America’s Influence on Uighur Human Rights

Each month, humanitarian organizations report on human rights violations on the Uighur population of Xinjiang, China’s largest, westernmost province. This Muslim Turkic minority receives little publicity in comparison to the Buddhist Tibetans in the province to their south, though the repression is similar and has gone on as long. The United States, a nation that prides itself on promotion of human rights and democracy, is as well aware of Beijing’s repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang as throughout China. How, then, has America influenced China with regard to its policies and behavior?

The United States appears to have a number of bargaining tools available, mostly economic, some strategic and diplomatic—and, on the surface, it seems the US has used these regularly to pressure China; yet policy changes and human rights have, at best, improved subtly, in Xinjiang, more likely worsened. This is in part due to Beijing’s remarkable resistance to foreign pressure. However, the United States has rarely demanded human rights improvements when they might endanger economic and strategic relations. This paper will look at China’s treatment of Uighurs and assess the effect of American policy.

Background

The ethnic history of Uighurs alone was long politically controversial for China, which for dynasties held that all Asian populations were descendants of Hans. Uighurs are in fact of Turkic descent, and therefore have a more Caucasian than Sinoid appearance.

Like Tibet, Xinjiang holds the status of autonomous region—meaning that Beijing does recognize the presence of a large indigenous population. Xinjiang has been a
constant bed of unrest and revolts, overrun variously by Tibetans, Indians, Soviets, Kazaks, and Uighurs. It is still an ethnically diverse region; the next most populous peoples after Uighur and Han are Kazak, Hui, Kirghiz, and Mongol\(^1\), many of whom are Muslim. China claims that its consecutive sovereignty over the area dates back to its unified rule under the Mongol dynasty in 1789; relations between Uighurs and Chinese Han, however, go back to at least the Tang Dynasty and the first Uighur empire, founded in Mongolia in 744 AD. The empire later migrated to Xinjiang in 840 AD, gradually spreading throughout the Kashgar region of Central Asia, comprising the famous Silk Road, and mingling with Indoeuropean populations. By the twelfth century they had largely converted to Sunni Islam (from earlier Manichaism) and adopted Arabic script.\(^2\)

Not surprisingly, unrest persisted after 1789 as a movement for the independent Uighur Muslim state of East Turkistan (also sometimes called Uighuristan). Exacerbating local unrest in the 1930s, the Soviet Union backed separatist activity in the region so as to weaken China and protect its Siberian territory. The PLA victory in 1949 wrested away Xinjiang from Soviet influence, but with the successful separation of several neighboring former Soviet territories of similar ethnic and religious make-up, such as Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, Xinjiang separatists had renewed hope for their own independence.

As evidence of persistent ideological separatism today, China points to such groups as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, a group based in neighboring nations, purportedly trained by recognized terrorist organizations such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda. However, the evidence linking the two—especially ideologically—is weak, the

\(^{1}\)Benson and Svanberg, p.16.
\(^{2}\)Idem pp16-18.
memberships are tiny, and few incidents are provably linked to them. It is likely that “China exaggerates the number of terrorists in Xinjiang in order to disarm foreign criticism of the way it treats the Uighurs.” In short, there are far more Uighurs who benignly aspire for an independent state of East Turkistan but suffer from policies that exaggerate their intentions.

Indeed, China has a long record of abusing the ethnic populations of Xinjiang, in particular the Uighurs who are the most populous and least stable. The great distance and cultural differences between eastern, developed China and the western territories have made them historically difficult for Beijing to control. China usually justifies its violence and harsh treatment of these areas as necessary for the suppression of separatist movements and China’s national integrity, blaming this separatism sometimes on local religious fanaticism, other times foreign goading or anti-communist elements.

China has furthermore long been protective of its sovereignty, having suffered repeated humiliating losses of territorial control to foreign hands, particularly to Western encroachment in the last two hundred years. There is little tolerance or sympathy for external pressure and internal separatism; its policies for dealing with border areas experiencing both, like Taiwan, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, are especially heavy-handed.

