostering partnerships with other authoritarian states, China has effectively mobilized votes within the Council, leading to the adoption of resolutions that deflect attention from its human rights abuses while promoting a distorted view of human rights that aligns with its political objectives.

Additionally, China has engaged in the practice of "shaming and blaming" dissidents at international forums. By leveraging its economic power, China attempts to coerce countries into refraining from criticizing its practices. This coercive diplomacy serves to isolate Uyghur advocates and human rights defenders abroad, deterring them from speaking out against the repression that afflicts their communities.

Countries that depend on economic ties with China often choose silence over confrontation, inadvertently enabling Beijing's authoritarian agenda.

The Chinese government has also exploited the INTERPOL system to pursue dissidents outside its borders. Reports indicate that China has misused alerts, including Red Notices, to target activists and critics living abroad, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. For instance, individuals who have voiced opposition to the Chinese government have often found themselves facing legal repercussions or deportation due to unfounded charges relayed through INTERPOL's system, which is ideally meant to facilitate cross-border cooperation in combating crime.

Furthermore, China's approach to international legal frameworks raises significant concerns. The country has made efforts to influence the drafting and interpretation of international treaties and norms to align with its interests, often favoring state sovereignty over the protection of individual rights. This strategy is evident in its push for a redefinition of the concept of human rights; China promotes a model that emphasizes economic development and social stability, effectively sidelining civil and political rights.

In addition to its maneuvers within established institutions, China actively participates in the creation of new multilateral frameworks that reflect its authoritarian values. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) not only serve economic purposes but also facilitate the dissemination of governance models that prioritize control over individual freedoms. By exporting its surveillance technologies and repressive practices to partner countries, China aims to create a global network of authoritarian governance that can potentially normalize these practices on an international scale.

China's diplomatic outreach also extends to enhancing bilateral relations with other authoritarian regimes. This mutual support enables these governments to share strategies for maintaining power and suppressing dissent. For instance, collaborations with authoritarian states in Africa and Central Asia have led to the exportation of China's surveillance technology and the adoption of similar repressive tactics. Such global networking plays a crucial role in fortifying authoritarian control and eroding the progress toward democratization in various regions.

Additionally, the Chinese government has strategically advanced its interests through economic investment and development assistance. By tying aid to compliance with its political narrative, China seeks to ensure that recipient countries do not criticize its human rights record. This economic leverage creates a silencing effect, as countries are often hesitant to confront China's abuses for fear of losing valuable trade relationships.

The cumulative impact of these strategies reflects a concerted effort by China to disrupt and displace international norms that uphold human rights and freedoms. The establishment of a parallel framework for human rights, which prioritizes state sovereignty and emphasizes economic development over individual rights, poses a challenge to the longstanding global consensus that has traditionally supported democratic principles.

In summary, China's evolving approach to international norms and institutions illustrates the complexities of authoritarianism in the contemporary global order. By cultivating alliances with other repressive regimes, manipulating international legal frameworks, and leveraging economic power, China continues its campaign of ideological influence. These efforts not only threaten the integrity of international human rights standards but also signal a broader challenge to democratic governance around the world. Understanding these dynamics is critical for effectively addressing the challenges posed by authoritarianism and safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities, particularly the Uyghurs in East Turkistan.

The Uyghur Situation: Historical Context and Current Realities

The Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic group primarily located in East Turkistan, also known as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China. Historically, this region has been characterized by a rich cultural heritage and a deep-rooted sense of ethnic identity. However, the situation for Uyghurs has drastically deteriorated since China's invasion in 1949. Over the decades, successive Chinese governments have implemented policies aimed at suppressing Uyghur identity, culminating in a systematic campaign of repression.

The launch of the 'Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism' in May 2014 represents a significant turning point. The campaign aims to combat what the Chinese government labels the "Three Evil Forces": ethnic separatism, violent terrorism, and religious extremism. Under this pretext, the Chinese government has escalated its discriminatory policies against Uyghurs, framing them as necessary measures to combat terrorism. Yet, the reality on the ground reveals a different narrative, where the notion of terrorism is used to justify widespread human rights abuses that target the very fabric of Uyghur life.

