

China Ratchets Up Its Anti-Islam Campaign in Xinjiang

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In May 2018, the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Yao Jing, gave a lengthy interview to a Pakistani paper defending the Chinese government's treatment of the Muslim Uighurs. Among other claims, he insisted that the Chinese government has given full freedom to the Muslims and allowed them to observe fasting during Ramazan [Ramadan]. Muslims in China, he said, have full rights to practice Islam.

[Here is the report](#) on his defense of China's policy (the substandard English in the newspaper article has been left throughout):

In an exclusive interview with 'The News' Chinese Ambassador Yao has said that western media is showing totally different picture that Muslims in China don't have freedom to follow

Islam whereas situation on ground is totally different.

He said in China everyone is free to follow his religion in China because law gives them full protection to practice religion no matter one [sic] is Muslim, Christian or follow any other religion. Chinese ambassador said there is no restriction by the government even for government employees. "Muslims are free to follow Islam like in Pakistan," he added.

Ambassador told that Xinjiang is the Muslims majority region of China and they have around 24,400 mosques and many religious colleges in which number of Muslims are getting Islamic education. Not only this during Eids and traditional festivals, Muslims enjoy holidays here, which shows they are free to practice Islam in China.

Chinese ambassador further told that like other parts of the world a number of religious believers provide free 'iftar' to fasting people and the local governments help them to arrange religious activities go in order. [sic]

Every year number of Chinese Muslims performs Haj and Xinjiang government helps them to get medical treatment and other facilities," Chinese ambassador told. Chinese Ambassador said that China is growing economy in the world and some unhealthy minds are not happy with its development that's why western media is doing this propaganda that Muslims in China are not allowed to practice Islam.

Xinjiang province has distributed 43 Islamic publications in different languages of minority ethnic groups, totalling over one million copies, including over 230,000 copies of new Koran and over 29,000 copies of Basic Knowledge of Islam, both in the Uygur language. Thousands of books have been translated and published on Quran and Selections from Al-Sahih Muhammad Ibn-Ismail al-Bukhari in different languages, which are available in open market. Every year Xinjiang sent

number of Chinese Muslims students to Pakistan, Egypt and other Muslim countries for further studies, and to improve their religious knowledge.

The famous definition of a diplomat as “someone who is sent abroad to lie for his country” fits perfectly here. Far from allowing Muslims to observe Ramadan without hindrance, the Chinese government has made it harder, or in some cases impossible, for the devout to do so. The government in 2017 passed laws requiring all restaurants to stay open during Ramadan. Further, it has forbidden teachers, civil servants, and all those working in the public sector from observing Ramadan, and if any are caught doing so, “they will be dealt with.”

As for the ambassador’s mention of the “new Qur’ans” distributed by the Chinese government, it should be noted that Muslims have been required to hand in their own Qur’ans to the government if those copies were published before 2012. The reason for this is that in 2012, the Chinese government prepared “new” Qur’ans, heavily censored, with the “meaning” of the verses that remained annotated by government experts so as to lessen their anti-Infidel message, and the commands to wage Jihad carefully “contextualized.” The only Qur’ans now legal in China are the versions published by the government.

The ambassador claims in his interview that Muslims in China are free to go on the hajj. He fails to note that Muslims in Xinjiang must request government permission to do so, and that they are asked to register their age, job, health, and economic status. Strict guidelines are put in place for applicants, who must be aged between 50 and 70 and have lived in Urumqi, the region’s capital, for at least five years. They are thoroughly investigated by the government for their political views; anyone who has displayed the slightest hint of being politically unreliable is denied permission to go on the hajj.

Furthermore, all those who apply to go on the hajj must also pledge allegiance to the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to national unity (and therefore against Uighur independence).

Indeed, Muslims who travel abroad for any reason, not just for the hajj, upon their return are subject to particular scrutiny, especially if they have spent any time in Muslim countries. More than one million Uighurs have been placed in re-education centers, subject to anti-Muslim propaganda, and forced constantly to express their loyalty to the Communist Party, lest they have been exposed to "subversive" ideas about Islam, especially if they have traveled abroad and met with non-Chinese Muslims, or have been exposed to dangerous Islamic websites online.

As for other restrictions on Islam, in Xinjiang, imams have been subject to public humiliation by being forced to dance en masse in public, and at the same time, have been forced to make an oath to keep children away from religion, and as public servants, paid by the state, the imams were forced to brandish the slogan that "our income comes from the CKP, not from Allah." Many of the imams were forced to wave Chinese flags during their ordeal. Speeches were made – it's unclear from the reports if these were by Chinese government officials or by government-approved imams – in which young people were told both to stay away from mosques and that prayer, wherever it was said, was harmful to one's health. Teachers throughout Xinjiang have been instructed to teach children to stay away from religion; retired teachers have been posted outside mosques during Ramadan to prevent students from entering.