When Mao’s Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA) reclaimed the region in 1949 for Communist China, the loyalties of Xinjiang people were hardly assured; Uighurs had struggled with China for an independent Muslim state of Eastern Turkestan for hundreds of years. Additionally, there was some residual Soviet loyalty from its most recent anti-Chinese alliance with the USSR. Before 1949, Chiang Kaishek’s policy for dealing with

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3 Tyler, p.245.
these inherently separatist ethnic minorities was to engender Chinese unity by racial
assimilation. 4 Kaishek had also established Han governance for Xinjiang to enforce Han
supremacy. After Kaishek fled to Taiwan and Mao became leader, he officially dropped
the racial policy of Han governance declaring “Great Han chauvinism” to be “counter-
revolutionary.” 5 Nevertheless, the Communist Party was almost all Han, and his
governance of Xinjiang and other minority-populated regions almost identically
patronizing. Wang Enmao, a top official in Xinjiang from 1949 to 1968, reveals a
prevalent bias in his description of Xinjiang as “a minority- nationalities region
and…economically and culturally backward.” 6

Because the loyalty of Uighurs was still in question, their treatment continued to
be particularly harsh. In addition to enduring the “normal” repressive policies of Mao’s
communist rule, Uighur nobles and clergymen were shot or “reformed” through ritual
humiliations; imams were forced to preach party ideology, and nomadic herdsmen forced
for a time to give up their livestock and settle. Arabic, because it was the language of
Islam, was outlawed and replaced in 1958 with pinyin, the standard romanization of
Mandarin Chinese 7.

In 1956, Uighurs and other minorities suffered intensely during Mao’s nationwide
anti-rightist campaign for their “local nationality chauvinism,” 8 and a decade later for
their supposed foreign allegiance. 9 Their presumed separatist motives also meld easily

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4 Tyler, p. 130.
5 Tyler, p.131.
7 Tyler, p. 143.
8 Idem, p. 144.
9 Idem, p.149.
with the long-standing stereotypes of Uighurs as aggressive barbarians and Islamic fanatics—making violent repression all the more easy to justify.

The effort to dilute Uighur ethnicity through Han immigration was a success. In 1949 the 3 million Uighurs represented 75% of the population of Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{10} Immigration from China proper peaked at half a million in 1959 during the Great Famine. From 1949 to 1982, the Han population went from a 6% minority to a 40% plurality, finally outnumbering the Uighurs\textsuperscript{11}. This “dilution” involved interracial marriage (usually by financial incentive) and minority childbearing limits.

After Mao’s death in 1978, the party relaxed its grip on Xinjiang somewhat and restored many freedoms. Uighurs were permitted to live nomadic lifestyles, write in Arabic script, and read their own history. In 1978, all Chinese minorities were declared exempt from birth control policies, and Article 46 of the constitution declared freedom of worship (but not of proselytization). In 1988 however, birth control policies also applied to Muslims. There are many Uighurs reports of forced abortions and sterilizations verified by Amnesty International\textsuperscript{12}. Other abuses continue and will be addressed later.

\textbf{Background of US policy}

Before 1972, there was little Sino-American relation; the United States believed that Communist China was an ally of Moscow. As part of Soviet containment, the US trained and supported rebel activity among China’s border areas including Tibet and Xinjiang. The border dispute between the USSR and China along the Mongolian border in 1969 made clear that the two regimes were no longer on friendly terms—rendering China a viable ally, to the real-politician Nixon. US alliance with China began with

\textsuperscript{10} McMillen, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{11} Garver, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{12} Tyler, p.159-161.
Nixon’s visit in 1972 and was purely anti-Soviet; Nixon made no pretense of humanitarian aims in China when he told Mao that a nation’s “internal political philosophy” was not as important as “its policy towards the rest of the world and towards us.” The two nations agreed to keep democratic and socialist doctrines to themselves.

