

Testimony of Randall G. Schriver

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight

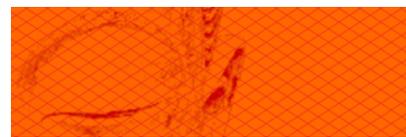
Bill Delahunt (D-MA), Chairman

Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Ranking Member

Thank you Mr. Chairman and thanks to the subcommittee for inviting me to testify today on this extremely important topic. You are to be congratulated for dedicating time and energy to the issues associated with the Uighur minority in China. Sadly, not enough Americans are aware of their plight and their struggle for basic freedoms. Let me also express my sincere gratitude to your staff for all the hard work that they do. In the lead up to this hearing, it was a pleasure to work with your outstanding team.

The subject of my testimony today concerns an ethnic minority in China, the Uighur population. Mostly residing in the Xinjiang province of the People's Republic of China, the Uighurs is a community of Turkic peoples that have a tumultuous history with the government of the PRC. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia from 2003 to 2005, I first became aware of the Uighur community. As a result of those experiences, I have come to develop a strong appreciation for the Uighur people and their culture. I also developed deep concerns regarding their socio-political status within the People's Republic of China. As documented in the State Department's annual Human Rights Report, the Uighur community has experienced continual tragic oppression at the hand of the Chinese government. Further, there is little evidence the Chinese authorities will ease their pressure on the Uighur community any time soon without strong international pressure.

I had the great fortune to enjoy personal interaction with the Uighur Diaspora in the United States. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, I was part of a U.S. government team that worked for the release of then-political prisoner Rebiya Kadeer alongside the Uighur American Association. I note that Ms. Kadeer testified before your committee last week – and let me add she is a personal hero of mine. She was a prominent Uighur businesswoman and political activist who was detained by Chinese authorities in 1999 on baseless treason charges. Ms. Kadeer was a prominent personality in Xinjiang and also a mother of 9. We worked closely with with people like Nury Turkel to secure her freedom even when told by Chinese authorities her release would be impossible. Eventually, on March 14th, 2005, Kadeer was released on medical grounds into the custody of U.S. federal

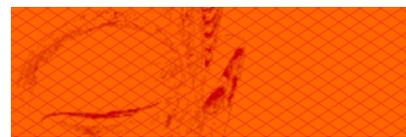


authorities. Shortly thereafter, I had the great honor to meet Ms. Kadeer and many of her elated children. That experience is something I will never forget. Getting to know Ms. Kadeer has been a privilege and has also reinforced my firm belief that the Chinese approach to Xinjiang is misguided. Someone as talented, energetic, and passionate as Ms. Kadeer should be seen by the Chinese authorities as a great resource who will strive to enrich Xinjiang and China— rather than as someone threatening to the central leadership.

Mr. Chairman, as part of my testimony, you have asked me to address the topic of Uighur nationalism. In any society, analysis of a community's nationalism can be a problematic endeavor. Nationalism characterized by love of country, pride in culture and heritage, and activism to promote the community is to be admired and encouraged. Certainly, such aforementioned traits would describe the vast majority of the Uighurs in China, and all the Uighurs with whom I have had the pleasure to meet. But Nationalism can also engender more problematic and even dangerous activities. Unfortunately, the Uighur community does not appear to be immune to this type of nationalistic manifestation. Even if this represents a very small minority within the minority, it would be wrong, in my judgment, to condone nationalistic sentiment that leads individuals or groups to commit acts of violence against innocent civilians.

Your staff asked me to review the specific designation as a terrorist group applied to the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement” (commonly referred to as ETIM), a separatist group operating in the Xinjiang region of the People's Republic of China. Though the Uighur community as a whole understandably rejects Chinese authority (due to their historical track record of oppression), the United States has an obligation to the international community, and to her own citizens to apply a uniform standard with respect to terrorism. It is unacceptable and must be combated. In 2002 the United States, as part of this obligation, conducted an investigation of the activities of ETIM in the Xinjiang region, in the People's Republic of China, and outside China. It was deemed that the group met our legal criteria to be designated as a terrorist organization, under the authority of Executive Order 13224, issued on September 23, 2001 by former President George W. Bush.

Let me add that the Chinese authorities vigorously pursued our designation of other groups alleged to be operating in Xinjiang. But we were well aware that the information provided by the Chinese government about suspected terrorists groups was unreliable, and very likely tied to ulterior political motives. In all other cases, the United States was unable to make the lawful determination concerning a terrorist status of the other groups the Chinese asked us to designate. The only organization determined by US officials to be a legally recognized terrorist organization was the ETIM. In an age where China bustles with international visitors – including two and half million U.S. visitors a year – and hosts major international events such as the Olympics and the Shanghai World's Fair, the United States would be negligent and irresponsible if we did not take a candid and sober-minded view of groups and/or individuals who intend to commit acts of violence against innocent civilians in China to further their political agenda.