Mosques have been required to push Communist propaganda, swapping inscriptions about Muhammad for red banners that declare, "Love the Party, Love the Country."

Muslim men have been required to shave "abnormal" or "religious" beards. Punishment is strict; one man was

sentenced to six years in jail for refusing to do so. Names given to children must not be “religious.” Twenty-nine names have been banned so far, such as Islam, Saddam, Mecca, Quran, Jihad, Medina; all are now strictly forbidden. Women may not wear any veils that cover the face; even women wearing only the hijab have been prevented in some parts of Xinjiang from using buses. Muslims are required to listen to the official state television (that carries anti-Muslim and pro-Communist propaganda), and cannot prevent their children from attending state schools, where anti-religion messages are strong.

When the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan offered his preposterously sanitized version of how his government treats Muslims, he had no fear of being cross-examined. For he knew that Pakistan needs China, both as an economic partner, and as a military ally – China supplies 70% of Pakistan’s weaponry – and the Pakistani government is not about to contradict the official Chinese line. The Chinese are, in stark contrast to the fearful and appeasement-minded West, unafraid to come down hard on Islam. And the Pakistanis did not dare to protest. (More recently, a single Pakistani official mildly suggested that the Chinese not end, but merely “soften” their policy in Xinjiang). The reason the ambassador lied is simple: because he could.

Now the world knows that one million Muslim Uighurs have been sent to re-education camps in China, where they are forced to take part in sessions designed to inculcate contempt for religion. These re-education camps have been operating for more than a year. The Uighur inmates are asked to renounce Islam, and are forced to learn Mandarin. [A recent report](#) shows there has been no let-up in this anti-Islam campaign:

A city in China’s far-western Xinjiang region has ordered people who are “poisoned by extremism, terrorism and separatism”, in contact with overseas terror groups or act in a conservative Islamic manner, to turn themselves in to authorities.

Those who surrender to judicial organs within 30 days and confess to their crimes will be treated leniently and might avoid punishment, said a notice posted on Sunday on the official social media account of the Hami city government.

Beijing has in recent months faced an outcry from activists, academics and foreign governments over mass detentions and strict surveillance of the Muslim Uighur minority and other ethnic groups that live in Xinjiang.

China rejects the criticism, saying that it protects the religion and culture of minorities in the region and that its security measures are needed to combat the influence of “extremist” groups that incite violence there.

“All individuals involved in terrorist crimes and poisoned by the ‘three evil forces’ are urged to surrender themselves to the judicial organs within 30 days and to confess and hand over the facts of your crime,” said the Hami city notice.

The Chinese government, not content with banning beards, nullifying names, and confiscating Qur’ans, is now asking Uighurs to denounce themselves for the “three evil forces” – extremism, terrorism, and separatism – in the same spirit as the campaigns of public self-denunciation that were such a feature of the Cultural Revolution. If those “involved in terrorist crimes” turn themselves in within 30 days of the announcement just made, and supply useful evidence that might, of course, implicate others in “terrorism,” they can expect “leniency,” although how the ruthless Chinese Communists define “leniency” is unknown.

The notice issued by the municipal “leading small group for stability maintenance” says that actions ranging from being in contact with overseas “terror” groups to conservative Islamic behavior should prompt individuals to turn themselves in.

The kinds of attitudes and acts the Chinese government thinks Uighurs should turn themselves, in for, or report on others about, cover quite a range. The government has decreed that if you have had "contact" with overseas "terror" groups, you should turn yourself in. But what constitutes "contact," and what qualifies as an overseas "terror" group? Would visiting a half-dozen times the website of a group of French Muslim clerics who are intent on carrying on campaigns of Da'wa in southern France be something for which you must turn yourself in? What about frequently talking on the phone with a Uighur friend now working as an engineer in Saudi Arabia? Would the Chinese government consider this "contact" to be suspect, on the assumption that any Muslim living in Saudi Arabia would necessarily be influenced by the Salafi version of Islam that prevails in that country? If a Uighur's cousin, now living in Turkey, attends out of curiosity a single meeting in Istanbul of a pan-Turanian group that has, among its goals, independence for Xinjiang, and mentions it in an email to his cousin, noting that he thought pan-Turanianism was an impractical idea, does that email have to be reported to the Chinese government, as "contact" with an "overseas terror group"?

Advocating that people live their entire lives in accordance with the Koran, stopping other people from watching television, or banning alcohol, smoking and dancing at weddings are listed as behaviors that should warrant informing the authorities.

The list also included openly destroying, rejecting or thwarting the government identification system, as well as rejecting government provided housing, subsidies and cigarettes or booze as being "haram" or forbidden.