Even had Nixon wished to influence China towards democratic practices, he lacked the leverage to do so. The US was dependent on China’s influence against the Soviets from Korea in northern Asia to the Vietnam War raging in southeast Asia. Economic interests were moot—there was no existent economic exchange between China and the US, and market activity was anathema to Mao’s regime. Because the alliance helped America geostrategically more than it helped China in any respect, Nixon had to offer something in return for China’s alliance without significantly catering to its ideology. China’s most prominent interest then was what it continues to be now: territorial integrity. Its border dispute with Russia set aside by then, the remaining problems (that the US could conceivably address) were Kaishek’s government in Taiwan and CIA-aided separatists in Tibet. Nixon therefore accepted to recognize the Peoples’ Republic of China, not Taiwan, as the legitimate China, and to end support of Tibetan rebel groups. The first concession, Taiwan, continues to be a delicate diplomacy and semantic battle; the second was an easy calculation, since China clearly followed no Soviet agenda there was no reason to continue aiding anti-Chinese militants—even if they were oppressed. Soviet Communism was a great threat to humanity, but human

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13 President Nixon, in Wan, p.40.
14 The White Paper on National Defense for 2000 states that “China has always attached primary importance to safeguarding state sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security,” and ends with a specific mention of the Taiwan issue, stating that China “will never tolerate, condone or remain indifferent to the realization of any scheme to divide the motherland.”
rights, per se, were not yet a stated American policy, nor were they in the public consciousness.

Mao died in 1977. His policies had been a disaster of human civil and political rights, and even failed to secure the one human right he originally pursued—basic sustenance. Deng Xiaoping, Mao’s successor in 1978, declared a new “open-door” policy to strengthen China’s economy by allowing foreign trade and investment. This new plan meant giving up some sovereignty to the world economic community and whatever conditions it might tie to trading with China. More specifically, this gave bargaining leverage to America, being the largest potential trade and investment partner.

Meanwhile Carter had been elected in 1976 declaring human rights as the basis for his foreign policy. Two years earlier, Congressman Fraser had successfully amended the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 with a new section 502 to block US aid from going to regimes with political prisoners. This signaled growing public weariness of Cold War support for distasteful regimes. Carter endorsed and expanded on this movement by creating the Bureau of Human Rights in 1976 to draft yearly reports on human rights conditions worldwide. Although the first such report on China was only published in 1979, Congress and the media were already more aware of its objectionable, authoritarian rule: dissidents had marched in Tiananmen Square first in 1976 and again in 1979 with posters demanding “The Fifth Freedom”—democracy. The poster’s writer Wei Jingsheng was imprisoned 15 years. Also around that time the Dalai Lama’s brother exiled in America since 1965, was already raising awareness of repression of Tibetans. Congress, alert to the increasing American concern for Chinese human rights, criticized Carter for leniency towards Beijing.

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Unfortunately, although Carter wanted to abandon Cold War politics, and claimed in his campaign that he would not “ass-kiss” brutal regimes as Nixon had, the Iranian Revolution was a wake-up call to temper idealism with realism. Punishing abusive leaders with diplomatic and economic isolation could exacerbate belligerence and fuel anti-Americanism, and in the worst-case scenario, might supplant an unpleasant but friendly nation with a worse and unfriendly one. China’s good grace was still too valuable for containing the Soviet Union, so following a meeting with Xiaoping in 1978 Carter removed American troops from Taiwan entirely and agreed only to sell it defensive weapons. He also extended full diplomatic relations with China, initiating the grant of most favored nation (MFN) status, to be reviewed every year for renewal. MFN was a valuable trading and negotiation tool, but was not used as one, accorded for ten years without conditions or fanfare.