Since 2017, over 3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples have been arbitrarily detained in concentration camps. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has employed various mechanisms to implement these repressive measures, including mass arbitrary detentions, forced labor, and extensive surveillance. Under the leadership of Chen Quanguo, appointed as the Party Secretary in August 2016, the

XUAR (East Turkistan) has seen an increase in technological surveillance that aims to monitor and control the Uyghur population meticulously. Quanguo had previously been appointed in Tibet, where he led the development of a system for control using new technologies. The “Integrated Joint Operations Platform” (IJOP) serves as a central system for data collection and analysis, utilizing advanced digital monitoring to target individuals based on their ethnicity and religion.

Uyghur Repression: Mechanisms of Oppression and Cultural Erasure

The systematic repression of the Uyghur population in East Turkistan epitomizes a comprehensive state-sponsored assault on identity, culture, and basic human rights. The Chinese government's oppression manifests through various mechanisms that not only aim to control the population but also seek to erase Uyghur cultural and linguistic identity.

One notable aspect of the Chinese government's policy on Uyghurs has been the establishment of an extensive network of concentration camps, where it is estimated that over one million (according to a UN report, but Uyghur and some other reports estimated around 3 million) Uyghur and around 1 million Uyghur children have been separated from their families. These children are subjected to policies aimed at remolding their identities, often referred to as "re-education". Reports suggest that these camps employ coercive measures including indoctrination, forced labor, and psychological manipulation, to achieve their objectives. The severing of familial bonds serves both as a significant violation of human rights and as a calculated strategy to displace cultural continuity among the Uyghur population.



Detainees listening to speeches in a camp in Lop County, Xinjiang, April 2017

The August 2022 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights marked a crucial moment in documenting these abuses. The report substantiated claims of systemic human rights violations against Uyghurs, including arbitrary detentions, forced labor, and the destruction of Uyghur cultural heritage. It underscored concerns that these actions might constitute crimes against humanity, highlighting the urgency for the international community to respond to the situation.

Moreover, the report corroborated testimonies regarding the treatment of individuals within these camps, detailing the harsh living conditions, a lack of access to basic rights, and the psychological toll exacted on Uyghur detainees. The culmination of these perspectives reinforced the broader understanding that the policies on Uyghurs aim to systematically destroy the Uyghur culture.

In addition to the concentration camps, cultural repression extends to educational policies designed to suppress the Uyghur language and promote Mandarin Chinese dominance. The Chinese government has instituted policies promoting bilingual education, ostensibly to enhance communication and cohesion within a multicultural society. However, the implementation has often led to the marginalization of the Uyghur language and culture, resulting in the erosion of Uyghur identity. By prioritizing Mandarin, the Chinese state seeks to assimilate Uyghurs into a Han-centric national identity, effectively diluting ethnic distinctiveness. This linguistic suppression is not merely an educational policy but an extension of the state's broader campaign to integrate Uyghurs into the dominant cultural narrative while eradicating their unique identity.

Furthermore, the establishment of madrassas and public schools that emphasize Mandarin language and 'patriotic education' further exemplifies efforts to indoctrinate the youth. Curricula are infused with nationalism aimed at fostering loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, while Uyghur cultural education is systematically downplayed or erased. This approach serves to instill a sense of cultural deficiency surrounding Uyghur identity, generating internalized stigma that detracts from a positive sense of self among Uyghur youth.

An especially concerning aspect of this cultural erasure is the targeting of religious freedom. The Chinese state has imposed severe restrictions on religious practices within the Uyghur community. Between 2017 and 2020, it is estimated that around 8,000 mosques were demolished, while another 8,000 were partially destroyed. The Islamic names of mosques have been banned, further demonstrating the lengths to which the state will go to suppress Uyghur religious identity. Moreover, the wearing of hijabs, maintaining beards, and displaying other religious symbols are prohibited, further limiting the ability of individuals to express their faith.

Essential religious practices such as fasting, prayer, religious marriages, and funeral rites have also been banned, creating an environment where traditional Islamic practices are systematically dismantled. These actions signify not just a violation of individual rights but a deeper assault on the very essence of Uyghur cultural identity, with implications extending to future generations.