Uighurs should turn in their fellows, too, for being too observant in their practice of Islam. If a Uighur knows of someone who advocates that Muslims "live their entire lives in

accordance with the Qur'an," he (or she) has a duty to turn that person in. If you find a Muslim who prevents his fellow Muslims from watching television (which broadcasts government anti-Islam propaganda), you have a duty to report him. If a Uighur prevents other Muslims from drinking alcohol, or smoking, or dancing at weddings – all activities that are haram – he is viewed as suspect, and should be reported to the government or ideally, should denounce himself to the authorities.

Those who turn themselves in on time will be treated leniently, and if the information provides a significant clue, then they might avoid all punishment, the notice said.

The "information" that "provides a significant clue" refers to helping the authorities identify others who have exhibited behavior that marks them as "too Muslim." Turn yourself in, and you "will be treated leniently." Help the government track down others – in other words, act as an informer – and you may be let off without any punishment.

In August, a United Nations human rights panel said it had received many credible reports that a million or more Uighurs and other minorities are being held in what resembles a "massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy" in Xinjiang.

China says it is not enforcing arbitrary detention and political re-education.

Aside from the mass detentions, rights groups also say that the Chinese government has significantly raised limitations on everyday religious observances in the region.

Last month, the region's capital Urumqi launched a campaign targeting halal products, like food and toothpaste, which are produced according to Islamic law, in order to prevent what it sees as the incursion of Islam into secular life.

Just as the Chinese government forced Uighur restaurants to stay open during Ramadan, it is making it ever more difficult for Muslims to avoid what is haram. The Chinese government is now targeting what it calls “pan-halalization.” This is done by making sure that non-halal foods are present everywhere, including schools, hospitals, and government canteens. Those who are government employees, [according to official reports](#), “should not have any diet problems” – meaning that if you work for the government, you should be willing to eat regular, non-halal foods. And “work canteens will be changed so that officials could try all kinds of cuisine” – which means, of course, trying out foods that are strictly haram.

After more than a year of witnessing the ratcheting up of the campaign to restrict the practice of Islam in Xinjiang – those shorn beards, those confiscated Qur’ans replaced by edited versions, those banned babies’ names, those dancing imams in the public square, those re-education camps, Muslim countries [have remained remarkably silent](#). Some, such as Egypt, have even sent Uighurs back to China, where they undoubtedly faced prosecution. Even when a Pakistani government official finally issued, in late September, a statement about the crackdown in Xinjiang, in late September, it was only to urge that there be a “softening of restrictions” on the Uighurs – with no details given, and that the Chinese government exercise “patience” in dealing with the Uighurs – in other words, the mildest of protests.

The silence is understandable. Chinese are big buyers of oil and gas from Muslim countries. They are also providers of large amounts of both foreign aid and investment, and Pakistan, in particular, economically on the ropes and so reliant on Chinese investment and aid, cannot afford to alienate Beijing.

Finally, at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, not Muslim but [Western countries spoke out about the re-education camps](#):

China faced calls on Tuesday [Nov. 6] from Western government to end its mass detention of Uighur Muslims, but brusquely rebuffed the concerns as “not factual” and “politically driven.”

“China is here to seek cooperation,” said its vice foreign minister, Le Yucheng, at the opening of a review by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He pointed to China’s achievements in lifting millions of people from poverty, largely skirting its treatment of ethnic minorities.

The focus and tone changed after North American and European diplomats expressed concern over deteriorating human rights and a crackdown in the western region of Xinjiang that has swept upwards of a million people into indefinite detention in re-education camps. The Muslim detainees are told that they are infected with an “ideological virus,” and are indoctrinated in devotion to the state and the Communist Party.

Representatives of the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and other countries called for an end to the detention of Uighurs and members of other minority groups, and urged respect for freedom of religion, expression and association.

Here is something to bring up, whenever Muslim propagandists tell us how aggrieved they feel at the “colonialist” and “anti-Muslim” West and its “islamophobic” peoples. Remind them that it was that West – NATO forces, led by the United States – that rescued the Muslim Bosnians from the Serbs. (Whether that policy was folly is a different question.) Remind them that the Americans have [spent 5.6 trillion dollars](#) on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Pakistan. The Americans wanted only to end the despotic rule of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria, of the fanatical Taliban in Afghanistan, and also to help Pakistan, which has proven to be

a meretricious ally, to fight the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorists, while remaining economically afloat. At least 5.6 trillion dollars – keep reminding yourself and the world's Muslims – has been spent since 9/11 to improve the lives of Muslims. Mention, too, the colossal sums – in the tens of billions – the United States has spent since 2001 on economic and security aid to Egypt, to Jordan, to Pakistan, and other Muslim-majority countries. Note, and re-note, that of the six top recipients of American aid, five are Muslim countries.

And then, as a final fillip, point out that it was the West – the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Australia – that raised with China the issue of the re-education camps for Muslim Uighurs, while the representatives of Muslim countries sat on their hands. That might, if only temporarily, shame the International Islamic Grievance Committee into a chastened silence.

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