Carter’s request for China to commit to peaceful resolution of the Taiwan problem and his criticism of government-sanctioned repression in Tibet and elsewhere were ignored\textsuperscript{16}. He did possibly influence one success for human rights: in that same meeting he requested privately that China allow freedom of religion, as well as accept Bibles and missionaries. Xiaoping refused missionaries, but did legislate freedom of worship. Uighurs and other Muslim Chinese were granted some level of religious freedom, such as access to mosques, permission to Hajj (make the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). Though Carter himself acknowledged later that the state in China continued to impede true freedom of religion, for example requiring registration of all members of congregations\textsuperscript{17}, the desired and produced effect was positive. Nevertheless, it was

\textsuperscript{16} Fairbanks, “Former President Carter Opens Lecture Series.”

\textsuperscript{17} Carter, “The United States and China.”
possible and would have been consistent with the Foreign Assistance Act for Carter to be firmer without being so harsh as to spite China back into an isolationist hole. He could have ceased sales to Taiwan—where Kaishek was in fact also committing human rights abuses—to convince China of the US’s commitment to China’s interests, but withheld normal trade relations until China made more concessions.

Reagan, much as Carter had, vilified China’s brutal excesses and pledged hard-line policy. He even alluded to considering a pre-Nixonian “two China” policy (i.e. treating Taiwan as a sovereign nation), and indeed spent the first four years in office irritating China by increasing arms sales to Taiwan. Yet after visiting China in 1984, Reagan decided communism there was not as threatening as its Soviet counterpart, and resumed a realpolitik Sino-US alliance with fresh vigor. Xiaoping and Reagan signed a communiqué temporarily settling the Taiwan issue agreeing not to use force if the US reduced weapons sales—over an indefinite period of time. In return for the generously-worded document, the US pledged to increase technology trade\(^\text{18}\). This friendly exchange effectively pressured Soviets from below. Once the threat of war with the Soviet Union crumbled in 1985, the Sino-American relationship balance finally tipped in America’s favor. Since China’s aide was no longer necessary to curb Soviet spread, America could start making requests. If ever there was a time to demand improved human rights, this was it—but Reagan made none.

Reagan continued using arms sales to Taiwan as a nudging on China to emulate democratic regimes; he could afford the temerity to do this since the communiqué signed in 1984 to reduce such sales was so broadly termed. This was at least somewhat

consistent with his election claim that the US had the duty to protect democracy; yet Regan failed to react to ongoing abuses of democracy in China’s west.

**Human Rights in Xinjiang 1980s-1990s**

In May 1989, Uighur and other Muslim minorities across China protested a publication “Sexual Habits of the Muslims,” as degrading and contributing to negative perceptions. The outcry successfully persuaded Beijing to remove the book without much resistance—except in Xinjiang, where crackdown on the mostly Uighur demonstrators was brutal. Authorities claimed protests here were “an organized and premeditated incident devised by a handful of people who adopt a hostile attitude to the Chinese Communist Party and the socialist motherland, and oppose the reunification of the motherland and unity among all nationalities,” thereby linking them, disingenuously, to the mounting protests in Tiananmen Square.

Beginning in May 1989, Chinese students across China and the world joined in protest of the Beijing government. Beijing’s infamous response on June 4 was the Tiananmen Massacre, killing several hundred (the actual numbers are still disputed), imprisoning hundreds more, and marking a new decade of iron-fisted policy and standoffish diplomacy. Beijing believed the protests had been encouraged by foreign elements to weaken Communist rule, and thus declared a campaign to eliminate foreign and other subversive influences. Minorities were automatically suspected of other loyalties—religious or nationalist—and often of receiving foreign aid. Thus, in Xinjiang, authorities destroyed more Mosques, forbade unsupervised religious gatherings such as Ramadan services, no longer allowed civil servants, students, and teachers to fast or

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19 Xinhua News Agency…quoted in Tyler, p.154
publicly to pray. In 1996, an anti-crime campaign justified purging underground Koranic schools of their believers, coupled with atheist re-education.