The findings of the London Uyghur Tribunal in 2021 further reinforce the narrative that these practices constitute an ongoing genocide against the Uyghur people. This independent tribunal, comprised of legal experts and human rights advocates, found overwhelming evidence of crimes committed against Uyghurs in China, marking a significant step in documenting state-sponsored repression. The tribunal concluded that the Chinese government's actions against the Uyghurs amounted to genocide, particularly regarding the forcible transfer of children and the systematic destruction of Uyghur culture.

The Broader Implications of Cultural Suppression and Human Rights Abuses

The implications of these systematic repressive measures extend far beyond the immediate suffering of Uyghurs. They represent a fundamental challenge to the international human rights framework and pose critical questions regarding the responsibilities of the global community. The repression experienced by Uyghurs has far-reaching consequences, as it challenges the principles of self-determination, cultural preservation, and human dignity.

The international response to the abuses on Uyghurs has often been plagued by political hesitance and reluctance. While international human rights organizations and advocacy groups have raised alarms regarding the situation, concrete action remains limited. The UN's August 2022 report and subsequent findings from independent tribunals signal an urgent need for the international community to adopt a more robust stance in responding to state-sponsored human rights violations.



The Id Kah Mosque in 2023

Moreover, the entrenched nature of China's authoritarianism complicates the pursuit of accountability. The Chinese government employs tactics of coercive diplomacy and economic leverage, often dissuading nations from confronting its human rights record. The fear of economic repercussions has led many countries to prioritize trade relations over the ethical imperative of addressing human rights abuses, thereby enabling the continuation of these severe violations.

As the plight of the Uyghurs unfolds, there is an undeniable and pressing need for international solidarity. Advocacy for Uyghur rights must include collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders to raise awareness, mobilize public opinion, and hold perpetrators accountable. This solidarity will also entail acknowledging the interconnectedness of human rights struggles worldwide, reinforcing the importance of collective action in combating authoritarianism and promoting democratic values.

In conclusion, the systematic repression of Uyghurs highlights not only the abuse of human rights but also a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of cultural identity and the role of the state. The strategies employed by the Chinese government seek to erase an entire cultural identity, leaving in their wake a generation stripped of its heritage. It is incumbent upon the international community to confront these realities, ensuring that the voices of the oppressed are amplified and that the fundamental tenets of human rights are upheld.

Transnational Repression and Its Global Implications

The scope of the Chinese government's repression extends far beyond its borders, encompassing a transnational network of control that targets not only Uyghurs but also activists from Tibet, Hong Kong, Inner Mongolia, and Chinese human rights activists. This form of repression profoundly impacts their lives as they navigate a landscape characterized by intimidation, surveillance, and threats to their family members within China.

Countries such as Thailand and Cambodia have faced international pressure for their deportation of Uyghurs, demonstrating a concerning trend where the sovereignty of nations is leveraged against the rights and safety of ethnic minorities, particularly in the Global South. Reports indicate that in these countries, Uyghurs have been forcibly returned to China despite objections from Democratic countries, human rights organizations, highlighting the influence of Chinese diplomatic coercion.

Moreover, a disturbing trend has emerged where foreign states, particularly in the Global South and predominantly Muslim countries, have collaborated with the Chinese government to facilitate the suppression of Uyghurs. CCP has organized trips for diplomats, journalists, and so-called experts to the Uyghur region, exposing them to a highly curated propaganda narrative designed to foster the legitimacy of China's actions. These tours serve as vehicles for disseminating state-sanctioned narratives that deny the severity of Uyghur genocide, while portraying the region as an example of social stability and harmonious coexistence.

The Chinese state has also initiated measures to suppress dissenting voices from Tibet, Hong Kong, and Inner Mongolia. Activists from these regions face similar forms of transnational repression, including surveillance and harassment abroad. Chinese diplomats have been known to follow and photograph activists at international events, including UN meetings, attempting to intimidate them and undermine their visibility. The reach of Chinese state surveillance extends into diplomatic spaces, creating a climate of fear among human rights advocates who challenge Beijing's policies.

Within diaspora communities globally, Chinese state agents have reportedly conducted espionage operations, infiltrating gatherings of activists and monitoring their activities. Through sophisticated methods, including surveillance and gathering intelligence, these operations undermine the efforts of activists to speak out against the Chinese government. Disturbingly, families of dissidents in China have often been taken hostage, with the authorities utilizing loved ones as leverage to intimidate activists and silence dissenting voices abroad.