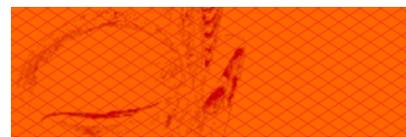


Some critics suggest that there was a different U.S. government agenda tied to the designation; a move by the United States to enlist Chinese support in the Global War on Terror. I find that linkage highly problematic. First, as mentioned, the United States was very judicious in use of this designation, and did not designate other groups China was urging us to designate. If the goal was to ingratiate ourselves with the Chinese, government officials understood that we were falling well short of any standard Beijing's leaders may have set for us. Secondly, nobody serving in the U.S. government was naïve to the counterfactual – that somehow China needed an outside authority to provide an imprimatur for their oppression. China's treatment of Uighurs was always poor, and Chinese suppression predates the designation of ETIM as a terrorist organization. Further, if the goal was to win Chinese favor, our many other actions supporting Uighur's in China – such as fighting for the release of Ms. Kadeer; documenting China's repression in our human rights report; speaking out and testifying publicly about the Uighur's plight; refusing to return Uighur detainees to China publicly citing concern that they would not be treated humanely; simply do s not support the claims of aiding and abetting a Chinese crack down.

Mr. Chairman, you also asked if I would comment about the Uighur situation at the Guantanamo Bay Detention facility. The situation of these detainees can be described nothing short of "tragic". Originally, there were twenty-four Uighur detainees at the Guantanamo Bay Detention facility. At a very early juncture – albeit "early" is a relative term that surely sounds unsympathetic to those wrongly imprisoned and their families – the decision was made through the Combatant Status Review Tribunal that fifteen Uighurs were eligible for release. In 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell rightfully determined and stated that the Uighur detainees held at the Guantanamo Bay Detention facility would not be deported back to the People's Republic of China. This decision, combined with a Department of Homeland Security decision that no detainees – regardless of country of origin – would be permitted into the United States, forced US officials into the difficult position of where to relocate the Uighur detainees. Recently, the government of the island nation of Palau has offered asylum to some Uighur detainees. Four others have been released to Bermuda. We can only hope that these sub-optimal outcomes permit the former detainees to carry-on with their lives in freedom and with dignity. I would urge the Obama Administration to continue to work towards the full resettlement of the Uighur detainees who have been determined eligible for release.

Going forward, the best possible future for the Uighur community, the Xinjiang province and the People's Republic of China as a whole, depends on the allowance of greater freedom to the Uighur community. By ending its persecution of the Uighurs, the Chinese government would be better suited to handle to problem of insurgent activities in the long run. And more importantly, a great people could enjoy the freedom to pursue life and liberty as they see fit.

In my view, the United States must continue to concern itself with global terrorism – no matter the nomenclature. Part of that effort should involve the designation of terrorist



groups worldwide who meet our legal criteria. That being said, in the context of China we must be vigilant against the possibility that the Chinese authorities might use “counter-terrorism” as a cover to excuse the Chinese-led oppression of the Uighur community. We should recognize that most of the Uighur population is peaceful and does not resort to violence against innocent civilians, and that genuine aspirations for greater freedoms should be supported.

Let me add my specific recommendations to the U.S. government going forward.

- 1) The Obama Administration should continue to make human rights and religious freedom priorities in our interactions with China; any policy that is conceptually based on the premise that down-grading those issues in pursuit of other priorities should be disabused as a policy based on false trade-offs, and a potentially harmful policy.
- 2) President Obama himself should use his unique platform to highlight the plight of the Uighur community; President Bush met personally with Ms. Kadeer, and I believe President Obama should do the same.
- 3) The Obama Administration should endeavor to ensure all Uighur detainees eligible for release from Guantanamo Bay are resettled outside of China; further, the United States should continue to take an active interest in their well-being to ensure there are no repercussions down the line for having been wrongly imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay.
- 4) More U.S. officials and members of Congress should travel to Xinjiang as part of the many official delegations that visit China; Officials and Members should publicly report their findings and advocate for greater freedoms for the Uighurs.
- 5) Similar to the U.S. government policy toward Tibet, the Obama Administration should promote a dialogue between the Chinese authorities and legitimate representatives of the Uighur community in Xinjiang to better define genuine autonomy for the Xinjiang Province, and to promote basic freedoms of the Uighur people.

Again Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this very important hearing and for bestowing upon me the honor of testifying here today.