**American Response**

Tiananmen shocked people around the world, not just Americans, but from then on the American president’s treatment of China’s human rights would be publicly accountable. Beijing no longer holding any trump cards, Bush could afford to be critical. His response was instead pragmatic and muted. Immediately after the Tiananmen incident, he denounced the event publicly and placed FAA-justified economic sanctions on China. These measures temporarily pacified the outraged US public, while Bush privately sent a mission to Beijing just three weeks later to insure the possibility of continued relations. After obtaining token public acts of good will from China, such as the release of a few protesters and announcing the intention to buy $2 billion worth of Boeing airplanes\(^\text{20}\) --helping assuage growing complaints in Congress about the trade deficit with China—Bush, aided by business lobbies with interests in the Chinese market, successfully renewed China’s MFN status in 1990 and recommended renewal for 1992. Twice he vetoed the attempt to attach renewal of China’s MFN to human rights. It is worth noting, however, that the Foreign Appropriations Act continues to block economic aid to China except to restricted recipients, such the government in Tibet and UN assistance programs\(^\text{21}\).

Although his personal justification was to ensure “constructive engagement” with China—fearing that world condemnation would send it back into isolation and potential belligerence—Bush had many economic tools with which to leverage, could probably

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\(^\text{20}\) Cohen, p.222.

\(^\text{21}\) Lum, Thomas, p.10.
have pressured a public apology or more protective rights from Beijing, and it is deeply troubling that he did not.

While campaigning for office, Clinton followed in the tradition of the two presidents before him and condemned the incumbent for his leniency toward China. He specifically criticized Bush’s “unconscionable” act of renewing China’s MFN status despite Beijing’s refusal to apologize for its behavior in the Tiananmen Incident as well as for continued human rights violations. Every year, starting in the 1992 campaign, Clinton threatened to remove most favored nation (MFN) status, but never once did. When it did come time to renew at the end of 1992, Clinton decided to think first of his pledge to “revive the American economy,” and to avoid a trade war with China; he attached the next year’s renewal to a number of concrete human rights improvements, such as ending prison labor and permitting free broadcasts\(^2\). In 1994, however, business interests were just as dear, and China might be necessary as a strategic ally again, this time against the potentially nuclear North Korea. Lee Hamilton, chairman of the House Committee on foreign affairs, writes in 1994 that if North Korea became a threat “China’s cooperation will be fundamental to achievement of U.S. objectives,” and concludes that, while MFN should continue having human rights conditions, and while China still had not met Clinton’s 1993 conditions, denying MFN in 1994 on such grounds would be misunderstood and possibly taken as an attempt to divide China internally\(^3\). Clinton managed to renew, and this time with human rights conditions at all; he did, however, express deep disappointment with the lack of improvements in China.

\(^2\) “President’s Visit to China in Context,” Human Rights Watch.
\(^3\) Hamilton, pp. 1 and 7.
In 1996, to the relief of American businesses, Clinton passed a bill to grant China permanent trading partnership by 2000, thus giving up the valuable MFN bargaining tool. Also in 1996, China established a partnership with its Central Asian neighbors, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia, to fight terrorism and separatism brewing amidst their shared Turkic and Kyrgyz populations. Uzbekistan has since joined. China successfully pressured some of these countries to forbid Uighur parties and political representation. Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Shattuck, and Secretary of State Albright declared their concern over religious and persecution of dissent in China at a 1996 Press Briefing of Country Reports on Human Rights. They affirmed their commitment to “constructive engagement,” and claimed that though change is slow, isolation would achieve nothing. Shattuck later in the same briefing said that the US has made its stance on human rights issues in China clear, but that “it is really up to China at this point to determine whether or not it wants to show progress in the field of human rights.”