The establishment of Chinese police stations in over 150 cities and countries worldwide underscores the global reach of China's transnational repression. According to the 2022 report by the organization Safeguard Defenders, the Chinese regime is operating 30 police stations within the European Union. These overseas police outposts are believed to be used for extradition purposes and for monitoring dissidents, instilling a pervasive atmosphere of fear that deters individuals from expressing solidarity with their compatriots in China. By projecting its authority beyond its borders, the Chinese government effectively exports its repressive tactics, aiming to suppress dissent both within its territories and among diasporic communities worldwide.

49 Watford Way, one of the alleged Chinese overseas police stations, in London, United Kingdom



Case Study: Dolkun Isa and the Challenges of Activism

To illustrate these struggles, my (Dolkun Isa) case, a long-time pro-democracy Uyghur activist, unveils the relentless challenges faced by those opposing the Chinese government's repressive regime. Isa has been wanted by Interpol since 1997, facing a Red Notice for 21 years based on unfounded allegations from the Chinese state. This measure served as a tool for Beijing to intimidate and silence activists, creating a façade of legal legitimacy for pursuing dissenters on foreign soil.

Significantly, in February 2018, Dolkun Isa's Red Notice was removed by Interpol, marking a pivotal moment in his activism. The removal of the notice was viewed as a recognition of the politically motivated nature of the charges against him. By lifting the Red Notice, Interpol effectively acknowledged the concerns raised about the legitimacy of China's claims and the potential for abuse of the international legal system to suppress dissent. This development allowed Isa to travel more freely and advocate more vigorously for the rights of Uyghurs without the looming threat of arrest based on politically driven accusations.

However, despite this victory, Isa's activism remains fraught with challenges. His status as a prominent figure opposing the Chinese regime has placed him in precarious situations, as he encounters intimidation tactics from Chinese state agents wherever he goes. Isa has faced arrests and harassment in various countries, including South Korea and Italy, where his previous status as a wanted individual by Chinese authorities put him at significant risk.

His personal narrative is infused with tragedy; he lost his mother to a detention camp, which remains a poignant reminder of the human cost of China's repressive policies. Furthermore, the detainment of his two brothers, Yalkun Isa and Hushtar Isa, sentenced to 20 years and life imprisonment, respectively, exemplifies the stakes involved for Uyghurs who resist state oppression and continue to advocate for their rights.



Dolkun Issa as a speaker in the Turkish Muslim Young Leaders Training Program held in Krefeld, Germany

Dolkun Isa's experience reflects a broader pattern of persecution aimed at Uyghur activists and their families, as well as those from Tibet, Hong Kong, and Inner Mongolia. The security measures enacted by the Chinese government, including the deployment of Red Notices, not only seek to extradite dissidents but also foster an atmosphere of fear that inhibits activism within diaspora communities. This strategic targeting induces self-censorship among those living abroad, who may worry about repercussions for speaking out against the injustices faced by their compatriots.

In summary, the transnational repression exercised by the Chinese government illustrates a complex web of international complicity, fear, and manipulation. The efforts to silence dissenting voices extend well beyond China's borders, creating an environment where activism can be met with severe consequences. The global community has a responsibility to recognize these dynamics and to stand in solidarity with all those in exile, ensuring that the voices of the oppressed are amplified and that the fight for justice persists undeterred.

So call Autonomous: Rights in Theory and Practice

The ancestral homeland of the Uyghurs, East Turkistan, was designated by the Chinese government as the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" on October 1, 1955. This year marks the 70th anniversary of this so-called autonomous status. The Chinese government was holding major celebrations on October 1, 2025, to commemorate the occasion.

However, it's important to emphasize the following point:

The so-called "Uyghur Autonomous Region," declared on October 1, 1955, was never established as an institution based on the free will of the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in East Turkistan. It is solely a governance system forcibly imposed by the Central Government of the People's Republic of China.

In 1949, East Turkistan was occupied by the Communist Chinese army, and following the occupation, armed and ideological resistance continued in the region. During this period, the Chinese government declared the "autonomy" status in order to suppress Uyghur independence demands and to establish its own control.

The proposal by then-Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai on the "Establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" was approved by the Standing Committee of the China National People's Congress on September 13, 1955. The area, previously administered as "Xinjiang Province," was declared the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on October 1, 1955. However, no concrete or clear legal framework was provided to support the autonomy at the time of its declaration.