One can only understand this “Constructive engagement” as a commitment to suggest, not pressure, and certainly not punish. And this has been the pattern in Sino-US relations. The Commission on China, formed by Congress in 2000 as a prudent response to the executive decision to grant permanent normal trading relations (PNTR), acknowledges its limited authority. Its purpose is to review human rights in the context of the rule of law—the law of international covenants and other treaties China is signatory to—but its opening statement declares that there is no way Americans can

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“impose our will on China or on its 1.3 billion citizens.” Later, it also assures that the panel favors deepened engagement with China, including PNTR\textsuperscript{26}.

The pattern of soft-pedaling humanitarian concerns indicates a belief that friendly relations are more influential than forceful coercion. Indeed, the commission declares that, thanks to since the start of Sino-American relations, China has progressed somewhat with respect to Taiwan and greatly improved economic laws. Their hope is that PNTR status will exert the same kind of influence as WTO membership does on economic regulations: it commits China to be more transparent and comply with standards overriding its national sovereignty. However, this hope is somewhat facetious, as the commission also recognizes that despite the same 50 years of engagement, despite the economic leverage America has (owing to its enormous trade deficit with China), many humanitarian abuses have worsened and that Chinese “rhetoric” is what has improved on some\textsuperscript{27}.

Throughout Clinton’s presidency, especially during the first term when Tiananmen memories were fresh, human rights was an inflammatory and polarizing issue between America and China. However, another bargaining tool during Clinton’s first term was the 1993 meeting of the International Olympic Committee to decide the 2000 host country. This decision is influential due to its public desirability and rests on certain standards of conduct by host countries. Citing reports of worsening rights abuses in China, sixty vocal members of Congress explicitly discouraged the Olympic Committee from letting China host\textsuperscript{28}. Beijing felt humiliated and viewed the American opposition as pivotal to its lost bid for 2000. However, the advantage of such a multilateral

\textsuperscript{26} “FAQ” Congressional Executive Commission on China website.
\textsuperscript{27} Baucus, in “Human Rights in China in the Context of the Rule of Law,” p.2.
\textsuperscript{28} “China and Tibet: Human Rights Development.” Human Rights Watch.
punishment is that China could not retaliate or misinterpret it as a policy intended to benefit another country’s private interest.

**Current American Policy**

The September 11 terrorist attack in New York and President George W. Bush’s “War on Terror” retaliation affected all American foreign policy. President Bush came to office in 2000 intending to distance himself from Clintonian engagement and favor Taiwan. After the Al Qaeda attack, Bush realized China was invaluable to combating terrorist cells and other threats throughout East and Central Asia, and also as an ally for potential war in Iraq. Although in many cases the cause of fighting terror has excused flagrant abuses of human rights in the region, Bush finds himself glossing over the abuses of the Chinese government and emphasizing its economic and strategic strengths.

In his October 2001 meeting with former President Jiang Zemin, President Bush gave a cordial public statement with one sentence on the treatment of dissidents—that the war on terrorism must never be an excuse to persecute minorities.  

Most recently, in April 2001, Beijing declared a “strike hard” campaign against the “three evils” of extremism, splittism, and terrorism. Although “the United States Government has expressed to the Chinese Government that [America does] not consider the Uighur dissident movement to be a terrorist movement,” the broad language of Bush’s War on Terror, along with his usage of this war to attack preemptively, and target predominantly Islamic Regimes, has given officials in Xinjiang an easy excuse for ignoring abuses of Uighur rights. For instance, in 2002 America recognized the East

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29 Transcript: President Bush, China's Jiang Zemin Meet in Shanghai,” The White House Office of the Press Secretary.
Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as terrorist and froze its assets; however, this group was not well-known and the evidence for separatism-motivated ends was dubious. America’s position here caused some to suggest “that the US move, coming as it did so long after the attacks on New York and Washington, was based not so much on hard evidence against the group (the Chinese had blamed many differently named groups in the past) but more on the Administration’s need to win China’s support for a quite unrelated venture: the war against Iraq”.