Twenty-nine years later, on May 31, 1984, the National People's Congress passed the Law on Regional National Autonomy. This law, consisting of 67 articles, theoretically recognized political, economic, cultural, and religious rights in autonomous regions, granted them established legislative, administrative, and local resource management powers under the law.

Within the framework of this law, five separate institutions were established in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region:

1. Communist Party of China Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party Committee
2. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region People's Government
3. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region People's Congress (regional legislature)
4. Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Political Consultative Conference
5. Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Bingtuan)

Although these institutions appear equal in written law, in practice, the highest decision-making authority is the China Communist Party Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party Committee. In other words, while there are five institutions on paper, the actual decision-making power rests entirely with the Party.

Thus, under the 67-article autonomy law adopted in May 1984, political, economic, cultural, and religious rights were theoretically recognized, but in practice, they have not been implemented. Even where implemented, only a very limited portion has been realized. The Chinese government has consistently showcased the law for its own purposes, rather than ensuring genuine autonomy.

Theoretical Rights vs. Practical Violations

1) Political Rights

Theoretical:

- The autonomous region has its own regional People's Congress and People's Government.
- Executive positions, particularly the governor and key posts, should be held by local ethnic groups (Uyghurs).
- The regional legislature can make local regulations, subject to Beijing's approval.
- Every ethnic group has the right to participate in state affairs and local democratic elections.

Practical:

- All political authority is concentrated in the hands of the CPC Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party Secretary. (Chinese)
- The governor and other administrative organs have no real decision-making power; local mechanisms operate only within the framework of the Party Secretary.
- Officials who are not Party members, especially Uyghurs and Kazakhs, cannot exercise decision-making or implement policies.
- Over 90% of Party officials are Chinese, and Uyghurs and Kazakhs are minimally represented; no actions can be taken without the Party Secretary's approval.

2) Economic and Social Rights

Theoretical:

- The region can formulate its own economic development plans and utilize its underground and surface resources.
- Resource revenues should primarily be used for the welfare of the local population.

Practical:

- The Chinese government favors Chinese nationals economically.
- Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other ethnic groups face serious discrimination despite legally recognized autonomous rights.
- Discrimination is persistent in workplaces, especially since 2008, young Uyghur have been relocated to other Chinese regions as cheap labor.
- Forced labor continues: 25% of global cotton production, over 40% of raw materials for solar panels, and significant portions of products such as ketchup and tomatoes rely on Uyghur forced labor.
- These practices violate Articles 23 and 10 of the Law on Regional National Autonomy.

3) Cultural and Educational Rights

Theoretical:

- Local languages (Uyghur language) should be used in official institutions and education.
- There is the right to mother-tongue education; textbooks should be prepared in local languages.
- Cultural heritage and ethnic traditions should be preserved.

Practical:

- Under the “bilingual” education program, Uyghur-language education has been completely eliminated.
- This violates Article 37 of the Autonomy Law and reflects the government’s aim to Sinicize Uyghur national education.
- Since 2004, education has been conducted primarily in Chinese.
- After the September 5, 2009, events, hundreds of Uyghur-language websites were shut down, and their administrators were arrested.
- Uyghur language activists such as Abdulla Ayup were threatened and imprisoned for opening a Uyghur language nursery in 2013.

4) Religious Rights

Theoretical:

- All people have the right to freely practice their religion.
- Places of worship should be protected, religious leaders trained, and religious institutions operated.

Practical:

- Religious freedoms are severely restricted.
- Between 2017–2020, approximately 8,000 mosques were demolished, and 8000 mosques were partly destroyed.
- Islamic names of mosques are banned.
- Hijabs, beards, and other religious symbols are prohibited.
- Fasting, prayer, religious marriage, and funeral rites are banned.
- These practices violate Article 11 of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Law.
- Reports by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) document these violations in detail.

5) Rights over Underground and Surface Resources

Theoretical:

- The region can manage its own resources, and most revenues should be allocated for local development.

Practical:

- East Turkistan’s oil, gold, uranium, gas, and other resources are controlled by the central government.
- Uyghur and Kazakh communities derive virtually no benefit from these resources.
- This violates Article 62 of the Law on Regional National Autonomy.