The current American government is well aware, from independent organizations as well as its own state department reports, of routine religious discrimination and brutal repression of Uighurs—as well as generalized and systemic practices of torture, extraction of confessions, and denial of due process. In 2001, Human Rights Watch declared that “Xinjiang remains the only province in China where execution of political prisoners is common,” and Amnesty International reported over 200 people killed between 1997 and 1999—more than anywhere else in China—the country leading all others in executions. The State Department Human Rights Report for that year notes the especially brutal implementation on Xinjiang Uighurs, as well as previously mentioned elimination of Uighur language instruction and destruction of historical Uighur books. The newly formed Congressional Executive Commission on China invites testimony and prepared and candid statements regarding human rights and law in China. In August 2002, Kathy Polias, Co-Director of Uighur Human Rights Coalition in Washington, testified on discriminatory policies in Xinjiang, such as Beijing’s leap to portray Uighurs as terrorists, and unfair economic practices, including exploitation of Xinjiang benefiting

32 Tyler, p.244-245.
33 Tyler, p.174.
Hans more than Uighurs.34 A Xinjiang University professor also attested to forced elimination of Uighur language instruction in schools, and the destruction of Uighur-language and history books. A Congressional Report from 2003 cites “intensified human rights abuses” in Xinjiang, with continuing discrimination and lower living conditions for Uighurs, increased censorship of press, religious repression, detention of suspected “splittists,” and poor to abusive prison conditions35. Besides this, common stereotypes of Xinjiang’s ethnic minorities as dangerous and barbaric persist—a recent example being the horse-riding desert bandit in Crouching tiger hidden Dragon, who makes off with the heroine’s brooch (even if the depiction is romantic). Finally, the Chinese government is particularly set on cleaning up visible irregularities—from the political to the aesthetic—in preparation for the 2008 Olympics.

President George W. Bush has not denounced China publicly for these abuses. At his 2001 meeting with then President Jiang Zemin, he reiterated once again that China is a friend and partner. It is true that China is strategically valuable again, still as a go-between between the US and North Korea, but also between the US and Pakistan and as an aid to combating terrorist cells in Central Asia. Bush could attach humanitarian conditions to US relations with Taiwan, but is more likely to comply with China’s demands—based on past administrations’ handling of the same issue, but also on current silence regarding democracy in Hong Kong.

In recent years, China’s growing dependency on Middle Eastern oil has been a useful counterweight: China does not want to be seen as an enemy of Islam by its suppliers. Birth control policies have loosened and living standards improved around the nation.

35 “China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, Macau)” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.
Still, the religious freedoms of Uighurs and all Islamic minorities of Xinjiang are not yet secure, though they are currently permitted and even funded Hajj (the Islamic ritual of traveling to Mecca, Saudi Arabia) and though Uighur CCP party members are not held to standard strict atheist requirements (they can attend some Islamic functions and pray—although not five times a day\textsuperscript{36}). In addition, since the mid 1980s, they have benefited from some China’s affirmative action policies for minorities. While this policy chiefly addresses economic rights, to which China has always given priority over political rights, it also grants immunity from the one-child policy, and tries to compensate for the socioeconomic imbalances perpetuated by pro-Han discrimination.

Religious and human rights of Uighurs have improved, but in increments difficult to trace back to American influence. One tool that has proven itself useful is the Olympic bidding, which had a clear attachment to human rights and, as an international committee decision, was not tainted by other interests. The issue of human rights appears in every discussion of US-Sino relations, but one can safely say that the US government’s interest in addressing them has been superficial, mostly in response to the short-spanned US public opinion. Human rights have usually taken a back seat to business relations in good times and security interests in bad times. Most recently, since September 2001, American policy has in fact contributed to worsening the situation for Uighurs. In addition, China’s government has shown remarkable resistance to outside pressure.

Looking at the history of Sino-American relations, one can declare safely that that “Western human rights diplomacy has largely failed if judged by its declared objective of changing Chinese behavior.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} Mackerras, in Safran, p.30.
\textsuperscript{37} Wan, p.134.
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