Conclusion

On paper, the 1984 Law on Regional National Autonomy provides the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region population with broad political representation, cultural freedoms, religious rights, and access to economic resources. However, in practice, all of these rights remain largely theoretical, suppressed by the central government's control and the dominance of the Communist Party.

The so-called “autonomy” granted by the Chinese government under the name of the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” is nothing more than a political mask. In reality, it serves to erase Uyghur identity, forcibly assimilate the Uyghur people, and permanently annex East Turkistan as Chinese territory.

History shows us clearly: whether under the Manchu Empire, the Nationalist regime, or the Chinese Communist Party, none of the promises made to the people of East Turkistan were ever honored. Every Chinese regime has sought to dismantle the region's political and cultural autonomy.

After the founding of the East Turkistan Republic in 1944, the Communist occupation of 1949, and the hollow declaration of “autonomy” in 1955, Uyghurs have been subjected to systematic oppression, their identity eroded, and their freedoms crushed under the weight of state control.

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2014, these policies have escalated into a full-scale campaign of genocide. United Nations assessments, independent investigations, the Uyghur Tribunal's rulings, international reports, and the recognition of Uyghur genocide and crimes against humanity by 11 parliaments—including the European Parliament—document the shocking reality: mass arbitrary detentions, forced labor, coercive birth control, and the deliberate destruction of Uyghur culture and heritage.

In the face of this ongoing atrocity, it has become undeniable that there is no lasting path for the Uyghurs to safeguard their identity, language, culture, and very existence other than through independence. The international community must no longer remain silent. It must recognize these crimes for what they are, uphold international law, and respect the Uyghur people's right to self-determination. Support for this fundamental right is not a matter of choice—it is a moral and political obligation.

Implications for International Human Rights Law

The challenges faced by the Uyghurs under authoritarian rule in China have profound implications for international human rights law. The systematic abuses occurring in East Turkistan underscore the need for a reevaluation of the mechanisms through which international human rights norms are enforced. Despite the existence of legal frameworks designed to protect individuals from state-sponsored violence and discrimination, the enforcement of these laws remains exceedingly weak, particularly when confronted with powerful authoritarian regimes.

The challenges faced by the Uyghurs under authoritarian rule in China have profound implications for international human rights law. The systematic abuses occurring in East Turkistan underscore the need for a reevaluation of the mechanisms through which international human rights norms are enforced. Despite the existence of legal frameworks designed to protect individuals from state-sponsored violence and discrimination, the enforcement of these laws remains exceedingly weak, particularly when confronted with powerful authoritarian regimes.

Toward International Solidarity and Action

The plight of the Uyghurs serves as a microcosm of broader struggles against authoritarianism and the fight for human rights worldwide. It is incumbent upon the international community to recognize the interconnectedness of these struggles and to embrace solidarity in the face of oppression. A unified front is essential for challenging the rising tide of authoritarianism, securing fundamental rights for all individuals, and affirming the principles of justice and dignity.

In advocating for Uyghurs, the global community must demand accountability from the Chinese government. Sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and coordinated international actions are necessary to challenge state-sponsored abuses. Additionally, initiatives that promote awareness and understanding of the Uyghur situation can mobilize public opinion and encourage civic engagement in support of human rights.

As we confront the disturbing realities of genocide and oppression, we must recognize that human rights violations anywhere threaten rights universally. The interconnectedness of today's globalized world compels us to act collectively, ensuring that the pursuit of justice and dignity is not confined to borders.

Conclusion

The rise of authoritarian regimes presents a formidable challenge that necessitates urgent action from the global community. The situation faced by the Uyghurs exemplifies the multifaceted nature of this struggle, highlighting the implications not only for individual rights but also for the integrity of international norms.

The call for action is clear: the safeguarding of human rights requires a commitment to accountability, solidarity, and activism. It is through the collective efforts of individuals, communities, and governments that we can challenge the prevailing tide of authoritarianism and work toward a future where freedoms are respected and where the dignity of every individual is upheld.

In conclusion, as we delve into these pressing issues, let us fortify our resolve to connect, support, and amplify the voices of those affected by oppression. Together, we can foster an environment where fundamental rights are not just recognized but actively protected, ensuring that the struggles of today pave the way for a more just and equitable tomorrow.



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